



# weekly **worker**

**Labour Against the  
War - conference  
reports and interviews**

- World protests
- National protests
- SA executive
- SSP manifesto

No 474

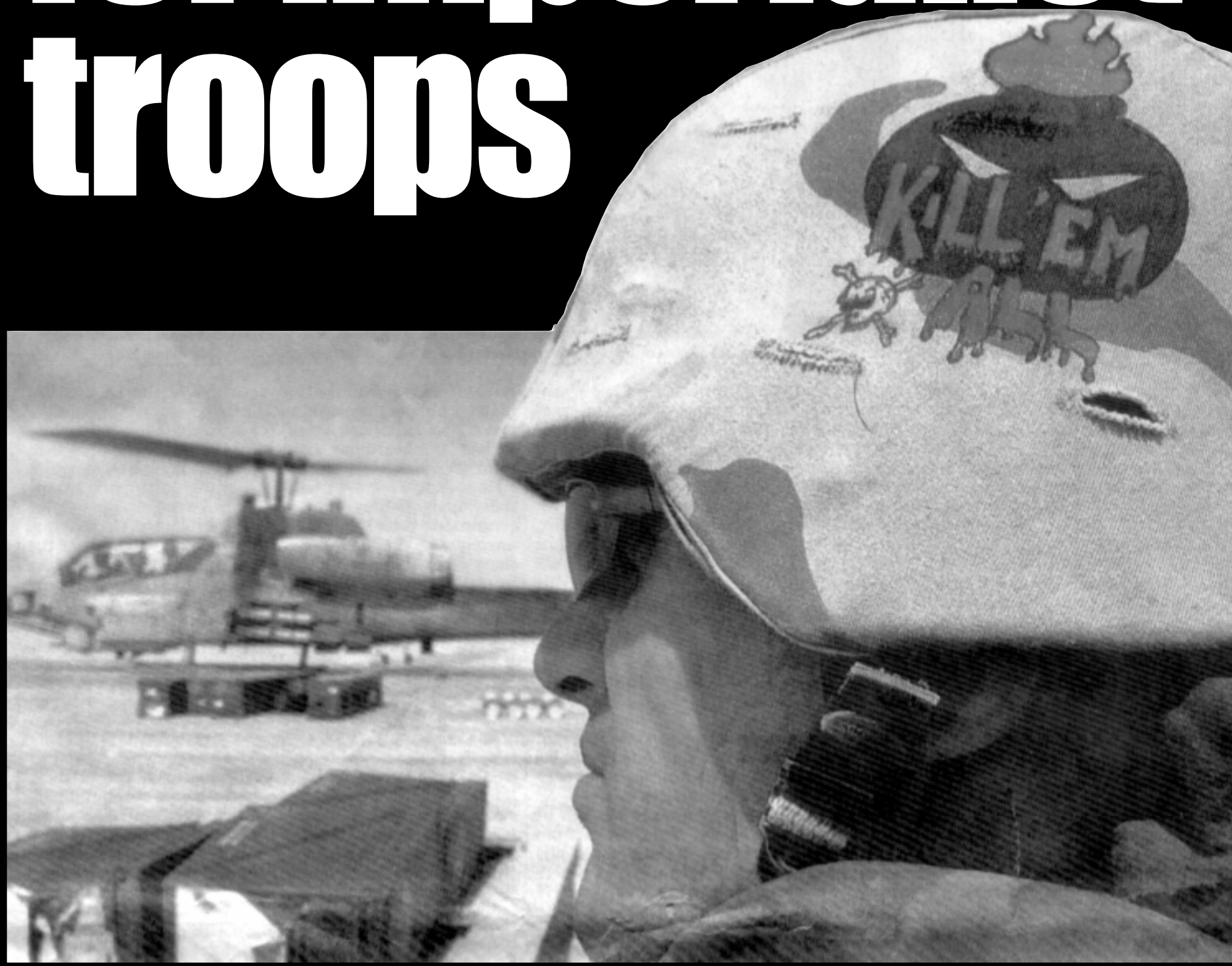
Thursday April 3 2003

Regime change begins at home

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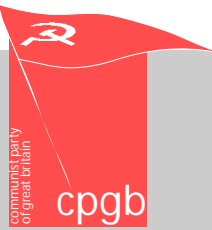
# No support for imperialist troops





# PARTYnotes

## Which side are you on?



**R**obin Cook, resigned from the government, citing opposition to the war on Iraq. At the same time he carefully pledged his undying loyalty to Tony Blair. A mere tactical ploy. Bourgeois politics rest on deception and double-talk. Cook harbours vaulting ambitions. He fancies himself as prime minister of a post-war government or at the very least the prime minister-maker.

The more Donald Rumsfeld's strategy runs into the sand of popular Iraqi resistance, the more that emboldens Cook and fellow conspirators. After all, Blair has risked everything on his alliance with George Bush. Unless the armed might of the US-UK coalition swiftly succeeds in overcoming the impoverished, half-wrecked Iraqi rogue state, he is finished.

The opening gambit came in the *Sunday Mirror*. Cook warns of the war leaving a "long-term legacy of hatred of the west" if the Iraqi population continue to suffer from the "effects of the war we started". He is fearful of a humanitarian disaster. A prolonged siege of Baghdad would be "brutal". People go hungry. Water and power supplies stop. Children die of diseases.

Cook then insists that Britain should cut its losses and get out of America's "bloody and unnecessary" war. "I want our troops home," he boldly declares, "and I want them home before more of them are killed" (March 30).

Reactions proved mixed. Andrew Murray, chair of the Stop the War Coalition, announced that the anti-war movement "would agree with Mr Cook". The *Morning Star* tentatively praised him for being the "architect of an ethical foreign policy". The *Independent's* Andreas Whittam Smith proclaimed Cook a hero: "Britain has a new leader of the opposition." Paul Routledge in the *Daily Mirror* was almost as effusive: "He is the authentic voice of the Labour Party."

However, the pro-war press unleashed a wave of patriotic vitriol. Cook is now a hate figure. "Obscene," hissed the *Daily Mail*. "Grotesque and mis-conceived," added the *Daily Express*. The *Times* attacked Cook for "pointless point-scoring". The *Daily Telegraph* accused him of placing his "own ambition above the interests of our troops in the field". As for *The Sun*, it dismissed any idea of bringing "back our forces" as "ludicrous". "It would mean that their sacrifices and effort had been in vain." Government ministers eagerly concurred: "We have to back those who are in the conflict in bringing down Saddam Hussein", not "capitulate", said David Blunkett.

Showing his political backbone and commitment to principle, Cook collapsed within hours. Doing an almost instant U-turn, he pathetically complained of misrepresentation: "I am not in favour of abandoning the battlefield. There can be no question of letting Saddam Hussein off the hook. Having started the war, it is important we win it."

'Our boys' fighting in Iraq constitutes the razor-sharp line of demarcation that must separate the anti-war party from the vacillating middle ground. A middle ground that blows hot or cold according to the fickle winds of popularity, but always bows before patriotism at the end of the day.

It is no good denouncing as illegal and unjust the US-UK plans to conquer Iraq and then wishing well the forces actually carrying out such plans. Those who do are hypocrites and, equally to the point, poisonous.

Patriotism ('nationalism', if you prefer the word) is the only argument the Bush-Blair coalition has left. It is a strong and very persuasive argument though. Not because what lies behind it carries any inherent intellectual weight. Quite the contrary: patriotism relies on myths, the darkly irrational, the false consciousness that all classes belong to a common community bound together by history and fate.

Patriotism is imbibed with mother's milk and is carefully sustained and promoted by schools, the mass media and sports events. Patriotism provides a sense of belonging and meaning in a bleak and lonely world of powerlessness and alienation, but simultaneously acts like a social acid, eating away the forward-looking solidarities of internationalism, humanism and socialism. Patriotism therefore serves the capitalist state admirably. Especially a patriotism that justifies the oppression of others. People can be won in their millions to hate and kill fellow human beings by putting them under the spell of some purpose-giving national destiny or mission.

To stop this war - more importantly, to stop the system that generates wars - one must break completely and irrevocably from the patriotism of imperialist Britain. The anti-war party must take not Britain and the British state as its starting point, but global humanity. Our practical line of march then becomes crystal clear.

Of course, demand the immediate withdrawal of British and American troops from Iraqi soil. There can be no question of them finishing Saddam Hussein. That task must be left to the Iraqi people.

However, what if the anti-war party does not secure a pull-out? What attitude should we then adopt? Communists have no desire to see American or British troops return home in body bags. Yet we cannot support an unjust imperialist war.

Let us pose the question in the baldest, starkest terms. It is far better that the US-UK coalition is soundly defeated by Saddam Hussein's forces. Communists - in Britain and Iraq - loathe Saddam Hussein and his bureaucratic dictatorship. But, given the choice, we prefer victory for the existing Iraq state to victory by the US-UK coalition.

The main enemy of the Iraqi people is no longer Saddam Hussein's regime. It is the drive by US imperialism to re-impose neo-colonialism upon Iraq. And after Iraq it will be North Korea, Iran, Libya, Cuba and a new American century of global domination.

Preferring the defeat of imperialism does not imply that communists, revolutionary socialists and democrats in Iraq should suspend their struggle against Saddam Hussein or join some rotten military bloc.

On the contrary, leadership of the struggle for Iraqi self-determination must pass to the masses. It must interweave with the struggle for democracy, the struggle for rule by the workers and the urban and rural poor ●

**Jack Conrad**

## LETTERS



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

### Military support

Jack Conrad writes: "... Saddam remains the enemy of the peoples of Iraq - but now, with the imperialists overrunning 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" ('Conquerors, not liberators' *Weekly Worker* March 27).

I couldn't agree more. But need I point out the obvious: that the tactic Conrad advocates is called military, as opposed to political, support? It is advocated spontaneously by perhaps a majority of the people of the Middle East under the blows of the US and British invaders. But the only "shift" going on here is the one being executed by Conrad and the CPGB, who have up till now argued against the whole idea of military support as a notion peculiar to isolated Trotskyist sects.

**Jim Cullen**  
New York

### Greater enemy

I agree with what you say about Saddam Hussein and I also agree that US-British imperialism is the greater enemy. A defeat of these imperialist forces would be a great victory. However, it is not likely.

There is still the possibility of people in Iraq welcoming the conquerors, because they fear them, or they are glad the war is over and they survived. Many may be glad that Saddam Hussein is gone. But, with the many deaths that have occurred over the last days, and the many more to come, this scenario is becoming increasingly less probable. My hope is that, if they should enter Baghdad, they will be greeted with stones instead of flowers.

Here in America, most people are appallingly stupid, as they adhere to all this jingoistic nonsense about 'supporting the troops', no matter what they are doing. I hope people in Great Britain are not so stupid.

**Timothy Lauby**  
USA

### China analogy

Your party probably has a dim view of Maoism, but what if events unfolded in Iraq as they did in China in World War II? Put Saddam in the role of Chiang, and the 'coalition' forces (all two of them) in the role of Japan.

It would be nice if the Iraqi proletariat and peasantry took the opportunity to organise independent red paramilitaries to resist the US/UK invasion and then slough off the Ba'athist parasites, as the Chinese did the Kuomintang, once they finished off the Japanese invaders.

But of course, only the Iraqis themselves can decide what to do. Our job is to make sure our governments do not make their choices for them.

**Ed Yoo**  
email

### Right slogan

Jack Conrad says in regard to the US-UK coalition forces: "We prefer their defeat to their victory." Quite right. A victory of the coalition forces would reinforce the plans of George W Bush and US imperialism. In the UK it would also bolster support for Tony Blair.

The best result would be for the defeat of coalition forces after a long drawn out war. But what do we say to social groups C2, D and E, who, according to *The Guardian*, "support our troops"? Victory to the people of Iraq would

mean the death of many UK troops. Also the UK troops mostly come from working class backgrounds. Are not these troops just 'workers in uniform' who joined the forces to get away from pockets of high unemployment?

**John Smith**  
Cambridgeshire

### Wrong slogan

I am unhappy with slogans which appear to call for the military defeat of America and Britain, or victory for Iraq.

We must distinguish very carefully between the capitalist states at war here (which include the Iraqi Ba'athist state), and the role of ordinary working people, here and in Iraq. It cannot be any part of revolutionary communist/socialist strategy to call for the military defeat of one's 'own' state. True, this may give rise to opportunities to overthrow it by political revolution, as in 1917 Russia. It could equally mean chemical or nuclear annihilation of the home population.

Political opposition to capitalist/imperialist war must rule out advocating military victory or defeat for any particular side. How would military victory for the Iraqi capitalist state further the cause of the Iraqi people to free themselves from this fascistic terror?

However, the Iraqi people are clearly the ones being subject to attack, rather than the American or British. It must be right for the Iraqi people to resist the American and British onslaught, by whatever means necessary, including armed resistance, alongside the standing army of the Iraqi state. The use of irregular forces and tactics to harass and wear down the invasion forces can be seen as part of this more generalised resistance, defending the interests of the Iraqi people, rather than the state.

Armed resistance to external invasion based on the armed masses, rather than privileged units placed above seems to be entirely right, can be seen as a prototype of the new forms of the Paris Commune-type state power the working class will need when we are ready to make socialist revolution.

**Andrew Northall**  
Northants

### Frightening

I totally agree with your article ('Conquerors, not liberators' *Weekly Worker* March 27). I may not have considered myself a communist before, but now I am at least thinking of it.

This war scares me to death. I can see huge forces being unleashed in Britain, with the working class being easy prey to the easy message of the fascists - ie, that dirty-skinned foreigners are the cause of all their hardships.

The British National Party may not officially support the war (siding with Blair would be too much), but they will welcome with open arms all the small-minded council estate racists who talk of throwing asylum-seekers back in the channel!

If you object to my description of the working classes, may I remind you that fascists only gain power and influence when the working class joins the fold. Oldham, Rochdale, Halifax, Bradford are not Tory strongholds.

**Nigel Garcia**  
Andorra

### Dismay

It is with great dismay that I felt like throwing the *Weekly Worker* in the bin on seeing "Victory to the Iraqi people" - following last week's ridiculous headline, "Rather defeat for US-UK ..." This is sounding more and more like the Workers Revolutionary Party and Socialist Workers Party, which I personally have no time for.

**Mervyn Davies**  
Colchester

### Censorship

Censorship is in full swing at the BBC! I have sent around 30 emails opposing the war to the BBC website. None of them published. In despair I turned to the BBC's message boards and got published a message concerning American support for rightwing regimes. This was too much for the BBC who deleted my message after around five minutes.

**Stuart Whatley**  
Norway

### Useful idiot

The war will be stopped once Saddam and his rapist gang are out of power. I wonder if you would still want his regime in power if a member of your family had been killed, tortured or raped by a member of Saddam's regime?

Now, be honest with yourself and your conscience and let the coalition of free nations do their just work. Do not continue to be a useful idiot!

**Mike Joseph**  
email

### British salvation

Recent events have placed you in Britain in an unprecedented situation. With one concerted effort you can accomplish what millions of people around the world can only dream of. You can stop the war on Iraq and save the lives, not only of British and American men and women, but also the lives of millions of Iraqis.

Great Britain has already played a critical role in this war. While the United States has developed into the world's only superpower and has launched a reckless, illegal and immoral war, it could not have started it without the support of Great Britain.

Virtually no one in the world outside the United States would have believed the lurid tales coming out of the White House without the 'confirmation' provided by prime minister Blair and his cabinet. If Great Britain had opposed this war, the United Nations and international law, as well peace, security, stability and harmony around the world, would have been strengthened rather than shattered.

Now the war is 'going badly'. The Iraqi working class and people, whatever they think of the regime of Saddam Hussein, are defending their country and, in the face of hopeless odds, are resisting heroically. Now British and US soldiers in Basra and throughout Iraq are slowly but surely being turned - against their will - into war criminals.

But - without the support of Great Britain, this war cannot last another day. History has placed in the hands of the British working class a weapon - a weapon not of war, but of peace, a weapon which at this time can bring the war in Iraq to an end. And that weapon is a general strike. That weapon will save millions of lives, end the war and restore and strengthen the United Nations and international law, as well as peace, security, stability and harmony around the world.

**Robert Ryan**  
Ottawa

### Behold

We are continually reading about Islamic fundamentalism and the Koran. Let us have a look at the Jewish Torah, the first five books of the Christian Bible:

"Turn you and take your journey and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea-side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go to the land in which the lord swore unto your fathers, Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them” (Deuteronomy 1, 7, 8).

“But thou shalt utterly destroy them: namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the lord thy god hath commanded thee” (*ibid* 20,16,17).

For ‘ites’ read Palestinian Arabs. The Euphrates flows just south of Baghdad.

Ivor Kenna  
London

## SA bulwark

“The Socialist Alliance is dead. Long live the Socialist Alliance,” proclaimed the *Weekly Worker* (March 15). Such a bold statement needs closer examination.

Electoral work is a major area of development for the SA and its component parts. The idea and practice of challenging Blair’s Labour Party at the ballot box has been a substantial change in tactics and political outlook for much of the traditional left, where this amounts to a break from Trotskyite orthodoxy: ie, auto-Labourism. Challenging the ‘lesser of two evils’ theory in practice has had real concrete implications for comrades.

Electoral work is of significant importance for comrades in the north west. As many comrades will be aware, the British National Party has made considerable electoral headway in the mill towns of Lancashire and south Yorkshire. Plans are afoot to use their recent work in Oldham as a launch pad for deeper infiltration of Greater Manchester.

South Manchester SA has already put in place a raft of candidates, and other local alliances are doing the same. It is vital that the alliance has a clear understanding of the need for electoral work in this period, in order to challenge New Labour and the BNP, in equal measure building up support from the working class.

Standing in elections helps weld together the component parts of the SA around real political questions and draw in new forces. Having said that, the current structures are in need of development, which must include closer ties between component organisations in a partyist direction rather than a backward step to loose autonomy or bureaucracy.

While the People’s Assemblies are a welcome development, they need to be approached in the concrete area by area. In Manchester there is no PA, but there is an active and well attended SA. Where should comrades focus their energies? The short answer is neither one nor the other, as both are sites for struggle. In Manchester and the north west the SA is still the main vehicle for rapprochement with other groups and for electoral work. The Stop the War Coalition gives an opportunity to engage with the wider population who are moving into political action. But this must act as a conduit to the SA - party-building is the main task from all these sites.

When a site for struggle with regular and well attended meetings and an established structure exists, it would seem folly to abandon this to chase shadow PAs, which are quantifiably at a lower level of development currently.

Philip Cambridge  
Manchester

## SSP example

Looking from the outside, I find it very sad that the Socialist Alliance project has proven to be such an utter sham-bles.

Just now, as it comes up to the May elections, the SA should be prospering, capitalising on the grotesque policies carried out by the ‘Labour’ government. There are many people out there who are sick of privatisation and there are many more who are opposed to the war. These people are being offered no alternative when they should be.

This time, more than ever before, a well

organised Socialist Alliance is needed. I contrast the SA to the Scottish Socialist Party, which is flourishing and looking forward to perhaps a 400% or 500% increase in the number of its MSPs. Whether this happens or not, what is definite is that it will increase its share of the vote.

I read of concerns, from those in other parts of the UK, about the increasing importance the SSP is attaching to independence. Can anyone be surprised by this trend, when its sister party, instead of making similar progress, has not even got out of the starting blocks? Socialism of any sort, although still far away, is looking nearer in Scotland than before and it is now up to the SA to start releasing its potential or continue to be insignificant.

Julie Thomson  
Fife

## Labour racism

Thank you for pointing out the Labour Party’s imperialist history. With support for the war up, I am appalled to think that British people have allowed themselves to be duped by the propaganda.

Let’s face up to it: a majority of British people think imperialism and the racist warmongering that goes with it is okay if there are benefits for them and if it gives them a chauvinistic high. Most British don’t care about Iraqis dying, because of racism.

Thatcher relied on racism and war to keep office. New Labour is doing the same. We should mount a ‘Coalition against the Labour Party’ and campaign for people to boycott and withdraw all support. We should specifically target ethnic minorities in the cities, where Labour depends on black and Asian votes to get elected. We should point out the racism and imperialism and lying behind this war.

Enough is enough! Never again must the oppressed lend support to this racist and imperialist organisation, which just uses black votes and black workers to gain office, whilst implementing racist policies. All the good work done by the Labour left is reduced to ashes, as the reactionaries forever keep power and control in the Labour Party.

Indira Sethi  
email

## Spilled beans

Unfortunately, it is a fairly commonly held belief that asylum-seekers receive better treatment than many people already living in Britain. Those who subscribe to such a view may like to consider the statement below, which recently appeared in the press.

Following reports of very frightened

asylum-seekers being sworn at, spat on and threatened with dogs and knives in Scotland, a court heard that “people think there are a lot of [asylum-seekers] coming, moving into their area and getting privileges. It is complete rubbish. We are never taking about large numbers of people. It is one of the great myths.”

Readers may be interested to learn that the above statement was carried in the March 22 edition of that quintessential mouthpiece of the establishment, *The Daily Telegraph*. And which militant asylum rights campaigner made such a claim? Why, it was none other than high court judge Mr Justice Moses.

What must the editors of viciously racist tabloid rags like the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *Daily Express* be thinking when another rightwing paper reports on how a judge could have spilled the beans in such fashion?

Geoff Smith  
Birmingham

## Aussie SA

I’d like to comment on David Lee’s letter (*Weekly Worker* March 27). He is of course right that the Socialist Alliance in Australia received derisory results. As much as they may use the spin that the candidates were busy with anti-war work, it does not really excuse the fact that the SA has received lower votes than the previously ‘sectarian’ Democratic Socialist Party, or the Communist Party of Australia in 1999 or even within a bee’s dick of the high votes the Progressive Labor Party received in the past.

Another issue I’d like to comment on is the false impression that the DSP wants to ‘do a Scotland’. They in fact want to create a more centralised party, but it is more equivalent of a corporate takeover, rather than “putting more resources into the alliance”. It is not the International Socialist Organisation, which scotched it for its own sectarian reasons. They have done it, because they rightly see it as a manoeuvre of the DSP. All along the DSP have been trying to split the ISO.

The real failure of the Socialist Alliance, like the PLP before it, is its orientation to the working class and its movement. It sees itself as ‘the’ working class movement, which causes it to make great mistakes. For example in the Cunningham by-election, one of the first wins for the left, the SA stood itself rather than supporting the local left candidate, and building the left. As a result, they got a derisory result for presenting a ‘socialist alternative’.

Dave Murray  
Newcastle, Australia

## Fighting fund

# Magnificent

Last month’s fund received a timely boost in the shape of a magnificent £100 donation from comrade JS, who nonchalantly slipped us the extra, without comment, along with £30 for his annual subscription to the paper. Thank you, comrade. You helped take us well over our £500 target for March, aided and abetted by PJ (£20), TG (£15), JB and SD (£5 each). Our total for the month was a tremendous £609.

But let’s not rest on our laurels. We need the full £500 each and every month and there have been many lows as well as highs. Hopefully April will see another of the latter. We start off with a cheque from comrade SW, who writes: ‘I have some disagreements with the CPGB, but I think

the organisation needs the money at this critical time.’” You can say that again, SW. Thanks also to JC, a young comrade from Yorkshire, whose £5 was very much appreciated.

So we start off April £25 to the good. How about some more contributions from our internet readers, 7,100 of whom logged on to our site last week?

By the way, we are still urging all readers to become sellers. The war has opened up a whole new audience for revolutionary ideas. Order bundles of five, 10, 15 papers. Pay us - monthly - for what you sell ●

Robbie Rix

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

# ACTION

## CPGB London anti-war forums

5pm, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street (nearest tubes - Great Portland Street, Regents Park).

Sunday April 6: ‘Why it is wrong to “back our boys”’. Speaker: Jack Conrad.

## CPGB Manchester anti-war forum

‘For people’s assemblies’ - Monday April 14, 7pm, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester (behind Central Library).

## Anti-war events

Saturday April 5 and Sunday April 6

**Reclaim the bases:** International days of anti-war protest and direct action at military bases. Protests on Saturday April 5 at Fylingdales, Devonport and RAF Stafford; on Sunday April 6 at Portsmouth, USAF Fairford, Northwood Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) in London, Aldermaston and USAF Lakenheath.  
email@reclaimthebases.org.uk; 07887-585721.

Saturday April 5

**March on US embassy:** Assemble Broadcasting House, 2pm, BBC Broadcasting House, corner Langham Place, Portland Place (nearest tubes: Great Portland Street, Regents Park. March to Grovesnor Square (nearest tube: Oxford Circus).

Wednesday April 9

**Budget day of action:** ‘Not a penny for the war’. Anti-war rally, Parliament Square.

Saturday April 12

**National demonstration:** Assemble 12 noon, central London (details to be announced). March to Hyde Park. Book coaches now.

## Trade unions and the political fund

Socialist discussion forum, Sunday April 6, 2pm to 5pm, Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road, London WC1 (corner Wren Street). Speakers (personal capacity): Pete Firmin, political officer, CWU West London Amalgamated branch, Mark Hoskisson, trade union officer, Socialist Alliance.  
Organised by *New Interventions* and *What Next?*

## London Labour Left

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

## Racial justice and asylum

Conference - ‘The fight for racial justice and the struggle to defend the rights of asylum-seekers’. Saturday April 12, 9.30am to 6pm, Highfields Youth and Community Centre, 96 Melbourne Road, Leicester, LE2 0DS.  
Speakers include: Imran Khan, Louise Christian, Gus John, Suresh Grover and local family campaigns. Workshops on: access to justice for asylum-seekers; the hysteria over asylum-seekers; the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002; combating racism and attacks; Banner Theatre - migrant voices; Race and social cohesion.  
Organised by Leicester Civil Rights Movement: 0116 253 1053; info@ncrm.org.uk; http://www.ncrm.org.uk/


## 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

Not  
in my  
name



Stop the War Coalition  
www.stopwar.org.uk  
020 7053 2155/6

April 12 national  
demonstration

www.cpgb.org.uk/action



## LABOUR AGAINST THE WAR

# Key debates surface

Over 350 Labour Party members and delegates gathered in Friends Meeting House in central London on March 29 to discuss how to organise opposition to Blair's warmongering. **Mark Fischer** reports

**G**eorge Galloway MP was spotted on with one of his opening comments to the morning session of the Labour Against the War conference.

"I am going to say some things that you won't necessarily agree with," he warned. "Of all the meetings I am going to do today, you have to face the unpalatable fact that this is probably the smallest of them. You have to face some difficult truths ... We effectively do not have a Labour Party in this country ... Can the Labour Party be reclaimed for peace and anything like socialism? [shouts of "Yes!"] If so, you'll have to provide some evidence. The question is, are there enough of us left inside the party? Have most of us already gone? ["Join the Socialist Alliance, then!"] This is a deadly serious business here: we shouldn't be making trivial remarks. The second question - is there enough *democratic space* left in the party to reclaim it?"

George's comments had the great merit of highlighting questions that this gathering needed to address before it could decide whether it was even worthwhile getting on with the rest of the day - that is, was the meeting's stated aim to 'reclaim the party' feasible or not? The bulk of the delegates - despite a palpable respect for the Glasgow MP's sterling work in the mass anti-war movement - clearly believed that they can do more than simply exist in the

Labour Party. They are convinced of their potential to fight within its ranks and to win.

Thus, the tone of many contributions was pugnacious - some comrades were quite willing to ignore calls for caution. Despite criticisms that need to be made of aspects of the event, this was a positive day - not simply for the Labour left, but also for the broader movement.

The agenda was divided into two halves. The morning session was billed as 'analysis' of the war - its effects on Labour and wider society. This would have been a little bland, had it not been spiced up by comrade Galloway's blunt observations. In effect, despite the fact that he found little support for his line of argument, he provided a contentious introduction to a key discussion for this new Labour left, as it reasserts itself - stay in the party, or decamp?

In the afternoon, conference debated practical measures aimed at 'reclaiming' their organisation. Again controversy stirred around the less immediately practical question of LATW including in its aims the removal of Blair as leader of the party.

A succession of prominent figures, including Tony Benn, Alice Mahon and Billy Hayes, lined up to tell conference that the question of who led the Labour Party was an irrelevance, that there should be no talk of bloodletting internally with all this gore flowing on foreign soil and even - most imaginatively

in the speech of MP John McDonnell - that Blair has somehow "gone"! Apparently he is "no longer the leader of the Labour Party".

Thus, in an indicative vote called by conference chair Alan Simpson, delegates voted by a solid (although not overwhelming) majority that a serious fight against the war must logically imply a challenge to Blair's leadership. A welcome sign of confidence.

It was a sensible move to make this vote indicative rather than binding. True, the final statement drafted by LATW leaders outlining the "stark choice" facing Blair - that he "can claim to lead the war party or the Labour Party, but not both" - contains an implied challenge to his position. But clearly MPs and other luminaries are wary of alienating potential soft allies who have been prepared to vote against the government, but would balk at launching a coup against the PM. Chris Smith's name was mentioned more than once in this context.

So it was good that the organisation did not split over such a question at its first gathering. However, there exists a fundamental difference in orientation that must be addressed at some stage soon.

One comrade told me of his hope that LATW would come to resemble "less of a 'support group' for MPs and CLPs; more of an organisation that campaigns for *action*". Doubtless the comrade was

pleased that a number of motions remitted to the incoming campaign leadership included the call to deepen and broaden the LATW presence in the party - Leyton and Wanstead's, for instance, suggested setting up local Labour Against the War conferences and groups.

Less positive was the confusion that seemed to surround the LATW leadership itself. The fact that it is an "advisory committee", not a "steering committee", seems to indicate a very limited remit. As delegate Pete Firmin wondered in the debate, "advisory to *what*, to *who*?" A 25-person committee was agreed by conference and - despite continuing ambiguities around its exact role - the vast majority of delegates took away the conviction that conference had ratified a project of initiating local action and organisation.

Judging from the quite robust and democratic discussion, the Labour left's confidence is on the up: it is starting to seriously reconstitute itself as a force within the party. This process - which we have been commenting on for some time - has clearly been propelled forward by two historically unparalleled anti-war marches and the largest ever parliamentary revolt by Labour MPs. The Labour left has also been revitalised by the series of left victories in the trade unions. This underlines conclusively the fact that the Labour Party remains a type of *workers'* party, with the vitality of its left wing organically linked to the general

combativity of the workers' and progressive movement.

Proof that the Labour left is starting to organise itself once more as a *left* was provided by John Edmonds, new realist turned government critic. In funereal tones he told us that there was nothing to be done to stop the war. Therefore, our role should be to "concentrate that energy on arguing for a massive increase in humanitarian support for the Iraqi people - through every NGO, every relief agency, every support agency that is willing to go. Because the more people, the more organisations, the more relief we can get into Iraq, the less chance there is that the war will be won by excessive bloodshed."

Edmonds' advice to conference that our new role is as pathetic, charity-mongering camp-followers of the advancing imperialist armies went down like Billy Connolly's proverbial fart in a space suit - he walked back to his seat to applause so lukewarm I almost weakened and gave him a clap myself.

Of course, communists do not believe that Labour can ever be a vehicle for winning socialism.

Our strategic task remains to convince through their own struggles and experiences the millions who support the party electorally and the tens of thousands of sincere activists in its ranks of that. This can never be achieved through moralism or shrill ultimatums ●

## Two MPs with different views on the way forward

**George Galloway** doubts the possibility of reclaiming the Labour Party

**Many of the contributions at today's conference revolved around the questions you raise of the practical feasibility of reclaiming Labour. I've heard people describe you as a 'counsel of despair'.**

Far from it. I am one of the leaders of a genuinely mass movement. Far from despair, I have never been more confident in the determination of big sections of the British population to really change things in this country. Nor have I ever been more confident that they have the organisation developing to make a significant tilt at achieving that.

I don't say we can change British society yet or anything like that, but we now have more people, more conscious and more organised in pursuit of that goal, than we have ever had. That opens up tremendous possibilities. I am not despairing, but those who accuse me of it are perhaps clinging to a false optimism about the possibility of reclaiming the Labour Party.

If that *could* be done, it would be the best solution. I mean that. It still retains the allegiance of millions of working class voters, still retains the affiliation of millions of trade unionists and just in terms of 'branding' and 'product recognition' it would be much better. But we need to see evidence that it can be done and we need to see evidence *quickly*. We can't just sit here, as crimes are committed, and tell ourselves that we are going to reclaim the Labour Party at some point in the future.

In this context, the People's Assembly was a very important development. The size of the event was slightly disappointing in some ways - it didn't reflect the broadness of the movement. Having it on a weekday may have been a tactical error. We should have another one - on a Saturday. We have to make greater efforts to make it a genuine *alternative*.

A speaker from the floor here today said we've got to pay less attention to parliament, more to the mass movement. I spend almost no time in parliament; all my time travelling around the country talking to meetings. The People's Assembly idea could - with some refinements - be an alternative model of democracy that we should develop.

Certainly, this mass movement in the country feels cheated and betrayed by parliament and they are right to feel so. Developments in the House of Commons are clearly a *by-product* of what we do on the streets. We mustn't foster illusions in the parliament ... or in the Labour Party, frankly" ●

**Alan Simpson** chaired the conference. He offered his impressions during the lunch break

**Is this a small meeting or, as some comrades have suggested, a highly representative one?**

I would have liked the hall to be packed, but it is a legitimate point that there are more CLPs represented here today than you will get in the Labour Party conference. We have a phenomenal number of CLPs who have sent reps to take part in today's meeting at a time when it is becoming harder and harder to get them to send people to national conference.

The bigger issue, however, is how we get people to go from here back to their CLPs to build an anti-war movement at the grassroots. To do that, it must be done in conjunction with the trade unions. Those trade unions that are openly opposing this war must get that to be reflected in their affiliations to local CLPs - their delegates must focus on building an anti-war base in every CLP around the country.

That then will be the platform that allows us to require the Labour Party nationally to re-engage with what the

vast majority of its members feel - that we should be actively opposing this war.

**But there is a tension that George Galloway has pointed to between Labour and the movement. Can that 'anti-war party' find any sort of meaningful organisational expression in Labour, given the restrictions on democracy - restrictions no one denies?**

Well, I don't see any other party for it to find reflection in. Those that suggest that this is a time to leave play to the agenda of the right. What we have is a very broad anti-war movement that I think is also a social justice movement and an internationalist movement. You have to say - where would that get reflection in a parliamentary context? *Nowhere* other than Labour.

That for me is the absolute bottom line. However, the real challenge today has been to the trade union leaders. Half of Labour's national executive is made up of directly elected or appointed trade union representatives, barely one of whom reflects the views of the unions that put them on the NEC!

So, my argument with many of the trade unions that are currently debating the question of disaffiliation from the Labour Party is that they should address the failings of their own democratic processes, in order to have their representatives actually articulating their own union's policies. That is the initial challenge - to make the trade union link *work*.

Those who say they are just going to up stumps and go, for me that is a

*massive* political irresponsibility. It ducks the fact Labour is in the mess that it's in because the trade union movement has failed to give a lead that the rest of the party can draw on. The failings of the Labour Party are the failings of the labour movement - and you can't walk away from that.

**At the same time, what George Galloway is pointing to is an extremely powerful fact. There were two million people on the streets. He is surely right that Labour rebellions in parliament are a by-product, a reflection of that huge movement on the streets. Where can those people find a political voice? Surely not in today's parliament, or even in the ranks of the parliamentary Labour Party?**

You're right. The issues are not being driven from parliament down. At best, parliament is only playing catch-up with what's going on outside. I am not doing meetings at CLPs during this period, for instance. One of the problems with them is that they have given up external campaigning. They will go vote-campaigning at election time, but they won't do *issue*-campaigning.

We have to be a bridge to bring the issues that are involving millions of people - the war, campaigning for comprehensive education, the NHS - onto the floor of parliament. We have cease to be on the *defensive* about the Labour Party. We have to confidently make the case for reclaiming our party.

It's much harder to start from scratch. If the party belongs to us in the first place, why not take it back? ●

# ‘We can actually win’

**Rozanne Foyer** - assistant secretary of the Scottish TUC and a member of the Campaign for Socialism - inspired the LATW meeting with her account of the rebellion against Blairite control-freakery at the March conference of the Scottish Labour Party. Later in the week Rozanne spoke in a personal capacity to the *Weekly Worker*

**R**emind our readers of what actually happened at Scottish Labour Party conference.

Basically, in the week leading up to conference, delegates were constantly being told via the media that on no account would they be allowed to discuss motions on the war. It started to become clear that the conference arrangements committee itself hadn't been fully consulted in this.

So a number of unions and Constituency Labour Parties began to grow very concerned because there was actually nothing in the rules that seemed to suggest there was any reason why motions on the war couldn't be discussed. Eventually, a coalition of CLPs and trade unions, led by the TGWU, challenged the CAC report at the very beginning of conference, threw out the agenda and demanded that conference discuss the war before anything else.

Conference had to be suspended at that point - highly embarrassing for the leadership, of course. In the card vote, something like 84% of the CLPs and over 90% of the unions voted to turn over the CAC report.

Party workers still insisted that it is no longer constitutional to discuss issues that aren't devolved to Scotland. As a compromise, they therefore agreed to hold what was akin to a policy forum in the conference hall for the whole afternoon session on the Friday. We agreed to that. If we hadn't, I suspect they would have just shut the whole conference down. They were that worried.

Senior members of the leadership obviously knew that they were going to be absolutely done over if it came to a show of hands - policy forums don't take votes, of course. So they had to allow a debate, but there was no vote.

It was a very big step forward because we had won a full debate, although not an open one. Policy forums are closed to the media: they take place in closed session. But that backfired because it just produced even more intense interest from the media about who said what.

If the leadership had been sensible and allowed a proper debate, the thing probably wouldn't have got as big as it did. But when you push people down and suppress their right to debate for so long, it comes to a point where they won't take it any more. I really think this marks a sea change in the nature of the Scottish Labour Party conference. The leadership went one step too far.

Of course, it was around the specific issue of the war, but what it brought out more generally was that people have had enough of the arrogance of our leadership in trying to stifle debate, to rob conference delegates of their rights.

We had a Campaign for Socialism fringe meeting that evening. (CFS is a left of centre grouping for Labour Party members in Scotland, like the Socialist Campaign Group down south). The fringe was very well attended and we realised that this year we had won through our unity. In previous years, the CLPs might raise some issues but with no support from the unions; other times the unions might have decided to take action in the party, but without support from the CLPs. If we prepare together in advance and speak with one voice, we can actually win at conference.

Now, we do want to look at the rules of conference and what we are allowed to do constitutionally. Two solid proposals have come forward. First, to change the rules to make it explicit that we can discuss non-devolved issues: we are not limited to issues specific to the Scottish parliament. We feel very strongly that we are the Scottish Labour Party - we are in constituencies that are represented by MPs at Westminster and they must be accountable to the Scottish party. If we want to

discuss issues that pertain to Westminster and national government, we should have every right to do so.

Historically, the party in Scotland has had different policies on peace and defence, for example. It seems crazy that we are no longer allowed the right to retain the right to separate policies on UK issues if we so wish.

The second proposal we are putting forward is that we should be allowed to table amendments to the policy documents that come out of policy forums. This is so you are not faced with the choice of either voting against the whole policy booklet or accepting it as it is. You should be able to discuss specific issues. No entire policy document has ever been overturned - effectively this means that the sovereignty of conference is seriously undermined by the policy forums.

I'm very confident that these can be won at the next conference if we work hard. It is quite difficult to find Labour members that are actually happy with our party's democracy. You cannot underestimate the change in the atmosphere and the confidence for the grass-roots members of the party and the unions that the massive defeat of the leadership over the agenda of conference has brought.

**You say it's a sea change. What other developments since conference support this?**

There hasn't been another opportunity to test that. We are now informally getting into election mode for the Scottish parliament.

But of course, the war is going to impact massively on that. The Scottish Socialist Party launched their manifesto on April 1 and they are explicitly telling people to make this election a referendum on the war.

**Is that a big danger for you?**

Yes. Even our first minister admitted on national television that it is quite likely that the election results could be seriously affected by the fact that the country is at war. We have had very high turnout on demos and, of course, on February 15 we had the largest demo in Scottish history in Glasgow. So public opinion is still running high.

The coalition against the war in Scotland did a survey of candidates and CLPs and over half the CLPs in Scotland had passed some sort of anti-war motion. That's how we knew we had a base for a strong challenge at the conference. Also, over 300 candidates for the Scottish parliament and local government elections intended making some sort of statement of opposition to the war.

**You spoke in the LATW conference of young people you encounter regarding the Labour Party as the enemy. Given the high degree of involvement of youth in anti-war mobilisations, this is quite a problem.**

It is. It was very hard when we were going into the Labour Party conference. There were young people from schools and colleges shouting "Shame!" at the delegates, as they made their way into the hall. It was very hard to explain that the Labour Party and the government are two separate things and that it wasn't necessarily the position of the majority of the party that we should be at war.

These young people had a point of course, even if they were thinking about it in simple way. Essentially, they were asking us, 'Why are you putting up with this?'

**How long have you been in the Labour Party?**

I joined in 1996 because I was a public service worker in the benefits agency and the Tory government was trying to privatise the service. I naively believed that a Labour government would stop privatisation. Which I've learned to my cost is not the case!

But that has only made me more determined not to let this so-called Labour leadership get away with it. The Labour Party was set up by the trade unions to take forward the interests of working people. It politics are meant to be about protecting working people. I'm determined not to leave and let them hijack the party. The party has to be brought back to its original agenda.

The key thing people have to remember is that tearing up your party card is exactly what the leadership wants leftwingers to do. They were good at keeping people very quiet because the Tories had been in power for nearly 20 years. At first, I also bought the argument that you have to be disciplined, you have to keep your mouth shut. I even thought that perhaps Blair was being a bit shy about his so-

**There were young people from schools and colleges shouting "Shame!" at the delegates, as they made their way into the hall**

cialist credentials - as I said, perhaps I was a bit naive.

**You mention that half of CLPs passed resolutions of one sort or another against the war and also that there are large numbers of Labour candidates intending to take some sort of stand on the war. Do you think it is short-sighted of the SSP to therefore say it will stand against all Labour candidates, regardless of their stance of these important questions?**

There have been joint campaigns in the period of the last parliament in which elements of the Labour Party and the SSP have worked very well together. There are areas where we agree and can work - and have worked - very well together. Certainly, we have been working very well together in the anti-war movement in Scotland, the Coalition for Justice not War.

But when it comes to an election that breaks down. The SSP comrades just seem to spend most their time trying to persuade those of us on the left in the party to come and join them. They would like to see us just walk out.

The Scottish National Party also put on a very left face. But the central problem is nationalism. As someone who comes from a very industrial, urban area, I feel just as much solidarity with people from Newcastle or Liverpool as I do with working people in my own country - we share the same problems, the same history and culture.

Going it alone is not an option ●

**Rozanne Foyer: nationalism a central problem**



## LATW conference soundbites

**Billy Hayes**, general secretary, Communication Workers Union:

"We must not get distracted. We must be part of the broad anti-war movement. There's plenty of real blood being spilled in Iraq, without an assault on MPs and the government in this country. When the war is over, there will be time to look at things differently. There will be time to call a balance sheet. At this point, it is important we maintain a broad anti-war movement and reach out rather than internalise ..."

**John Edmonds**, general secretary, GMB

"We need to think what we do next. I am worried that we will do what we do so often in the

labour movement - retreat into our comfort zone, internalise our difficulties and argue amongst ourselves ... Overturning the prime minister of the UK won't stop the war."

**Alice Mahon MP**

"Any attempt to change the leadership of the party now would be a huge distraction ... I have been in this party for 50 years and I'm not walking away now."

**Alan Simpson MP**

"The only time that any other party will be formed is when the trade union movement decided to refund a Labour Party. There are two challenges here. First, the one we all need

to take away - are there enough of us to work for the return of a genuine Labour Party? The second is whether there is the democratic space. And that is the issue that the trade union movement must accept central responsibility for."

**John McDonnell MP**

"George has posed us some real questions that we have to address ... We know what we've got to do: we've got to reclaim the Labour Party. How do we do it?"

**Tony Benn**

"We won't get two million people in Hyde Park for a leadership challenge!"



## STOP THE WAR

### Urban 75 - <http://www.urban75.com> **Activist toolbox**

**U**rban 75 shot to national prominence early last year when commander Brian Paddick, the police chief who spearheaded a more tolerant and rational approach to cannabis use in Lambeth, became a regular contributor to the site's many discussion boards. Being openly gay and having expressed an interest in "anarchy", Paddick became a favourite whipping boy of the tabloid press, leading to his dismissal and the closure of the Lambeth cannabis scheme. However, from the point of view of U75 as a left resource, it is now on a par with Indymedia.

So what does the site have to offer? As I commented in relation to Indymedia, finding a place to begin is difficult, as there are literally dozens of links. The frequently asked questions, tucked away at the foot of the page, is a good place to start, offering a short and potted history of U75's origins. This narrative is expanded on in the 'About us' area of the magazine section, providing short biographies on Mike Slcombe (U75 webmaster/guru), discussion board moderators, the kind of accolades the site has received and press coverage.

The home page links are grouped under 12 headings, repeated along the top bar. Moving from right to left, the first is 'Boards'. Opening the link, we are presented with 22 forum topics under six headings. Each of these in turn comprise hundreds of threads with thousands of individual posts on practically every subject imaginable. The quality of discussion varies from intelligent and reasoned debate to vicious flame wars. Overall they are certainly not for the faint-hearted. Next along is the aptly named 'Useless', a collection of pointless games such as *Downing Street fighter* and *Abusive fruit machine*. I must admit, though, to spending some time here trading insults with the computer and taking time out to punch the likes of Tony Blair and Rupert Murdoch.

The 'Football' feature is quite interesting and deserves to be regularly read by all those wishing to reclaim the game. This area carries articles on the effects of the Criminal Justice Act on football fans to pieces dealing with the relationship between the game and big business. Soccer-related games are also listed, along with general football resources and links to Cardiff City (!) sites.

'Drugs' is a very interesting and valuable section. It carries the disclaimer: "This site neither

condemns nor condones drug use. This resource is for people to access the facts and make their own, informed decisions." The article collection here deals with the law, drug help lines, tips on safe use, death rates and a guide to 23 different narcotics. Understandably the Paddick/Lambeth affair is covered in depth. There is some crossover here with the music section, which features some shared legal links and first aid guides, as well as the latest news from the party scene. 'Photos' is a fairly kooky page carrying the webmaster's favourite personal pictures, and providing a DIY guide to photography.

The U75 magazine page is very much a varied collection of disparate links. Poems, cartoons and more games sit comfortably along with articles on internet culture, London cafes, and cyberspace self-help. But probably the most important feature on the site are the action/campaign pages. Links are grouped under eight sections. 'Direct actions' features reports, histories, photos and comment on recent and ongoing, high-profile campaigns, such as Mayday and Stop the War events. 'Issues' takes a more in-depth look at current affairs. I found the sections on the top five censored news stories particularly interesting, and there is an excellent archive of U75 material covering the 2001 general election. 'Your rights' repeats a lot of the material from 'Drugs' and 'Music' but includes advice on such matters as using the police complaints procedure.

The links page is very good, listing an eclectic collection of progressive websites and contact details, alternative news sources, fanzines, spiritual sites, etc. But it was the DIY media section that caught my eye. It is truly an activist toolbox, featuring a long piece by George Monbiot on how to exploit the mainstream media, organising impromptu street parties, tips for budding squatters, small press printing and more. New and seasoned activists are guaranteed to find something useful here.

Comparisons are bound to be made with the UK Indymedia website - both being anarchist-inspired independent resources. Yet both are very different: while Indymedia is news-oriented, U75 provides an unparalleled degree of depth on practically every issue under the sun. Communists could do a lot worse than spend a few hours exploring this valuable resource ●

Phil Hamilton

## Protests rock Latin America and Asia

**E**ven as US and UK soldiers continue their attempted conquest of Iraq, the worldwide movement against the war continues to mobilise and demonstrate its potential power.

On March 24, more than 100,000 employed and unemployed workers, students, professionals and political activists flooded into the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to commemorate the 27th anniversary of the military coup and demonstrate against the war in Iraq. 'No more impunity, hunger and repression' and 'No to the imperialist war against Iraq' were the principal slogans.

The march in Buenos Aires was headed by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, an organisation formed to demand justice for the 30,000 Argentinians who were 'disappeared' during the mili-

tary dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s. Protestors linked the struggle of the families of the 'disappeared' to the fight against the war, raising slogans like: 'No more hunger, war and plunder - Yankees out of Iraq!'

Juan, a member of the Communist Party of Argentina, said: "This advance of imperialism in Asia can end up continuing into Latin America. But I believe that it can also create the opportunity for the people of North America to open their eyes to the massacre."

Three days later, on March 27, public workers in Turkey downed tools and demonstrated in Ankara's Kizilay Square.

Members of the Turkish Confederation of Public Employee Unions (Kesk), the Revolutionary Confederation of Labour Unions (Disk), the Turkish Union of Engineers and Architects Chambers

and the Turkish Doctors Union participated in the event.

The day before, Disk and Kesk workers in Istanbul demonstrated against the war in Iraq. Kesk chair Sami Evren said in his speech to the rally that labourers in all provinces of Turkey would hold a protest against the war and the budget by gathering at town squares.

Disk chair Suleyman Celebi said that US imperialism had once again turned toward the Middle East, and that the US invasion of Iraq violated United Nations resolutions. He concluded by calling on all democratic organisations across the globe to stand firm against the war.

Kesk spokesman Orhan Karakaya, criticising the Turkish government, said that the current budget pushed back health and education investment ●

Martin Schreder

## Chicago: Warned not to smile

**J Quinn Brisben**, veteran peace activist and former presidential candidate for the Socialist Party USA, describes his arrest

**I** cannot tell you much about the anti-war demonstration at the federal plaza in Chicago on March 21, for I was arrested about three minutes after I got there, while trying to explain to a policeman that I needed the reinforced bath chair I was carrying because I cannot stand for a long time without pain.

The chair and my cane were confiscated and I was handcuffed and put in a police van, along with 20 other demonstrators. We remained there on Jackson Street for an hour, then were taken to Area Two police headquarters on 115th Street, where we sat in the van for three more hours.

My plastic cuffs were so tight that I lost feeling in my hands, and my general discomfort so great that I was close to fainting. I was finally taken to the cab of the van, where my name and address were taken and, after I mentioned my acquaintance with several police officers working out of that station, my cuffs were loosened.

We had a jolly time in the van and later in our cells. I was, at age 68, the third oldest in the group, one of my seniors being the noted pacifist, Bradford Lyttle. The youngest arrestees were in their teens. Six in the van were experiencing their first arrest. We kept each other entertained with songs and a stream of anecdotes about the good old days. We were kept in the van because other vans ahead of us were being unloaded and processed.

Once inside, my cane and chair were returned and five of us with alleged medical problems were segregated in a cell. I have no idea how many were incarcerated with us. Many in the jail were still there from arrests at earlier actions the night before. I had been able to call my wife from a cellular phone, which was for some reason not confiscated, inside the van, and later a detective allowed me to call her on his cell phone. We were not fed, but I had a granola bar in my pocket, which sustained me until 7.30pm.

Shortly before 3pm, a detective announced that the five of us were going to be released shortly without paying the \$100 fine, as many were required to do, since he had warned police officials about problems that might result from our

alleged medical condition. However, our release took three more hours. Somehow, the elaborate new fingerprinting technology did not work well and we had to submit to it twice. I had to be admonished not to smile while my mug shots were being taken.

One of our group was a US citizen who had been born in Malaysia, a country of which no one in the squad room seemed to have heard. He was not released, for undisclosed reasons, with the other four of us. His wife and daughter are in jail in another part of the city. Lawyers have been alerted to his plight.

My wife reported that neither she nor dozens of other family members waiting

for the release of prisoners were allowed into the station, but kept outside in 40-degree Fahrenheit [5-degree Centigrade] temperature, with a nippy wind. We were able to take two of my cellmates to a rapid transit stop and Brad Lyttle to his home in Hyde Park. Brad suffered a massive heart attack two weeks ago, but, as his friends would have predicted, that was not stopping him.

My court appearance is set for May 1, the day I am supposed to address comrades in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, an engagement I intend to make. However, I shall try to avoid arrest between now and then, but, the way things are going, that may not be possible ●

## ISO setback

**A**gainst a backdrop of mounting tension and increased polarisation in Zimbabwe between the ruling Zanu-PF and opposition Movement for Democratic Change, the International Socialist Organisation candidate and former MDC MP, Munyaradzi Gwisai, was badly squeezed in a parliamentary by-election in Harare.

Comrade Gwisai could only muster 73 votes in the solidly working class constituency of Highfield, as against over 8,000 for the victorious MDC candidate and 3,000 for Zanu-PF. He finished fourth out of the seven candidates, despite being the outgoing member - his expulsion from the MDC for opposing its rightwing, neoliberal policies automatically triggered the by-election.

With Zimbabwe still simmering following the March 18-19 political stayaway/lockout, organised by the MDC leadership in cooperation with a section of Zimbabwe capital, the by-election came at a bad time for an independent working class candidate. Hundreds, if not thousands, of potential ISO supporters decided to back the MDC - originally set up by the trade union movement - in order to keep out Robert Mugabe's Zanu-

PF, which is despised by the overwhelming majority of workers.

However, while MDC voters felt free to back their candidate in the ballot box, party workers were forced to stay away. Following the stayaway/lockout the leadership issued an ultimatum (which expired on March 31, but was subsequently extended), threatening more of the same if the government did not accede to its list of demands.

Mugabe has reacted with predictable ferocity, flooding key areas of Harare with riot police and paramilitary forces, arresting leading MDC figures and beating supporters. Many have been forced into hiding.

Clearly comrades from the ISO - sister organisation of the Socialist Workers Party - must now reassess their strategy after what was undoubtedly a successful period of work in the MDC. ISO national treasurer Rosa Zulu concluded: "We are back in the position we were in before the party was formed. Nevertheless, we will continue our work, we will continue to publish *Socialist Worker* and we will continue our struggle on the ground" ●

Peter Manson

around  
**THEWEB**

## EDINBURGH

# Thousands take to streets

On Saturday March 29, around 12,000 came out in Edinburgh to protest against the war with Iraq. The turnout was impressive, given the short space of time in which the demo was organised.

There was an hour's delay before the march was able to set off: the bus that was supposed to lead it was trapped amongst thousands of demonstrators. Other than that, things went very smoothly and there was none of the violence and destruction that the police had warned of in an attempt to scare off many from attending. The only disruption that was caused was a sit-down protest by a group of anarchists that stopped traffic on the Lothian Road for a while.

In contrast to the previous week's event, there was an absence of Scottish National Party placards - no doubt due to SNP backtracking in its 'opposition' to the war. Fortunately - again in contrast to the previous week - there were plenty of placards and banners in the name of the Coalition for Justice not War and the Scottish Socialist Party. Many protesters had their own messages for Tony Blair and George Bush: such as "Support our troops - bring them home" or "Tampax America - no more blood for oil". The good weather contributed to what was a lively and colourful protest.

After marching for an hour and a half the crowds assembled for a rally in the Meadows. The platform included Iraqi dissident Susan Karim, former SNP MP Margo McDonald, comedienne Elaine C Smith and, of course, Tommy Sheridan ●

**Sarah McDonald**

## HACKNEY

# Turning point

Over 700 people joined a very militant demonstration through Stoke Newington and Dalston.

Stop the War Coalition chair Andrew Murray, speaking at the end-of-march rally, called for Blair to be sent to the Hague tribunal for war crimes. On a more militant note, Paul Embery, branch secretary of Islington Fire Brigades Union, made it clear that despite the wishes of a section of the leadership, "The majority of firefighters are not going to bend to government pressure". He later told the *Weekly Worker* that he believed that the rank and file in London will definitely reject the employers' offer and the decision at the recall conference in April could well be in favour of continued strike action.

On April 2, Diane Abbott addressed a local rally of more than 400 people. She stated her clear opposition to the war and added: "There have been many things my government has done with which I disagree, but this war is the thing of which I am most personally ashamed" ●

**Anne Mc Shane**

## LEWISHAM AND GREENWICH

# SWP excludes Ian Page

Lewisham Socialist Party councillor Ian Page was kept off the platform at a rally on March 29 by SWP hack Moira Nolan.

Around 300 protesters had marched from Lewisham to Greenwich and comrade Page, as the most widely known activist and only elected socialist in either borough, was expected by many to be the final speaker. On the eve of the march and rally, the SP had telephoned a Stop the War Coalition official and received an undertaking that comrade Page would be asked to speak, even though he had

not up to then been invited.

Comrade Nolan's stated reason for reneging on this was that a previous speaker had announced himself as a member of International Socialist Resistance and the SP. She said that she would not have let him speak had she known his affiliation - one SP speaker was quite enough.

Several non-SWP STWC committee members were unhappy with comrade Nolan's high-handed sectarianism, especially since she herself had dominated proceedings.

Earlier the demonstrators had marched with an assortment of banners and placards from Lewisham shopping centre. As well as SWP and SP supporters, comrades from the CPGB, Alliance for Workers' Liberty and *Socialist Resistance* were present. There were contingents from the CND, Green Party and Muslim Association of Britain, and local union banners from Unison, Natfhe and the NUT. It was pleasing to see the good turnout from school and college students ●

**Peter Manson**

## BRIXTON

# Marchers converge

On Saturday March 29 around 500 people converged in Brixton from various south London locations, mainly Lambeth and Southwark, via a number of feeder marches.

The rally, which attracted a fair-sized crowd of Brixton shoppers, featured a number of speakers, including anti-war school students, trade unionists (not least Greg Tucker of the Socialist Alliance and RMT) and a spokesman from the local mosque.

A speaker from Vauxhall Labour Party reported that, such is the polarisation within the party, an attempt is underway by Blair supporters to deselect Kate Hoey MP, normally considered rightwing, for her opposition to the war. At the end of the rally, a number of marchers left for foreign secretary Jack Straw's house, located nearby, to continue their protest ●

**Ian Donovan**

## TOTTENHAM

# Oil and imperialism

"Victory to our troops! Long live America! Up the war!" For over 20 minutes a middle-aged man stood opposite our rally, shouting abuse at us. Some occasionally swore back, although many clearly felt a certain respect for the persistence of this lone individual.

After all, there were over 500 of us who had marched from Finsbury Park to Turnpike Lane. Our march had grown along the way, as shoppers and residents joined the demonstration. We listened to speeches from Pat Arrowsmith of CND, trade union reps and local school students, who turned out in force.

A group of young boys, most of them not older than 12, stood watching the pro-war heckler for some time. It was their first demonstration, they told me, and they thoroughly enjoyed it. But this one person annoyed them. One of the boys finally plucked up the courage to go over to him. For about five minutes, the two were arguing passionately. The boy

then picked a crumbled leaflet out of his back pocket and handed it to the man, who started reading it immediately, while slowly walking away.

When he returned to his cheering friends, he proudly reported back: "Well, I told him about the injustice of this war and that it's all about oil and imperialism, inni"? That shut him right up," he said, grinning from ear to ear ●

**Tina Becker**

## MANCHESTER

# Propaganda organ

The March 29 Manchester demonstration, which targeted BBC north-west headquarters, was a vast improvement on last week's affair.

On both occasions, the sun shone and the scene was set for good turnouts of around 3,000, but this week's demo was far more upbeat. On March 22 the longish march meandered down the back streets of the city centre to conclude with barely audible speeches, made through a hand-held loudhailer.

This week, the march featured a large contingent of Iraqi exiles. It was also heartening to see members of the Labour Party marching in direct defiance of the leadership. This is the first time rank and file members have come out so publicly in support of the anti-war movement in Manchester.

The SWP lead speaker, Mark Krantz, condemned the BBC for its role as Blair's lackey. He recommended that comrades obtain the satellite TV station, Al Jazeera, as an alternative (if you speak Arabic, that is).

Such advice speaks volumes for the SWP's substitutionism and reveals a distinct lack of ambition ●

**James Frazer**

## LEIGH

# Promotion beckons

On Friday March 28 almost 80 people crowded into Leigh Liberal Club to hear a heated debate on the war featuring local Labour MP Andy Burnham.

He told the meeting of his "agonising dilemma" in the recent Commons debate on Iraq. He had ended up voting for military action in the belief that there was no other course of action open. He hoped the war in Iraq would be short and casualties kept to a minimum. The shouted response of "One death is one too many" drew cheers and applause from the floor. Credit should be given to the Leigh member of parliament, for very few other MPs would be as brave as to face a room full of angry anti-war protesters.

When the debate was given over to the floor, a World War II veteran questioned the sensibilities of those present. How was anybody to know what was right for Iraq? Only the Iraqi people knew the answer to the question.

**It was also heartening to see members of the Labour Party marching in direct defiance of the leadership**

"Well, are there any Iraqis in the room?" he asked, mockingly.

And there he stood, in a denim jacket and with a sullen face. "I am from Iraq," he began. "My family now live in Baghdad". It was emotional, not only for him, but for all those present. Clearly upset, he wished the war would stop. "But not everything is black and white. There are grey areas. We do not want Saddam Hussein, nor do we want America" ●

**Nick Redmond**

## CARDIFF

# Stella Artois nationalism

A few hundred demonstrators marched through Cardiff city centre, and rather uncomfortably past a plethora of beer gardens, in which drunken football fans questioned the 'Britishness' of the marchers, with abuse particularly thrown at the muslim contingent. "Support the troops!" boomed one fan, as we made our way back to the City Hall for the speeches, which seemed to follow the general limited line of 'Blair out!'

Protestors ranged from the organised left to the usual dove-carrying peaceniks, but particularly encouraging was the number of school and university students who turned out on an action-packed sunny afternoon. If the march did nothing else, it proved how the evils of nationalism, particularly when mixed with Stella Artois, serve to distort the truth and the real issues behind such bloody imperialist adventures ●

**Ben Lewis**

## SWANSEA

# High profile

Up to 200 people demonstrated in Swansea on March 29. A cross-section of activists were present, ranging from the Greens and CND to the left generally and the local branch of the Welsh Socialist Alliance. Swansea WSA used this opportunity to build its campaign in the town for the Welsh assembly elections in May. Both seats are being contested, with Alun Thompson standing in Swansea East and Leigh Richards fighting Swansea West ●

**Bob Davies**

## GUILDFORD

# His lordship regrets

On March 28, about 120 people gathered at the University of Surrey in Guildford to debate 'Iraq - the way forward?' with a rather interesting panel of speakers.

Surrey Stop the War Coalition organised the meeting, and was represented on the platform by its secretary, Jeremy Butler of the CPGB. He was joined by John Gladwin, bishop of Guildford; human rights campaigner Lord Nazir Ahmed; Dr Scilla Ellworthy, director of the Oxford Research Group; and Lord Howell, MP for Guildford and member of Thatcher's cabinet between 1979 and 1983. Lord Howell is now the Conservative's opposition spokesman for foreign affairs in the House of Lords, and attended to defend the war.

He did this on the well worn grounds that it was a deeply regrettable necessity to displace Saddam's evil dictatorship, and that Iraq had become a "lynchpin of terror" and "danger to the region". Perhaps throwing a bone to a clearly uneasy audience, he acknowledged the war's "unpopularity". He blamed "Bush's speech-writer", for the fact that, whenever the president spoke, his lordship was "really turned off".

We are a polite lot in Guildford, and listened quietly. Some even applauded, presumably impressed by his willingness to turn up. And then, from their various different standpoints, every other speaker attacked the war as unjust and Lord Howell's arguments were torn to pieces ●

**Manny Neira**

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## SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

# Business as usual for stalled

**A**s the Socialist Alliance executive committee was meeting on Saturday March 29, the sounds of the Birmingham anti-war demonstration passing outside filtered into the United Services Club. Reports from up and down the country of tens of thousands on the street against the war were phoned and texted in during our discussions.

The mass movement is making its mark. Yet, apart from a few placards and leaflets, the Socialist Alliance has failed to engage with it. It has passed the SA by. The alliance has not been transformed. Of course, individual SA members have thrown themselves into anti-war activity, but by and large they are not doing so *as* SA members. John Rees, representative of the Socialist Workers Party on the executive, ducked out of the meeting to appear at the rally following the demonstration. Of course, he was speaking on behalf of the Stop the War Coalition, not the alliance. Different 'united front', different hat.

We have seen two million on the streets. Mass meetings have been held up and down the country. The first People's Assembly has taken place. Labour Against the War has pulled hundreds of delegates to its conference. Every serious organisation has redoubled its efforts, increasing the number of its meetings, not cancelling them. While the rest of society debated and acted against the war, the Socialist Alliance postponed its conference - our highest decision-making body - for what was believed to be the duration of the conflict.

Where branches are doing anything, it is usually just the same monthly gathering of the same few people. After all, "We all know what we need to be doing", as national secretary Rob Hoveman (SWP) said at the executive meeting. We don't actually need to discuss the war after all. Trivial matters such as the politics of the war, what slogans to develop, the schisms in the Labour Party, how to campaign for a new workers' party - none of this was needed once war broke out. Such was the apolitical stance of the Socialist Alliance executive.

My charge of effective liquidation of the alliance was challenged at the meeting. The 100-plus candidates in the forthcoming local elections on May 1 is evidence that the SA is alive and well, I am told. This misses the point. Liquidation is not about what local branches do on the ground: it is about leadership. It is about where the alliance is going in these dramatically changed circumstances. Apparently, we are going exactly the same direction before the war crisis emerged as after: ie, nowhere in particular. The SWP does not have the politics or the courage to take the alliance to the mass movement as a bold campaign to forge a workers' party.

The Socialist Alliance has failed the test of the war. Where is this organisation going? No dramatic change of gear was proposed by the executive. Business as usual. The current framework seems to satisfy the majority. It does not satisfy me.

Discussion began with a feint. John Rees and Nick Wrack, the SA representative on the STWC steering committee, both gave reasonable assessments of the war and the movement. Comrade Rees said that the slogan 'Blair out!' had been adopted. This was all well and good, but what, I asked, was to replace Blair? Setting out the argument for regime change at home was the key task for socialists and communists. Now that the anti-war party had been reduced to its hard core of 30% or so, we needed to reinvent the majority with harder, more concrete politics.

Attention turned to the new stage in the campaign: April 12, the next national demonstration. Why shouldn't we have an SA representative speaking on the platform? After all, the SA was there at the start. Well, said comrade Rees, we'd be competing with 10 Iraqi organisations, 10 Kurdish organisations, etc. And if the SA wanted to speak, then what about the Socialist Party, *Morning Star*, Arthur Scargill? I suggested that John Rees could speak for the SA if the organising com-



mittee wanted a credible speaker from the anti-war movement. He did not seem so keen. It was agreed that the STWC be approached and comrade Wrack offered as our speaker.

Comrades seemed pleased that there were 25 to 30 people handing out SA material at the previous national demonstration on March 22. Rob Hoveman said he wanted to improve on this... Well, one way he could is by winning (instructing?) more of his SWP comrades to do this work, of course. I am sure no one would miss a few dozen sellers of *Socialist Worker*.

Alan Thornett (International Socialist Group) then presented two motions. One to endorse the writing of a pamphlet on the La-

bour Party and the war (albeit with a sexier title) by himself. The other was for a series of youth and student teach-ins under the SA banner.

Given that this executive should have ceased existence months ago (we were only elected for a year on December 1 2001); given that we have not actually had our annual conference to discuss and debate the question of the war and the Labour Party, I felt it precipitous, to say the least, to commission a pamphlet. Declan O'Neill felt that the proposals were too much "business as usual".

Nick Wrack in particular sought to ridicule my argument. He said that I could not have it

**Mass movement: where now for the SA?**

both ways. In fact it was myself who wanted business as usual when I insisted the annual conference go ahead on March 15. Alan Thornett's proposal was about acting quickly in the new circumstances, he said. For my money there are two interconnected points here. Democracy and ideas.

How can we commission a pamphlet without a democratic debate on the issues it will contain? How can we collectively think without a regular press and without having had a conference? I honestly do not know what comrade Thornett has in mind about the Labour Party and the war. Why would I vote for him to write a pamphlet on it? Only Tess McMahon, outgoing treasurer, and myself voted against this 'initiative'.

Describing going ahead with our annual conference a week before the war against Iraq started as 'business as usual' would be laughable if it was not so sad. We could have agreed emergency resolutions on the war. We would have had the opportunity to discuss our strategy with regards to the Labour Party. We could have launched a weekly or daily anti-war paper. There were motions to launch a campaign for a workers' party - just what was needed in the period of heightened political activity and direct mass involvement. Just what has been missing. Instead, the postponement allowed the groups to get on with their own narrow work. It was the victory of the sects over the fight for principled partyist unity.

On the matter of youth 'teach-ins' I abstained. I am not against them, but cannot really see the Socialist Alliance having much cutting edge in the movement, given that the majority faction, the SWP, favours either the

## Pro-party?

**A meeting called by Steve Freeman of the Revolutionary Democratic Group to discuss the cooperation of Socialist Alliance "pro-party" forces was held in Luton on March 30. Present were comrade Freeman; Martin Thomas and Gerry Byrne of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty; two comrades from the Bedfordshire SA Democratic and Republican Platform; two SA independents, Dave Church and Phil Pope; and myself. Workers Power did not reply to the invitation to attend.**

**Comrade Freeman proposes to rally the "pro-party" forces before the May 10 annual conference at a public meeting the weekend before - he seems to place just about everybody apart from the SWP in that category. Steve suggested that**

**non-SA comrades such as George Galloway, Tommy Sheridan and Dave Nellist be invited to address the meeting. Comrade Nellist, of course, led the Socialist Party out of the SA at the December 2001 conference, on the grounds that the more centralised structure just agreed had already transformed the alliance into a "party". I confessed to being baffled as to how comrade Nellist (or for that matter any of the organisations comrade Freeman wants to bloc with) could be considered "pro-party" in the context of the SA.**

**Comrade Thomas suggested that a get-together in a pub the evening before conference might be more realistic ●**

**Peter Manson**



# alliance?

STWC or Globalise Resistance for its youth activity. While a majority on the SA executive seems happy providing a ‘broad’ face for the SWP’s electoral united front, I am not.

Finally on the war, we discussed our slogans. Rob Hoveman suggested adding ‘Blair out, troops out’. This was agreed unanimously. Jim Denham of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty - there substituting for Martin Thomas, who prioritised attending Labour Against the War over the EC meeting - proposed adding: “Freedom for the peoples of Iraq”. Amazingly, only two voted for what I thought would be an uncontroversial slogan.

I asked what had happened to the People’s Assembly. John Rees assured us the second assembly would be called at the appropriate time. Last week’s steering committee of the STWC had decided that the time was not now.

### Local elections

There was fruitful discussion on the May 1 local elections. Comrade Hoveman reported that there will be more than 100 candidates in around 50 local authority areas. I expressed concern about the credibility gap between the results we will get standing as anti-war candidates and the actual level of anti-war sentiment in the country. I pointed to the debacle of the Australian Socialist Alliance in the New South Wales state elections. Just standing as ‘Socialist Alliance Against the War’ would not automatically bring us a mass audience.

I proposed that, where there was no Socialist Alliance candidate, the SA should call on activists to vote and campaign for candidates who were opposed to the war, supported the firefighters and stood in defence of asylum-seekers. This was how we could campaign for the ‘anti-war party’ on a class-struggle, internationalist basis. Comrade Hoveman stated that the SA had never called for a vote for another party or candidates before and we should not start doing it now without a proper debate.

A compromise was reached. The minimum platform of opposition to the war, support for the firefighters and defence of asylum-seekers was to be a “guide” enabling local alliances

to “seek cooperation on this basis”. Local activists can decide for themselves what level of cooperation this entails.

Our local government manifesto, which was cobbled together at the February 2002 national council meeting, will be issued to candidates and put on the website as a “draft policy document”. It was agreed that the document is very inconsistent and eclectic and needs a thorough going over before it could be considered SA policy.

There was discussion on a proposal from comrade Rees that the SA call a national meeting of anti-war candidates. Details were patchy. I opposed this. I argued that we should attend such a meeting if it was called by the Stop the War Coalition. However, if the SA called a national meeting of candidates whose only basis was opposition to the war, we could end up being swamped. Candidates from the Greens and Liberal Democrats would far outnumber us. I also opposed the SA calling such a meeting with no clear class basis to it.

It was agreed that a national meeting would be too difficult to organise, so it was suggested regional meetings of anti-war candidates be organised. I voted against. I suspect this decision will disappear without trace.

### Trade unions

The executive called on the SA trade union committee to meet and report on plans for union conference fringe meetings this year. Mark Hoskisson (Workers Power), SA union officer, was absent from the meeting. Comrade Rees reported that George Galloway had agreed to speak at a number of fringe meetings on democratising the union political funds - although obviously not under the SA banner.

### Finance and conference

Shelley Margetson was unanimously co-opted onto the executive to act as our treasurer until annual conference. Executive passed the draft budget for 2003 and recorded its vote of thanks to Tess McMahon, who is standing down after doing a fantastic job. Annual conference will go ahead on May

10, despite a request from Globalise Resistance to move it in order to avoid a clash with its own conference. Amendments are reopened and must be in by April 27. Emergency motions will be allowed. Conference arrangements committee will recommend which of these should and should not be taken.

I pointed to the motions from South Manchester and Greenwich, which condemned the postponement of the annual conference. In this light, I suggested that the executive needed to move an emergency motion. This should lay out the new situation before us: the fluidity in the workers’ movement; the lack of working class representation in parliament; the ructions in the Labour Party; the development of the ‘awkward squad’ of union leaders; and the continued disunity of the left despite the limited gain of the Socialist Alliance. Finally the motion should commit the SA to campaign for a new workers’ party based on the mass anti-war movement and issue a call to the Labour left, anti-war activists, trade unions, other socialist and working class organisations to unite.

People nodded. John Rees said he would “draft something up” along those lines. Given the meeting we had just had, I was surprised that comrades from the executive endorsed such a perspective. We will see how it all comes out at conference.

As comrades rightly throw themselves into the anti-war movement, we can still spare some time to ponder, whither the Socialist Alliance? Where is the SA now? How will it change? I feel now the change needed cannot come from within the SA itself - without a revolution in thought, and a break from the sect perspective of the Socialist Workers Party. It can only come from outside, from the SA and the SWP being forced to confront the movement itself. Perhaps from the class itself throwing up another concrete alternative to resolve the party question.

When all is said and done, it is this question, the fight for a workers’ party, which remains the strategic issue confronting our movement today ●

Marcus Ström

## TRADE UNIONS

# Rail solidarity needed

**G**uards employed by 10 train operating companies (TOCs), members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, staged 24-hour strikes on March 28 and March 31. The action was in protest at the companies’ refusal to sign up to an agreement to restore to the rail industry operational rule book the guards’ responsibility for train safety. The rule book had been arbitrarily altered in 1999, by the now defunct privatised track company, Railtrack, in a move which the union saw as enabling train operators to get rid of guards, transferring the safety role to drivers, the majority of whom are in the Aslef union.

The RMT’s initial action in response was highly successful. A strike by guards employed by the prestigious east coast main-line operator, Great North Eastern Railway, was swiftly settled, with the company agreeing to the reinstatement of the safety rules. Seven other companies have since followed suit, but now the remaining ones are going on to the offensive.

The hand of the Blair government is clearly detectable in the latest developments. The Strategic Rail Authority, a quango set up by Blair as part of his muddled response to the shambles that is the privatised rail industry, has made

what, until recent times, would have been regarded as an astonishing intervention. SRA boss Richard Bowker has announced that the authority will underwrite, with taxpayers’ money, losses inflicted upon the 10 TOCs as a result of the RMT’s latest strikes.

Unfortunately the leaderships of the rail unions, no less than the national executive council of the Fire Brigades Union, are seemingly paralysed. The tactics now being adopted by the RMT - discontinuous short strikes, with no effort to win the solidarity of drivers - are merely a repetition on a broader scale of those employed in the recently defeated guards’ strike at Arriva Trains Northern. On March 28 and 31, just as in the ATN dispute, large numbers of Aslef drivers continued to work trains, even though managers, supervisors and even clerks were acting as guards. When the latest strikes are precisely about the indispensability of fully trained guards, the ability of the TOCs to get away with using scabs, whose only qualification is attendance at a rushed course, is a setback at the very beginning of the union’s campaign. And, in the face of Bowker’s bankrolling of the TOCs, it must be patently obvious to even a disinterested observer, that there is an ongoing attack on all the rail unions. The

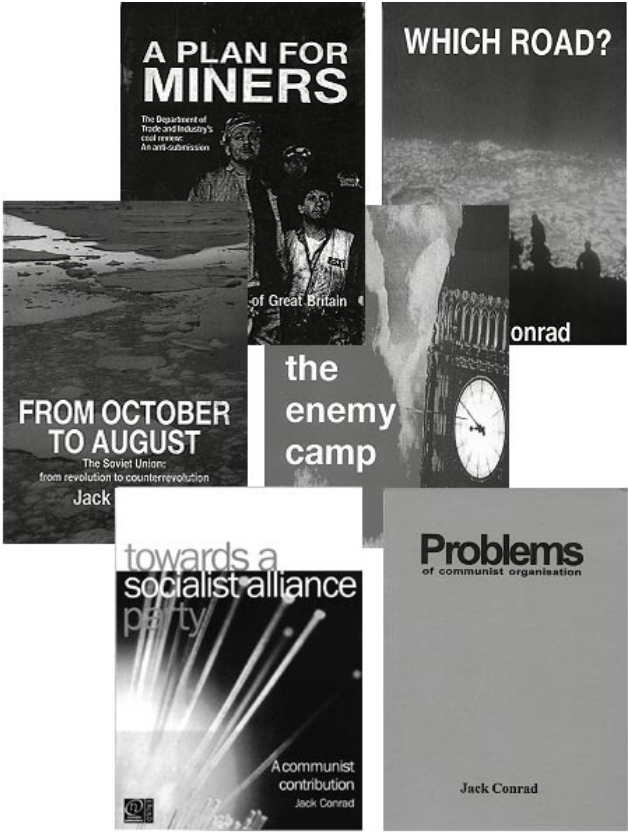
only appropriate response is a campaign that aims for the total stoppage of the whole industry.

The general secretaries of the two biggest unions, Bob Crow of the RMT and Mick Rix of Aslef, are trade union lefts with high profiles, who have been forthright in terms of anti-war and anti-New Labour rhetoric. But, when it comes to winning strikes and defending their own memberships, there are serious problems. Crow has apparently not even asked Aslef to refuse to work with scabs. In turn Aslef has issued a circular to its members at the strike-bound companies, telling them that it is up to the individual driver to judge whether he or she should take a train out, depending on whether they consider it safe to do so. It clearly falls to rank and file rail union activists to turn around this dispute.

It is very positive that the RMT has embarked upon strike action during the war, and the significance of this - not least because of the lead it offers to the firefighters - should not be downplayed. But the fact that there is a war on, leading to the intensification of all contradictions, including class contradictions, means that it is of vital importance that we have winning strikes ●

Derek Hunter

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## SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY

# All-Britain working class

On April 1 the SSP launched its manifesto for the May elections to the Scottish parliament. But the prioritising of Scottish independence as a “key strategic objective” is likely to damage the SSP campaign, argues **Tom Delargy**

**R**egular *Scottish Socialist Voice* columnist Kevin Williamson used his first post-conference outing to celebrate the passing of one particular motion. That motion (from the Tay Coast branch) was targeted by the CPGB, Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Workers Unity as the one we most wanted to defeat.

Unfortunately, we queued up to intervene in the debate in vain. A Socialist Worker platform member called for the debate to be cut short, and conference voted to do that. That is one reason I think this motion was passed illegitimately. Many cast their vote for the motion clueless as to what they were doing. Yet by voting it through on the nod the Scottish Socialist Party entrenched its nationalism and put socialism on the back burner. Might the final goal disappear altogether? Yes.

As Kevin makes clear in his defence of the new policy, socialism is no longer an intrinsic goal of our party; merely an optional extra that the Scottish people may turn to, after binging to its heart's content on the wonderful excesses an independent capitalist Scotland has in store for us. Never before has the party committed itself so clearly to such a miserable perspective. It is politically incoherent - an albatross around our necks. The party has not merely committed itself to a tortuous obstacle course: the path we have chosen will prove as welcoming as a swamp, with many political casualties inevitable.

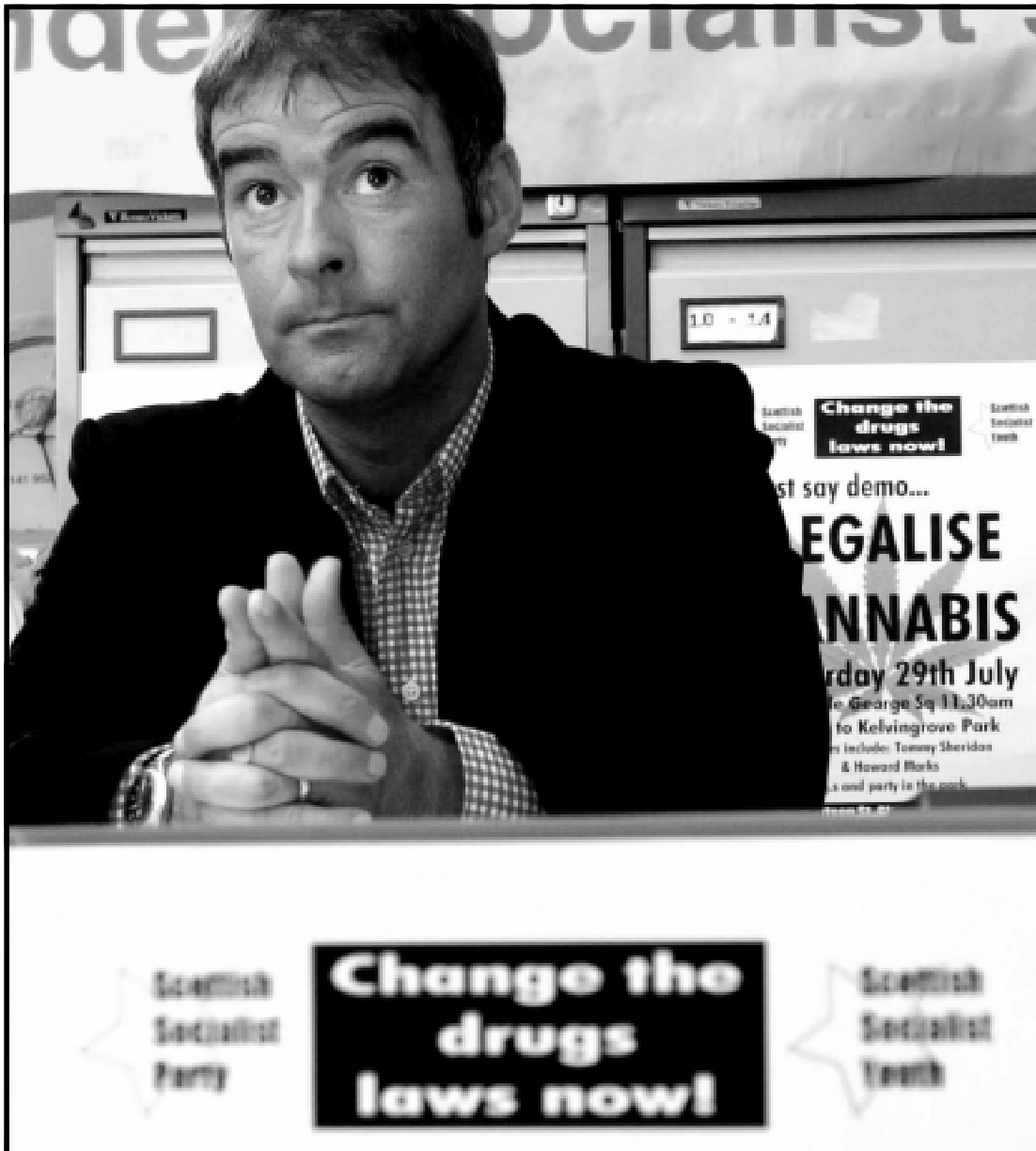
If an independent capitalist Scotland constitutes an unavoidable staging post on the road to socialism, socialists should ration our electoral interventions. Never again should we be so indulgent as to give workers a socialist choice come elections to Westminster or local councils, since they lack any proportional representation component. And where does this leave a second policy motion (a much better one) passed at this year's conference - the one from Kelvin branch affirming that the party will not sell our soul to the Scottish National Party in a kind of Lib-Lab pact?

By the logic of the Tay Coast motion, we would have to do that. At least until after the SNP delivers a successful referendum vote and passes the necessary legislation through the Scottish parliament, before and after negotiations with Westminster, the EU, etc. That would mean Tommy Sheridan and our MSPs voting for many rotten compromises and who knows how many votes of confidence. These are the reactionary consequences that flow from this new policy, consequences that have to be faced up to, not swept under the carpet. That, alas, is what conference delegates agreed to do when they voted to cut short the debate.

There were other reasons to reject this motion. It is littered with factual inaccuracies - implying, for instance, that Lenin advocated Scottish independence. In reality, Lenin proposed a different solution to the national question in Britain: a federal republic. Secondly, John Maclean is portrayed as an advocate of an independent *capitalist* Scotland. What Maclean stood for was a Scottish workers' republic, a position rejected by Lenin, but still a million times better than Kevin's.

The motion should have been rejected because of one extremely bizarre proposition: in the absence of Scottish independence we lack the democratic machinery to move towards socialism! This must come as a surprise to most members of our executive, who spent their formative years in the workers' movement arguing against Scottish independence. What is it about the English that causes Kevin so much anxiety? Are they deemed congenitally incapable of supporting socialism? Answers on a postcard, Kev.

Some of Kevin's views, as spelt out in his article, remind me of the worst kind of patron-



Majorities come and go. We are patient, confident our day will come. And, when it does, Kevin Williamson will be free to remain, and to call for changing the policy back again.

Democrat though Kevin undoubtedly is, his understanding of the concept leaves a lot to be desired. Defending the right of the Scottish people to self-determination does not mean *advocating* independence. A nation's right of self-determination is synonymous with their right to opt for an independent state, if they express a desire to do that, by means of referendum, for example. But nations have the right to opt for alternative solutions to the national question: for example, a federal republic or even a centralised state. Closing off alternative options is anti-democratic. Let the people decide.

Kevin wonders why SSP members who accept the aspirations of Kurdistan and Palestine to independence raise objections to Scottish independence. As Leninists, we distinguish between socialists living in an oppressed nation, those living amongst the oppressors, and those beyond the national antagonism in question. For Marxists, even if the Scottish people were an oppressed people (and we are not), emphasis would be placed on maintaining, and strengthening, the unity of the organisations not of the British state, but of the British working class *against* that state.

Our class automatically gravitates towards such unity, unity reactionaries are committed to wrenching apart. As principled trade unionists, striking firefighters in Scotland refuse to sell out their brothers and sisters in England and Wales. Even though their short-term interests suggest a better deal *might* be on offer from the Scottish parliament, instinctively they know it is not in their interests to go for a separatist solution to this class question.

When trade union bureaucrats have misled workers down sectionalist blind alleys in the past, our class has paid a heavy price. During the miners' Great Strike of 1984-5, the Nottingham miners were used by the bosses to undermine the strike. In precisely the same way, in Scotland and Wales, area leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers exploited nationalism to divide miners into doing deals to keep 'their' nation's respective steel mills open. Nationalist poison has had far more lethal consequences elsewhere, and cannot be ruled out in Scotland.

By no stretch of the imagination can Scottish separatism be held up as unequivocally progressive. Those who argue otherwise need to explain why Scotland's richest man, and homophobic bigot *par excellence*, Brian Souter funds the SNP. They need to explain why his multi-billionaire role-model, Rupert Murdoch, allowed the Scottish edition of *The Sun* to back the SNP for an extended period during the 1980s and 1990s.

If the SSP is first and foremost a nationalist party, then by all means let us place independence "at the centre of our campaigning work". However, despite the nonsense peddled in the Tay Coast motion, the SSP remains primarily a *socialist* party. Class independence, not national independence, has to remain at the centre of all our campaigning work. In practice the short-term electoral needs of our party require us to downplay the 'independent' component of 'our independent socialist Scotland' goal. Those whose number one priority is independence will vote SNP. It would be tragic if we alienated the majority of those who will consider voting for us in May's Scottish parliamentary elections on the basis of *class* questions. This is perhaps the most pressing of many reasons our party must ignore this motion.

I have no problem appealing for the votes of supporters of independence. But I want the vote of every worker who decides to register

ing rubbish peddled by apologists for British colonial policy, charlatans who also liked to portray themselves as 'forward-looking internationalists', even as they exported 'civilisation' to so-called backward peoples - as they claim to be doing in Iraq even today. The picture he paints of Scots mirrors that of xenophobes the world over, referring to us as "having made unparalleled (by any country of a comparable size) cultural, scientific, technical and philosophical advances that have enriched the whole planet". National supremacists everywhere describe their respective nations in similar terms. This kind of arrogant, patriotic chest-beating makes me want to vomit. The Scottish people are neither better nor worse than the rest of the human species.

Kevin gets a little hot under the collar when forced to acknowledge that some SSP mem-

bers remain unconvinced that championing Scottish independence is such a wonderful idea. He is no less frustrated by those who defend independence on the basis of tactical advantage, as most International Socialist Movement and Committee for a Workers' International comrades have thus far. According to Kevin, defending independence on that basis is an insult to Scots. As Kevin points out, the Tay Coast branch shifts the SSP from defending independence based on tactics to that of 'principles'.

Like Kevin, those who lost the vote are democrats. We accept the rights of the majority to decide party policy, including drawing up election manifestos committing our elected candidates to an independent socialist Scotland. But that is no more the settled will of our party than the existing constitutional arrangement is the settled will of the Scottish people.

**Tommy Sheridan: first and foremost a nationalist?**

## Scottish troops

**With all the anti-war activity taking place, the Scottish parliamentary elections have taken second place. However, with less than a month to go, we are beginning to see the campaign move into gear.**

**The SSP has been the first party to launch its manifesto following the formal dissolution of the Scottish parliament at midnight on Monday March 31. Opinion polls had put the party at 8%-10%, but since the start of war this figure has risen to 10%-12%. We could be looking at double-figure representation in terms of MSPs.**

**The SSP's manifesto calls for abolition of the**

**council tax and its replacement with a Scottish service tax, and demands free school meals for every state school student, a £7.32 minimum wage for public sector workers, the scrapping of PFI and an end to the war against Iraq.**

**Tommy Sheridan in an interview with the BBC said: "Those in Scotland who believe that Scottish troops should not be involved in America's war can vote for the SSP to endorse the proposal that we bring our troops home." Presumably that would apply to British army troops from England, Wales and Northern Ireland too ●**

**Sarah McDonald**



# resistance

opposition to Blair’s imperialist war. I want the vote of every single worker who appreciates that our party stands alone in Scotland in its principled defence of the Fire Brigades Union, and every other trade union, against Blair’s anti-working class government. For socialists to place independence “at the centre of our campaigning work” in the run-up to May’s elections, against the backdrop of Blair’s imperialist warmongering, is to undermine our ability to attract towards us all but a fragment of our natural constituency. It is as tactically inept as it is unprincipled.

On raising objections to the strategic goal of independence, I get reminded that implementing our party’s radical programme *requires* independence. After all, without a sovereign Scottish parliament, our MSPs will be limited in what they can deliver. But is that really the case? If we have to stick to the constitutional straightjacket imposed on the Scottish people by Tony Blair, what was in the mind of Alan McCombes when he drew up an election manifesto that could not be implemented within these constraints? And what was in the minds of conference delegates who voted for that manifesto, with not a single vote against?

The 200 policies our candidates will stand on have been carefully drafted: none of them taken in isolation breaks through this constitutional straightjacket. That said, it is explicitly recognised that the manifesto in its entirety cannot be implemented within the financial constraints imposed by Westminster. That causes no problem so long as we confine ourselves to an opposition within parliament. But our manifesto goes on to argue that, in the event of our being the largest party in parliament, we would not hesitate to pass an illegal deficit budget, one that embraced *all* our policies.

But if we have the nerve to propose such an act of constitutional defiance, inevitably provoking Blair into mobilising the UK state

against us, why stop there? Why not make clear that in the event of our forming a majority government, one not restrained by our having to rely on the votes of the SNP, Labour left, or left independents, we would go the whole hog? In other words, we would form a government committed to carrying out our entire maximum programme, the programme for a so-called independent socialist Scotland?

Would that not be unconstitutional? Absolutely, but no more so than the existing policy defended to such good effect in our manifesto. What is more, my proposal is far more principled. Were we to win a majority of seats in parliament (meaning we must have won majority support within our class), why should we agree to tie one hand behind our back, and all but one little finger of the other hand? Must we do that just because Tony Blair insists we must? Could we really justify keeping our noses out of some of the most important aspects of politics? Of course not.

There is simply no way we would sit back, as Blair continued to hold weapons of mass destruction on Scottish soil. We would demand that our new first minister, Tommy Sheridan, lead a team of weapons inspectors (democratically elected delegates from the trade unions, colleges, estates) through the gates of Faslane. Would the SSP executive tell us that this was not possible, at least not until after we win a referendum? And what about the anti-trade union laws? Would an SSP government really sit back, as firefighters were arrested for defying a ban on strikes, or as train drivers were arrested for striking to stop weapons of mass destruction being delivered to Iraq?

What if workers in the private sector struck to force their employers to follow the example of public sector employers, delivering on our election pledge to increase the public sector minimum wage to £7.32 per hour? What if private sector workers occupied their workplaces

until the bosses caved in? And what if Blair sent in the police and/or army to have them evicted, even thrown in jail? With our MSPs on the back benches, our rank and file would organise mass resistance. So can we really expect a majority SSP government to tell its members to go back to their constituencies and prepare for an independence referendum? I simply do not believe that Alan McCombes would do any such thing.

Might it be argued that the scenario I have just painted means I advocate an independent socialist Scotland in all but name? I can understand the confusion, but that is not the case. Rather than declaring UDI, an SSP government should appeal for workers’ solidarity across (and against) the United Kingdom state.

No one should be in any doubt that Blair would deploy the full might of the British state, whether an SSP government promised to keep within the constitutional limits of the existing parliament or not. An all-Britain state would be wielded as an unrestricted weapon of mass destruction against our class and our party. An all-Britain class resistance would have to be mounted, prepared for well in advance.

An SSP government should not merely welcome our brothers and sisters in England and Wales opening up a series of second fronts against the British state: as a matter of policy we should explicitly *call* for such solidarity. And if our appeals fall on deaf ears? Then of course we should not surrender positions won in Scotland until the struggle across the rest of Britain catches up. In such circumstances, a road to independence would open up. An independent socialist Scotland (or Scottish workers’ republic) should then be accepted as a necessary, but *temporary*, staging post.

But we cannot narrow our ambitions to an independent socialist Scotland, nor portray independence as in any sense progressive in and of itself ●

## LOCAL ELECTIONS

# Stoke-on-Trent Anti-fascism of fools

After a flawed but promising beginning, the North Staffs Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (Norscarf) has undergone a qualitative turn for the worse.

Last month saw the resignation of president Jim Cessford after a Socialist Party-sponsored constitution fell. Had it been passed, Norscarf would have been committed to attacking the material roots of the British National Party’s support. Unfortunately the Anti-Nazi League ‘Nazis are bad’ style of politics, pushed since the campaign’s relaunch, allowed for the close involvement of sections of the local government elite, and it is therefore unsurprising that the SP constitution was effectively vetoed. To illustrate this emptying of working class content, at the October rally Mike Wolfe (then prospective mayor) turned up at the very end. At the March 31 event, he was chairing it.

Held in Stoke’s council chambers, it served as a lesson in how not to run an anti-fascist campaign. Despite a few SP and SWP members (wearing their ANL hats) in attendance, a good proportion of the 80 or so present were made up of council mandarins and Labour loyalists. If anything, the platform was worse.

Addressing the meeting first, Racial Equality Council chief executive Mohammed Tufail delivered the usual ANL-style

fare. He highlighted the BNP’s law and order rhetoric and contrasted it with its leading cadres’ criminal convictions. He also slammed their anti-woman “solutions” to (white) Britain’s declining birth rate, before summing his speech up with reference to the economic contribution made by minority communities.

Next to speak was Christopher Hill, the bishop of Stafford. His was an exercise in pious sermonising, peppering the speech with anecdotes about visits to holocaust memorial sites in Poland, and the anti-fascist German pastor, Martin Niemöller. “One can be a patriot without being a Nazi,” he concluded.

Mike Wolfe then introduced Leon Greenman, a 92-year-old survivor of Auschwitz and five other death camps. He gave a moving talk about his life in Rotterdam before the war, the horrors experienced in the camps and his dedication to the struggle against fascism. The ensuing question-and-answer session saw him expand on the nature of Nazi slave labour, his survival strategies and the death threats he still receives. He argued that a repeat of the holocaust was still possible, and called for the audience to prevent it by joining the ANL and getting involved in the liberal anti-fascist magazine, *Searchlight*.

Winding up the meeting, deputy council leader Chris Wood was interrupted by

prominent BNP fellow traveller Jenny Holdcroft, who attacked Greenman’s “pack of lies”. Julie Waterson of the ANL/SWP, backed up by a number of councillors and ANL activists, wrested the microphone away. Chaos descended into farce when Holdcroft was arrested and led away by about a dozen police.

From the perspective of Mike Wolfe and his Labourite allies, the meeting enabled them to display their ‘progressive’ credentials and the fracas ensured front-page headlines in the local press the following day. But for genuine anti-fascists and communists, it was a missed opportunity. There was a complete absence of politics - let alone those based on a working class programme. There was no strategy on offer beyond the usual ‘Don’t vote Nazi’ call.

Looking forward to May, it seems that the BNP will not face a socialist opposition at the polls. Instead Labour candidates are likely to stand on the Norscarf ticket, offering nothing to potential BNP voters but the usual diet of cuts and cronyism, with a dash of official anti-racism. As for Norscarf itself, for all intents and purposes it has become an adjunct of the local government bureaucracy - a symbol of the bankruptcy of ANL class collaborationism ●

Phil Hamilton

# 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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## Struggle for hearts and minds in Iraq and at home

# Public relations campaign stumbles

**T**wo weeks into their invasion of Iraq, the Anglo-American imperialists are beginning to look in some trouble.

For all the bombast, all the arrogant assumptions that this would be an easy victory - or a "cakewalk", as one of Bush's more wacko advisers publicly bragged shortly before the invasion began - US and British troops were forced to call a halt to their advance for several days. The projected uprising against Saddam Hussein's regime, which was supposed to be triggered by the coming of the British and American 'liberators' (in reality would-be conquerors), has not happened. Instead, the imperialist forces are facing something that they certainly did *not* expect: guerrilla warfare, with every sign that defenders using these kinds of tactics are finding plenty of support among the civilian population. The same civilian population, that is, that the imperialists crowded would greet them with flowers and American flags. Evidently, something has gone badly wrong somewhere.

The supposedly devastating tactic of 'shock and awe', that would so terrify the regime and anyone in the civilian population inclined to defend it that they would allegedly surrender within a few days at most, has failed miserably. The so-called 'surgical' war, where government buildings are blown up by computer-controlled, satellite-guided Tomahawks, has included, amongst many other criminal acts, the bombing of a Baghdad market last week, killing at least 55 and injuring hundreds, and the shooting to death of women and children at a US army checkpoint.

It is worth recalling that similar atrocities, carried out by those deemed to be enemies of the west, were the *excuse* for bombing wars by the Nato powers in the former Yugoslavia in 1995, and again in 1999. Iraqi government sources, entirely credibly, claim that over 500 civilians have been killed in coalition bombing. These tactics are visibly backfiring, as the population regards itself as under fire by a foreign invader that makes hypocritical noises about its 'humanitarianism', while not hesitating to shed the blood of Iraqi civilians.

Indeed both the British and Americans have been forced onto the defensive. There are the publicly leaked grumbles by the US army brass about defence secretary Rumsfeld's interference in operational decisions, including, of course, his decision to send only about half as many troops as his generals reckoned were needed. There is the pause for reinforcements that will take several weeks to arrive with their equipment (while meanwhile the desert temperature gets hotter and hotter). These reinforcements are projected to double the size of the US contingent - yet despite this the Americans, reportedly engaging with elusive Republican Guards



50 miles from Baghdad, are now proclaiming that the battle for the capital has begun. In this confusion, 'Prince of Darkness' Richard Perle, one of the chief ideologues of the Committee for a New American Century and an adviser to Bush and Rumsfeld, has already gone, allegedly due to a 'conflict of interest' - hardly unique for people of his ilk.

Then we have the pathetic procession of nonsense stories, including notably from the British camp: the on-off-on capture of the port of Umm Qasr (apparently it is still not considered completely safe even now); the 'mass uprising' in Basra that turned out to be a mirage; the column of 'hundreds' of tanks that supposedly fled south from Basra that turned out to be no more than half a dozen strong; the incredible stupidity of Blair publicly accusing the Iraqi regime of 'executing' captured soldiers whose relatives had already been told by the British army (correctly) that they had died in battle. The cacophony of quickly discredited disinformation cannot inspire confidence in even the most credulous elements of the population - something the imperialists are well aware of. Which is why, of course, the volume of nauseating moral denunciation of the perfidious enemy has been pumped up more and more.

The coalition is complaining that its captured troops have been exhibited on Iraqi television - yet, even as Rumsfeld whines about violations of the Geneva convention, Iraqi 'irregulars' taken prisoner are being shipped off to Guantanamo Bay to join the hostages taken in the US war in Afghanistan - where they have no rights as POWs (which they obviously are), nor legal redress of any sort.

The war fought by the coalition more and more resembles the kind of campaigns waged by the Israelis in Lebanon - bloody and indiscriminate - and Iraqis have begun to employ the kind of resistance tactics used with notable success by Lebanon's Hezbollah - suicide bombings that make the occupying troops fear their every contact with the population at large. A perfectly le-

gitimate tactic waged by a people fighting an invading force that in technological power outguns them by so many orders of magnitude as to make the contest one of the most unequal in human history.

In fact, while American and British military spokesmen have spent a fair amount of time in the last two weeks squirming and having to make damaging admissions about the previous day's briefings, at times their Iraqi counterparts have exuded a certain confidence and bravado. Iraqi information minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf's briefings of the international media have attracted attention for their informative and often cogent content, in contrast to the contradictions of the coalition spokespersons, who have had to field numerous questions regarding the misinformation they were spinning the day before.

There is little more nauseating than the imperialist rhetoric about winning the 'hearts and minds' of the Iraqi population. Indeed, this kind of phraseology is an indication of political defeat: it shows that the claims of 'liberation' are not believed by the Iraqi population, so the imperialists are resorting to the tac-

tic of the hard sell. As with previous imperialist propaganda campaigns in such places as Vietnam, when the hard sell fails then the concentration camps will not be far behind.

In fact, many exiled Iraqi opponents of Hussein's odious dictatorship, understanding the simple and obvious fact that this war is a grab for control of a country which boasts the second biggest oil reserves on the face of the planet, are returning to fight for their country's right to national independence against imperialist piracy. Evidently, a popular movement now exists, with a real democratic thrust: it is not fighting so much for the existing regime, with all its undoubted barbarities and atrocities, but rather for the right of Iraq to be free from foreign invasion and domination - *despite* the regime.

This is an entirely progressive aim that all class-conscious workers, socialists and communists should support.

The defeat of coalition forces, including, if necessary, inflicting massive casualties, and their expulsion from the territory predominantly inhabited by the Arab Shi'a majority and Arab Sunni minority, would be a massive victory for the working class of the world. If a progressive anti-imperialist movement in Arab Iraq - composed of principled defenders of Kurdish national rights, capable of winning Kurdish militants away from their current fragile alliance of desperation with the Americans in favour of a united struggle for the liberation of all the peoples of Iraq - were to arise *against* Saddam Hussein, then that would be even better.

In any case, the prospect of an extended war, with the Anglo-US imperialist coalition facing a hostile population, something of a quagmire and likely many months of a war of attrition, means that there are new opportunities for socialists and opponents of the war to make progress. There has, predictably, been a wave of popular support in Britain for

'our troops' once the fighting got underway, irrespective of the massive size of opposition to the war before it began. But this has been followed by popular scepticism, both here and in the US, over the military claims of the coalition. Indeed, three British soldiers have been sent home from Iraq - they now face possible court martial for criticising the targeting of civilians.

While it is by no means clear that the current difficulties of the coalition will prove insurmountable, there are real grounds for optimism, given the fluidity of this situation and the imperialists' difficulties, that the mass anti-war movement can be rebuilt, with a good deal more political radicalism and potency, as pro-war disillusionment sets in. Indeed, recent opinion poll surveys indicate that close to one third of the British population still, in the midst of the chauvinist wave, oppose this war.

It is also notable that the firefighters have rebelled against their leadership's attempts to sell out their dispute under the cover of war, and that railworkers have gone on strike only this week despite the bellicose atmosphere - the fact that workers are prepared to pursue their trade union demands is a straw in the wind.

What the anti-war movement lacks, of course, is a *political* alternative, a conscious set of politics that can link working class discontent to the struggle against war. Politics, that is, to counterpose to the politics of the capitalist parties, and bourgeois ideology in general, that conditions working people to support their own ruling class at war.

Ultimately, a new working class party, armed with the most advanced Marxist theory - and thereby consciousness that working people have interests utterly opposed to those of the ruling class - is what is objectively necessary for real victories against imperialism and its wars ●

Ian Donovan

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