



weekly **worker**

**Glen Rangwala: US
strategy for pre-emptive
and active overthrow**

- Gulf War II - balance sheet
- April 12 anti-war demo
- May elections
- FBU Brighton conference

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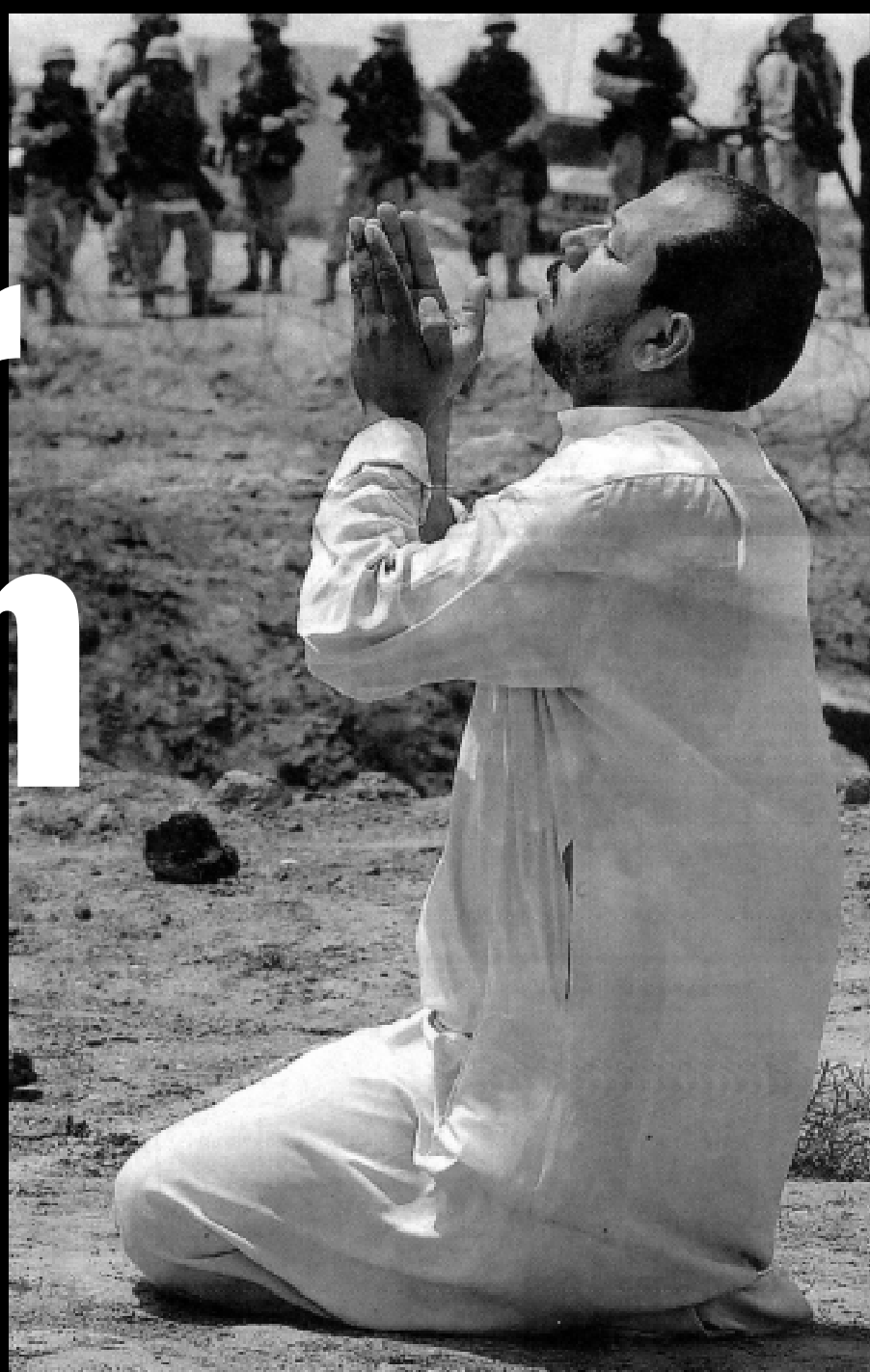
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Why Iraq could never have been another Vietnam

● **Mike Macnair argues that
the left was wrong - see
pages 6-7**



Balance sheet

The Iraq phase of US imperialism's permanent war is virtually over. It is timely therefore to draw up an honest balance sheet.

Alongside the abundant gains and successes recorded by the anti-war party (and the left), errors and shortcomings must be fearlessly admitted and speedily rectified. Only then can we properly prepare for the next phase of what James Woolsey - CIA director from 1993-95 and Pentagon choice to head the information department in the US occupation government - has chillingly called "World War IV". This bloodthirsty hawk envisages a conflict "against tyranny" lasting "decades" (*The Guardian* April 8). Iran, Syria, North Korea, Libya, Cuba and even China - all of them are targeted for regime change.

The anti-war movement was above all international. Actions were often simultaneous and coordinated. November's Social Forum in Florence set the scene. Across the world many millions marched. Britain - junior partner in the 'coalition of the willing' - proved to be no exception.

On February 15 London witnessed a truly historic demonstration of two million. Glasgow 80,000. Tony Blair faced two unprecedented parliamentary rebellions. Robin Cook resigned. But the parliamentary pro-war party always commanded an unassailable majority. Meanwhile opinion polls recorded most people in the country opposing the war. On March 12 1,500 delegates met together in the first People's Assembly. The anti-war party implicitly challenged the sclerotic and unrepresentative nature of parliament and Britain's quasi-democratic constitutional monarchy system.

The day the war broke out - March 20 - there were countless nationwide protests. School students formed the vanguard. A new generation emerged singing and shouting into politics. Two days later half-a-million rallied in London. Patriotism and 'backing our service men and women' was the only convincing argument in Blair's armoury. Amongst the soft and vacillating it wrought devastation. Robin Cook, Mo Mlam, Diane Abbott, Charles Kennedy and *Daily Mirror* editor Piers Morgan abjectly surrendered. Despite that between 20% and 30% of the population continued to support the anti-war party. April 12 - as the war against Iraq reached its chaotic climax in looting and state collapse - 80,000 in London and 3,000 in Glasgow protested against the US-UK occupation.

Achievements on the credit side are therefore palpable. What about the debit column? Keeping the Stop the War Coalition single issue served to camouflage an opportunist fear of providing a clear, unambiguous political lead. Confronted by big issues such as terrorism, democracy and patriotism, STWC balked. Clarity was sacrificed to a chimerical numbers strategy. Andrew Murray - STWC chair and member of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain - wanted to reach out to the Liberal Democrats and "even into the ranks of the conservatives". His disastrous slogan: the anti-war party must be "as broad as the country".

That meant a pigheaded refusal to condemn the murderous actions of al-



Every reason for confidence

Qaida, welcoming a Liberal Democratic fifth column onto platforms and curtailing or strangling debate. The Socialist Workers Party and their CPB allies tried to run the STWC's conference and the first People's Assembly as bureaucratic rallies, not democratic forums and decision making bodies. And having reluctantly agreed to the launch of the People's Assembly, the SWP put a block on local and regional assemblies - STWC's authority and thereby SWP interests might be jeopardised.

The anti-war party is undoubtedly a people's movement. But not one in which the organised working class exercises decisive hegemony. That must change. One encountered much over-excited chatter about strike action. Foolishly the People's Assembly agreed an extravagant - buck passing - resolution demanding the TUC "immediately" organise "general strike action". However, real strikes proved elusive and, had they occurred, would have scattered Murray's liberals and conservatives like autumn leaves in a thunder storm. To become a war stopping social force the anti-war party must adopt consistent internal democracy and solidly base itself on the militant working class.

Perhaps the biggest failure has been the Socialist Alliance. Despite the explosive wave of radicalisation the SA lackadaisically opted for "business as usual". The SWP, Workers Power, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the International Socialist Group and most of the so-called independents voted to postpone the annual general meeting till after the war. Already dangerously becalmed, this effectively liquidated the SA. The SWP saw a golden recruiting opportunity for itself - and would brook no competition.

Consequently the left spoke in a welter of fractious and confusing voices. Petty sect rivalry triumphed over the partyist project of incorporating all talents and all principled shades of socialist opinion - including in the Labour Party - into a single democratic and centralised organisation.

Doubtless hundreds of new members were made along with thousands

of new contacts. Ambitions should have been higher though. Far higher. The narrow carapace of the sects should have been shattered and abandoned. By transforming ourselves we could have won tens and hundreds of thousands.

If it is to have a worthwhile future the May 10 - delayed - AGM will have to be a relaunch conference. Gulf War II proves that an on-off SWP "united front" of an electoralist kind is as good as useless.

What of the CPGB? There were definite shortcomings. Our leadership did not move swiftly or decisively enough. Furthermore, sectarian diversions were given far too much leeway and prominence. Eg, objections to the involvement of the Muslim Association of Britain in the anti-war party. Puerile talk of popular fronts went hand-in-hand with brittle moralism about selling out fellow communists in the muslim world. Under the circumstances such nonsense should have been dealt with quickly and firmly.

The CPGB actually shed a thin layer of members. Collectively we failed to enthuse and lift them to the tempo exhibited by the mass movement. Either they quit or membership was terminated. Dead wood. An inactive communist is a contradiction in terms. Of course, numbers have been more than made up for by an influx of recruits. But there is no room for crowing.

Take the *Weekly Worker*. Sales on the numerous protests and demonstrations boosted circulation. But not qualitatively. Readership - in the print and electronic formats - still hovers at just under an *average* of 10,000. Not good enough. Obviously our paper shuns populism and demands seriousness. More should have been done though to improve accessibility (without watering down hard hitting polemics, etc).

There is, however, every reason for confidence. Britain is changed forever. The audience for leftwing ideas has multiplied many times over. There is a thirst for knowledge. A prediction - the anti-war generation of 2003 will progressively come to regard the *Weekly Worker* as required reading ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

Return home

Ian Donovan's article ('Consistent democracy after Saddam Hussein' April 10) brings to light Sean Matgamna and his cronies' ruthless persistence in pursuing anti-Arab chauvinism.

Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon, not mentioned by Donovan, is the AWL majority's continued refusal to support the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. However, Donovan is misled in believing that such political analysis stems from the AWL 'not having time for Arabs' as such. Rather the reason the AWL does not support Palestinian and Iraqi self determination stems from their overtly pro-imperialist and anti-communist ideology and practices.

Consider this example. In the new AWL pamphlet, Rhodri Evans informs us that if the Iraqi Communist Party had taken power (or led a revolution) in the 1950s, Iraq would have become "a prison house for its workers". He is talking here about the largest and most popular political party in modern Arab history, with millions of members and grass roots working class and peasant support. Their brand of socialism was not good enough for the AWL.

The party's adoption of a Moscow friendly policy made them evil, power-crazed 'Stalinists'. Just as well the ICP were too timid to lead the working class to power and left the country in the stable hands of the Ba'athist mass murderers and their now imperialist successors and former sponsors. Suffice to say that the AWL does not limit its opposition to socialism and national liberation in the Arab world.

Following close behind the strongest link of anti-communism (Matgamna and co) is Jack Conrad. Dropping another cold war bomb shell he writes "In the west anti-communism - based in no small measure on the appalling reality of 'actual living socialism' - cowed, politically disarmed and contained the working class" ('American power and the Bush project for the 21st century' April 10).

But no antidote to this anti-communism is provided by Conrad, who typically refers to the "appalling reality" of communism while ignoring its major achievements and failing to contrast it to the appalling realities of anti-communism and imperialism (infiltrating the left and trade unions, arming and training dictators and death squads, raping the third world, etc).

Currently the *Weekly Worker* seems to have nothing to say about the ongoing resistance to neo-liberal imperialism and capitalism across the world. From peasant uprisings in Columbia, Mexico and Nepal to the building of mass democracy in Venezuela. Is not the aim of communist propaganda to give live blood and encouragement to such resistance and inspire further resistance? Let us please put an end to the dogma, the pessimism and the academic onepmanship of the revolutionary left and build a mass movement capable of bringing about change.

Joe Wills
email

Unwarranted

Comrade Donovan's article 'Consistent democracy after Saddam Hussein' contained the line "It is quite obvious that the AWL doesn't really like Arabs very much, and does not regard them as having much in the way of national rights".

While we would not subscribe to the AWL's politics on Israel/Palestine, we nevertheless view their arguments as merely mistaken, and not born out of a dislike of Arabs.

As CPGB members we view this as an

unwarranted extrapolation from their argument, and would therefore wish to disassociate ourselves from it.

Manny Neira
Lee Rock
Steve Cooke

Excellent

With reference to your article "Consistent democracy after Saddam Hussein", excellent stuff.

It has been a long, long time since I have seen a genuine example of proletarian internationalism. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty's position is shameful.

Jim Williams
email

Defeatism

On the Saturday April 12, anti-war march, the organizers claimed 200,000-250,000 people attended, the figure I guess to be around 50,000-60,000.

Is this a sign of defeatism? Do we feel like we have to resort to lies? We are seen to be ashamed of our numbers, Well I say that we do not have to be.

We should be proud to be anti-war. It means that the government and their propaganda organs such as the BBC have not distorted our minds, our opinions. The fact that we have not changed our minds just to be a cog in the system of the patriotic mass gives us the means to be proud of ourselves; we have stood firm and united in what we believe.

I only hope that this unity continues in the future. Workers of the world unite!

James Campy
Wakefield

Non-sectarian SWP

I have watched with interest the transformation of the *Weekly Worker*. It now has less sectarian attacks on the SWP etc. This was something I tried to raise with the CPGB a few months ago when I considered joining. I was told that the *Weekly Worker* was proud of its coverage on the far left and that this was vital to the working class etc.

It will be interesting to see if your paper returns to its old ways now the immediate military campaign in Iraq is drawing to a close. I feel that huge numbers of people have become radicalised for the first time in their lives over the past few months. If Marxists are to develop this then continuing your "gossip sheet" of the left will be totally fruitless.

I instead decided to join the SWP because it is clear that they have, above any of the far left, been able to build a mass movement and in the process argue for revolutionary politics within that movement. I am of the opinion that the SWP is clearly the most non-sectarian organisation on the left - and this is proven by its track record within the coalition - but it is also principled in the clarity of its anti-imperialism.

Now I know you won't agree with that but I have to say that Welsh CPGB members have been singularly lacking in any involvement within the coalition in Wales. They do very occasionally appear to tell people what we are doing wrong, however, and this is met with anger or laughter. Come on comrades get in the water- its warm!

Bobby Blazer
Caerphilly

Aaronovitch

So your former comrade David Aaronovitch is recommending the *Weekly Worker* to the readers of his column in *The Guardian*. He says that your gossip sheet is "by far the best and most analytical source of information on the far left" (April 8).

But what do you really do? You perform a splendid service - for the other

side. The *Weekly Worker* spends most of its time attacking other sections of the left - the SWP, the Socialist Party, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Certainly more energy and space is given over to damaging the left with little internal tit-bits than uniting against Tony Blair and his rotten imperialist government.

Aaronovitch used to support the CPGB journal *Marxism Today*. Now that he is thinking about joining New Labour he is supporting the *Weekly Worker*. Ever wondered why?

Eddie Holland
email

After Saddam

As the battlefield phase of the war in Iraq approaches its conclusion, the future of the country after Saddam becomes the urgent question. The search is on for the fairest and most effective means to achieve a stable civil administration that will represent the true interests of all the people. Already rival plans and interests have emerged and the differences engendered look set to open up wider chasms sowing seeds of future conflicts. To make sense of these turbulent times, we can turn to history as it may offer some hard but necessary lessons for us.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the territory of modern day Iraq came up for grabs. Unfortunately for the people (Arab and Kurd alike) the land fell under British control. The new British masters did not have an easy ride however. It was many years before the local population were pacified, during which the British did not flinch from employing the fiercest repression.

Today the US invaders and their supporters talk about "liberating" the people of Iraq; in the 1920s, the British and their apologists talked about "civilising" them. Not much has changed apart from words. Let us have no illusions, Britain's record is not a benevolent one, neither is the American's today; Britain was interested mainly in securing its vital interests in Iraq, which focused on the oil around Mosul and Baghdad. These reserves represented the biggest prize, never far from British calculations. For this the British were prepared to play a very dirty game indeed. What has really fundamentally changed now?

British public records now reveal the government debates about the use of gas on rebellious Arab and Kurdish tribes, with Winston Churchill (our greatest war hero) arguing: "I don't understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes".

Gas was indeed used against the people "with excellent moral effect" according to the estimate of one British official. Elsewhere Wing-Commander Arthur "Bomber" Harris (another British war hero, let it be noted) boasted: "Arabs and Kurds now know what real bombing means in casualties and damage. Within 45 minutes a full-size village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured...." Shock and awe!

Like today, the confrontation presented an opportunity to take extreme measures and this became a useful testing ground for a host of new weapons: phosphorous bombs, liquid fire, delay-action bombs in the case of the 1920s. New weapons are being tested right now in the current Iraq campaign.

What is unfolding in Iraq today can perhaps best be described as globalisation at gunpoint, the reshaping of a country to suit international capital. The 'liberation' structure envisaged will be a hand picked group of Iraqi exiles who have no social base among the people. It seems that no democratic mandate is to be risked at least until everything has been tightly sewn up.

In this respect it is significant that the leader of the Iraqi National Congress Ahmad Chalabi has called for US troops to remain in occupation for at least two years before elections can be organised and the outcome more or less guaran-

teed. It is unsurprising that these aspirants to the highest office already cannot trust the people; their ambitions don't run much further than the desire to plunder the country with their American friends.

The greatest danger to the future dignity and true independence of the people of Iraq lies in the political vacuum left by the formerly dominant Ba'ath Party. Since Saddam's machine systematically eliminated all effective opposition, including the once mighty ICP, there is simply no organised group that can defend national interests against what the US and UK plan to do now in the liberated country, which is nothing less than a corporate takeover.

'To the victor the spoils' is a truism now being vividly illustrated as the scramble for the big reconstruction contracts gets underway. We have trade secretary Patricia Hewitt saying that UK companies are well placed to win in fair competition against companies from countries who had previously 'collaborated' with Saddam. She even generously conceded that companies from Iraq would also be able to bid for reconstruction contracts (in their own country).

Only the Kurds can claim serious legitimacy, although their writ does not run beyond the boundary of Kurdistan. After their loyalty to the coalition, what can the Kurds expect to gain - or will they be betrayed yet again? Finally, will the Kurdish leaders now be able to walk tall and by standing up for true Kurdish interests set an example for all Kurds and Arabs seeking to restore their dignity as human beings?

All true friends of the Kurds desperately hope that there will be a capacity to resist the more glaringly abusive whims of the US-UK coalition as they seek to impose their own vision on the country. 'Baghdad is ours' ran the headlines in some UK newspapers. No, it is not. Baghdad belongs to the Iraqi people, just as Sulaymaniya, Arbil (and Diyarbakir) belong to the Kurdish people!

David Morgan
email

Helen Dawit

Helen Dawit is a second year student at City and Islington College in London, studying travel and tourism.

She had to flee her home in Eritrea after her father, who had been involved with the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), disappeared. She had personal acquaintance with people who were killed for opposing the government. Helen and her mother were subjected to violent harassment by Eritrean security forces and fled

the country after a particular violent attack.

In Ethiopia Helen got separated from her mother and she has not heard of her since. A friend of the family helped Helen to travel to the UK, where she arrived in December 1997 and claimed asylum. The home office turned down her application, claiming it would be safe for her to return to Eritrea. This stands in sharp contrast with reports from Amnesty International about the fate of Asylum seeking Eritreans who had been deported from Malta in October 2002, and who were immediately arrested by the Eritrean Authorities.

The detainees have since 'disappeared'. There is also the possibility that Helen might be forcibly recruited into the army. The present political situation also increases the dangerous situation in Eritrea and highlights Helen's vulnerability if she returns.

When Helen, now 21, came to this country, she was 15 years old and completely on her own. She has succeeded with her studies and built a life despite her trauma from the past. She does not know anything about the fate of her parents and apart from the dangers of being detained and tortured if deported to Eritrea, she also has nobody and nothing to return to.

Please support her appeal to be able to stay in the UK and continue her studies. What you can do - download the campaign petition (<http://www.ncadc.org.uk/letters/newszine33/helen-dawit.html>) and get as many signatures as you can. Inquiries/further information: Asylum for Helen Dawit c/o Linda Lloyd, City and Islington College, 444 Camden Road, London, N7 0SP.

NCADC
Manchester

Canada gaffe

The United States ambassador to Canada, Paul Celluci, finds it "incomprehensible" that Canada's ships in the Persian Gulf would not automatically turn over possible Iraqi war or human rights criminals to the US.

I find it "incomprehensible" that the US should have such an ignorant and undiplomatic ambassador. There is now a world court for war criminals, the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands. The US signed the ICC treaty in December 2000, though it has yet to ratify it. The US State department should keep its ambassadors informed.

No wonder Bush is not coming to Canada. With advice from this ambassador, many stupid decisions are possible.

Tom Trottier
Ottawa

Fighting fund

Much more

Over the last two weeks our £500 monthly fighting fund was looking a bit thin. This week I can report a slight improvement. Thanks to comrades TR (£50) and WR (£20 each), comrade MG (£10) and a total of £55 collected for us on CPGB stalls at the April 12 demonstration against the occupation of Iraq our total has risen to £162. Still nowhere near enough, but at least we are nearer the right trajectory to hit our target.

As we have said before and will no doubt say again meeting our £500 target is vital if our mounting expenses are to be met. Lifting ourselves during the war period has been exhilarating. But is has also been hugely costly. Phone, print and post bills have soared. So comrades we really do depend on you to keep

going.

One particularly positive feature of the April 12 demonstration was the number of email readers who bought the print version of the paper. Sellers report that they also accounted for the bulk of donations on the day. So a big thanks this week to our e-readers.

With the extra sales on the two legs of the London march and in Hyde Park plus 7,189 e-readers recorded by the midnight of April 16 our total circulation this week stands at around 9,500. As we have said, this is good. But much more can and needs to be done ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

CPGB London forums

Every Sunday, 5pm, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street (nearest tubes - Great Portland Street, Regents Park).
Sunday April 20: 'The new US imperialism'

CPGB Guildford forums

'The new US imperialism', Wednesday April 23, 7.30pm, Lecture Hall, Guildford Institute, Ward Street.

CPGB Wales forums

'The new US imperialism', Tuesday April 22, 7.30pm, Clwb Ivor Bach, Womanby Street, Cardiff (5 minutes walk from central station)

May Day actions

London: Demonstration supported by TUC and Stop the War coalition on Thursday May 1: Assemble 12noon at Clerkenwell Green, march to Trafalgar Square.
Manchester: March and rally on Saturday May 3: Assemble 12.30, Chamberlain Square, march through city centre.

The Really Big Blockade

Faslane nuclear base, on the Clyde, 7am. Details from Scottish CND on 0141 423 1222.

Jeremy Hardy film

'Jeremy Hardy v The Israeli Army', a dark comedy by Leila Sansour, presented by the Palestinian ambassador Mr Afif Safieh. Q&A session with Jeremy Hardy and Leila Sansour after screening. April 23 and 24, 8pm, The Bloomsbury Theatre, UCL, 15 Gordon Street, London. Tickets £6.50. Box Office: 020 7388 8822.

Anti-racist march

Manchester anti-racist day, Saturday April 26, 10.30am, Castlefield Basin, Liverpool Road. Called by Unison. Rally and music, 12 noon onwards, Albert Square. Concert in Apollo, 7pm onwards, with Chumbawamba, Alabama 3 and others. More details from www.anl.org.uk or www.northemandus.org

Love Music Hate Racism gig

Sunday April 27, Burnley Mechanics, 3pm-11pm, with Basement Jaxx, Tim Westwood, Heartless Crew and others.

Socialist Alliance annual conference

Saturday May 10, 10am to 5pm, Islington Green School, London. For details phone 020 7791 3138 or go to www.socialistalliance.net

Free Palestine national rally

Saturday 17 May, 1.30pm, Trafalgar Square, London. Called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

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

Communist University 03

This annual school will be debating a whole range of issues to do with the Iraq war including:

- new American century and the myth of post-imperialism
- the aftermath of the US-UK conquest
- rogue states and why they were invented
- fighting for defeat: Leninism and war
- Socialist Alliance and Iraq: did it meet the test?

August 3 - 10 2003, London

Places are limited. Reserve your place now by sending a cheque for £20 to the CPGB address.

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one day (sessions only): £15/£8,
one session: £6/£3



www.cpgb.org.uk/action

AFTER GULF WAR II

Around the web

Debating the next move

To compliment the last feature on alternative news sources (*Weekly Worker* April 10), this week we will be dipping into a small selection of key progressive discussion lists.

There are a number of important announcement lists that deserve to be consulted. www.groups.yahoo.com/group/anti-war-news, www.groups.yahoo.com/group/communist-internet, and www.groups.yahoo.com/group/peoples_war carry a good deal of reports from domestic and international media sources. The latter two being Stalinist-inspired lists, it is understandable that statements make up a good proportion of posts from various communist parties (ruling or otherwise) and their 'official' news agencies. Nonetheless they do have the virtue of presenting another perspective on the Iraq conflict. The Scottish Socialist Party's announcement list (www.groups.yahoo.com/group/ssp-notice-board) is also a valuable port of call. Most posts here are forwarded articles from the bourgeois press (particularly *The Guardian*), or from other alternative news sites. Obviously the war is heavily featured, but in 'normal' times domestic class struggle issues predominate – albeit with a Scottish twist.

One of the quirkiest but most useful lists around is www.groups.yahoo.com/group/leftist_trainspotters. Dedicated to "playfully sectorological, good-humouredly sectarian" discussion, the *raison d'être* of the list is to "trainspot" the left - be it on demonstrations, elections, the internet, the media, chance encounters down the local supermarket, and amusing anecdotes.

With the war on Iraq, the list has come into its own for background information on the Ba'ath movement, exile groups, Iraqi communists (and the circulation of their material). Given the 'spotting' opportunities of anti-war demonstrations, there has been a flurry of eyewitness reports from around the globe. However, the remit of this list does not cover (in theory at least) debate and discussion beyond spotting related information exchange.

Returning once again to Urban 75 (*Weekly Worker* April 3), the boards area of the site has discussion threads on nearly every subject under the sun. Of particular interest to anti-war activists will be the section given over to the war in Iraq. In keeping with the other forums, U75 participants discuss all aspects of the imperialist attack. To give a general flavour of what is on offer, there are threads on the

Bush-Blair strategy, the Project for a New American Century, resistance, and media coverage. There is even a light hearted thread on the Goebbelsian Iraqi minister for information, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, carrying a near-complete list of "Comical Ali's" famous empty boasts. For anti-war discussion, U75 is probably unbeatable.

Red Pepper's official discussion list at www.groups.yahoo.com/group/redpepperdebate has developed something of a niche for itself in the course of the war. Ordinarily a general left discussion list dominated by debates around the European Union and more theoretical issues, recent threads have featured some high-level discussion on some of the US motives behind the war. The thesis that the war is partly about the supremacy of the dollar over the euro (see www.atriueword.com/index.php/article/articleprint/49/-1/1) has generated a lot of interest, and does itself deserve wide consideration.

The (infamous) UK Left Network list (www.groups.yahoo.com/group/uk_left_network) tends to have a wider purview than that of Redpepper Debate, serving as both a place for debate and information exchange. Despite periodic bouts of bad tempered point scoring, political debate is frequently of a high standard. Perhaps the dominant theme to have emerged in the three years of its existence is the problem of independent working class politics in Britain, and this does colour a great deal of the contributions.

For instance debates around the tasks of communists in both Iraq and imperialist countries, the character of Labour as a bourgeois workers party, elections, the SSP, and Socialist Alliance tend to be framed by the question: 'what do we do now?'. The UKLN is certainly an essential list to be on, though comrades thinking of subscribing should be prepared for heavy email traffic.

This is by no means an exhaustive tour of online leftist communities and there have been an important number of omissions (such as Red Action's bulletin board, and the SSP and SA debating lists). Discussion in cyberspace should be no substitute for action, but it can (and does) compliment our political practice by providing a platform for leftists to thrash out important issues and allow for rapid dissemination of information. Communists and revolutionary socialists could do worse than checking these important forums out ●

Phil Hamilton

Esher gets taste of war protest

Saturday April 12 2003 was a day of demonstration, and not just in the streets of London. The Home County communities of Hersham and Esher in Surrey got a taste of protest too.

A small group affiliated to the Surrey Stop the War Coalition assembled on Hersham Green - much to the bemusement of local shoppers. At one point it looked as if there would be more marshals than marshalees. However numbers slowly grew to around 60 marchers. The group marched slowly through the town, setting many a net-curtain twitching.

Once assembled on Esher Green, speeches began. John McDonald MP, of Labour Against the War, reminded us that when pausing to honour the dead, we must think of all the dead. Soldiers of both sides as well as civilian men, women and children. The US-UK coalition may feel vindicated. But what has been the human cost of imposing neo-colonialism?

Mick Moriarty (Labour) and Sandra Simkin (Green Party) also graced the soapbox. But they had little new to say. Then Jeremy Butler (CPGB) took the stand. He demanded passionately that the Stop the War Coalition take on the mantle of fighting the corner of the Iraqi people and all oppressed peoples of the world. His words were well received - as well received as one can be when delivering a speech on a village green to the sound of wedding bells. It was refreshing to hear the message of anti-imperialism and communism in the heart of Surrey ●

Rae Hancock

United Nations Authentic and fake

On April 12 many thousands of demonstrators rallied in Hyde Park at the call of the Stop the War Coalition. What did the main speakers - Alan Simpson, Jeremy Corbyn, Anas Altikriti, Andrew Murray, *et al* - have to say? One after another they repeated flautulent demands for the United Nations and the International Criminal Court to intervene. Eg, "political control must be transferred to the UN."

While US imperialism, the sole remaining superpower, completes the Iraq phase of its "decades long" campaign to impose complete control over the world, the leadership of the anti-war movement is effectively reduced to begging reactionary organisations to intercede.

Of course, not everyone peddled that line. Yet even Lindsey German - editor of the Socialist Workers Party's *Socialist Review* and convenor of the STWC - packages her politics in what could easily be mistaken for pacifistic platitudes. While a small army of *Socialist Worker* sellers pushed the SWP's version of revolutionary politics, their comrade on the Hyde Park platform came over as another left reformist.

Key speakers either simply had little useful to say, or avoided saying it, to preserve the 'broad coalition'. This approach sacrifices real political leadership on amazingly bad terms, as inevitably the size of demonstrations has dwindled as British troops found themselves in the firing line. A coalition for victory was proclaimed by the political establishment and the bourgeois press. Our majority melted away as soft elements deserted to the patriotic flag.

So the demonstrators were hardly

Anti-war party

The April 12 march organised by the Stop the War Coalition was nothing like the wake predicted by some smug media pundits.

First because, given the endgame being played out in Baghdad, it was numerically very big. Predictably, the police and march organisers gave very different figures for the turnout - estimates varying between twenty thousand up to 200,000-plus. (No prizes for guessing which one is which.) The left currently does not have a reliable and accurate method of calculating the size of such mass actions - or indeed the culture of telling itself the truth about them anyway. However, in the view of this reporter, it is 'artistically' accurate to say that the march was up to 80,000 - by any standards, an impressive achievement given what was happening in Iraq itself.

So, the size of the march was excellent - its mood of quiet determination was even better. This was the 'hard core' of the movement on the streets, and its size and solidity should be a cause for some confidence. Again, young people were very much in evidence and leftwing paper sellers did a steady trade. While the bulk of anti-war protesters do not yet hunger for ideas, there is certainly a minority that is refreshingly open to the politics of the left. The demographics of the march underlined that a new, very young, layer of political activists has definitely arrived on the scene.

The question is, where now?

I spoke to a number of SWPers during the day who agreed that the size of

the march was an effective rejoinder to those that had written off the anti-war party in the lead up to the event. However, from the comments of a number of these comrades, there is a lack of clear vision about where the movement must go now.

Some hoped for a large turnout on the May 17 national demonstration in solidarity with the Palestinians, with the new layers activated by the fight against the war "feeding into" mobilisations on other issues. In other words, more big demos, more opportunities to recruit to 'the party' - the SWP sect, that is. If cynical, one might conclude that the SWP believes the task for the movement is to serve the 'party', not the other way round.

Of course, the likelihood is that these new forces will indeed have undergone a more general politicisation, and that they will become activists on other issues as well - particularly one as closely linked to the Iraq war as Palestine.

Yet the maverick MP George Galloway has correctly warned against a 'grand old duke of York' strategy for the movement - up to the top of the hill, then all the way back down again. There has to be something more than simply one march after another, an unending sequence of mass mobilisations that simply *protest*. The movement needs to come up with some *answers* of its own, then *organise* to achieve them. It needs something like a political party, in other words.

Sellers of the *Weekly Worker* reported that during the course of discus-

to hike arms spending and cow potential international competitors.

The change in US policy is partly a result of its revised thinking in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The US is now the only superpower, and wishes to remain so. After war on Afghanistan and Iraq, US imperialism has barely drawn breath before concocting the thinnest of all cases to justify the invasion of Syria. Iran and North Korea were long ago put on notice of possible action by their inclusion in Bush's 'axis of evil'. As for Castro's regime in Cuba, it has long been a humiliation for the US by its very existence. Once again it has become a target for 'liberation'.

But the US has not been unopposed even by other bourgeois governments, and this fact warrants discussion. A common theme of the STWC platforms has been heaping of accolades on Germany and particularly France for opposing the war and now insisting on a UN and not a US administration of occupied Iraq.

Countries characterised by the US as 'old Europe' (as opposed to the pro-US EU applicants of eastern Europe) did not speak out due to altruism. French imperialism negotiated lucrative contracts with Saddam Hussein for the supply of many of the military technologies he used to kill his own people: a crime it shares with its US and UK counterparts. Moreover, France fears losing out now that the US controls the oil directly. It also recognises that were US imperialism to achieve its global aims, it would be at the expense of the EU's own plans for imperialist domination.

What of the UN? It was established as a 'den of thieves' in which compet-

around
THEWEB

remains defiant



Which way now?

sions with many marchers, the phrase ‘I’ll never vote Labour again’ was a recurring one. We even heard something like it from several of the platform speakers in Hyde Park.

This is understandable - laudable even, given the despicable Blair and the craven role of much of the parliamentary party. But what - in effect - does it mean?

There is no viable political alternative to compete with Blair and his party for the votes of the anti-war movement, progressives and the working class. In its

absence, the ‘softer’ elements of the anti-war party will either drift back towards grudging support for Labour as the lesser evil, or even - if really disorientated - towards the slippery Charles Clarke and his Liberal Democrats. If the harder elements that marched on April 12 do not address themselves to building a political alternative to Blair and Labour, then the ‘no vote to Labour’ stance is effectively a *disengagement* from politics - the exact *opposite* of what the movement needs.

The monster anti-war mobilisations that began on February 15 were lightening flashes that momentarily illuminated broad vistas for the left, revealing the huge potential for a revolutionary alternative to take root in contemporary society. We need to put our own house in order before that happens, however.

So, let us try that again, shall we - mass movement serves ‘party’, or party serves mass movement? Getting that the right way round would be a start ... ●

Ian Mahoney

anti-imperialism

ing imperialists attempted to resolve their disputes - not least with the Soviet Union - without resort to mutually ruinous war. It is neither progressive nor democratic. It is a gathering of governments. Not peoples. Many member states are naked dictatorships. The UN recognises ‘de facto’ governments,

which effectively means that if you control a people, you are granted a seat. Tyrants are therefore allowed to vote on behalf of the people they oppress. It is like kidnappers being asked to represent the views of their hostages.

Naturally, the UN also contains representatives of bourgeois liberal democra-

cies like our own. However, once again, it imposes no obligation on those representatives to vote or act in accordance with the wishes of their peoples. The UK argued for war on Iraq against clear and persistent evidence that its own people did not support this demand.

Ironically, as STWC platform speakers continue to call for UN action, and effectively reinforce dangerous illusions about its powers and its nature, that very body is fast becoming irrelevant. Thieves may cooperate while their forces are evenly balanced. But let one gang overtake its rivals and they inevitably want to keep the whole plunder for themselves. Cooperation and even shares are derided. An analogy which exactly describes the behaviour of the US in Iraq. It acted without UN sanction. Now it insists that the UN has no right to hamper its robbery and extortion. The UN restricts itself essentially to charity work.

While the UN itself may not insist on the wishes of peoples being observed by its members, in theory the British parliament, elected by our own people, could have imposed this responsibility on our UN ambassadors, and have prevented any British action in the war, for want of support.

A central lesson to be learnt from the history of Gulf War II in Britain was the way in which any pretence of such democracy was abandoned. The needs of US imperialism and its little brother came first. The wishes of the people were ignored by the government. So when they hammer on about ‘regime change’ to achieve democracy abroad, the communist reply is, ‘regime change begins at home’ ●

Manny Neira

Defending Galloway and Dalyell

Meeting on Monday April 14, the Hackney Stop the War Coalition was smaller than usual, perhaps reflecting the fact that there was nothing to organise for at the moment. Naturally discussion turned to where we should go next. There was a general desire to keep things going because nobody seriously believes that the United States project for world domination is finished. The Socialist Workers Party is organising a very welcome meeting on the American Century which might help orientate activists.

I raised the necessity of the anti-war movement taking a lead in building a viable party alternative to the pro-war Labour and Tories. Others opposed this course.

One comrade thought that a party would be unacceptable to groups like anarchists and muslims. We could not think of creating a party unless we had a programme for them.

Generally the meeting agreed that parties were an obstacle to unity. Another speaker said that the degree of unity reached by the movement was due to the vagueness of the slogans. If we had a party it would have led to us discussing the meanings of the slogans and split the movement apart.

Possibly so. But only because some elements on the left are unwilling to accept the constraints of democracy. Not because understanding is the

enemy of unity.

The SWP - which calls itself a ‘party’ and therefore an ‘obstacle to unity’ and feels no need for any other - called us back to the planned demonstrations on the horizon, namely May Day and around the G8 meeting near Geneva in June. They seem to be shepherding everyone towards Globalise Resistance - another transmission belt for SWP recruiting.

The danger of the Labour whip being withdrawn from George Galloway and Tam Dalyell was raised. Comrades were urged to write to Tony Blair complaining about any attempt to throw them out of the Labour Party.

It was felt that this should be left to individuals and not be done by the group lest we be seen as irrelevant ultra leftists. Both local MPs, Dianne Abbott and Brian Sedgemore, voted against the war. But it was thought that their seats were safe due to local support, indicating the depth of opposition within Labour to the war hereabouts.

Unfortunately the meeting exhibited no strategy for drawing this layer to the left other than saying they should leave Labour and join us. But exactly who are we? We change our name every couple of months, and think a united working class party is a contradiction in terms ●

Phil Kent

Model letter issued by STWC

The CPGB’s draft programme includes this section on peace

British imperialism has an unparalleled history of war and aggression in virtually every corner of the world. Though no longer the power it once was, it maintains large, well equipped armed forces in order to defend the interests of capitalism abroad and at home. Communists oppose all imperialist military alliances and ventures.

British capitalism is one of the world’s main weapons manufacturers and exporters. It has a vested interest in promoting militarism. Communists stress however that the struggle against the military-industrial complex cannot be separated from the struggle against the profit system as a whole.

Communists do not call for this or that percentage cut in military spending. We are against giving even one penny or one person to the capitalist state’s armed forces.

Peace cannot come courtesy of bodies such as the United Nations - an assembly of exploiters and murderers. Nor can it come about by trying to eliminate this or that category of weapons. It is the duty of communists to connect the popular desire for peace with the aim of revolution. Only by disarming the bourgeoisie and through international socialism can the danger of war be eliminated.

Communists are not pacifists. Everywhere we support just wars, above all revolutionary civil wars for socialism. Communists will therefore strive to expose the war preparations of the bourgeoisie, the lies of social chauvinists and the illusions fostered by social pacifism. These alien, bourgeois influences objectively disarm and paralyse the working class in the face of a bourgeoisie armed to the teeth ●

Draft CPGB programme 50p each or £2 for 10 copies

Rt Hon Tony Blair
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

Re: George Galloway MP and Tam Dalyell MP

This is a letter of support on behalf of the above members of the Labour Party. The Stop the War Coalition has benefited from their involvement from the embryonic stages of its existence. Importantly, the anti war movement has been the biggest of its kind, not just in Britain, but in addition encompasses the international perspective.

The fundamental freedom of speech in a democracy must be preserved, and their political dissent should not be silenced. Many of the elective object to the invasion of Iraq, the lack of legal legitimacy, and the unnecessary deaths of civilians. It is their duty to represent their constituents and the public at large.

I am writing to demand that the whip is not removed from Messrs Galloway and Dalyell. This would render them powerless in the House of Commons and my views will no longer be voiced.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address]

HISTORY

Iraq could never have been

It has been common among opponents of the imperialist conquest of Iraq to say that the US and Britain are getting into a “new Vietnam”. Certainly the leaders of the anti-war movement, many of whom came into politics at the time, liked to imagine the anti-war movement as akin to the movement against the Vietnam war.

The rapid collapse of the Ba’athist regime has quietened these arguments. But has not silenced them: after all, in Afghanistan US troops are still taking casualties from guerrilla opponents ... However, the invasion of Iraq is not analogous to the Vietnam war. In particular, the anti-Vietnam war movement is not a satisfactory guide to the tasks of opponents of the “war on terror” and its current manifestation in Iraq. To understand why, we need to understand how the USA came to be defeated in Vietnam and the nature and role in this defeat of the anti-war movement.

Vietnam

The Vietnam war began effectively in 1946, and US involvement began in 1950 - in the form of material aid and advisers supporting the French colonial power. During World War II, the existing French colonies and protectorates in Indochina had been occupied by the Japanese, and the Allies had supported national resistance groups led by the Communist Party.

When the war came to an end, the British occupied southern Vietnam, disarmed the resistance groups and handed the country back to the French. The north was occupied by Chinese Koumintang troops, which did not disarm the resistance movement; the CP-led resistance movement was able to declare independence, the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and a Viet Minh (Vietnamese Revolutionary League, a nationalist front led by the Communist Party) provisional government.

The French invaded the north in 1946 and were able to obtain control of the cities and towns, but were never able to take effective control of the countryside. After the Chinese revolution in 1949, the DRV/Vietminh began to receive significant military material from the new People’s Republic of China, and from 1950-51 they were able to develop a conventional army under the leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap; the same events led the USA, which had been lukewarm or hostile towards French recolonisation of Indochina, to throw their lot in with the French.

US material and military advisers began to arrive from October 1950, and by the end of the war the US was paying 80% of the costs of the French war effort. The next four years saw Giap pursuing a complex mixture of guerrilla and conventional warfare, culminating in 1954 with a major conventional defeat inflicted on the French at Dien Bien Phu.

After Dien Bien Phu, diplomacy briefly took over. Under the Geneva accords (1954), the French conceded Viet Minh control of northern Vietnam, while the Viet Minh conceded French temporary administration of southern Vietnam. A declaration, to which the US expressed reservations, called for all-Vietnam elections in 1956 to decide on unification.

In fact, the US now forced the French out of the south and supported a government led by Ngo Dinh Diem, a catholic nationalist who had collaborated with the Japanese, moved out of the north for obvious reasons, and opposed the French. Substantial US resources were put into building up the Diem regime. The 1956 elections were never held, and Diem’s catholic regime was unacceptable to the buddhist sects which held considerable practical power in the southern countryside.

From 1957 the CP began guerrilla activity in the South with military support from the DRV. The scale of this activity gradually built up, and the Diem regime’s armed forces proved unable to contain it. In 1960 the CP formed the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the south. The US in 1961 moved beyond CIA resources to the direct use of US troops as advisers to the southern army; by 1962 there were 14,000 of these “advisers”. The NLF controlled about a third of the territory of the south. Recognising that the situation was deteriorating, the US now sanctioned a military coup which overthrew and killed Diem. The South Vietnamese generals had, however, great difficulty in forming a stable political leadership and political crisis continued through 1964 and 1965 until the emergence of Nguyen van Thieu as the US preferred protégé.

In February 1965 US troops officially went directly into action, and by the end of the year the US had over 100,000 troops in Vietnam. By 1966-7 the number had risen to 300,000 and by January 1968 to 498,000. The DRV and NLF, which had begun to shift from guerrilla to conventional warfare, were forced back on guerrilla methods. The US also in 1965 began an enormous air onslaught on the DRV with the aim of destroying the north’s willingness to support the NLF. This failed in part because of the government’s mobilisation of the population to repair damage, conceal operations, etc, but also because the USSR supplied the DRV with Migs and sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles, while China maintained a steady supply of lower-level arms. It was later estimated that around 1,400 US aircraft were lost over the DRV between 1965 and 1968.

By pouring troops into southern Vietnam and launching its massive bombardment of the DRV, the US seemed to have restabilised the situation. It was therefore an enormous shock to the US administration when in February 1968 the NLF launched the Tet offensive in the cities and towns of the south. The attacks were beaten off, but US commander, general Westmorland, had his request for another 200,000 troops rejected; in November 1968 the bombing campaign against the DRV was halted, and in January 1969 peace talks began in Paris. The US began to adopt a policy of “Vietnamisation”, ie, retreat (at least in theory) to US troops playing only an advisory and back-up, rather than a front-line, role.

Nonetheless, the war was to drag on for another seven years before the final collapse of the southern regime in 1975. Paradoxically, the Tet offensive may have actually improved the position of the Southern regime on the ground, since it was, in immediate terms, a defeat for the NLF and as a result led to some growth of pragmatic support.

The US now put major resources into training and equipping the regime’s army and building up paramilitary forces, though their confidential documents continually complained about the problem of these forces avoiding direct combat with the NLF and developing into local protection rackets. The number of US troops in Vietnam began falling in 1969: from 542,000 in 1968 to 537,000 in 1969, to 473,000 in January 1970, to 336,000 in 1971, 133,000 in January 1972,

and 45,000 in July 1972.

In spite of the avowed policy of ‘pacification’ and ‘Vietnamisation’ US troops continued until 1970 to be employed in aggressive ‘search and destroy’ sweeps against the NLF, with massive use of firepower which devastated villages without eliminating the guerrillas. An American invasion of Cambodia in 1970, and a southern regime invasion of Laos in 1971, both aimed at eliminating guerrilla ‘sanctuaries’, were both failures. By 1971-2 the US army in Vietnam was experiencing a crisis of morale and discipline, with large-scale drug use, ‘fraggings’ or assassination of officers and NCOs, trebling of absent without leave and desertion rates and an approximate doubling of mutinies and refusal of orders between 1965 and 1971.

In 1972 the DRV launched a large-scale conventional offensive, across the north-south border, which after early successes was beaten back by the southern army with massive US air support, the DRV gaining only limited territory. This apparent success for ‘Vietnamisation’ enabled the US administration to save its face enough to sign a ceasefire agreement in Paris in January 1973. The last US combat troops left Vietnam in March.

President Nixon, meanwhile, was fighting for his political life in the face of the Watergate scandal, and was unable to resist when on June 30 1973 Congress voted to cut off funds for all military activity in Indochina. Congress went further, cutting the funds for resources for the southern regime’s army by 50% from 1973 to 1974 and again by a third from 1974 to 1975.

The results for the southern army were disastrous. Trained in the US style of massive use of firepower, they were now subject to enormous cuts in ammunition supplies and their ability to use air support. In November 1974 they were down to 85 rifle bullets per man per month, a tiny figure. In January 1975 the DRV opened a new conventional offensive, and the southern regime now collapsed rapidly, with DRV troops entering the southern capital of Saigon and southern formal surrender on April 30.

An account sympathetic to American objectives and conduct of the war, Guenter Lewy’s *America in Vietnam*



US troops terrorised but did not win

(1978), concludes that the USA in the end was never able to construct a broad consent to the regime - or a state not radically weakened by corruption - in south Vietnam. But he also argues that this was not in itself decisive, but rather what caused the Thieu regime to fall was the US’s abandonment of its ally in 1973-4. He attributes this latter, as well as the collapse of US morale around 1970 and after, to the (as he sees it) malign role of the anti-war movement.

US anti-war movement

Successive US administrations never had overwhelming support for their Vietnam policy. Until 1964-5 US involvement was largely covert. A 1964 poll showed 53% of university graduates willing to send troops to Vietnam, but only 33% of those with school education only (a rough parallel for class, indicating less support for the war among the working class). Polling in August 1965 showed 61% in favour of US involvement in Vietnam, a clear majority but not one which would marginalise opposition. Opposition

was strongest among blacks, women, and the over-50 generation which had lived through the 1930s depression and World War II. By 1971 polls showed a clear, but equally not overwhelming, majority of 61% against the war. (This and other information following from Howard Zinn *A People’s History of the United States* 1996.)

The anti-war movement began on a small scale in 1965 and seems to have grown at least in part out of the experience of the black civil rights movement which had been going on since the middle 1950s. There was a demonstration of about a hundred in Boston in early 1965 against the bombing campaign, and another of a few hundred in Washington in summer 1965. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the lead organisations in the civil rights movement, called for withdrawal from Vietnam in early 1966, and SNCC members began engaging in non-violent direct actions against the war that year.

From 1967 the movement began to snowball, with perhaps two million involved in one or another form of demonstration on the October 15 1969 day of action, and continued into the early 1970s: in 1971 20,000 people took part in a sit-down protest in Washington and 14,000 of them were arrested, while demonstrations nationwide continued to attract hundreds of thousands.

The non-violent direct action was clearly learned from the civil rights movement, which had used such tactics in its campaigns against segregation and for black voter registration. Its purchase on the war was simple. The USA was fighting in Vietnam with a conscript army. Though the US state had before World War II only used conscription in full-scale wars, its imperial responsibilities as global cop had led to continuation of selective conscription. The ‘draft’ went through the Korean war and into Vietnam. The officer corps was traditionally supplied in small part by the military academies, but more extensively by the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTCs) on the university campuses.

Draft refusal as a mode of protest against the war had been first suggested in 1964. Burning draft cards or handing them back became a form of organised

resistance. By mid 1965 there were 380 prosecutions, by mid 1968 3,305; by the end of 1969 there were reported to be 33,960 offenders. In May 1969 2,400 of 4,400 summoned to the Oakland, California draft induction centre failed to turn up. The draft board offices and induction centres became targets. Protests against ROTCs led to their removal from over 40 campuses, and between 1966 and 1971 ROTC enrolment fell by two-thirds.

Beyond the attack on the draft, there were some extraordinary instances of individual heroism. Two American sailors hijacked a shipload of bombs. Government officials opposed to the war began to leak information. Individual acts of overtly political resistance by US servicemen and women began as early as 1965 and became more common as the war went on. A servicemen’s anti-war movement developed, with more than 50 underground anti-war newspapers circulating on US military bases by 1970. Refusal to fight spread to the troops in Vietnam, especially among blacks.

The race question also had a more direct impact on the willingness to continue the escalation and attrition strategy of 1965-68. 1967 saw enormous riots in the black ghettos. The group advising president Johnson on general Westmorland’s request in early 1968 for another 200,000 US troops commented that:

“This growing disaffection [the anti-war movement] accompanied, as it certainly will be, by increased defiance of the draft and growing unrest in the cities because of the belief that we are neglecting domestic problems, runs great risks of provoking a domestic crisis of unprecedented proportions.”

They clearly judged that the state faced not merely non-violent resistance but the risk of riots turning into full-scale insurrection. This judgement was reflected elsewhere in exemptions from the Civil Rights Act 1968 for police and armed services members engaged in “suppressing a riot or civil disturbance”, and in a substantial stepping up of the FBI’s *agent provocateur* activities against black organisations and the left. The idea that the USA risked full-scale revolutionary crisis if it continued with escalation in Vietnam may well have been false; but it was this fear as much as the simple fact of the anti-war movement protests which determined the decision to de-escalate from 1968.

Another factor was the beginning of the reflection of the movement in the high-political terrain. Johnson’s decision to de-escalate (and not to seek re-election) was partly informed by the strong result of the anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire presidential primary election on March 12 1968.

Debates

Local direct actions were organised by a wide variety of bodies, but the big demonstrations and nationwide days of action needed broad coalitions, since there was no party capable of fully taking the lead in the movement: the Communist Party USA, though much larger than its Trotskyist and Maoist/ New Left competitors, was not so much larger as to be able to act on its own, and the virulent anti-communism of the McCarthy era in the 1950s had not yet faded away, so that it would have been tactically unwise for it to do so anyhow.

Within the coalitions there were thus inevitably episodic debates about the slogans on which demonstrations should be called. The CPUSA generally looked for whatever minimum slogan or slogans would attract the broadest support. The main Trotskyist organisation, the Socialist Workers’ Party (no relation to our own dear SWP!) argued for two

another Vietnam

slogans only: withdrawal of US troops, and ‘self-determination for the Vietnamese people’. These, they argued, were a sufficient basis of clear opposition to the imperialist war. To their left, the Maoists and groups influenced by them called for ‘Victory to the NLF’ to be the basis of the movement.

International movement

In 1966-70 Vietnam solidarity movements sprang up in a wide range of countries, in particular in Europe and Japan - inspired partly by the American movement, and partly by the common interests of the ‘official’ communist parties, the Maoists and the so-called Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International wing of the Trotskyist In solidarising with Vietnam.

These were not important to the American defeat in the way the US anti-war movement was, though they may have lent aid and comfort to the US anti-war movement. They were more inclined to the ‘Victory to the NLF’ slogan than the majority of the US anti-war movement; and their ‘direct actions’, since the countries in question were not belligerents, tended to have the character of seeking a Barney with the police, rather than anything which would have substantially impeded US action.

The mass workers’ parties did not turn their members out, with the result that the Vietnam movements provided the first opportunity for the groups of the far left to appear as leaders of an actual movement; thus, for example, members of the International Marxist Group (whose remote descendant is today’s International Socialist Group) and International Socialists (today’s SWP) were prominent in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, which mobilised 100,000 in London in October 1968.

US defeated?

It is traditional on the left to say that the US was defeated in Vietnam by the heroic and prolonged resistance of the Vietnamese people and the growth of the mass anti-war movement in the US - which also involved considerable courage in acts of direct action and resistance in the face of police repression, though anti-war protesters never met the scale of violence which was inflicted on the Vietnamese people.

It would be more correct to say that the US could not have been defeated without these elements. More, however, was needed. Guerrilla struggle has been carried on by the Palestinians now for 36 years without defeating the Israeli state, and several countries in Latin America have also seen very prolonged but ultimately unsuccessful guerrilla movements. The defeat of the US involved a series of very specific elements.

In the first place, the Vietnam war has to be understood in the context of the Cold War and the Sino-Soviet split. The USA was not prepared to contemplate direct and open war with the USSR or China. But the lesson of the French defeat was that this also excluded the reconquest of the DRV: resupply across the Chinese border had allowed the Viet Minh to maintain guerrilla and conventional forces which tied down French forces and ultimately inflicted a defeat at Dien Bien Phu on an isolated French stronghold, which politically forced a settlement.

Thus the reconquest of the DRV would require military operations in southern China, and ultimately the reconquest of China - or, as MacArthur had suggested in Korea and Westmorland was to suggest in Vietnam, the use of nuclear weapons, risking a general nuclear war. On the other hand, the Sino-Soviet split led Beijing and Moscow though the late

1950s and 1960s to posture to each other’s left as supporters of the colonial revolution. As a result, the DRV obtained substantial support from both powers. In particular, the Soviet supply of high-tech air defences, though it did not neutralise American air superiority, made its exercise seriously costly, while general resupply limited the military effect of US strategic bombardment of the DRV. The result was that the US could only have won the war politically, by stabilising the southern regime, not by militarily destroying the ability of the DRV or the NLF to fight.

Secondly, the US had committed itself, by virtue of the doctrine of ‘containment’, to defending a proto-state created in the southern half of Vietnam out of a combination of émigrés from the north, former collaborators from the French regime, and local pre-feudal elites. The resources poured into this entity understandably did not produce a transition to capitalism (as it did in formerly feudal South Korea) but vanished into the pockets of state actors. The southern regime never became anything more than a corrupt predatory entity, and this character was reflected in the relative ineffectiveness of its armed forces and its inability to make itself appear more attractive to the masses than the Stalinism to its north.

But for the US to win the war it had set itself to win, South Vietnam had to become something like South Korea. The US kept putting on pressure for land reform in order to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the peasantry; the regime delayed, adopted half measures, and so on, while all along the regime’s troops operated large-scale looting and protection rackets in their own interests and that of landlords and officials who paid them off.

Thirdly, the US suffered from a sharp internal contradiction in the post-war period between on the one hand its reliance on democratic ideology to legitimate itself both internally and internationally, and on the other hand its reliance for its state core (officer corps, security apparatus, etc) on a ‘party of order’ characterised by anti-democratic ideologies and nostalgia for the pre-Civil War slaveocracy. This contradiction adversely affected its ability to coerce the local elites in southern Vietnam and give effect to stabilising policies. It also exploded in the USA’s internal political life in the form of the black civil rights movement, which in turn shaped the US anti-war movement. In this context, the fact that the US was relying on a conscript army became politically fatal, by giving opponents of the war a clear political focus and allowing mass opposition to the war to become quickly directly reflected in the armed forces.

Lessons: the US state

Elements within the US state drew a number of lessons from their defeat in Vietnam. A significant fraction of the US military took the view from some stage of the war that guerrillas (or ‘terrorists’) cannot operate without ‘sanctuaries’ or safe areas, so that counter-insurgency demands a willingness to take on and eliminate the ‘sanctuaries’, whether these are physical (hence the invasions of Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971) or constitutional (hence the US government’s flat refusal to treat al-Qaeda combatants in Afghanistan either as prisoners of war, or as criminals).

The key to defeating insurgency is therefore a willingness to engage in unlimited aggression. On this view, US failure in Vietnam flowed from unwillingness to commit sufficient forces to actually conquer the DRV and if necessary China and/or to use nuclear weapons (suggested by Westmorland shortly before

he was superseded in 1968). This doctrine has been reflected in Israeli military policy in the occupied territories and in the 1970s in Lebanon. It appears to have come to the fore in the US military, after being a minority position for some time, since 9/11.

The counter-view, which has been consistently held by the British military since their successful practice of it in Malaya in the late 1950s, is that the key to defeating an insurgency is the production of local counter-forces by exploiting politically any divisions within the local society. This calls for the use of minimum force in support of local political objectives, rather than large-scale search and destroy operations. A view which has certainly been adopted by some US analysts but seems to have had limited effects on US operations to date.

More generally, the fall of the Thieu regime and the contemporary (1974-5) defeat of Portuguese colonialism in Africa and revolutionary crisis in Portugal led the core elements of the US state to conclude that the policy of ‘containment’ of communism adopted in around 1950 had failed and that it was necessary to adopt a new policy of ‘rollback’. The new policy began with the ‘human rights offensive’ launched by Jimmy Carter, president 1976-80, and was continued by Ronald Reagan’s massive military build-up in the 1980s, which aimed - successfully - to break the capacity of the USSR to sustain military competition with the US, and thereby, by removing the Soviet military umbrella, to give the US a free hand throughout the world.

One lesson which was fairly rapidly carried into effect was the end of the draft. The French used Foreign Legion and colonial troops rather than conscripts from an early stage in Vietnam, and the British abandoned conscription fairly rapidly after Malaya and Cyprus; evidently conscript armies are untrustworthy for ‘counter-insurgency’ purposes. The US followed suit after Vietnam. All the more reason for communists and republicans to demand universal military service and a citizens’ militia!

An associated change has been expressed by political analysts, until recently, as a fear of committing US ground troops to any conditions which will give rise to large-scale casualties. Some US political actors assess the mass anti-war movement in the late 1960s as a result of escalating US casualties. Yet at their high point in 1968, US combat fatalities in Vietnam reached only 2.4 dead per 1,000 strength - extremely light in conventional military terms - though with so many troops on the ground, even this figure meant some 1,200 going home in body bags in 1968.

The reality was that in the first place the war never had overwhelming public support in the US (conversely, it was never subject to overwhelming political opposition); secondly, large numbers had been partially radicalised by the civil rights movement, and the draft gave their opposition a concrete target; and thirdly, the Tet offensive, while it was unsuccessful on the ground, told millions of Americans that their government had been lying to them about the success of the US military intervention, and called into question all the rest of the case for the war.

The ‘fear of casualties’ is an ideological formula. It covers what is more exactly a fear of the US political establishment of getting into another war without sufficient political legitimacy and provoking another mass anti-war movement, without, however, admitting that the problem with the Vietnam war was that it lacked political legitimacy. The result in practice has been a shift (outside Latin America) from long-term military and covert opera-

tions to support regimes, as in Vietnam, to short-term interventions to destroy resisting regimes, leaving chaos behind (Lebanon, Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan).

The linkage between the crisis of military morale, the growth of mass opposition to the war, and the race issue, led leading political and some military actors in the US to make a serious attempt to develop a black middle class and a black element in the officer corps through ‘affirmative action’ and other measures. The American right never fully accepted this project and has been engaged since the late 1970s in efforts to roll it back. It is noteworthy, however, that a challenge to university affirmative action, sponsored by the right, has this year prompted opposition from the military high command.

Lessons: the left

The lessons the left drew from Vietnam were simple and disastrous. The first was that a combination of colonial guerrilla insurgency with a solidarity movement in the metropolises based on direct action could defeat the projects of imperialism.

It is from the high point of the Vietnam war, as much as from the dissemination at the same period of Che Guevara’s falsified account of the Cuban revolution, that the infatuation with guerrillas, individual terrorism and ‘minority actions’ took its starting point. The formula has been repeatedly repeated, in most cases disastrously. It has remained most influential in the so-called third world, but had significant effects in the US, Italy and Germany and more diffuse effects in the character of the left in the 1970s more generally.

What was omitted in this story was (1) the fact that the US anti-war movement emerged from a mass radicalisation on the issue of race, the civil rights movement, which had already made the US state paranoid about internal threats; (2) the role of conventional military action in the Vietnam war; and (3) the role of Soviet and Chinese military support to the DRV - especially the anti-aircraft assistance which made the US bombing of the north so costly, but also the more general supply of arms and resources. The problem was that the New Left’s (justifiable) hostility to the USSR led it to downplay the actual role both of the USSR and China and of the overall international situation in the defeat of the USA in Vietnam. The ‘official’ CPs had their own reasons for wanting to assert the ‘purely national’ character of the Vietnamese movement. The left thus failed to think internationally even when it was engaged in ‘international solidarity’.

An associated idea was the centrality of forms of ‘direct action’. Proponents of this - chiefly coming from the Maoist, anarchist and pacifist traditions - have never quite realised that the reason for the centrality of direct action in the US movements of the 1950s to early 1960s (civil rights movement) and later 1960s (Vietnam) was the presence of targets which were easy to hit and do real damage to by direct action: segregation and denial of the vote in the civil rights movement, and the apparatus of the draft in the anti-war movement.

Outside this context, activities like cutting the wires at Greenham or Fairford, etc, unless they really become *mass* actions - the activity of millions - achieve only publicity stunts, valuable as such, but not immediate blows to the regime and its projects. On the other hand, if they *did* become the action of millions, they would be an immediate insurrectionary threat to the state, which the direct actions of the 1960s were not. They would thus pose the question of political alternatives.

The second was the idea of small committed groups swimming in the sea of broader fronts as the road to political hegemony for revolutionary politics. This too came from the Maoist and Guevarist arsenal; but it seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the anti-war movement in the USA was built by a combination of coalitions and local initiatives of very diverse groups. What it neglected to mention was that (1) the Vietnamese and Chinese CPs were already mass parties *before* they began, in their guerrilla operations, to “swim like little fishes in the sea of the people”; and (2) the anti-war movement in the US, though its effects *helped* the US state to reach the decision to ‘Vietnamise’ and withdraw, did not in itself achieve political victory. Subsequent broad mass movements and fronts have mobilised very substantial forces, which have, however, dissipated as soon as the immediate crisis came to an end.

... and Iraq

From what has been said it can be seen that the idea of Iraq as a ‘new Vietnam’ is desperately misleading. Very specific of circumstances meant that in 1965-75 a combination of third world military resistance, with Soviet and Chinese support, and a mass movement in the US which emerged from the mass anti-racist movement and had a ‘hard target’ in the draft, could defeat the US’s immediate military project.

Vietnam was, in fact, unusual. None of these factors have been present in the Iraq war. It may well be the case that Ba’athist guerrilla resistance continues after the fall of the cities, just as Taleban guerrilla resistance has continued after the fall of the cities in Afghanistan. This does not make Afghanistan, and would not make Iraq, a new Vietnam.

The policy of the US has changed: it no longer engages military force over the long term to attempt to stabilise client regimes, but merely in the short term to inflict destruction and withdraw, leaving “reconstruction” efforts at most to small cadres of covert and special forces. The US armed forces are now volunteer forces rather than conscripts, and serious efforts have been made (albeit imperfect ones) to tackle their racial contradictions.

Equally, the lessons drawn by the left from the mass movement against the Vietnam war fail to address the core problem. At the end of the day the US’s war in Vietnam was acutely and specifically vulnerable, because of the draft, to the internal contradictions of American society.

Where these very specific vulnerabilities are absent, a successful challenge to imperialist war involves the construction of a broad political alternative which addresses not *just* the war, but also all the issues affecting the broad masses in the imperialist country. This is the party question: and it cannot be resolved without the existing organised left addressing the problem of its division and the ‘party’, in fact sect, regimes which produce this division.

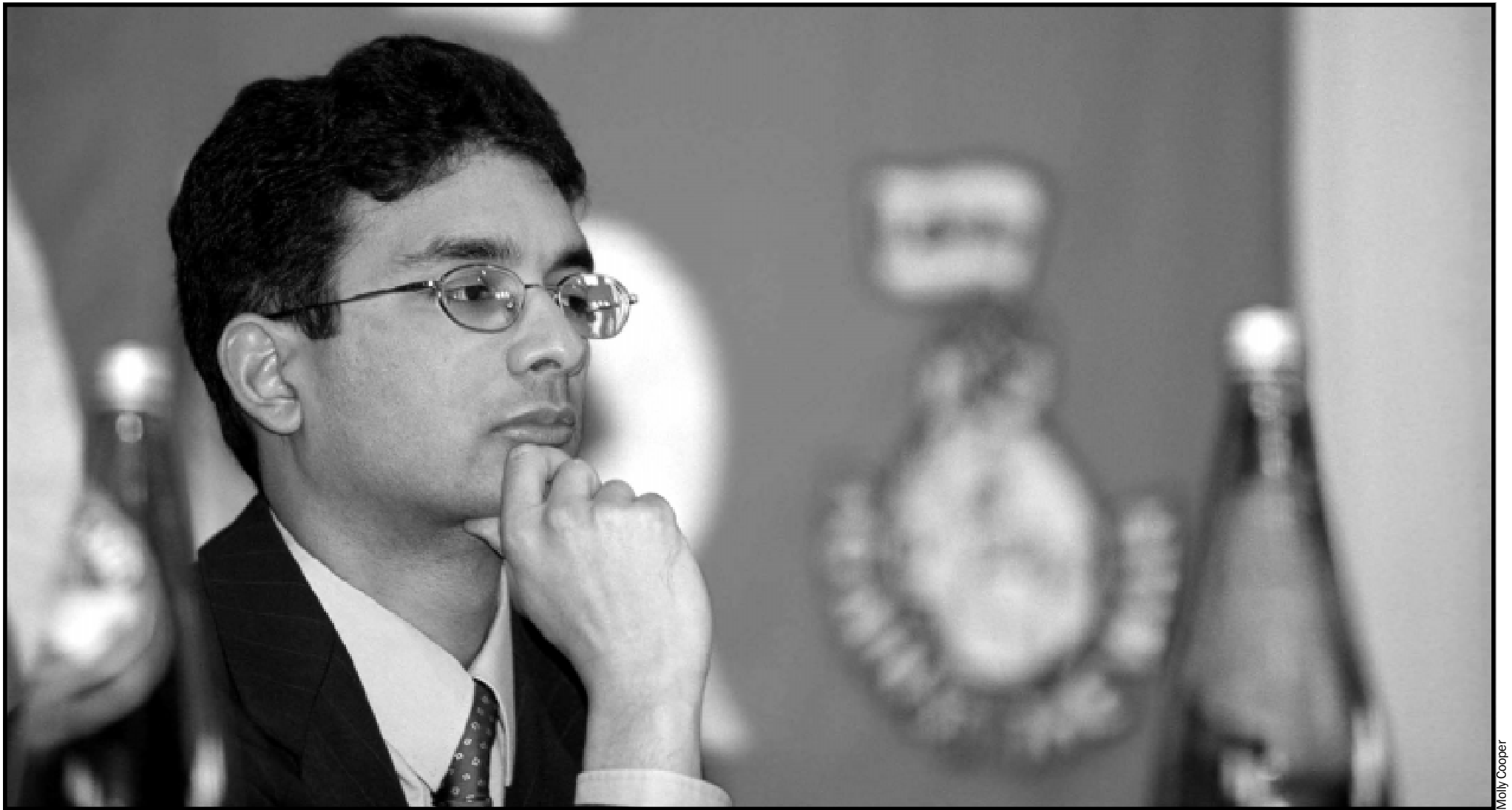
Small hyperactive groups, ‘swimming in the sea’ of broad fronts which form transmission belts into the ‘party’, cannot substitute for the creation of a mass party of the workers’ vanguard. The multitude of groupuscules, which when they unite in coalitions can animate large movements, but which (precisely *because* coalition actions are thought to be enough) never take the step to an actual *party* organisation, is part of the inheritance of the modern left, worldwide, from the generation who radicalised around the Vietnam war. It is the part we most urgently need to abandon ●

Mike Macnair

US STRATEGY

Pearl Harbour moment

Dr Glen Rangwala is the Cambridge academic who discovered that the Blair dossier on Iraq's 'weapons of mass destruction' was drawn largely from a decade-old plagiarised source. He is also a member of Labour Against the War. Here he outlines his analysis of US motivations behind the conquering of Iraq



Molly Cooper

Clearly, the Iraq conflict was just the starting point of a much broader and deeper project of the United States to reshape the world post the Cold War. There are three elements to this.

In the aftermath of the first Gulf war in the early 1990s, there were a number of US figures – particularly in the Pentagon, the department of defence – who were determined that the regime of Saddam Hussein had to go and a new regime be installed that would be friendly to Washington. It was the reluctance of the leading members of the Bush senior administration – people such as Colin Powell – to undertake that which angered many elements in the defence department.

In 1992, a man who is now number two in the pentagon – he was then number three – Paul Wolfowitz, circulated an influential memorandum amongst Pentagon officials, giving birth to what we now call the 'neo-conservative' trend in US ruling class circles. This essentially argued that US strategy in international affairs had to decisively change course. He outlined three policies:

- First, the end of the idea of 'containment' of enemy states, the policy on Iraq at the time. 'Containment' consisted of sanctions on the country, attempts to isolate it, to essentially 'box it off'. Wolfowitz argued that this was a false strategy – hostile regimes needed to be actively *overthrown*. Pre-emption rather than containment became the keyword. The installation of pro-US governments should become the *active* and unilateral policy of the American government.

- The next element of the new policy flows logically from this more aggressive stance. Pursuing an approach like this would inevitably mean that the US would not be able to pull all its allies on board for pre-emptive action. Thus, America would have to make do with whatever allies it could cohere around itself for particular pre-emptive ini-

tiatives. Thus, stable, long term alliances would actually hinder the US's ability to take the type of bold, decisive action that Wolfowitz felt was required. For example, if you had to wait for a security council resolution, if you had to wait for your European allies to come on board, you would be cramping your ability to act in your own interests.

Thus, you had to take on board whoever would join up for whatever campaign you were undertaking at the time – conjunctural alliances rather than stable, institutionalised bodies such as the United Nations. Wolfowitz's 1992 memorandum called them "ad-hoc coalitions" – they are now known

to prominence at the same time as many people who are actually his opponents in terms of the direction of foreign policy – his number two at the state department is John Bolton, a neo-conservative.

Powell still values the idea that US interests are best served by keeping international alliances in some sort of stable format rather than a 'pick-n'-mix' approach. However, this policy has largely been discredited after all the wrangling in the UN security council over Iraq. Yet, even now, he is at pains to emphasise that there were 45 countries on board the coalition for war in Iraq.

The US was not alone, he said, and, inter-

Glen Rangwala:
US spends more
than the nearest
ten countries
combined

tary muscle in those regions that no country feels it can compete with its might. Thus, we have seen a massive increase in American defence spending. Wolfowitz and the people around him look to the Reagan era as a model in this. So we now have a situation where the US spends more on its military than the nearest ten countries put together.

So this three-point strategy not only expresses the reality that America is the world's only superpower in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR. It is also crafted to ensure that the US will *remain* the only world superpower. The massive military build up is intended as a *deterrent* to future potential competitors for world hegemony – particularly Europe.

Thus, US military spending this year will top \$400 billion – over one billion dollars a day. This is simply without precedent in history.

This neo-conservative strategy was developed gradually throughout the 1990s. It was felt that such an interventionist, aggressive foreign policy could not be won all in one go. In a core ideological document of this trend in 2000, it was said that it would take a cataclysmic event to make the US public accept such massive expenditure – a sort of 'Pearl Harbour moment'.

Obviously, 9/11 gave them that. After the attack on the twin towers, it was felt that they had the justification in popular discourse to be able to argue for this new course ●

Wolfowitz argued that hostile regimes needed to be actively overthrown. Pre-emption rather than containment became the keyword. The installation of pro-US governments should become the active and unilateral policy of the American government

as "coalitions of the willing".

The logic of this has been outlined in written material since. If you put too much emphasis on international alliances and international law, you are in effect de-legitimising your right to take unilateral action. Thus, there is a need to denigrate international institutions, denigrate the very idea of international legitimisation and law in order to press this approach through.

That has clearly become central to US strategy since the 1990s, with periodic attacks on international institutions in the security realm.

In this context, it is clear that Colin Powell does not belong to this neo-conservative trend; he is a traditional realist. He has come

estingly, "they do this in the face of public opposition"!

This was very revealing. It emphasised that even for the more 'moderate' elements of the US administration, international alliances are essentially deals between political elites; winning the majority of people in a particular country to support the course of action you are embarking on is an irrelevance.

- The third element is the US's presence internationally. If the country is to undertake pre-emptive actions with nothing more than ad-hoc coalitions, then the US must have *military dominance*. This applies particularly in the core regions for US interests – the Gulf, east Asia, Europe.

The US must have such an extent of mili-

Project for a New American Century
www.newamericancentury.org

Further writing by Glen Rangwala
www.middleeastreference.org.uk/writings.html



AGGREGATE

End of Gulf War II and our tasks

An aggregate of CPGB members on Sunday April 13 discussed the way forward in the changed political environment. Many comrades, including new members attending for the first time, contributed useful ideas and constructive criticisms of the Party and its work. This aggregate provided the opportunity to reflect on the recent period of intense political activity and lessons for the next wave of anti-war protests.

It is certain that the war with Iraq was only the beginning, as explained in the article by Jack Conrad *American power and the Bush project for the 21st century* (Weekly Worker April 10). US imperialism is open about its plans and intention to use the “war on terrorism” to neutralise any potential threats to its dominance. There is mass opposition across the world to this threat. We have moved out of the period of reaction of a special type, and into a new phase of anti-imperialist struggle. The shadow cast over the whole socialist project by the fall of the Soviet Union has been left behind.

Comrade John Bridge gave an analysis of the current situation. Given that the fighting in Iraq has died down sooner than many predicted, it was impressive that so many attended the April 12 anti-war demonstration. Over two million people came out onto the streets on February 15. Yet so far the left has failed in its task of organising this politicised mass. The Socialist Alliance had the potential to channel the anti-war movement into a party. Contrary to what some opponents mischievously claim, we have not given up on the Socialist Alliance and at the May 10 annual general meeting will continue to argue for what is necessary - a paper and a single party.

Had there been a Socialist Alliance party, people would have gravitated towards it, comrade Anne Murphy agreed. She said the CPGB has been criticised for appearing to have the same attitude to the Socialist Alliance as the rest of the left. That it is something to be dropped when there are other things going on. Comrade Mike Macnair said a partyist project should involve organising people around local issues where they live and work, as well as on high politics. He also suggested that perhaps the CPGB should have supported the organisational structure proposed by the Socialist Party in 2001. This idea was firmly rejected by other comrades, including Marcus Ström. Comrade Ström added, however, that if a new alliance of left forces emerged to replace the Socialist Alliance, we would work within it even if it had such a federal structure.

A range of views were expressed regarding the Stop the War Coalition. Some comrades had condemned it as a popular front that can never politically lead progressive forces. They criticised us for accommodating to it. Others criticised the CPGB’s leadership for

being too slow to become involved. Comrade Ström said he hoped to see a reorganisation of anti-war forces on a global scale under the umbrella of the Social Forums.

Most debate focused on recent *Weekly Worker* articles stating that we would have preferred military victory for Saddam Hussein’s regime to that of the US imperialist forces. Comrade Cameron Richards called it an error, an adaption to the politics of lesser evilism, which overestimated the strength of Iraqi nationalism. Comrade Murphy agreed that there was a danger in appearing to call on the Iraqi masses to side with their oppressor against our oppressor, but said we would welcome the defeat of imperialism whatever its source.

Comrade Ström argued that it is possible to prefer one thing to another without calling for it, but comrade Stan Kelsey called this a very subtle distinction. Comrades Lee Rock and Sarah McDonald said some readers perceived it to be pro-Saddam. But other comrades defended the slogan as a hard rejection of the patriotism which the ruling class successfully used to undermine support for the anti-war movement.

Comrade Richards put forward the following motion: “This aggregate rejects the notion that calling for the defeat of one’s own ruling class in war automatically implies the

exactly what he meant, and withdrew it. Comrade Bridge’s motion was accepted overwhelmingly with one abstention.

After lunch comrade Mark Fischer spoke on the current state of the CPGB. Recently a few members have resigned. Some have interpreted this as a crisis. Comrade Fischer reminded comrades that at the January aggregate he warned that as we move into a more challenging period we might lose members who were not capable of the necessary increase in commitment, and this is what had happened. Those who have gone had been either not contributing financially or not taking part in actions.

Our main problem remains the weakness of our national structure, which makes it difficult to integrate new contacts and members. We have attempted to address this problem by changing the *Weekly Worker* to make it more useful to people new to political activity. Comrade Fischer claimed that the leadership should be criticised for moving too slowly in making necessary changes.

In fact some members have criticised it for acting too quickly. Comrade John Pearson had even claimed that democratic centralism had collapsed, but nevertheless he has now said he accepts the decisions of the authoritative bodies such as the Provisional Central Committee and aggregate votes.

We need to take a distinct position, and avoid slipping into the sort of Trotskyist idiocy that calls for a military bloc between their non-existent forces and the world’s least democratic regimes

victory of the opposing side.” He said revolutionary defeatism should mean calling for defeat of both sides. We need to take a distinct position, and avoid slipping into the sort of Trotskyist idiocy that calls for a military bloc between their own non-existent forces and the world’s least democratic regimes.

Opposition to imperialism should not involve support for reactionary anti-imperialism. Comrade Bridge proposed the alternative motion: “This aggregate agrees that calling for the defeat of the US-UK forces in the Iraq war was a clear expression of militant opposition against UK chauvinism. It in no way implies military or political support for Saddam Hussein and the Ba’ath dictatorship.”

Some comrades argued that the two motions were not incompatible and supported both. Others said that although they did not disagree with the text of Richards’ motion, they could not accept the motivation behind it. Comrade Richards conceded that he wanted to express his concern about what he thought was a changing line. After some discussion he agreed his motion did not express

Comrade Macnair appealed for patience with comrades who accuse the leadership of bureaucratic practices. Such practices have destroyed 90% of revolutionary organisations. But he said the accusation that democratic centralism had collapsed was being used as a substitute for political content. Comrade Steve Cooke called for the decisions of the leadership to be more widely circulated to the members, to make us aware of changes in the paper and better prepared to defend them to readers.

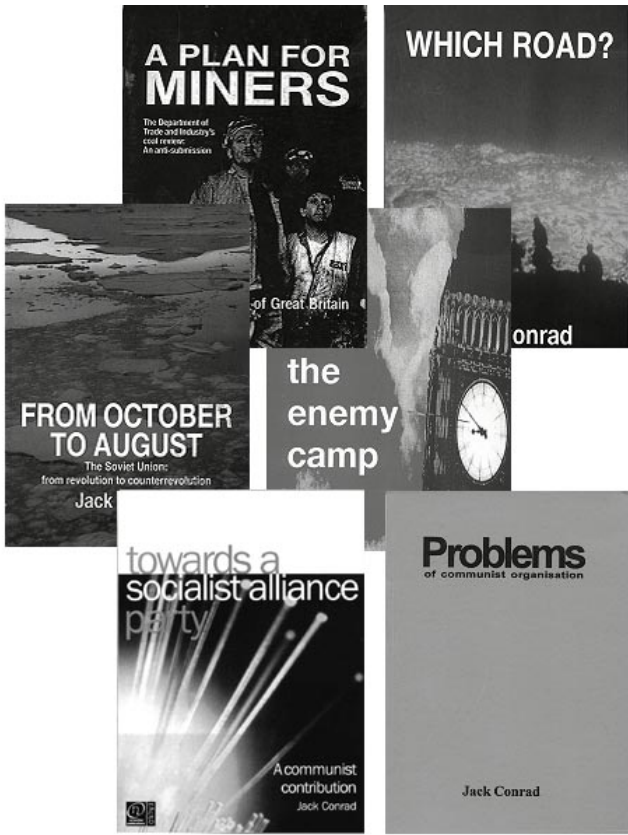
Member and supporter should be clearly delineated categories, argued comrade Murphy. She criticised the delay in dealing with inactive people who were counted as members. Comrade Bridge argued against setting up barriers to membership. People who seriously wanted to join should be allowed to. If they prove unable to fulfil the duties and obligations of a communist then they should be dropped, hopefully with an amicable relationship remaining on both sides.

The *Weekly Worker* remains our most valuable asset. It has improved in the recent period, and become better integrated with the rest of CPGB work. As ever, we need more writers and there was discussion on the best way to train comrades to become journalists. Calls for the leadership to spend less time on the paper were flatly rejected.

Our total readership remains *comparatively* high, just under 10,000 per week. Internet readership has remained more or less static during Gulf War II. The print version has increased due to the numerous anti-war protests and demonstrations. This may be because most of our main audience, people on the revolutionary left, already read it. Several comrades suggested including more material for less experienced comrades, although it was emphasised that this did not mean neglecting the requirements of existing readers ●

Mary Godwin

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ELECTIONS

England

Futile opportunism

Amazingly the local elections in England on May 1 see the anti-war party poorly represented in terms of candidates and barely organised. There are 158 Socialist Alliance candidates plus a smattering of candidates for one or another of the socialist sects and a few Labour candidates willing to stand on an anti-war platform.

Clearly, we have failed to create a united anti-war party - for carrying on the struggle after the war.

Palpably, the Socialist Alliance failed during the war. The SA presented itself as merely one of the SWP's numerous 'united fronts', not an alternative to the sectarian divisions that have plagued the left for far too many decades.

Merely tacking 'Against the war' onto our name smacks of futile opportunism. It shows we are not serious about building a credible partyist project. Even in bland marketing terms it is useful not to mess with your 'corporate image' - especially as the war is all but over.

Nevertheless, the CPGB recommends a Socialist Alliance vote

where possible. It is a project still worth defending against total liquidation. Nothing else has come into existence to replace it - as yet. It might still act as a step towards other, higher, developments in the workers' movement. But as a vehicle of class struggle it has shown itself totally inadequate.

Our overall strategy in these elections should be to build the

largest vote for the inchoate and now ebbing anti-war party. Where there is no Socialist Alliance candidate, other candidates should be supported - if they oppose the neo-colonial occupation of Iraq, if they support the campaign of the firefighters' union, if they will defend the rights of asylum seekers ●

Marcus Ström

Scotland

Politics of divorce

Labour in Scotland is running scared. A low turnout, due to voter apathy, is on the cards. Latest opinion polls show the Scottish Nationalist Party neck and neck on 31%. The possibility of Jack McConnell (first minister) and his coalition Liberal Democrat lackey Jim Wallace (deputy first minister) losing control of Holyrood on May 1 has prompted a flurry of electioneering activity, which resembles panic.

Addressing the Scottish Trade Union Congress in Inverness on April 14, McConnell warned that the SNP would divorce Scotland from the UK and as a result, threaten jobs, mortgages and public services.

Rushing up north, in order to galvanise Labour's apathetic membership, we have Helen Liddell (Scottish secretary and erstwhile personal aide to Robert Maxwell). The national question haunts her too. She attacked the SNP's strategy for a breakaway. A major election plank is the pledge to hold a referendum on independence with the 'break' coming in 2007. This referendum plan was a "sham" because "we would have to sign up for the costs of a divorce settlement before we knew what those costs were actually going to be". This from a former Maxwell employee!

Tony Blair also is troubled. Taking time out from carving up the economic and 'democratic' future of Iraq, and concerned by the prospect of a low poll and SNP victory, he attended a stage-managed meeting in Glasgow on April 15. His arrival was greeted not only by loyal supporters but also by an anti-war demonstration organised by the SSP. Ignoring the protestors, he warned his carefully selected audience that they had a choice between "devolution or divorce, investment or cuts, and stability and certainty or instability and isolation."

As the war in Iraq splutters on, the possibility of targeting another 'rogue' state becomes a real possibility. Labour is acutely aware that in Scotland, although polls indicate that 48% support military action, this is due to support for the troops rather than the war itself.

At a press interview on March 26, SSP press officer Hugh Kerr suggested that the SSP stood to gain from the imperialist invasion of Iraq because of its anti-war position. Labour attacked this and called for his resignation. McConnell's support for the neo-colonialist occupation of Iraq corresponds to the paltry 15% of the electorate who accepted invasion without United Nations backing.

When Tommy Sheridan (SSP convenor) branded McConnell a "quisling" at the anti-war demonstration in Edinburgh on March 29, this was too much for the sensitivities of the first minister. Various Labour luminaries fell over themselves in attacking comrade Sheridan's

description of their leader. They mischievously concluded that McConnell had been branded a 'Nazi'. Other party leaders also added their voices of disapproval. These deliberate distortions were further compounded by an article in the Labour friendly *Sunday Mail* (March 30) in which the first minister accused Tommy Sheridan and the SSP of "delighting in the bombing of Baghdad".

Slurs directed at the SSP suggest that McConnell and the Labour Party feel they have something to fear. Nevertheless SSP support has grown to 6% on the first round vote and 10% on the second. Under the partial proportional representation system, this would signal an increase of an additional seven MSP's alongside Tommy Sheridan. A prospect Jack McConnell does not savour.

However, unless the SNP gain an overall majority (unlikely), McConnell might just scrape through. It is extremely improbable that SNP leader John Swinney will seek a coalition with the Lib-Dems. Unless they get rid of Jim Wallace. It is also improbable that Swinney will try to woo the SSP, in light of scathing comments made by Roseanna Cunningham (SNP deputy leader) on the funding of the SSP's manifesto "200 steps to a new Scotland".

Sheridan has drawn the support of trade union leaders at the Scottish TUC in Inverness this week. He shared a platform with Bob Crow (general secretary of RMT) and Mark Serwotka (of the civil service union PCS). Comrade Sheridan said the SSP's anti poverty policies of scrapping the council tax, universal free school meals and a decent wage for public sector workers address the real needs of people the Labour Party has long since turned its back on. SSP support for democratic public ownership stands in stark contrast to New Labour's obsession with privatisation. No wonder thousands of trade unionists and disenchanted Labour supporters are turning to the SSP.

Comrades Crow and Serwotka agreed that the SSP is the only party in Scotland that now best represents the interests of the working class. Bob Crow called for trade union political funds to be diverted from their traditional home into parties like the SSP, "which support our policies". Comrade Crow described the relationship with Labour as "a rocky marriage heading for divorce. We did not walk away from the Labour Party. They walked away from the working class."

Mark Serwotka said, "If I lived in Scotland, I'd be a member of the SSP and I'd be campaigning right now. These are exciting political times. What the SSP is doing in Scotland acts as a genuine beacon of hope for the working class in England and Wales." Socialist Alliance please note ●

Ronnie Mejka

Wales

Election? What election?

With only two weeks to go before elections to the National Assembly of Wales, the campaign seems hardly to have registered with most voters in the principality. Whilst undoubtedly this has something to do with the blanket coverage of the war, apathy also reflects the high degree of indifference with an institution which is frequently viewed as merely a talking shop.

Yet it would be a mistake for socialists to tail this apathy and view the elections as irrelevant. In fact, the election result on May 2 could well force socialists in Wales to take a hard look at themselves and consider whether present strategies only consign the Welsh left to the furthest margins of politics.

Unlike Scotland, where there is a real buzz about the prospect of the Scottish Socialist Party becoming a significant force, no such excitement exists in Wales. Consequently politics will be largely viewed as a choice (let us leave aside the Tories) between three parties - Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats, whose policies a cigarette paper would find difficult to separate.

Such an approach to the elections is taken in an article by Daniel Morrissey in the latest edition of *Workers Action*. This article is worth commenting on as it represents one of the very few attempts on the left to write seriously on Welsh politics.

Yet the vision comrade Morrissey has for the working class is a feeble one. Despite first minister Rhodri Morgan's talk of putting 'clear red water' between Welsh Labour and the party nationally, Morrissey recognises that the policies of Welsh Labour and Plaid amount to little more than warmed-over social democracy politics. But he seems to suggest that the approach of both parties is rather different to the neo-liberal policies of Blair.

Consequently, comrade Morrissey calls upon the working class to vote for Labour with their first vote and cast their second vote for Plaid. Since Labour is unlikely to win more than one seat on the regional lists this will maximise the vote of the 'left' parties. Indeed in the event of Labour again failing to win a majority in the assembly, the comrade advocates a Labour-Plaid Cymru coalition instead of the present Lib-Lab one.

Thus, the tactics employed by Daniel Morrissey amount to little more than auto-Labourism with a 'twist' - voting Plaid where a Labour vote will be wasted. Unfortunately such tactics can only sow illusions in the working class that these parties represent an alternative to neo-liberalism.

First, let us look at Plaid Cymru. This party is nothing more than a petty-bourgeois nationalist party. True, it has op-

posed the war and will use the word socialist in its rhetoric when it suits. Clearly it has begun to win a base in industrial South Wales.

Yet its vision for Wales is little more than mirroring the neo-liberal 'tiger economy' approach of the Irish ruling class. When Plaid has taken control of councils, such as in Rhondda Cynon Taff, its record has been a programme of cuts seen all too often with other parties.

No vote should be advocated for Plaid. Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT, would be well advised to think again whether he really wants his members' money going to this source.

What of 'Welsh' Labour? For all of Morgan's 'red' rhetoric he is nothing more than an old Labourite of the right-wing variety. He has sat on the fence during the war, clearly showing his unwillingness to break from Blair. His Labour colleagues in the assembly are not much different. Having done its best to rid the assembly of dissident leftwing voices in a rigged selection process in 1998-99, Labour AMs have not been characterised by their propensity to defend the interests of the working class. Indeed the handful of the more independent AMs are either retiring from the assembly, have been deselected or have been 'disgraced' as in the case of Ron Davies.

In these circumstances a blanket call to vote Labour is unwise. If a Labour candidate were to come out unambiguously for socialist policies and defence of working class organisations, which would place him or her at loggerheads with both Morgan and Blair, then a critical vote could be advocated. Yet this seems unlikely.

However an interesting situation has arisen in Wrexham, where the former MP and sitting AM John Marek is standing as an independent, following his recent deselection by his local Labour party. In fact the full title is the Independent John Marek Party, having been joined by the leading Cymru Goch supporter, Marc Jones, in a neighbouring constituency and by an anti-war activist in a third north Wales constituency.

The logic of this tactic is straightforward. Even if Dr Marek fails to win his constituency, he is still likely to win a seat on the regional list. Yet a recent opinion poll for HTV suggests another scenario is now possible - not only will he win his Wrexham constituency, it is just possible that a second seat for IJMP could be won on the list, with Marc Jones squeezing through.

What approach should be taken to the IJMP by socialists? The 'party' has really been conceived as simply a way of ensuring Marek is returned to Westminster. It is really not much more than

a vehicle for a bourgeois politician to remain in gainful employment. He is no left-wing socialist. Dr Marek is best described as a maverick politician. With no hope of further advancement, he has found the Blair era too much to stomach and rebelled against certain New Labour policies.

His opposition to the recent war has been muted. In a recent interview in a new Cymru Goch inspired publication, *SEReN*, Dr Marek was asked about his position on the war and remarked that, "I do have strong views on the war, but am not saying anything that may increase casualties in Iraq. It is important to remember that British armed forces are there doing their duty under orders from the British government."

More recently, he has made his opposition 'clearer', as he trawls around for anti-war votes. Interestingly, Bob Crowe has also pledged his support for Dr Marek, an RMT member, and will speak at an election rally on April 30.

What, then, of those to the left of Labour, Plaid and IJMP? There will, in fact, be no shortage of left parties standing in the elections.

Attracting most attention so far is the Socialist Labour Party, with its leader, Arthur Scargill, heading the list in South East Wales. The SLP is also standing in two other regions, as well as in the Ogmore constituency.

The Communist Party of Britain will be standing in two regions. Not content to simply support Plaid or IJMP, Bob Crowe is being billed as the star speaker at its main rally on April 28. Bob has obviously completely severed his links with Scargill, since the CPB and the SLP will be going head to head in the South Wales Central region.

Of some curiosity has been the emergence of Vote 2 Stop the War, which is standing on two of the regional lists. This appears to be some sort of 'popular front' party, its candidates being a motley crew of Stalinists, peaceniks and the odd former cold war stalwart, such as Group Captain Kel Palmer.

The WSA is actually standing as the 'Welsh Socialist Alliance - Against the war'. This may bolster the vote, particularly in areas, most notably Swansea, where the WSA has maintained some sort of existence between elections.

Yet it is already apparent that the WSA is not fighting a centralised national campaign, but a set of local campaigns handicapped by their rank amateurism. The campaign website of the WSA remains largely dormant, with its manifesto still to be posted on the site. It is not clear whether this is because of dozy organisation or because the WSA does not actually have a manifesto ●

Cameron Richards

UNIONS

FBU votes for action

Two hundred and fifty Fire Brigades Union delegates unanimously voted to reject the employers’ “final offer” on pay and conditions at their recall conference on April 15 in Brighton. Delegates accepted proposals to renew industrial action after “the end of hostilities” in Iraq. Tina Becker spoke to Mark Skelton, a rank and file militant from Finchley in London, and Ian Foulkes, chair of the Merseyside branch

MARK SKELTON

How do you assess the outcome of the FBU’s conference?

I am very pleased that conference voted so strongly against the “final offer”, which fell quite a way outside of what our dispute was originally about - ie, a demand for a wage increase of 40%.

This offer had to be represented to conference, because at our previous conference on March 19 delegates overturned the EC’s recommendation to accept. As a result, we had to take the offer back to the membership, this time with the official recommendation to reject. And everybody did, including the leadership.

Unfortunately, the proposals presented by Frank Burchill then muddled the waters. The FBU executive committee recommended conference accept the proposals put to the FBU and the employers. There was talk of the leadership even cancelling the recall conference on the basis of these new proposals.

In your opinion, do these proposals present any great improvement compared to the employers’ offer?

They contain some minor improvements, but that is not saying much. Burchill is being presented by the media and employers as totally independent. However, he still really operates on the level of management and is not on our side - that is quite clear from the proposals.

I was dismayed to see the EC present those proposals as a forward-looking strategy. The employers would find it easy to negotiate down, but it would be almost impossible for the FBU to negotiate up from an offer that it has accepted.

Unfortunately, many branches followed the EC line and conference voted 2:1 in favour. I had some reservations whether delegates could vote on these proposals without a proper mandate. Members had seen them, but there was no time to properly discuss them.

These proposals have to go back to the branches now, so that the rank and file can look at them. The fact that the regional delegates accepted does not mean giving up. I hope members will see through what these Burchill proposals are all about: that the leadership has lost the heart.

Would you have to wait until the ‘end of hostilities’?

Unfortunately, there was an overwhelming vote on this motion, which came from Greater Manchester branch. This is very unfortunate, because it actually gives legitimacy to this war. And only yesterday I heard some US officer declaring the war over. For us to be hindered by such a motion is totally wrong. Will individual acts of terrorism be included under this formulation? What if the US starts an attack on Syria? The leadership seems to be pandering to New Labour rather than looking after the interests of the membership.

There were a number of emergency resolutions, which called for strike action even during war. However, the Greater Manchester motion was taken first and all the other motions fell automatically when it was accepted.

But what about the membership? Have they accepted defeat?

I don’t think so. There are a number of emergency motions being prepared in some regions, which challenge Andy Gilchrist and the rest of the EC, but I am not sure how strong this will be.

Also, there are some beginnings of rank and file organisation. An anonymous firefighter from Greater Manchester who calls himself ‘Simon’ has set up the website www.30kfirepay2.co.uk, where FBU members and the public are airing their views.

The leadership does not like this at all - Andy Gilchrist launched a big attack on it at conference - and have argued against “washing our dirty linen in public”. Actually, it is

quite an interesting site that has helped to further cooperation and organisation amongst firefighters ●

IAN FOULKES

Is it one step forward, two steps back?

I was very disappointed by the attitude of most delegates. They seem to think that we have gone through a hard fought battle. I believe we have not really started the fight.

I do not believe that this is purely the fault of the leadership. I think they have reacted to the messages that they have been getting from members. If there had been a way forward supported by all members, I am sure the leadership would have gone with it.

What about the war?

People are just not willing to strike during a war. For example, I have attended eight branch meetings in the last couple of weeks, where we have had a very mixed response for strike action during a war. Merseyside is normally a quite militant area, so I would suggest that the atmosphere in other parts of the country would have been even more negative.

The shadow defence secretary Bernard Jenkin accused the FBU of being “Saddam’s friends” when a strike date was set for March 20. The strike was cancelled by the leadership. Does the FBU now have to be accused of being “Tony’s friends”?

I definitely think the acceptance of this motion lets the EC off the hook. It allows them to not call any more strikes for another month or so. It takes the pressure off them. There is no momentum in this dispute anymore. We are dead in the water in that respect.

Unfortunately, I very much think members will vote for the Burchill proposal, because our conference has voted overwhelmingly to accept the offer.

What do you think of the proposals?

Unison
 Struggle and acceptance

Last week Unison’s health group conference voted to recommend acceptance of the ‘Agenda for change’, a so-called modernisation package. There will be a national membership ballot in May.

This is unfortunate. ‘Agenda for change’ represents an attack on pay and terms and conditions for health service workers. Even though the package involves a reduction in unsocial hours payments and offers a very poor protection agreement for those who would lose basic pay - at least 80,000 workers - the union bureaucracy was keen to see the package endorsed by conference. They got their way by convincing delegates that they had managed to secure a commitment to on-going negotiation from the government.

At the height of the FBU dispute last November, the government announced that unions representing health workers had agreed to a 10% pay increase over three years. No such agreement had been reached. Rather, this manoeuvre was an attempt to undermine the firefighters by portraying health workers as progressive and amenable to change.

Delegates seemed to understand this, as they did the argument that 10% over three years is effectively a pay cut or, at best, a pay freeze. The organised left in the shape of Unison United Left was successful in mobilising a number of good speakers and was able for the first time to draw a core of

They almost exclusively deal with the dispute procedure. The employers’ offer was based on bilateralism - ie, both sides would have to agree that there was a dispute, which would give the employers a veto. The new offer allows any party to bring a dispute forward, so it allows for unilateral action. That is the real difference.

The whole problem with all of these proposals is that they are not fully on the table. All the way along you deal with so-called ‘heads of agreement’, which means you do not see the full terms. It is signing a blank cheque.

I think the basis of both proposals is that we would be selling jobs to get a pay rise. **During the strike it has become obvious that there is almost no effective rank and file organisation in the FBU. Has that changed?**

Unfortunately there are very few members involved at a rank and file level. An exception is London, where people have done some sterling work. The comrades have come under heavy attack at the recall conference, because their whole region is fighting militantly against the Burchill proposals. They have been the most vocal brigade in opposition to a deal. They also spoke against the motion that suspends any strike action during the war. And they have got a well functioning rank and file structure, which has paid off. They have got their membership well on board and well educated, whereas other parts of the country have failed to do that. I was especially astonished by the Scottish delegates present, because they were on the right wing of the conference all the way through.

Do you think there is a potential for a leadership challenge after this conference?

Not a chance. The EC are now much better organised than the members and in a far stronger position than they were before ●

union activist around it. In part, UUL is a result of the belated turn towards standing in union elections made by the SWP a few years ago.

However, one argument that was not successfully won was that ‘Agenda for change’, as it stands, contains the fundamentals of performance related pay. If this is introduced it would result in a shift in culture in the NHS and make it easier for the government to impose further privatisation measures. In this way the package has implications that run far deeper than its initial appearance would suggest. In effect, it represents a threat to our class as a whole.

Encouragingly, about a quarter of the conference delegates were attending for the first time. Together with a tentative increase in disputes nationally, this may be a sign that health workers will see the ‘modernisation’ package for what it is.

Therefore, what is needed now is not only for activists to take a lead at local level but initiative from above. It seems unlikely that this will come from the bureaucracy. So responsibility falls to UUL. However, there is a danger that some will translate this into mere left posturing. After two decades of defeat for the working class as a whole, a democratic and political culture that can feed into and enrich the process below is desperately needed ●

Ethan Grech

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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Kurdish people demand self- determination

US neo-colonialism and democracy

The defeat of Saddam Hussein's regime has, as many have observed, opened up a Pandora's box for the US-British coalition. Now that Saddam has gone and the Iraqi central state effectively disintegrated, Kurdish national aspirations, brutality suppressed by the Ba'athist regime, now confront find the new occupiers.

In the hands of the imperialists, the oppression of the Kurds in Iraq was, with the utmost cynicism, made to play the role of a propaganda weapon against Saddam Hussein. But that is not possible any more; the US imperialists themselves are now responsible for administering Iraq, and they will have to deal with the Kurdish question. The expectations of the Kurdish population are understandably high in this situation. They expect the imperialists to provide them with effective self-government at the very least, or that the process of 'democracy' the Americans are promising will give them the possibility of seceding from Iraq completely and establishing their own state of Kurdistan, something the nationalistic-minded among them certainly see as essential.

The problem is that the Kurdish question does not just affect Iraq. It also affects Syria, Iran and Turkey, all of which contain distinct areas, contiguous to each other, where the dominant population is Kurdish.

The Kurds have a linguistic unity, a distinct territory where they clearly are the dominant group, and a national consciousness formed by many years of persecution in the states that control Kurdish territory. For the Americans, Kurdish self-determination is problematic because the largest chunk of Kurdish territory by far is situated in Turkey, one of America's most important regional allies.

The modern Turkish ruling class has ferociously oppressed the Kurds ever since a distinct Turkish national state was founded in the aftermath of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I; before then they were one of many subject peoples of that decaying multinational empire.

Indeed the denial that Kurds are even a distinct people at all has historically been regarded as central to Turkey's stability and viability as a nation. The large area of Kurdish territory that makes up Eastern Turkey is complemented by the often large Kurdish minorities that constitute militant sections of the working class in some of Turkey's major cities. (The same, to a greater or lesser extent, is true in the other states that overlap Kurdistan.)

The prolonged guerrilla war waged in Turkish Kurdistan by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), in which many thousands of Kurdish civilians were slaughtered mainly by the Turkish state, only came to an end with the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. Indeed, many believe that American intelligence



Kurdish peshmergas

helped them to ensnare him and bring him back to Turkey. Certainly, US (and British) imperialism has characterised the PKK as a 'terrorist' organisation, something which was given a certain credence by the PKK's often brutal reprisals against Turkish civilians for the acts of the Turkish army. But in any case, this record ought to be enough to clarify that US imperialism is no friend of the Kurds.

Despite this, however, the leaders of the two main Kurdish organisations in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), are pro-western and willingly collaborate with US imperialism against Iraq. While Saddam Hussein's terrible regime survived, many of their followers, understandably in many ways, believed this was the only policy that could ensure Kurdish survival as a people, particularly with the bloody terror and genocidal mass repression that were used to put down Kurdish rebellion at the end of the Iran-Iraq war (including of course the chemical attack on Halabja) and again after the Kurdish rising at the end of the 1991 war with America. But now those political conditions are gone. A continued alliance, given the Americans' plans for Iraq, will simply mean Kurdish nationalist leaders betraying the Kurds' national aspirations to a US-run puppet state.

So the Turkish rulers are very afraid of the coming into existence of any kind of Kurdish state in Northern Iraq; they have been threatening to use military force for quite a few years to make sure this never comes about. But with the Americans in charge in Baghdad, and given the propaganda use of Halabja and the Kurdish question in prosecuting the war, for American troops to simply suppress Kurdish aspirations to keep the Turkish rulers happy would be very damaging to America's fraudulent pretence to have 'liberated' Iraq.

The Iraqi Kurds' struggle for liberation has enormous prestige around the world; the US would suffer a major propaganda defeat if it were to treat them as

they recently treated the Iraqi armed forces, for example. Conversely, not to secure Kurdistan against the Kurdish people themselves would damage US interests in a different way, by damaging relations with Turkey and perhaps leading to some kind of three-way military imbroglio, if Turkey were to intervene.

The only thing the American neo-colonialists are able to rely on at the moment is the pliable leadership of the Iraqi Kurds. After the taking of Kirkuk by the peshmerga guerrillas on April 10 (apparently without consulting the US military leadership on the ground), under American pressure and Turkish threats the KDP/PUK leaders of the peshmerga agreed voluntarily to vacate the city. A day later, Mosul was taken by the peshmerga, apparently acting in unison with some American special forces, though the upshot of this victory may well be that control of the city passes to the Americans and the peshmerga simply end up playing the role of a surrogate American police force.

The problem with this kind of thing is, again, now that Saddam has gone it is not just the Kurdish nationalist leaders

who are face to face with the Americans. So are the Kurdish masses and, in the current climate of raised expectations, if the pro-American leadership do not deliver real and tangible political gains for the Kurds, in terms of self-government and at least the possibility of real self-determination (ie, the right to independence), then such leaders could easily be pushed aside from below.

The Kurdish right to self-determination is a democratic question, one of many complex democratic and national questions that provide a particular challenge for Marxists when trying to address the problems of the Middle East. The fact that the Kurdish population, though being centred in the distinct territory of Kurdistan that overlaps four Middle Eastern states, also has a large semi-diaspora population that often constitutes militant sections of the working class in major cities in Turkey particularly (but also elsewhere), means that the Kurdish question is not *just* going to be solved by separation.

In fact, while Kurdistan must be fought for in terms of its elementary right to unify and constitute a distinct national entity of some kind, socialists should not be in favour of separation for separation's sake. Such a thing could severely damage the working class in Turkey, potentially damaging working class organisations and tearing apart hard-won unity between Kurdish workers and the workers of those countries that each rule part of Kurdistan.

National borders, in the Arab world particularly, have an artificial aspect, where such countries as Iraq and Syria really are the product of lines arbitrarily drawn on a map by colonial dignitaries (the Sykes-Picot agreement during World War I). These somewhat artificial divisions have acted in the last century as a serious impediment to the creation of a viable Arab nationalism, as evidenced among other things by Nasser's ill-fated project of the 'United Arab Republic'. But paradoxically, this could

also have benefits, in giving a certain potential plasticity to national relations, and in particular in making more possible some kind of federal solution for the Middle East, which could resolve the Kurdish question without tearing apart the interpenetrated sections of the proletariat.

Turkey, of course, has a consolidated national existence and a relatively coherent form of nationalism, courtesy of the legacy of the Young Turks and Ataturk. Iran less so, particularly with the rise to power of the Shi'a form of political islam two decades ago; though at a popular level who knows what is happening now that the hold of the Ayatollahs is in decline among the masses. Objectively, however, given the dispersal of the various populations throughout the region, a federal solution would be the most progressive in terms of giving real rights to the various fragments of each people that inhabit the nations dominated by others.

It seems to me that not only are the Kurdish workers often the most militant sections of the proletariat of the countries in which they are an oppressed minority – their shared consciousness could, harnessed to a socialist project of democracy for all peoples, act as a bridge to the formation of such a federation. A bridge that could be reinforced by the plasticised national existence of the Arab people, divided into states whose objective national character is problematic and unconvincing, and thereby crying out for some kind of broader solution.

On a region-wide level, of course, these questions will be necessarily intertwined with a consistently democratic resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian question (among others). But in this regard a genuinely broad democratic-federal entity in the Middle East, acquiring stability and then transcendence under a global socialist order, finds important points of support in the relations between these peoples in the here and now ●

Ian Donovan

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