



weekly **worker**

**John Rees and Socialist
Workers Party reject
Scottish lessons**

- FBU dispute
- SA conference
- George Galloway
- Cambridge spies

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On-off front

For the layer of pro-party groups and individuals, the Socialist Alliance's - much delayed - conference on May 10 proved disappointing. Sectarianism triumphed.

Dramatically the Socialist Workers Party bumped up their quota on the executive from three to 13. Furthermore, a whole new stratum of pliable SWP allies were added - supporters of *Resistance* now account for half a dozen seats.

The ham-fisted and totally untransparent slate method of election was painful to observe. Nevertheless, on balance, the rearranged and swollen executive is largely unproblematic. The SWP majority should now feel obliged to carry out executive decisions on the ground. One particularly galling feature of the SA has been the silent boycott of agreed actions which do not meet with SWP approval. So communists are not suffering from pique because the SWP - after some considerable effort by Chris Bambery - successfully dragoned its voting fodder so as to achieve an executive to its liking.

When it came to the executive, all the CPGB insisted upon was that each of the principal minority factions be represented. Only at the last minute did we persuade the SWP to back down from the high-risk intention to exclude the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - lack of basic class solidarity with George Galloway was cited. A deal was struck between Rob Hoveman and our Marcus Ström which put the AWL's Martin Thomas onto the SWP's slate. A small victory. Tolerance of differences has been one of the hallmarks of the SA. Booting out an awkward minority would have marked the death of inclusive democracy.

No, the negativity of May 10 lay in the SWP's complete rejection of any kind of partyist perspective for the SA. Moving towards unity of the left and, step by step, laying the basis for a new multi-tendency party of the working class was aggressively dismissed as mere resolution-mongering by SWP *numero uno* John Rees. Every SWP speech confirmed that its leadership wants nothing more than an on-off election front. The elementary lessons of Scotland were contemptuously dismissed. Except during elections SA branches will therefore not be revived or given any meaningful life by SWP input. Nor is the SA to have an official paper. That might endanger sales of *Socialist Worker*.

In common with Gerry Healy, Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe before him, comrade Rees seems to imagine himself the anointed possessor of some magical formula for revolution. Hocus pocus. Everything from the Stop the War Coalition to the SA's May 1 poll results in England were solely due to the SWP and its single-minded strategy of "building the movement". Put another way - building the SWP as a confessional sect and putting in place a whole series of so-called united fronts, which serve as transmission belts.

Yet Gulf War II saw unprecedented anti-war movements *spontaneously* erupt in countries where the SWP's co-thinkers are either absent or exist on the extreme fringes - eg, Spain, Italy,

USA. Nor does comrade Rees appear to notice another fact - the anti-war movement failed in its prime objective. The war went ahead. The only regime change happened in Baghdad. The US-UK 'coalition of the willing' occupies Iraq.

Another question. Did we permanently secure even a one or two percent scintilla of those who took to the streets in their millions over February and March into an organisation that can stop another war? The honest answer is that, no, we did not. Recruits numbered hundreds, not tens of thousands. Equally germane - could a narrow sect like the SWP contain and empower a mass membership? No, it could not. For that a wide party which practises democracy, which has a culture of open debate and does not routinely gag dissidents is required. A party is therefore not just a nice idea. It is an objective necessity.

What future does the SWP envisage for the SA? It is to be traded as a bargaining chip. The aim is a "new alliance" embracing Birmingham imams and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain. Perhaps George Galloway is to be crowned as the ornamental figurehead. Comrade Rees is free to negotiate "without restraints, limitations or preconditions". By piggy-backing on this rather incongruous and inherently unstable "new coalition" the SWP hopes to get its members into the Greater London Assembly and the European parliament in the 2004 elections.

How should pro-party forces respond? Frankly we must get our act together. The International Socialist Group lies in the pocket of the SWP. The AWL's obsession with Galloway is unhelpful, to say the least. Nor does Workers Power's renewed bout of isolationism from the left bode well. In their own way these groups still constitute part of the problem. Pro-party forces need to unite, first in serious discussion and debate. To further that process we shall be making available space in the *Weekly Worker* for a whole range of different views. Sessions at this year's Communist University over August 2-9 will also be arranged.

Whatever the immediate outcome, there is every reason for confidence. New Labour is producing its opposite in the collapse of auto-Labourism, the search by trade unions for a viable alternative and a series of small but significant rebellions. These are harbingers. On an international scale too the traditional reformist left - social democratic and 'official communist' - is in crisis and faces nemesis. Though it is embryonic, a new left stirs.

This or that fortuitously well placed sect might find its brief moment of glory. However, their days are coming to an end. Sects no longer possess the slightest historic justification. Mobilising against the new American hegemonism, reviving rank and file combativity, taking on the power of the modern state and achieving human liberation demands the organisation of the advanced section of the working class into something much higher, something much more worthwhile - a single, democratic centralist, party ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

Galloway

Ian Donovan's comments on the Galloway affair are ludicrous, even by his standards (*Weekly Worker* May 8).

A few points. First, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty does not support Galloway's expulsion from the Labour Party on the charges which the Blairites are currently bringing against him: ie, that he called on British troops in the Gulf to disobey "illegal" orders. In fact, we wrote that "if that makes Galloway a traitor, then we are all - those of us who oppose the present war - traitors many times over. British soldiers should refuse to obey 'illegal orders'" (Sean Matgamna, *Solidarity* March 27).

Secondly, far from participating in a "witch-hunt", we have repeatedly demanded "due process for all" and opposed "all expulsions and disciplinary action on grounds of dissident political opinion within the general parameters of the labour movement" (model trade union resolution on the Galloway affair, published April 24).

Thirdly, in 1994 we called for Galloway's local Labour Party (not the Labour leadership) to deselect him because of his active support for the Ba'athist regime in Iraq. In particular, he had just appeared before Saddam Hussein and, his voice conveying respect and awe, told him: "Sir, we salute your strength, your courage, your indefatigability. I would like you to know that we are with you. Until victory! Until Jerusalem!"

To elide our stance on Galloway in 1994 and the Labour leadership's current action is astonishing and presumably deliberately obtuse.

In short, we think Galloway put himself beyond "the general parameters of the labour movement" by supporting the quasi-fascist regime in Iraq. Quasi-fascist? Yes, not because we think "'Arab state' [is] synonymous with 'fascist'" (come on, Ian, you can do better than that!), but because 'fascist' is an at least reasonably accurate description of a regime which destroys the labour movement, suppresses all democratic institutions and civil liberties, institutes a totalitarian, one-party state, based on a militaristic and chauvinist ideology, and initiates wars of expansion against its neighbours.

Of course, Ba'athist Iraq was not comparable with 1930s Italy or Japan in terms of power - but in terms of savagery it certainly was.

Ruth Cashman, Sacha Ismail
Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Scum?

So now we know. At the Socialist Alliance conference last Saturday, our comrades from the Socialist Workers Party gave us their official line on why the British National Party is making electoral gains in many parts of the country.

It is a case of defecting Tories in solid Conservative Party areas like Broxbourne in Hertfordshire (Weyman Bennett); or in the Labour Party heartlands like Burnley or Stoke-on-Trent, the BNP's victory is attributed to the "scum" on the council estates - thieves, thugs, drug-dealers and general low lives, who have nothing to do with the 'real' working class (Julie Waterson). Pathetic, self-deluding and untheorised rubbish.

Even in overwhelmingly prosperous Tory strongholds like Broxbourne, where the Conservatives hold 34 out of the 38 seats on the council, the victory of the BNP's Ramon Johns (a 70-year old cabbie) in the Rosedale ward of Cheshunt cannot comfortably be written off as a mere manifestation of Tory malaise. This openly racist candidate polled just 32 votes less than the Conservative and Labour candidates' combined total.

Rosedale is basically a council estate, where Labour has traditionally done *relatively* well. But this time many, even perhaps hundreds of Labour voters, crossed class lines and voted for the BNP.

Why? Asylum-seekers and the chronic shortage of housing. Not that Broxbourne has even a solitary asylum-seeker within its council boundaries. But given the long council house waiting lists and some BNP lies about Bosnians, Afghans or whatever, that was enough. Were all the ex-Labour voters who were persuaded by BNP racist propaganda just "scum"? I think comrade Waterson, as a supposed partisan of the working class, owes them an apology. Like millions of working class people across the country, they feel totally betrayed by Blair's New Labour. Disorientated, angry and fearful, they turn to plausible demagogues like Ramon Johns. They are, in fact, the Socialist Alliance's natural constituency in this period, but we are failing to reach them.

Turn to an area like Stoke, and you see just how grotesque is comrade Waterson's view of reality. Coal and steel are gone; the potbanks are in terminal decline and the Michelin factory is closing down. Against this background of severe unemployment and the arrival of several hundred asylum-seekers, for the first time in living memory the Labour Party has lost overall control on the council.

Admittedly, the SWP is thinly represented in this city of more than a quarter of a million people, but they could at least listen to the Socialist Party, which does have a significant presence. The lessons from the doorstep are the same: disillusionment, despair, anger and fear.

Are *all* of these formerly staunch Labour Party supporters just "scum"? Of course not. In the SWP's imaginary political landscape the class seems to consist of two layers: the 'politically conscious' working class with its fundamentally 'social democratic' consciousness, derived from the Labour Party and trade unions; and the rest, who are dismissed and derided. It is axiomatic, from the SWP's point of view, that no section of the 'politically conscious' working class can vote for the BNP.

The best thing comrade Waterson and her ilk can do is to get out there and discover the complex and contradictory truth, rather than peddle a doctrine that is a stupid and insulting libel against strata of the working class bereft of a real socialist alternative to New Labour.

What does our class need? A genuine socialist party built on a socialist programme. That is what the SA could become, but the SWP, who for their own sectarian reasons do not want this, can deploy their forces to ensure its failure.

Michael Malkin
Hertfordshire

Lib Dem gains

With regard to your article 'Scotland shows unity is strength', what really irked me was that the Liberal Democrats managed to outflank the left to become the beneficiaries of the anti-war vote (*Weekly Worker* May 8). This was notable in areas with large muslim populations.

The elections point, therefore, not only to a failure of the left (apart from the admirable support for Scottish Greens and Scottish Socialist Party) but to a missed opportunity for the Stop the War Coalition. Perhaps this can be placed at the door of its subordination to the Labour left, who would never have endorsed anti-war candidates standing against the Labour Party.

David Morgan
email

Bureaucracy

Over a period of time, particularly in light of the US-UK-led war on Iraq, the *Weekly Worker* has come to gain recognition for its democratic forum of open discussion. There has been no shortage of criticism

regarding this. However, a substantial number of socialists from various 'parties' approve.

What worries me is that many people's reasons for reading is that they are unlikely to hear such an honest analysis of political (mis)developments elsewhere and so they obtain this awareness from your paper, yet they do not heed the message of the CPGB.

At a time such as this, where the failings of leading socialist parties such as the Socialist Workers Party are made obvious (mainly by the CPGB because of its democratic nature) it is necessary to rectify these failings. Yet it is also apparent that the SWP would rather defensively respond with abuse and stunts such as the 'no observers' one than to admit errors and attempt to avoid making the same mistakes again.

It is extremely important that we all show opposition to bureaucracy within left organisations now because, as a means to achieve a revolution, bureaucracy is dangerous and counterproductive. We should have learnt from history how bureaucracy hinders socialism. The realisation of socialism depends on democracy and only a truly democratic party should decide how to create socialist democracy.

If showing this opposition entails defecting, then remember it will be in the interests of the working class. Socialists must unite before we can expect the working classes to do so and we can only achieve such unity through unrestricted democratic organisations - such as the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker* have proven to be.

If you are a socialist and you disapprove of bureaucracy and limited democracy within your party, then you will do more than just admire or praise the *Weekly Worker's* forum. The majority of our objectives are the same and the methodology is absolutely critical to achieving these aims. If you aim to achieve socialism and if you honestly admire the openness of such democracy then you should join the CPGB. Yes, it would require supporting actions or policies you may disagree on but is that not the democracy you admire? How else can we hope to create a decisive revolutionary party?

Gary McClean
Armagh

The left

I enjoyed your look at the various socialist parties in the UK (*Weekly Worker* May 1). It is essential that people are educated and told what the different groups represent, especially at a time when so many new people are being attracted to the left. There are at least four different communist parties in Britain, including your own, and I was wondering whether you could highlight all the main differences between them also?

Julie Thomson
Fife

Numbers

Your article on the 'Anatomy of the hard left' was interesting and informative, but why did you not describe yourselves in it? How many members does the Communist Party of Great Britain have? I have never once seen anybody selling the *Weekly Worker* and I go to a lot of demos. So how many members do you have? Answer, please.

Geoff Dennis
email

May Day

I've only just read your article on May Day and I know I shouldn't be surprised that you fail to mention that the Haymarket Martyrs were all anarchists (*Weekly Worker* May 1). I suppose this doesn't fit with your idea of anarchists being petty bourgeois, does it?

Steve Turner
email

FIREFIGHTERS

Rank and file reject 'modernisation' deal

New Labour's attempt to bully the Fire Brigades Union membership into caving in and accepting a package of cuts, job losses and attacks on their working conditions for the moment appears to have failed.

Last week the Fire Services Bill, which would allow deputy prime minister John Prescott to "fix or modify the conditions of service of fire brigade members" and "give directions to fire authorities as to the use or disposal of property or facilities" was given a second reading by 284 votes to 59 in the House of Commons, despite the rebellion of 27 Labour backbenchers. It could become law by July.

The bill was introduced in the hope that the mere threat of implementing its clauses would see the FBU membership begging to sign up to whatever the fire service employers demand, for fear of having something worse legally imposed. General secretary Andy Gilchrist successfully persuaded the April recall conference, which voted to prepare for further industrial action, to give the leadership the go-ahead to negotiate a deal based on proposals from professor Frank Burchill, 'independent' chair of the National Joint Council, the union-employer body. But union sources say that when the FBU executive council announces the result of the membership consultation on May 15 there will be a clear majority in favour of rejection of Burchill, irrespective of Prescott's threats.

FBU London regional organiser Matt Wrack told me that the decision by the majority to stand firm was "quite remarkable" - especially after the two-to-one vote by delegates at the recall conference to support the executive. But, according to comrade Wrack, because of disparities in regional representation, the leadership may still be able to "cobble together a majority on the executive" to vote for Burchill. Nevertheless, while this would allow the EC to attempt to strike up a deal with the employers, there would still be the little matter of winning FBU conference to back it: "This puts them in a bit of a dilemma. The Burchill tactic has effectively failed," said comrade Wrack.

There is no doubt that much of the outrage expressed by the leadership over the bill was aimed at panicking the membership into going along with Burchill. The FBU claims that the government is breaking international law, as the bill "violates both article six of the European Social Charter and article eight of the International Labour Organisation's convention 151".

Comrade Wrack told me: "It is disgraceful that a Labour government is pushing it through and that there were only 27 Labour MPs who could bring themselves to vote against. However, I don't see it as being quite so cataclysmic as the FBU leadership. It doesn't take away the right to strike and in that sense is a little bit meaningless. It won't stop strikes and it may not stop this dispute."

After all, FBU members have already had a settlement imposed upon them - in the capital at least. Employers decided to force through new London weighting rates after failing to reach agreement with the union. But the London region voted to defer any fight over this until after the national dispute. "Effectively we have neither accepted nor rejected the imposed settlement. Our view, supported by our solicitors, is that this doesn't prevent us taking any action in the future."

Prescott, in introducing the bill last week, stressed yet again how 'generous'



Matt Wrack: fight continues

the employer's offer was and warned that if he was "forced" to use his new powers he might come to the conclusion that it could not be afforded and reluctantly decide to impose a lower figure. The government, employers and media have been falling over themselves in their rush to condemn firefighters for their 'greed' in not accepting what they say is worth 16%. In fact only four percent is guaranteed. Firstly any additional increase would be paid over three years and would be entirely dependent on savings being made and verified by the Audit Commission. At the end of the day that means fewer firefighters. But even then such a rise would not necessarily be paid to everybody - for example, there is a threat to abolish long-service pay and differentials.

The other string to Prescott's bow was yet another appeal to the patriotism of union members. He called on them not to strike while the military was still involved in Iraq. So much for the FBU conference decision not to call any industrial action while the war was being fought. UK forces may not be engaged in full-scale hostilities, but Blair and co can, and do, claim that the occupying troops are still undertaking highly dangerous duties and cannot be spared as stand-in firefighters at home. Besides they might be called upon to invade some other 'rogue state' at any moment.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow was quick to link up New Labour's Fire Services Bill with its support for the US-UK Gulf War: "Here is a government that says it wants to impose human rights in

Iraq at the point of a gun, yet wants to deny workers in Britain the basic right to bargain with their employers." Using "the power of the state to impose a pay deal on a group of workers and to force through cuts that will cost lives brings disgrace on the name of Labour," he said. "If the FBU is to be attacked in this way, the TUC must mobilise the whole trade union movement in their defence."

Obviously what is key is winning the hearts and minds of the rank and file. The trade union bureaucracy will not act unless it faces irresistible pressure from below. And that demands organisation of the militant minority.

The campaign undertaken by a handful of FBU militants through setting up a

website and exchanging emails has paid dividends. As comrade Wrack explained, "It's clear from this vote that there has been some kind of rank and file mobilisation. We've not only maintained the 15,000 votes we had at conference, but actually increased it substantially and seem to have got a majority of the membership across the country. That's only been done by rank and file members getting in touch with each other and circulating anti-Burchill material around different branches."

This may seem like small beginnings, but it is only through such self-organisation that the FBU dispute can be effectively fought ●

Peter Manson

Communist University

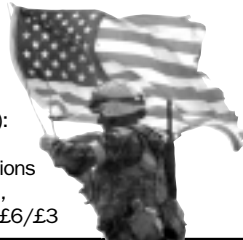
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ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday May 18, 5pm - '1945 - climax of Labourism', using Ralph Milliband's *Parliamentary socialism* as a study guide. Phone 07950 416922 for details.

Manchester Communist Forum

Monday May 19, 7.30pm - 'The new American century and how to fight it'. Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester (behind Central Library).

Communist University - Wales

Saturday June 28, Sunday June 29, Clwb Ivor Bach, Womanby Street, Cardiff (five minutes walk from Cardiff Central rail station).

Free Palestine

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

For a united Ireland

March and rally, Saturday May 24. Assemble 12 noon, Tothill Street, St James Park, central London. Rally, 2.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn. Speakers include Sinn Féin, ex-hunger striker, John McDonnell MP, Tony Benn. Wolfe Tone Society: 020 8442 8778; wts@brosna.demon.co.uk

Artists Against the War

'Shock and awe' cabaret, Monday May 26, 7pm, Cockpit Theatre, Blackfriars, London. www.shockandawe.org.uk

Release worker activists

Picket Chinese consulate, Edinburgh, Tuesday May 27, 4pm, 55 Corstorphine Road. Peter Burton: 0131-5567318. Organised by No Sweat.

NCADC AGM

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns annual general meeting, Saturday June 21, 12 noon to 5pm, Carrs Lane Church, Carrs Lane, Birmingham. Open to all anti-deportation campaigns (reasonable travel expenses paid) and their supporters. Crèche and lunch provided.

Confirm attendance to nearest NCADC coordinator:

London and South East England - Allison Bennett, ncadc-london@ncadc.org.uk North East England and Scotland - Kath Sainsbury, ncadc-ne@ncadc.org.uk

North West England and Greater Manchester - Tony Openshaw, ncadc-nw@ncadc.org.uk NCADC, 110 Hamstead Road, Birmingham B20 2QS, 0121-5546947; ncadc@ncadc.org.uk; http://www.ncadc.org.uk

Party wills

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RDG

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

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Scottish lessons lost

Soon after the start of last Saturday's Socialist Alliance conference, Allan Green, guest speaker from the Scottish Socialist Party, invited us to make a comparison between the 1997 general election and the May 1 2003 polls.

In 1997, he reminded us, the left, both in England and Scotland, averaged around 1.5% - if you left a couple of good results from Glasgow and Coventry out of the equation. Now, just six years later, the SSP had six MSPs and almost seven percent support - and the SA has its first elected councillor, he added diplomatically. It was not for comrade Green to suggest the way ahead for the SA, but he made it clear that the SSP's success was in no small way down to the decision to transform the Scottish Socialist Alliance into a party, whose aim was "not just to win the odd seat, but to challenge for power".

The importance of that decision may have been obvious to comrade Green, but it was lost on the Socialist Workers Party, whose comrades accounted for well over half of the 310 or so SA members present at the May 10 annual conference, held in Islington Green school. The SA had effectively been liquidated, since, at the SWP's urging, the conference, originally scheduled for March 15, had been postponed because the alliance was considered virtually irrelevant in relation to the tremendous anti-war upsurge.

Each of the component organisations, apart from the CPGB, decided they were 'too busy' for SA work - especially for an SA conference that would chart the way ahead - and concentrated instead on pushing their own cart. Thus a golden opportunity to provide the mass movement with a viable working class alternative to the warmongers was lost, as the alliance was hardly visible, if at all.

Perhaps then, with the SSP's electoral success as an example, the Socialist Alliance could now be relaunched as an effective organisation, equipped with a regular newspaper, committed to a campaign for the united party our class needs? Not a chance. Far from honestly accounting for our collective failure to grasp the opportunity presented to us, the SWP, by contrast, crowed at what it believes to be its tremendous success over recent months.

And of course, from its own narrow sect perspective, success of some sort is what it has achieved. It has won a position of influence in the anti-war movement, thanks to its leading role in the Stop the War Coalition, and now has the ear of George Galloway, Bob Crow and other Labour lefts and union leaders. The Socialist Alliance - boosted by Michael Lavalette's victory in Preston - can be used to enhance the SWP's position in any new left-of-Labour coalition that emerges.

But in the meantime the SA remains an on-off electoral front, now even more firmly under SWP control. For the first time at an SA conference the SWP had an absolute majority over all other groups and individuals combined, with around 170 comrades. The next largest group in attendance was the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, with about 30 comrades - a few more than the CPGB. The International Socialist Group and Workers Power had less than a dozen each. The SWP dominance is reflected on the new executive committee, where, together with its allies, it also forms a majority - no bad thing in itself, of course.

The future of the alliance was, then, the main debate facing conference, which had before it three main motions. The ISG's Alan Thornett proposed 'A new initiative for left unity' that contained many good points, but avoided

the 'p' word like the plague. This motion, backed by the SWP and allies, proposed keeping "an open mind on the organisational form that could emerge" from discussions with others on the left, but basically it was a recipe for carrying on as we are - stagnation, in other words. Comrade Thornett's concession to those demanding an SA paper was a call to develop *Left Turn*, the (very) occasional, single-sheet handout, as "a more regular and substantial publication of the alliance with an editorial structure".

What is the difference then between what comrade Thornett is proposing and the Cambridge SA proposal, backed by the CPGB, AWL and the Revolutionary Democratic Group, amongst others, for a straightforward "regular Socialist Alliance newspaper"? Is it the fact that the role of the paper would be not only to "cover current events", but to "promote political debate amongst Socialist Alliance members"? Or is it that comrade Thornett's proposal is just one clause buried in his lengthy motion, which can be safely forgotten?

Addressing conference, comrade Thornett admitted that he was proposing "building the alliance as it is", but went on to call for a "new realignment" with "much bigger" forces - anti-war activists, the trade union left, ex-Labour Party members, the Socialist Party, Communist Party of Britain ... In conclusion he said: "A workers' party is not so much the issue at the moment. We need to keep the coalition broad". One wondered *when* and *how* his workers' party would come into being if it is too early to even give it a mention in his motion - too early south of the border, that is.

The CPGB backed a composited alternative, moved by Chris Jones of Merseyside SA and the RDG, which specifically noted the success of the SSP and Rifon-

dazione Comunista, achieved "through making the party the focus of public work". The motion called on the SA to "seek to set up a 'Campaign for a new workers' party'" with others; to adopt "the aim of a workers' party in its constitution"; and to include "arguments" for this "as part of its campaigning propaganda".

Comrade Jones noted that actions such as standing in elections had a logic which pointed to a party. Adopting the strategic aim of a party would "deepen the basis on which we are united". Like the SSP we should "take ourselves seriously".

Mark Hoskisson proposed a third motion on behalf of Workers Power, the main thrust of which was virtually identical to the CPGB, RDG, Merseyside composite. It too called for the setting up of a "Campaign for a new workers' party", specifically stating that the type of party that would emerge should be left open. However, it appears that the mere mention of the SSP and Rifondazione was enough to preclude WP support for the Merseyside composite, which, according to Alison Higgins, was "too prescriptive".

In the absence of anyone from Cambridge, the CPGB's John Pearson stepped into the breach to propose the motion in favour of an SA paper. He pointed out that during the anti-war mobilisations we had been left "without a national voice". The opportunity provided by the two-million-strong London demonstration had been "squandered", as we had no common paper arguing the case for socialism.

Clive Searle, an 'independent' who is close to the SWP and the editor of the Manchester SA news sheet, also called *Left Turn*, said it was wrong to think that a paper is "going to solve all our problems". We have to "start walking before

running". He wanted to know how many other local alliances have "their own monthly newsletter". This is a completely topsy-turvy view. A *national* paper would avoid the absurd duplication of time, money and effort implicit in comrade Searle's notion and could be produced immediately.

As the CPGB's Lee Rock pointed out, we are already "walking all over the place" - the left publishes a whole range of different papers of a much higher professional standard than comrade Searle can hope to achieve. James White, a non-aligned supporter, made a good speech: "The key question is the creation of a new independent force to represent the working class. The conditions for a party are favourable" and it will either be the SA or "someone else" who will fill the void. Why keep putting it off, he asked. However, this was opposed by an array of speakers including the SWP's John Rees and WP's Mark Hoskisson. They implied that the composited motion in favour of a party demanded that we "just declare one" - *now*.

Tony Greenstein was another independent to criticise the absence of ambition on the part of the majority: "One councillor in alliance with the mosque is held out as a strategy for the future." He too pointed to the example of Scotland and concluded: "The SWP don't want a paper because they think *Socialist Worker* is it."

When it came to the vote, just about everyone except the SWP and Workers Power put up their hand in favour of an SA paper - not enough, of course, but it gave us a very healthy one-third minority. The minority for the pro-party motion was smaller - understandable, given the two alternatives, both of which the CPGB considered supportable ●

Peter Manson

SSP breakthrough shows the way

Scottish Socialist Party national chair Allan Green spoke at the end of the day's business to a small fringe meeting hosted by the *Resistance* newspaper - a tendency now heavily overrepresented on the Socialist Alliance executive.

Comrade Green has an understated manner as a speaker, but the excitement and sense of achievement generated by the important breakthrough of the SSP shone through his presentation. This included a brief history of the SSP, a survey of the response of the political establishment in Scotland to its success - at times this has bordered on the hysterical - and the effects on the party itself, as it starts to get a real sense of what is possible.

... a party is worthy of long-term support

He made two points that highlight the contradictory nature of the SSP as a guide for working class politicians in the rest of the country looking to break out of our current impasse. First, the positive. He remarked that the move from the pre-form - Scottish Socialist Alliance - to the SSP was vital. He noted that many potential working class supporters tended to regard an alliance as too nebulous, not a permanent or serious formation. The move to a party announces a serious intention: a party is worthy of long-term support and 'patriotism'. Allan also emphasised that the democratic form of the party - with the right to platforms, or factions, and unofficial party press - had in fact helped cohere the organisation rather than fragment it, although there would always be strains.

Intentional or not, this was an effective answer to John Rees's foolish comments earlier in the day, when he dismissed the notion of taking ourselves just as seriously in England and Wales as "pointless resolution-mongering". In fact, to use comrade Rees's words against him here, the day after the SSA had declared itself a party, it had "not changed the social forces involved, the actual people grouped together in [the] organisation for one instance": it still had "exactly the same people in the room". Something very important *had* changed, however, and it is a pity that sect-myopia has prevented the likes of comrade Rees from seeing this and making an equally bold move.

Second, the negative from Allan Green's comments. He effectively dismissed the significance of any potential realignment of socialists and commu-

nists in the rest of Britain for the work of socialists in Scotland. Tina Becker of the CPGB had asked the comrade for his thoughts on the still semi-subterranean moves in England to draw broader forces than those currently grouped together in the SA into some sort of party or unity project. How would the SSP look on such a development, she asked. Would this not have serious implications for its work in Scotland?

Comrade Green suggested that - no matter how viable in the rest of the country - such a project would not be viable in Scotland. "It would be a non-starter," he bluntly stated. The heavy implication was that, while the SSP might look to campaigning alliances with such an organisation, it would no more think of merger into a single party with socialists in England, Wales and Northern Ireland than it would with a parallel development in Guatemala ●

Mark Fischer



Allan Green: party "vital"

foto.co.uk

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Scottish Socialist Party, 73 Robertson Street, Glasgow, G2 8QD. Or phone 0141-221 7714



Religious dogma

The clearest example of the SWP's sect-like behaviour came, for me, during the debate on 'Racism and fascism'.

The organisation had previously won the Socialist Alliance's national council to a bland position - basically to support the Anti-Nazi League - and so the first motion, presented by the SWP's Weyman Bennett, was in the NC's name. At first his speech seemed pretty run-of-the-mill, but my ears pricked up when I heard him say: "The biggest vote for the Nazis comes from the middle class, where the Tory vote has collapsed. We are not seeing this in working class areas."

I genuinely thought I must have misheard - or perhaps Weyman was throwing a wobbly. I was under the impression that the Conservative Party had just won the biggest share of the vote in England and that the BNP had made most of its gains in such solidly working class towns as Burnley, Oldham and Bradford.

Surely Julie Waterson would put comrade Bennett right? But no: "The BNP are getting their vote from the collapse of the Tory Party," she said. Then

comrade Waterson went on to contradict herself: "The Labour vote collapsed in Burnley - they only got 300 more votes than the BNP." So the BNP is taking working class votes from Labour then? Only from the "scum" on working class estates, she remarked.

As if this was not enough, comrade Waterson enthused: "We have marginalised them. Now we need to crush them. There are only 17 [16 actually] BNP councillors because of us!" What world does she live in? Aren't these mainly new councillors, and aren't there scores of other wards where the BNP has increased its support or made an impressive showing? How did the SA vote bear up in comparison?

But there was more. Comrade Dave Landau (independent) moved a very long and extremely detailed motion which, amongst literally dozens of points, mentioned fascism's orientation not only to "sections of society with small privileges that have recently been lost or are threatened", but also to "white working class areas".

This was blasphemy for the SWP's Sean Docherty. "The BNP is not taking votes from the organised working

class," he stressed. No, not from the *organised* working class, comrade. He insisted that the offending clauses be deleted, otherwise the SWP would have no alternative but to vote against.

This was incredible. In a long - indeed overlong - motion such as comrade Landau's, everybody is bound to find something they disagree with - I know I did. The point is, though, are your differences over points of principle or ones of emphasis or interpretation? The SWP was prepared to back every suggestion for action the motion contained, but would not budge on this absurd question of quasi-religious dogma.

The conference chair, Steve Godward, ruled that no fresh amendments could be taken (he had made the same ruling earlier on the question of equal representation for women), and so comrade Landau's motion would have to stand or fall as it was. The SWP announced it would oppose.

A furious Terry Conway strode to the microphone, scarcely able to get her words out. The SWP was seriously asking conference to vote against defending asylum-seekers, she shouted, leaving us with a motion that does nothing

much more than back the ANL - another SWP 'united front'.

The fact that this criticism came from a leading member of the ISG - the SWP's usually docile comrades-in-arms - seemed to stun the SWP. The obvious course of action was to challenge the chair's ruling, ensure the objectionable clauses were removed and then vote through comrade Landau's motion, as amended. And that is what they did!

Needless to say, the SWP also voted down a CPGB amendment which read: "The Socialist Alliance will not enter into 'anti-racist' electoral pacts or joint statements with the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives or New Labour. Such pacts only serve to give 'anti-establishment' credibility to the fascists and cloak the nationalism and petty xenophobic policies of the mainstream parties ..."

No SWP speaker directly opposed this motion, but the implication was clear: the comrades actually think it *desirable* to line up with the bourgeois parties. Again our amendment picked up support from a good third of the conference ●

Jim Blackstock

Galloway obsession

Before conference got down to the main agenda items, it heard three emergency motions on the question of George Galloway.

For the SWP and allies, all is simple: "The attack on George Galloway is an attack on the whole anti-war movement. The Socialist Alliance is proud to give its wholehearted support to a campaign to defend George Galloway ..."

The AWL took up a diametrically opposite position to this uncritical line. It insisted that the SA, along with the entire working class movement, should have nothing whatsoever to do with Galloway, who had lined up with the "butcher of Baghdad" and taken money from Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. For the first-campist AWL this is much worse than lining up or taking money from the imperialists.

The CPGB and RDG took a more balanced approach. While recognising Galloway's "leading role" in the anti-war movement, calling for the defence of "all those being victimised as a result of their opposition to the imperialist war" and asking the SA to "support Galloway against the witch-hunt by Blair and the Labour leadership", it went on to state that "we should not be uncritical of Galloway's politics". He "has in the past appeared to have aligned himself with the dictatorship of the Saddam Hussein regime".

The motion, which refused to fall for the AWL's moralism, stressed the need to criticise "all our allies" and won the backing of around a quarter of the hall. The position of the SWP *et al* was carried by a large majority, while support for the AWL motion was almost entirely limited to their own circle of comrades. Obsession with Galloway was again on display at the fringe meeting after conference, which was supposed to discuss the next stages in the campaign for a workers' party. The AWL put another conference amendment which sought to overturn the decision of the SA trade union committee to act as "assistants at Galloway fringe meetings" at the forthcoming round of union conferences.

The same moralism extended to working with the Muslim Association of Britain. According to an AWL motion, the MAB is linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, "a political party of the wealthy classes, similar to fascism in its hostility to the labour movement and to democratic and women's rights". But is the MAB in Britain "similar to fascism in its hostility to the labour movement ..."? If so, how is it that its attitude towards the Stop the War Coalition, led by atheistic revolutionary socialists, and full of union leaders and Labour lefts, is tolerant and cooperative? It is true that the MAB is a reactionary grouping, but does that mean we should turn our backs on it and the thousands of muslims who felt encouraged to go on the anti-war demonstrations because of its co-sponsorship?

The Preston imam who mobilised support for our new councillor, Maulana Said Ahmed, later addressed the conference. He stated that, although the MAB "do not represent many muslims", he was glad the conference majority rejected the notion that we should not work with them. Is Ahmed an apologist for fascism himself? Should we have nothing to do with him too?

Thankfully such nonsense was soundly defeated. Unfortunately, though, so too was the CPGB's motion, which stood for an independent working class attitude in relation to both the anti-war movement and Iraq itself. Instead conference backed John Rees's motion, which did little more than offer opposition to the war and support for the STWC ●

Alan Fox

John Rees, in this imperious speech to conference, explicitly underlined that the Socialist Workers Party sees the SA as very much *its* possession

'Our members, our alliance'

What I want to know now, from people [who criticised the SWP's approach to the war and downplaying of the SA], if *you* were right and *we* were wrong, how come it was *our* members that were elected in Preston, how was it that *our* strategy worked, how was it that the Socialist Alliance received the best votes that it has *ever* got?

We did it *because* we came out of the Stop the War Coalition and that is how we *will* continue to build this organisation.

The only effect of adopting the aim of a party, a paper, declaring ourselves to be a workers' party today, will be that you have changed the wording, but you have not changed the social forces involved, the actual people grouped together in this organisation, for one instance. You will still have exactly the same people in the room. The only way that it is built is by people being the most active contingent of the Stop the War Coalition, by being the best activists for the firefighters.

Then we group other people around us. The *new* alliance that can make a difference to the politics of this country is there when Michael Lavalette stands up alongside Maulana Said Ahmed [the imam who backed him] and says, 'We worked together to get the alliance elected in Preston'.

That's what the new alliance looks like. That's why the negotiations that are taking place are not a mythology. In a week's time, when I go to see the Communist Party [of Britain], people we have worked closely with in the Stop the War Coalition, to discuss whether we can form a common platform with them for the 2004 Euro elections; or two days ago, when I met the chair of the Birmingham STWC and an important figure in the Birmingham central mosque and they said, 'We think we have a great deal in common with you; we want to form



John Rees:
"new alliance"

a joint platform with you. Can we discuss it with you?" - *that's* what the new alliance means.

When we held a meeting across the road and half the representatives of the PCSU, the RMT, of the FBU, along with George Galloway and with me as the spokesman for the Socialist Alliance - that was the first time that a group of people had got together to determine collectively how to build an alternative to New Labour.

These are the politics, *these* are the people - not the words, not the sloganeering, not the pointless resolution-mongering - these are the *real* social contacts, made through mass struggle, that are now paying off for the Socialist Alliance.

(Stormy applause and cheering - from one part of the audience) ●

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SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

NEC election farce

What a way to elect an executive. The Socialist Alliance conference was presented with only one slate to vote for (or against) - proposed by the Socialist Workers Party. Most participants had no idea where this list had come from. Why were there no other slates? Who had decided which nominations would be included? The only transparency involved was the one used to display the names of the candidates on an overhead projector.

The nomination procedure had all the hallmarks of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring - at the expense of an open, democratic process. A number of non-aligned comrades in particular are angry at the lack of clear information about how to present an alternative list, about who was included on the SWP slate, as opposed to those who had been nominated but not included. Sheffield Socialist Alliance has subsequently called on the executive to co-opt Phil Pope, one of the six nominees who did not make it onto the final executive.

How did this situation come about? Nominations for the executive committee opened in January. By the time conference opened, only 16 people had put forward their names. These comrades had provided a 100-word statement giving biographical details and political affiliations. That 26 nominations were taken on the day - many of whom conference as a whole had never heard of - was one problem. Theoretically any member could propose a slate from among those nominated, but those considering doing so were left in the dark.

There were further problems. From the beginning of the day leading SWP comrades were saying privately that they would not support any slate that included Martin Thomas or any other comrade from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Given the numerical dominance of the SWP on conference floor, this would effectively lead to the exclusion from the executive of one of the five principal supporting organisations of the alliance. An unacceptable precedent.

The SWP said that the AWL's position on George Galloway effectively deprived it of the right to be on the leadership. A number of executive members told the SWP's John Rees and Rob Hoveman that, while we totally disagreed with the AWL position on Galloway, this was no reason to exclude them from the executive. Some of us told the SWP that we would not be prepared to be on a slate that did not include Martin Thomas of the AWL. For most of the day, intransi-



The AWL's Martin Thomas: saved

gence prevailed.

I understand that at the 'independents' caucus meeting at lunchtime, a number of names had been mentioned in terms of membership of the executive. One of these was comrade Pope, who had been nominated way back in January. For one reason or another, the 'indies' meeting did not draw up a slate of its own.

Nominations closed at 2pm. As a member of the conference arrangements committee I took note of the 42 nominations - many of whom were unfamiliar to me. Still there was no progress on whether Martin Thomas would be on the SWP's slate. The CPGB began negotiations with Workers Power to consider putting forward our own slate from the 42 nominations - a slate that would include comrade Thomas. However, we felt unable to draw up an authoritative list. With no candidate statement for 26 of these people, how could we decide who was deserving of support and who was not? We were not sure of their political affiliation and did not know which local SA they belonged to. How could we strike up a political or regional balance under such circumstances? The SWP was in the driving seat.

Rather than start a debate about the relative merit of two slates, we decided to make the main issue whether or not the AWL was included. I was unaware of the preferences that emerged from the

'indies' caucus. So we decided that if the SWP proceeded on the basis of excluding the AWL, we would simply draw up a list that was 'SWP slate plus Martin Thomas'. (I understand that this was the approach of a number of independents - that they would settle for the same list as the SWP - plus any independents they backed whom the SWP had not in-

cluded. I do not know why the independents did not approach the conference arrangements committee to propose such a slate.)

At the conference arrangements committee desk I conveyed our decision to Rob Hoveman. I asked him what slate was being proposed by the SWP. He said that was not the way things work - slates

New executive

Mandy Baker (*Resistance*)
Charlie Balch (ind)
Weyman Bennett (SWP)
Matthew Caygill (*Resistance*)
Heather Cox (ind)
John Fisher (ind)
Steve Godward (ind)
Ameen Hadi (SWP)
Rob Hoveman (SWP)
Mark Hoskisson (WP)
Lyn Hubbard (SWP)
Jim Jepps (ind)
Sandra Johnson (SWP)
Simon Joyce (SWP)
Michael Lavalette (SWP)
Lesley Mahmood (*Resistance*)
Margaret Manning (*Resistance*)
Shelly Margetson (ind)
Tess McMahon (ind)

Will McMahon (ind)
John Mulrenan (ind)
Declan O'Neill (ind)
Andy Newman (SWP)
Sid Platt (ind)
Fiona Prior (SWP)
Cecilia Prosper (SWP)
John Rees (SWP)
Glyn Robbins (ind)
Jeannie Robinson (SWP)
Gordon Rowntree (ind)
Marcus Ström (CPGB)
Martin Thomas (AWL)
Alan Thornett (ISG/*Resistance*)
Louise Vanderhoeven (ISG/*Resistance*)
Sue Wild (SWP)
Nick Wrack (ind)

Marcus Ström

Alliance goes Dutch - or does it?

Apurely tokenistic constitutional amendment on women's representation was proposed by Margaret Manning from Manchester SA. As the comrades from the SWP chose to use their absolute majority to vote it through, the Socialist Alliance is now lumbered with a policy which states: "The executive is composed of 50-50 women and men"; and "... the national council has two delegates from each local Socialist Alliance - one woman, one man".

I was the only person allowed to speak against the motion. I argued against the prescriptive nature of the motion and that bureaucratic and rigid regulations cannot provide a solution for discrimination against women in wider society, which naturally finds its reflection in the SA. I argued for the SA to work towards a new culture that encourages women to come forward rather than doling out token seats. In Germany's Party of Democratic

SWP comrades display a certain contempt for the SA

Socialism, where this formula has been operating for some years, there was many an election fought with seats number 3, 5, 7 and 9 kept open - in the hope that at some point a woman might come forward to fill the space. A ridiculous situation that we should not imitate.

A similar motion was defeated overwhelmingly at the last SA conference, merely 17 months back. But it seems the SWP comrades have changed their minds in the meantime.

One SWPer reported from the floor that she attended the SA women's conference and was disappointed that an amendment agreed there did not find its way onto the agenda on Saturday. Apparently, those present at the women's conference decided to put forward a motion that would "strive towards" 50-50 representation - something everybody could and should have supported. Still, she went on, "we should support the motion as

it is because it tackles women's discrimination". So the SWP voted for the motion, prescriptive nature and all, unamended.

Not that it mattered to anybody, especially the SWP majority. Ten minutes later conference went on to elect the new executive - in breach of the amended constitution.

Our *unconstitutional* leadership consists of 13 women and 23 men - less than 40%. Our new appeals committee of five, which was supposed to be voted on "by the same method as election of the national executive", has only one woman in its ranks, the CPGB's Anne McShane.

Comrade Rob Hoveman (SWP) told other members of the conference arrangements committee that they should not worry too much about the rule that had just been voted through, because the motion does not "specify when it should come into effect". A ludicrous sugges-

tion. When exactly should it come into effect then? A week after conference? A month? At the next conference?

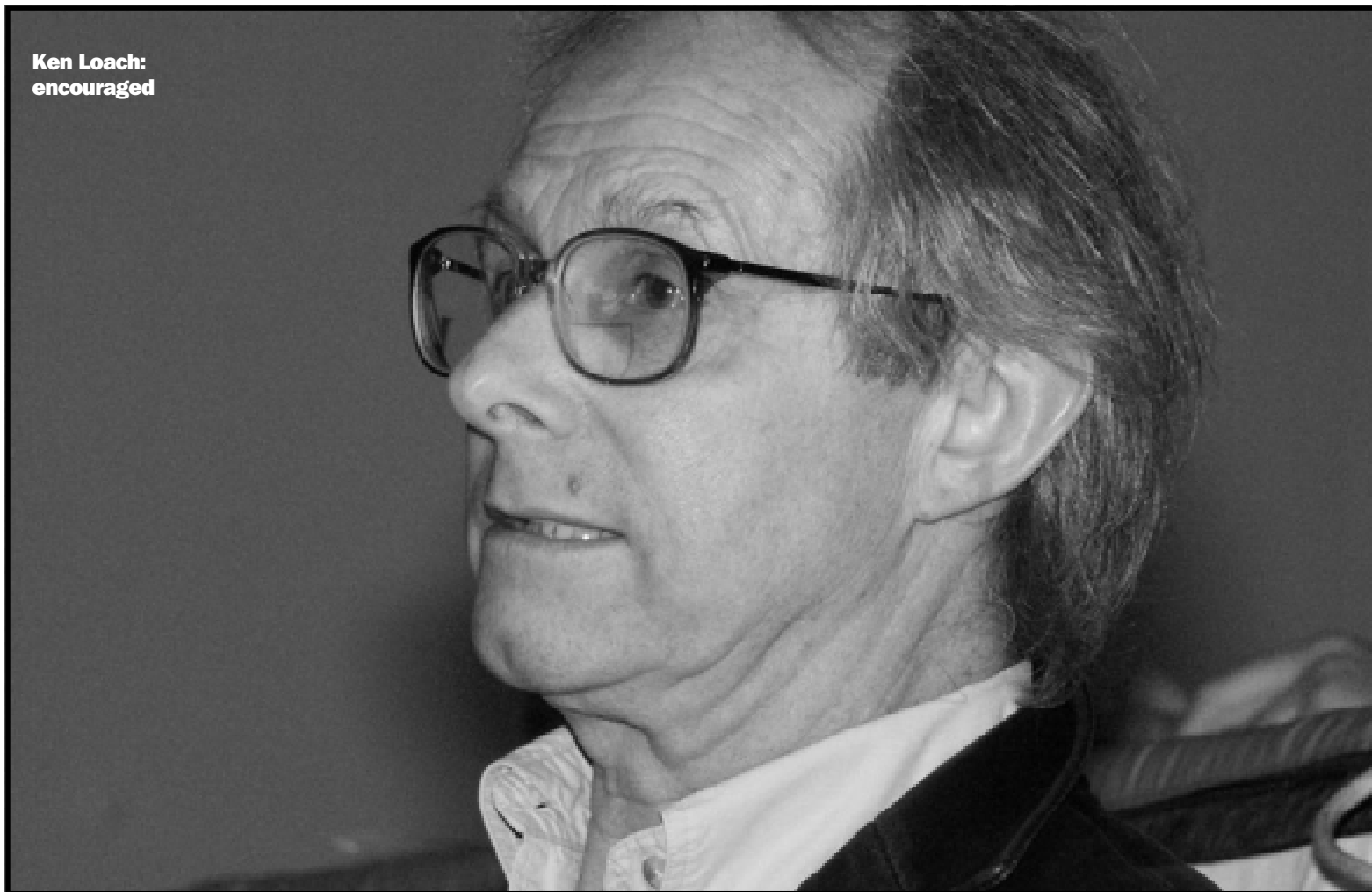
The motion was not only tokenistic in its content. By voting it through and then breaching it immediately afterwards, the SWP has shown that it does not intend to carry it out. Neither the SWP nor any of the other constituent parts of the SA operate according to any 50-50 stipulation. Not because they discriminate against women. But because working class organisations do not stand outside society and cannot simply abolish women's oppression by enacting bureaucratic mechanisms within their own ranks.

The SWP comrades display a certain contempt for the SA. They vote for the alliance to do one thing - and then use their absolute majority to do exactly the opposite ●

Tina Becker

'All chiefs, no Indians'

Left loses opportunity



Mark Fischer spoke to Ken Loach

In your speech to conference, you spoke about the SA taking itself more seriously. What do you mean by that?

The alliance has always taken itself seriously, but now we need to have the confidence that we do represent the majority - the policies we are putting forward are genuinely popular. There is massive revulsion against the war, against the way that public services are being privatised or sold off. I think we can form links with a lot of people who share our perspective.

We have to have the confidence to take centre stage. There is massive support for us - our views are not those of a left sectarian or some fringe group. Huge swathes of people think the same way as us. The challenge is to move from where we are to actually directly representing all the people who are with us.

There was certainly frustration in today's conference about taking the

alliance forward. The alliance as the alliance faded away during the war. Big issues come along and the SA fragments once again into its constituent parts - isn't this a big problem?

Yes, it is. The same problem actually confronts the Stop the War Coalition, of it breaking up into its parts. There must be a constant battle against sectarianism.

The millions of people we mobilised are not interested in the squabbling of one group against another. The alliance was created to end that. It's a process, however. What encouraged me today was resolution 13 that outlined that process. For me, raising the banner of a party now is premature. We have to create a broader movement and make contact with more people, build branches around the STWC and work in the trade unions. Then there will come a time when we will have to be a party. There is no argument that that is the goal; the question is how to make the process work to get there.

Surely part of that process would be a paper of the SA - a large minority of delegates supported the call for one today.

Again, I think that needs to be further down the line. There is no shortage of

...raising the banner of a party now is premature

papers and there is no shortage of places for people to put their views into print. So I cannot see that as the first priority. I think the first priority is for us to fight to be taken seriously on a national stage. Instead of a paper, we need to put those resources into a fully functioning press and publicity office, with press releases and so on. If you look through much of the press, you will see people at all sorts of levels in politics and society committing themselves to *our* positions.

We should be contacting these people to say: 'Look, we're having a rally - you may be a surgeon or an office cleaner, but come along and speak'. Through building the coalition, a party will come into existence.

But we have to be broader and break out of the ghetto first. We have to bring other people in from other sections of society. That does not mean that our socialist perspective is negotiable. That is the challenge - to bring a broader coalition of people together without compromising our core socialist beliefs. *Later* a party will emerge when there is a real movement for that party to coalesce out of. A party without a movement is all chiefs and no Indians ●

Aussie contrast to UK failure

On the very day that the SWP used its majority to block steps to put the SA at the centre of the fight for working class unity, the Socialist Alliance in Australia voted by a margin of three to one to move towards becoming a party.

Meeting on May 10 in Melbourne, the Australian SA conference supported a motion which asked for a "commitment from affiliates to building the Socialist Alliance through greater affiliate integration ... in word and in deed" with the intention of creating a "multi-tendency socialist party". This new party, with its "strong democratic structures" and a "national paper", would be "as broad as possible", while welcoming "a strong revolutionary socialist stream".

The motion was moved by the Non-

Aligned Caucus and had the backing of the Democratic Socialist Party, the SA's largest component, and Workers' Liberty.

It was opposed, amongst others, by the International Socialist Organisation, the SWP's sister grouping; and Socialist Democracy, supporter of the United Secretariat for a Fourth International, like the International Socialist Group in Britain. These organisations wanted the alliance to remain a "united front", while Workers Power proposed a campaign for an abstract "new workers' party" instead.

Nevertheless all the affiliate groups who argued against moves towards a party indicated during the debate that they would remain in the SA ●

Alan Fox



Supporters of the motion in favour of a workers' party, including the CPGB, Revolutionary Democratic Group and Alliance for Workers' Liberty, got together after the Socialist Alliance conference in a meeting called to discuss what ought to be done next. About 60 comrades met in the back room of a local pub. The mood was sombre: Pete Radcliff of the AWL said to me that several people he knew had not come, because the conference would be just another boring SWP rally - but in fact "it was so appalling, it was almost good".

Tony Greenstein (Brighton) summed up the feelings of many independents when he said that the SA had no future. The conference had rejected the very idea of a party, rejected the concept of an alliance paper and refused to take a realistic view about the SA's health and prospects. The project was now nothing more than an SWP front. However, as David Landau pointed out, comrades should not leave the SA, because there were still opportunities to do work locally and it was wrong to write SWP members off as being all of the same stripe - there are bound to be tensions amongst them. This position was generally accepted - except perhaps by the AWL.

All the AWL speakers sang from the same hymn sheet, and many were called to serenade us by chair Ruth Cashman - an AWL member herself. They all condemned George Galloway and the SA majority for "falling in behind him". It sounds to me like an exit strategy, but as yet they are not threatening to leave the SA.

An hour and 45 minutes into the meeting a situation arose that *Hansard* would have described as "confused" - a procession of AWLers had been heard, all of whom centred their interventions on Galloway, as if our relationship with the man was the only thing that needed discussing. What we should actually do, in or out of the Socialist Alliance, to fight for a workers' party was not addressed. In the meantime several comrades had to leave for various parts of the country, without having had a chance either to speak themselves or hear any concrete proposals.

Sean Matgama's contribution was difficult to hear, but I was just able to discern that he thought we should look to the trade union movement and the Labour Party as the only possible source from which a workers' party can come. But by now the meeting was equally as bad as the conference had been.

The confusion was compounded after complaints were made by CPGB comrades regarding the chairing of the meeting - there had been no attempt to ensure a genuine exchange of views by alternating speakers - CPGB, AWL, RDG and indies. When Manny Neira (CPGB) asked the chair who was still to speak, comrade Cashman replied: "One from the AWL and 11 others."

Steve Freeman (RDG), on whose initiative the meeting had been convened, was at last able to get in - Martin Thomas of the AWL had taken it upon himself to appoint the chair, ensure he was the first speaker and make the closing remarks (in which he pushed an AWL event). Comrade Freeman called for a further meeting, where firm proposals could be made.

John Bridge of the CPGB expressed the view that a genuine campaign for a workers' party, based on a joint paper, would depend, first and foremost, on the cooperation of the CPGB and AWL. Silence from the AWL - although some of the independents protested that they too had a role to play. Marcus Ström pointed out how the AWL's failure to accept CPGB proposals for a joint SA paper had cost us dear. We had been left without a united campaigning voice that could have pulled hundreds of people from the anti-war protests towards the alliance on the basis of fighting for a new party.

If we had done that, the conference we had just attended would have been very different indeed. An opportunity had been lost ●

Phil Kent

ASYLUM

Green Party -
www.greenparty.org.uk

Posing left

In addition to the Scottish Socialist Party, the other big winner in the May 1 election to the Holyrood parliament was the Green Party, which managed to scoop seven MSPs in the proportional representation-based list vote.

It was therefore surprising not to see any mention of this achievement on the home page of the party's website. Other than an annoying flashing message at the top of the screen ("If not us, who? If not now, when? Stand up and be counted. Join the Green Party."), the first item of interest is 'Leaving Labour'. Clearly trying to strike a leftist pose, a short article lists the litany of Blair's crimes, focusing on the war, neoliberalism and attacks on the firefighters. Interestingly the 'e' word (environment) only gets mentioned once. The piece is peppered with hyperlinks (in a manner similar to online versions of the *Weekly Worker*), allowing the viewer to rapidly survey key areas of interest. The article also serves as a preamble to a longer document of the same name aimed at a Labourite audience, helped along with anecdotal reports from activists that have made the break.

The next item, 'Topical comments', leads to a very comprehensive news page with 34 different subject headings. Clicking on 'Iraq' for instance took me to further material grouped under more subheadings: 'Comment' (views of various spokespersons), 'Articles', 'Press releases', and 'Speeches'. Along the top of the main comment page we have media contact details in 'Press office', and news from the London assembly. 'MSP news' directs us to the home page of the Scottish Greens, a site that is on the whole less cluttered, better designed ... and green! The final link in this set is to the news archive page, running intermittently back to summer 1998.

Returning to the home page, the layout is divided into three sections. Beginning with the centre we have 'Latest news'. Buried away on the next news page are the local and Scottish election results. Actually this in itself is not a bad thing, indicating that the website is updated when necessary rather than once in a blue moon.

The right side of the screen is given over to Green Party links. We are invited to subscribe to their information list, but if the

volume of on-site news is anything to go by, I would recommend that comrades empty their inboxes prior to joining. The next five boxes refer to the Greens regionally: London, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and European sites are given. Judging from this list, one can only presume that nothing of import ever happens in the rest of England to justify any other regional websites. Following these we have a 'frequently asked questions' box, providing national structure details, electoral progress, history, statements on ethical trade and the party 'programme', *Manifesto for a sustainable society*. This also includes statements on core values and philosophy, which sound nice but are ultimately vague. The 'Young people' box links to an array of external education links and the 'Young Green' site - yet another that is better designed than its parent. Rounding this column off are more reports on runways, congestion charges, etc.

The left hand bar is more of a navigational tool around the site. A lot of the links take us to sections of the site already explored previously. Interesting sections here include 'Conferences'. This page carries policy decisions and documents from the spring and autumn gatherings over the past six years. Unfortunately these offer a sanitised picture of the Greens, with no mention of unsuccessful motions or anything passing as an analysis of the events. The 'Members' link is a nice touch as well, giving the party a more human face with photos, music, jobs, and website support. 'Events' is self-explanatory, cataloguing important upcoming vigils, demos, and "gatherings". Finally, the 'Contacts and links' page is a minimal affair. Links to elected members, green parties nationally and internationally, and other green-related sites are neatly parcelled away under their own headings. This part is certainly interesting, linking the kinds of sites you would expect featured on Urban 75 or Globalise Resistance.

Overall the Greens are to be congratulated for keeping this site constantly updated, appearing to treat their website as if it were an integral part of their organisation. The rest of the left would do well to take note of this approach ●

Phil Hamilton

Mullin's rivers of blood

"Like the Roman, I see the River Tiber foaming with much blood."

Enoch Powell's was a very well educated ignorance. In 1968 he began his most famous speech with these words, deploying a classical education to legitimise the warped instincts, prejudices and fears of a whole swathe of plebeian and middle class reaction. Hatred of fellow human beings on the grounds of race was given patrician airs and graces. The 'rivers of blood' he foresaw would flow from the victims of the violence which was Britain's inevitable fate if it did not reduce its black population.

Powell's most recent intellectual inheritor is Labour MP Chris Mullin. Last week, his home affairs select committee produced a report which argued that Britain could not afford to provide a home to the 110,700 foreigners who applied for asylum last year. Eloquent racism was replaced with cold bureaucratic euphemism - "social unrest" will follow if the flow of migrants is not stemmed.

People have the legal right to escape persecution by fleeing to Britain under the terms of the United Nations' *Declaration on territorial asylum*, but it is the host country - in other words its government, and not the UN - which decides if such persecution has actually taken place. Our home office applies harsh criteria to distinguish 'genuine' asylum-seekers from mere 'economic migrants'. In short, if you can prove you are likely to be tortured or shot in your own country, you may possibly be allowed to remain in Great Britain. If you are merely likely to be homeless and go hungry, you must return to your own country.

Asylum-seekers and other immigrants are intensely vulnerable. Often they had to escape their home countries by circuitous routes to avoid detection by the states they fear, and are able to take few possessions. Where they exist, the very papers which might provide evidence of the risks they face in their own states are the most dangerous things they might be caught carrying. More commonly, no such documented proof is possible: torturers do not provide receipts. Not all refugees are educated or literate, and many do not speak English.

The system is stacked against them.

Are refugees so treated because immigration is a threat to the welfare of existing British residents? Is this a necessary, if unpalatable, safeguard? Consider the following:

- The population of Great Britain, including those granted asylum, has grown by less than 0.2% a year for the last 10 years: in a town of 100,000, that is only 200 new residents a year.

- Immigrant workers also become consumers and tax-payers, creating further jobs and services for others. In total, those already here contribute more to the economy than they consume.

- The proportion of the British population over retirement age is increasing, forcing ever more senior citizens to become effectively dependent on a smaller working population each year. Immigrants help to redress this balance, as the substantial majority are under 30.

In short, capitalism normally benefits. That reactionary journal *The Economist* has long argued the case for almost unrestricted migration - not on the grounds of justice or human freedom, but simply for the health of capitalism.

Through membership of the European Union, Great Britain bestows the right of permanent settlement to all 350 million people living within its borders. What the EU and advanced capitalist countries want to do is to *control* immigration, particularly in regard to poor and unskilled workers, whose level of culture, language and other abilities

may often render them less profitable to exploit as wage slaves. However, the very illegality of officially unsanctioned immigration can also provide capital with a source of worst paid labour. Men and women who live in dread of deportation will accept extremely low pay and appalling living conditions. Whole industries rely on their superexploitation. They can also be used to undermine working class solidarity and the ability of unions to defend their members' rights.

Equally, immigrants provide a scapegoat: someone to blame for the problems which face ordinary people. Such blame properly lies, of course, with the government and the capitalist system it administers, and Blair is happy to see it deflected against the 'outsider'. Unlike in 1968, when opposition to black immigration was openly espoused by a minority of mainstream politicians, in 2003 this official chauvinism is not constructed around racism. All Britons, black and white, are called upon to unite against the deadly threat from 'bogus asylum-seekers'.

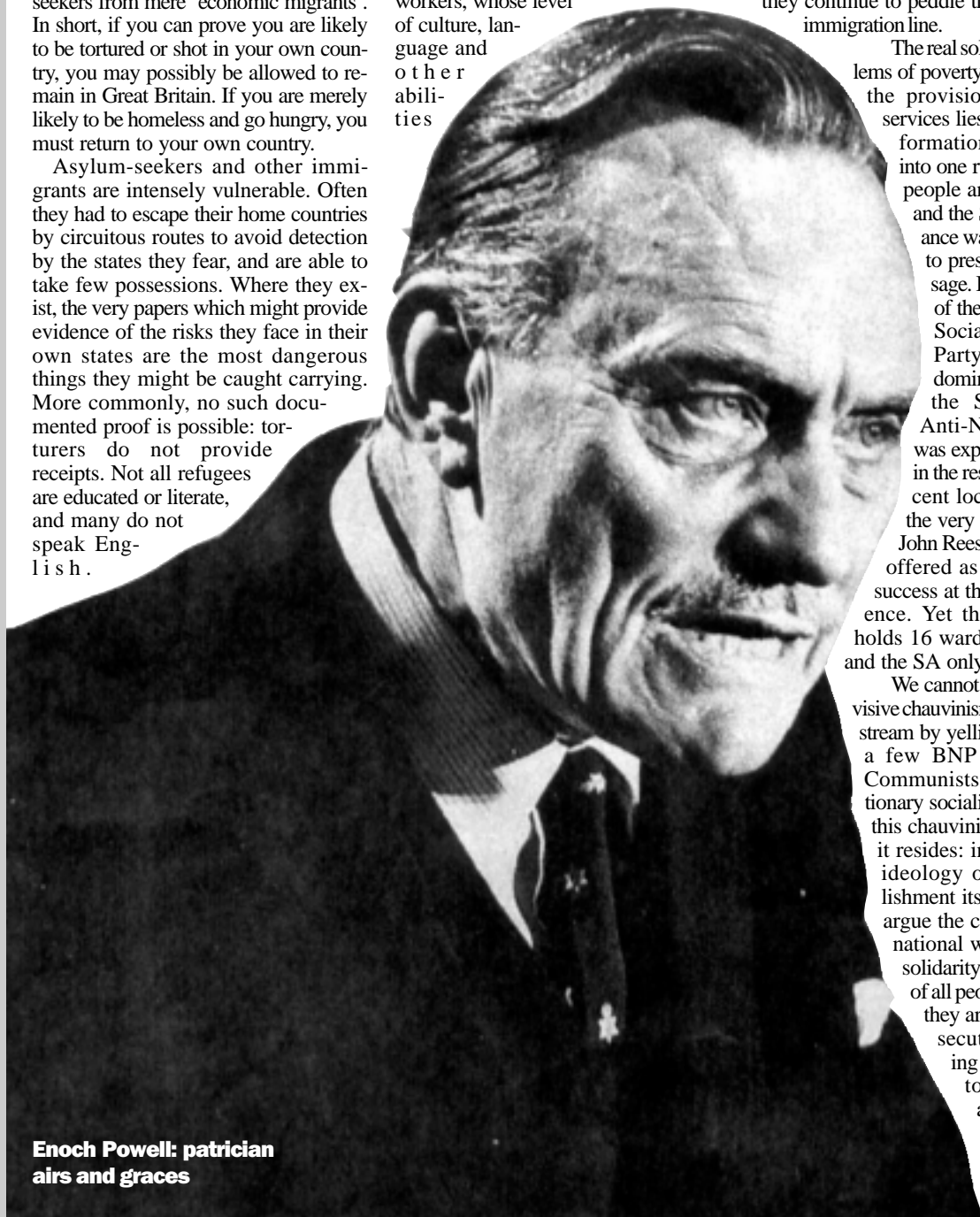
To this end, both major parties are now vying with each other to present the 'toughest' immigration policy, and in doing so are handing a gift to the British National Party, who have elevated the scapegoating of immigrants into a guiding political principle.

While both Labour and Conservative parties protest their contempt of the BNP, they continue to peddle the same anti-immigration line.

The real solution to problems of poverty, housing and the provision of public services lies in the transformation of society into one run by and for people and not profit: and the Socialist Alliance was well placed to present this message. But the failure of the tactics of the Socialist Workers Party through its dominance of both the SA and the Anti-Nazi League was expressed clearly in the results of the recent local elections: the very results which John Rees - incredibly - offered as evidence of success at the SA conference. Yet the BNP now holds 16 wards nationally, and the SA only one.

We cannot defeat the divisive chauvinism of the mainstream by yelling 'Nazi!' at a few BNP boneheads. Communists and revolutionary socialists must take this chauvinism on where it resides: in the official ideology of the establishment itself. We must argue the case for international working class solidarity, for the right of all people - whether they are fleeing persecution or seeking a better life - to travel, live and work where they choose ●

Manny Neira



Enoch Powell: patrician airs and graces

around
THEWEB

AGGREGATE

Partyist project continues



Stopping war requires party

How can the left in Britain be united in order to give impetus to the fight for a mass revolutionary workers' party? CPGB members met at an aggregate the day after the Socialist Alliance conference to analyse what they had witnessed and discuss the way forward.

Comrades agreed that we needed to think carefully about our future relationship with the SA. The conference demonstrated that the alliance - which we had seen as having the potential to transform itself into the core of the party we need, uniting the most advanced workers - has more clearly than ever been reduced to the Socialist Workers Party's electoral front. Many comrades went so far as to say that it was no longer the focus for the struggle for a workers' party. Thanks to the absolute majority enjoyed by the SWP, even the aim of a workers' party was voted down and the modest proposal for a regular SA paper was once again rejected.

Several comrades asked where this left the CPGB. Until now our perspective was to fight to win the alliance for partyism. If this is no longer tenable, it leaves a gap in our work. As a group we need a focus around which our members and supporters could cohere. Comrade Manny Neira said it would be tempting, but wrong, to adopt a 'wait and see' approach. We must offer political leadership, not just commentary.

Comrade Lee Rock and others advocated reducing the amount of money the Party gives to the Socialist Alliance. Last year we donated £1,590. Excluding the SWP - whose contributions came in the form of writing off £1,920 owed to its printshop, East End Offset - this is more than twice as much as the next largest donor, Workers Power, and almost exactly 10 times more than the International Socialist Group - the SWP's close ally, now rewarded with two seats on the executive. The idea of withholding contributions was rejected, but our representative will raise the whole question of finance on the SA executive committee.

It was generally agreed that we should re-

main involved in the Socialist Alliance - not in a cynical way, using it simply as a vehicle for attacking the SWP but as a site where we will continue to struggle for a democratic and centralised party, even if that struggle has been set back. We can also continue to inform the broader movement about discussions and decisions within the SA. Comrade Marcus Ström commented that the fringe meeting for those who backed the pro-party motion was even less inspiring than the conference itself. These forces are a lot weaker than they were two years ago, and it is unrealistic to think they can form the basis of a forceful campaign.

Our first task is to analyse what went wrong with the Socialist Alliance, why it has collapsed as a partyist project and what we can learn from it. Comrade Ström said that he agreed with Dave Osler, who said at the fringe meeting that the conference should have been about learning from the experience of the Scottish Socialist Party, whose transformation from an alliance had changed it into a force to be reckoned with.

Comrade John Bridge said we should ask even more basic questions, about the nature of the crisis of capitalism and how this is reflected in the crisis of Labourism, and about what form the new workers' party should take. The SWP believes the Socialist Alliance should be the basis for a "new" united front with Marxists in the minority. The Revolutionary Democratic Group's call for a communist-Labour party amounts to the same thing. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty leadership wants to rerun the 20th century by recreating another Labour Party. All these recipes are wrong. Marxism is the natural ideology of the organised working class and we should aspire to a genuinely revolutionary party. Comrade Ian Donovan said that in the current politicised situation we should be able to continue winning recruits to the CPGB by campaigning under our own name.

Although we successfully argued for a representative from the AWL to be kept on the Socialist Alliance EC, the behaviour of the AWL at the conference, and their recent ob-

session with George Galloway, make it clear that they have no commitment to the partyist project. They appear to be cohering their members against the rest of the left prior to a major policy shift - perhaps back towards Labour Party entryism. Comrade Ström described the independents as flotsam - crusty old lefties who, having been damaged by their experience in sects, now hate the idea of disciplined organisation.

Other speakers pointed out that, although this is true, these independents are people we must strive to organise and arm with a perspective. Comrade Mike Macnair said that those 'indies' who involve themselves in the Socialist Alliance are the most advanced section of a whole layer of dedicated activists working in trades councils, strike support committees and other working class bodies.

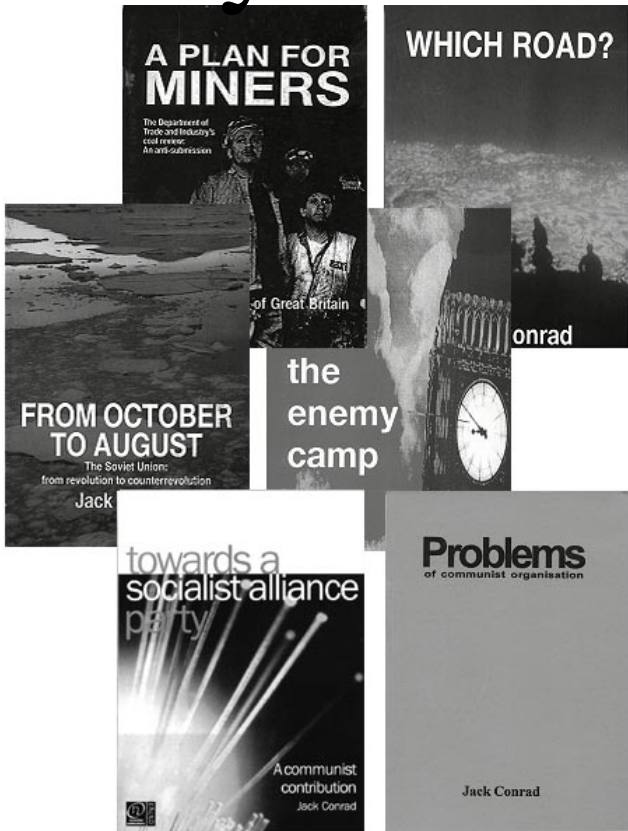
Some comrades argued that in the forthcoming period we should put more emphasis on the Labour left and the unions, where discontent with Blair and New Labour offered the possibility of a left split. As the Labour Party becomes more and more overtly anti-working class, we should be arguing more forcefully for the democratisation of trade union funds. We should not of course advocate breaking the trade union link with Labour now, especially since there is no viable alternative for the unions to affiliate to.

We are in a period where patience is necessary. We cannot act as substitutes for non-existent Socialist Alliance branches. Neither should we throw ourselves into mini-versions of SWP campaigns to keep comrades busy. We should use our press to cohere healthy pro-party forces, and constructively criticise the actions of the SWP and other groups.

Comrades agreed that the *Weekly Worker* should continue to encourage our readers to join the Socialist Alliance, and to take part in its actions and meetings where they take place. Our primary objective remains: the forging of a mass, revolutionary Communist Party in Great Britain ●

Mary Godwin

Communist Party books



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REVIEWS

Betraying whom?

Tim Fywell (director)
Cambridge spies
 BBC2, Fridays, 9pm

Dedicated idealists or traitors? One thing to be said for this series is that we, the viewers, are allowed to make up our own minds.

With certain relatively honourable exceptions like Alan Bennett's plays, *An Englishman abroad* and *A question of attribution*, dealing respectively with Guy Burgess and Antony Blunt, the network of men who emerged from Cambridge in the 1930s as NKVD agents - Blunt, Burgess, Kim Philby and Donald Maclean - have been crudely depicted as degenerate scum: drunks, misfits and of course 'queers', since Blunt and Burgess constituted what was homophobically referred to as the 'homintern'.

Then as now, the British establishment finds it impossible to deal with ideology, with the notion that the sheer power of ideas could lead someone to betray 'their' country. There has to be another explanation - drink, sexual 'perversity', avarice or whatever - an explanation which neatly pigeon-holes the perpetrators as deviants or freaks. It is, of course, the strident voice of reaction grappling with that which it cannot comprehend.

Long before the series was broadcast, this voice was heard in the columns of the *Daily Mail* and in the putrid utterances of one Oleg Antonovich Gordievsky. They condemned the BBC for depicting the Cambridge spies as idealists and heroes, when they were nothing but despicable traitors.

"KGB propaganda" was how Mr Gordievsky anachronistically described *Cambridge spies*. When it comes to treachery, this son and grandson of staunch Chekists certainly knows what he is talking about. Spitting on his forebears' graves, and ultimately abandoning his wife and children, he spied for Britain. Remember when he was vaunted as the man who single-handedly saved the western world by telling Thatcher and Reagan all about the innermost secrets of the Kremlin? Now he is reduced to moaning about his £20,000-a-year MI6 pension, failing as a Channel Four game show host and saddled with the fact that it was he, Mr Wonderful Gordievsky, who told us that Michael Foot, aka 'Comrade Boot', was a KGB spy. Michael, the old softie, settled for an apology. He should have taken the *Sunday Times* and Oleg to the cleaners in the high court, but maybe someone suggested to him that it would not be a good idea?

Here, of course, is the nub of the matter. Some 52 years after the defection of Burgess and MacLean, 40 years after the defection of Philby and 24 years after the exposure of Blunt, the establishment still seems anxious to keep the subject from public view, or, when absolutely necessary, to denounce the 'homintern' through pathetic little stooges like Mr Gordievsky.

Given that the cold war is over, and that the west definitively won it, this spiky, neurotic defensiveness appears puzzling. Why, for example, should the BBC be condemned by Gordievsky for portraying the British ruling class in the 1930s as "indolent, stupid and viciously anti-semitic, lording it over the poor" (*The Guardian*, May 8)? Anybody with an ounce of historical knowledge can tell you that this was precisely the case. In fact one of the programme's strengths is the way in which it conveys the atmosphere and texture of life in that select social club (both literal and metaphorical) from which the Cambridge spies emerged.

Director Tim Fywell and screenplay writer Peter Moffat do a reasonable job of setting the story in a broader political context: the rise of fascism and the failure of the Labour Party in government under Ramsay MacDonald to tackle fundamental social inequality and the



Clockwise: Maclean, Blunt, Burgess and Philby: anti-fascists

scourge of unemployment. The National Government of 1931, itself a perfect symbol of Labour's capitulation, and the victory of fascism in Italy, Germany, Austria and Spain, left young idealists with a stark choice. The only world power that appeared to stand against poverty and fascism, the only coherent vision of building a decent society, came from the Soviet Union and its promise of an unbounded future of collectivised agriculture, steel plants, full employment and technological wizardry. There seemed, as even Lord

Healey and scores of others will tell you, no alternative at the time.

If *Cambridge spies* has a weakness in the first episode, it is that this choice is presented in purely emotional terms, which fails somehow to convey the fact that all of the central characters, far from being just 'socialites with a conscience' were convinced *communists* and *revolutionaries*. They had read their Marx and thought they understood it. These were men who were determined to change the world, who took their convictions into that most exclusive of Cambridge clubs, the Apostles, where the cult of friendship was encapsulated in EM Forster's words: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."

When it comes to the mechanics of how the Cambridge spies were recruited by the NKVD, the moment when their 'betrayal' became real, history and the supposedly all-revealing Moscow archives still leave us in the dark. Was it Blunt or Burgess who was the prime mover? It really does not matter now. At some stage each of them made the personal decision to serve the USSR in the belief this would aid the struggle against fascism and further the fight for a communist future.

How much did they know about Stalin, the purges, the gulags? We cannot know, but Kim's own words reflect a truth: "It cannot be very surprising that I adopted a communist viewpoint in the 30s; so many of my contemporaries made the same choice. But many of those who made their choice in those days changed sides when some of the worst fea-

tures of Stalinism became apparent. I stayed the course" (K Philby *My secret war* London 1968, p7).

There is something stubbornly defiant in those words, "I stayed the course". For Philby and the others it was no easy 'secret war'. As the programme makes clear, living your cover as an agent of the NKVD involved real sacrifices and deep personal contradictions, but they made their choice and they stuck to it.

The later episodes show that Philby's access to the upper echelons of MI6 involved him in difficult decisions. Would-be Soviet defector Konstantin Volkov's knowledge of the Cambridge ring meant that, having offered his services to British intelligence, he had to be kidnapped and sent home to Moscow and a certain death. Albanian counterrevolutionary terrorists, parachuted into 'their' country by the RAF, were greeted by a hail of machine gun bullets, thanks to Kim. Espionage was and never is a glamorous James Bond business; in the end it is about producing reports to be digested, or not (usually not), by politicians; there are casualties, and anybody who thinks that all the victims were on one side of the balance sheet is a fool or a paid-by-the-line dolt and knave like the poor little swine, Mr Gordievsky.

Give us the proof, Oleg Antonovich: open to us the files that will show these men were "traitors" more than you were. For all their errors, the Cambridge spies were communists who did what they thought was in the interests of the working class ●

Michel Malkin

Europe: meeting the challenge of continental unity

Now reprinted



In his new book of essays Jack Conrad argues against those who view the European Union and the single currency with trepidation. The unity of capitalist Europe is our opportunity to unite the European working class into a single combat party - a Communist Party of the EU. An important step in that direction would be a European Socialist Alliance.
 pp129, £5 or €8

Not so invincible

Paul Virilio **Desert screen: war at the speed of light**
 Continuum, 2002, pp148, £12.99

Like Jean Baudrillard, a thinker with whom he has much in common, Paul Virilio is a modish French academic who sees industrial civilisation as a sort of apocalypse in waiting. Nearly 30 years as director of the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris has done nothing to deepen his faith in human creativity. Gazing out at a world of satellites, aeroplanes and televisions, he comes to only one conclusion - we are all the "consenting victims" of the machinery that will destroy us.

Virilio blames most of our problems on what cultural theorists call "time-space compression". He insists that the distinguishing feature of modern culture is the ability to traverse vast areas of space in very short periods. This can either be done literally (by jumping in a car, train or plane) or purely at the perceptual level (by using electronic media to beam images from thousands of miles away into our domestic spaces).

The problem with this culture is that it alienates us from the places in which we live, blunts our curiosity and makes us immune to regional loyalties. And with the disappearance of regional loyalties goes the weakening of all those collective ties (eg, of class, race and gender) which tend to go with them. Virilio evidently sees the modern human as little more than a perpetually moving atom, obsessed with speed and incapable of working in groups.

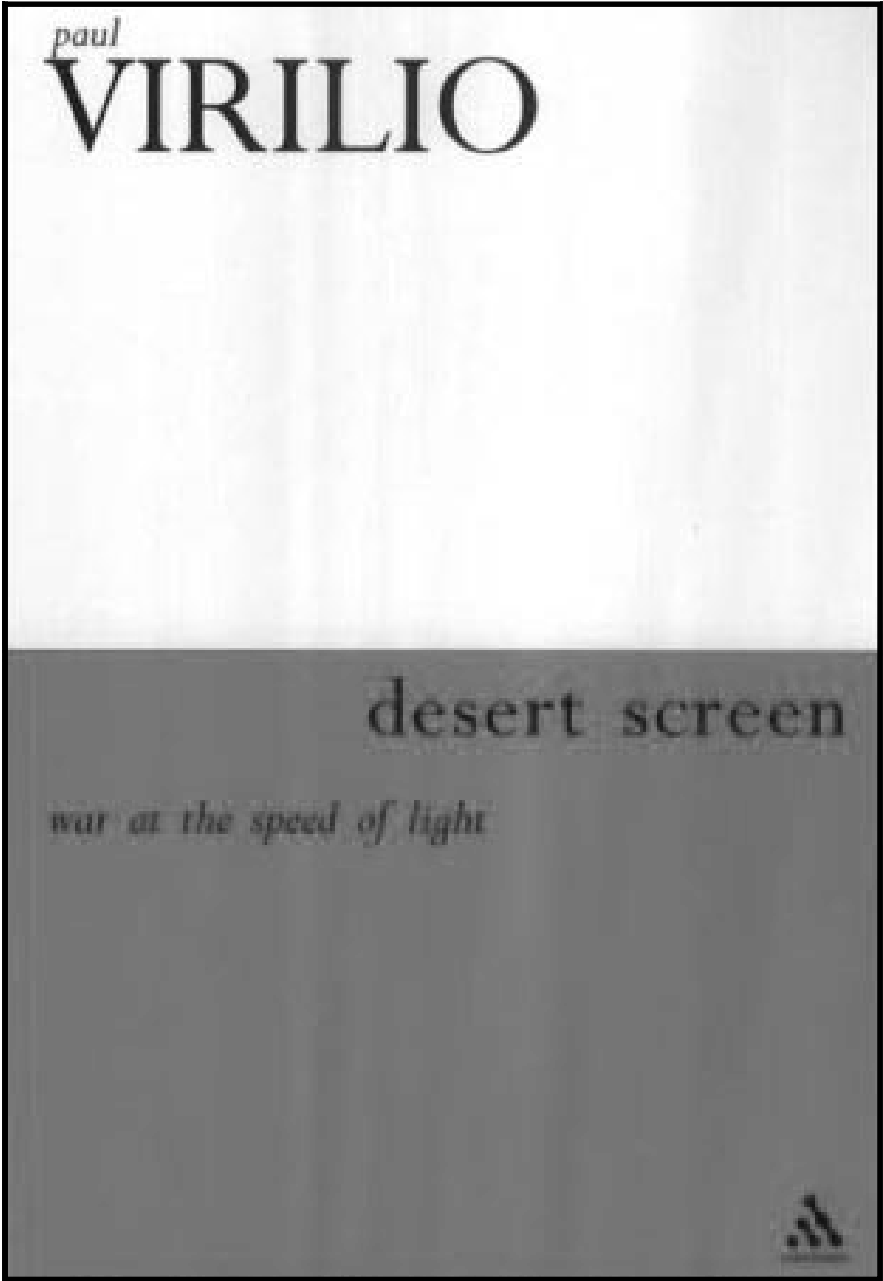
Desert screen is Virilio's attempt to extend his critique of space-time compression to the sphere of warfare. Consisting of a series of articles which Virilio contributed to the French press at the time of the first Gulf War, its implicit premise is that US imperialism has now achieved an unassailable position both at home and abroad. The sources of its unprecedented power are: (1) the surveillance technology which conveys military information across the world in the blink of an eye; and (2) the military hardware which enables the USA and its allies to target enemy action with unerring speed and precision.

Within seconds of an enemy commander issuing a hostile order (or even when preparatory movements of troops and weapons give a clear indication of what the order is likely to be), Washington will have heard about it and authorised a crushing response. As we saw on the opening night of the recent conflict, it is not even possible for Saddam Hussein to visit a Baghdad restaurant without having a cruise missile served up as his *hors d'oeuvres* - or so it was claimed.

Virilio also argues that the ability to crush opposition abroad is matched by a new power of bewitching opinion at home. In a culture of "global video production" in which Ted Turner is the "big boss", it is not only the military elite which has images of conflict beamed to it in real time - it is also the millions of viewers for whom TV is the primary source of information. Virilio's point is that instantaneous broadcasting is the enemy of democracy. Sucked into a televisual universe in which cities are bombed before our very eyes, we lose the ability to say *j'accuse* and become entirely seduced by the spectacle of absolute power.

There are several obvious objections to this counsel of despair. The most important is that modern surveillance technology is by no means as omniscient as Virilio implies. For all the satellites that have spied on Iraq over the last 20 years, no one was able to tell us where Saddam kept his weapons of mass destruction - assuming they existed. And no one can tell us today where Saddam himself is.

Nor is it the case that advanced weapons always confer total power on the countries which possess them. If the USA is indeed to impose its will on the various 'rogue states' in Asia and the Middle East, it will have to commit itself to an endless round of air attacks, ground invasions and military occupations. As Niall Ferguson and others have pointed



out, it is most unlikely that the American electorate, raised on a diet of fast food and trash TV, would be willing to tolerate this state of affairs for very long. Instead of lolling uncritically in front of instantaneous broadcasts from the battle front, they would be just as likely to recoil from what they saw and adopt a militant isolationism.

Virilio's admirers would probably claim that

his work is a form of science fiction, warning us about what might happen if modern trends are allowed to continue. No doubt this is true, but overestimating the power of the western states is a dangerous business. If imperialism is not exactly a paper tiger, it is still a lot less invincible than this interesting book would have us believe ●

Phillip Bounds

Fighting fund

Partyist priority

Disappointment, not to say despondency, was in the air after the May 10 conference of the Socialist Alliance. Many had thought that, after the election of our councillor in Preston, there might be a new mood of optimism, leading to a relaunch, a real advance in the direction of a party. It was not to be.

There is, however, a lesson. While the other principal supporting organisations fail to take partyism seriously, the *Weekly Worker* will continue - week in, week out, irrespective of difficulties and setbacks - to campaign for what our class needs: a democratic, centralised Communist Party. In the Socialist Alliance, in the anti-war movement, on demonstrations, on our stalls, we will not stop pointing out what is necessary.

That is why you need to make support

for your paper a priority. Without the full £500 every month we would be considerably handicapped in putting across our message as effectively as we need to. And that is why old stalwarts like comrade TR never let us down. This month his donation was for £30. Thanks also to GT (£20), JK and RT (£15 each), TY and AP (£10 apiece), who together took our May total up to £262.

Let me appeal once again to our web readers in particular - there were 9,404 visits to the CPGB site last week giving us a circulation of over 10,000 - to help fund the resource that so many find so useful. Please help us reach our £500 target ●

Robbie Rix

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 Worker

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Palestinian freedom demands unity below

Road map to hell

Now that Iraq has been seized for the benefit of big oil and the 'new American century', the new 'road map' for the Israel/Palestine question is being brought to the fore.

Drawn up by the so-called 'quartet' - ie, the US, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations - this 'peace plan' supposedly embodies proposals that will lead to a Palestinian state. But it probably would not be a good idea to hold one's breath until Palestinian freedom is attained; the bottom line of this renewed 'peace plan' is that if the Palestinians were only to give up their fight against Israeli occupation completely, renounce the whole ethos of their national struggle (dubbed as 'terrorism'), and replace their leaders with pliant supplicants who have the approval of the US and above all Israel itself, then and only then will they have the privilege of living in some kind of truncated geographic entity that somewhere down the line will be blessed with 'independence'.

It seems, however, that if Ariel Sharon has any say on the matter it will never get off the ground. The butcher of Sabra/Shatila and Jenin (among others) gave Colin Powell the brush-off in his diplomatic shuffle this week, protesting that Israeli settlements in the occupied territories need to engage in at least 'natural growth' at the expense of the Arab population - which does not bode well for the halt to new Israeli settlements in Palestinian areas that is supposed to be part of Bush's plan.

The 'road map' really is a concretisation of Bush's speech on Palestine last June, when he called for the ousting of Yasser Arafat as leader of the PLO and Palestinian Authority as a precondition for any kind of negotiations for a 'provisional' Palestinian state. Arafat was deemed 'tainted' by terrorism on the say-so of Sharon, Bush's soul mate, who has benefited enormously from the political consequences of the continued settlement of the territories seized in 1967 - ie, the West Bank and Gaza. Neither he nor the Israeli ruling class are about to voluntarily hand them over to some made-over PLO administration in Ramallah, as Bush knows very well.

Talk of a Palestinian state is cynical hogwash designed to achieve 'regime change' in the Palestinian authority - installing a leadership that is prepared to bargain away whole swathes of Palestinian land (Arafat has shown over the whole fiasco of the Oslo peace negotiations of the 1990s that he is quite capable of doing that himself). Even such a pliable Palestinian leadership is only acceptable if it is prepared to kiss Sharon's backside and repudiate the whole tradition of radicalism and the struggle for liberation.

This is the role of the new Palestinian prime minister, Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas). Formerly the PLO's secretary-general, this apparatchik appears to have been groomed by the United States to play the role of stooge, the would-be Hamid Karzai of the Palestinian authority. His determination to crack down on the 'terrorism' of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the secular Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is hardly in doubt: indeed it is his



Colin Powell and Ariel Sharon: demand surrender

main sales pitch to the Americans.

However, it is, to say the least, highly unlikely that he will have much more success in this endeavour than Arafat. In the end, the popular support for suicide terrorism against Israeli civilians is not something that can be turned on and off like a tap, even if the Americans were to provide Abu Mazen with a reinforced, US-trained police force. Rather, suicide bombings have a symbiotic relationship with the programme of Israeli settlement of the territories - stopping and reversing the slow-motion ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians from the territories would take much of the wind out of the sails of the suicide bombers.

The debate about whether to trade 'land for peace' has ravaged Israeli society for decades and never fully been resolved one way or another - the empirical 'common sense' of such a programme is countered by its incompatibility with Zionist doctrine. After all, what really is the difference between today's settlers on the West Bank and the founding fathers of Israel, who carried out a rather similar programme of stealthy, gradual annexation of land and pressure against the Arab population in the lead-up to the founding of the Israeli state itself?

This is a conundrum that Zionism as a political movement, even with a now long established and immensely powerful state, cannot solve and is organically incapable of coming to terms with. A genuine repudiation of annexation and colonisation - ie, a repudiation of historic wrongs that are being done today in the occupied territories - requires a programmatic reckoning with the historic wrongs of the previous two or three generations that are inherent in Israel itself.

This contradiction, in fact, is the real obstacle that prevents the Israeli ruling

class from making an enduring peace with the Palestinians. Real peace requires an admission that a historic wrong was done, and a commitment to genuine co-existence between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples that can only be cemented by massive compensation to the Palestinians for their dispossession, pauperisation, marginalisation and savage oppression over decades.

The same contradiction is also the reason why Bush's road map, even in the unlikely event that the Palestinian state he projects actually comes into existence, cannot solve the Israeli-Palestinian question. Such a state, the product of a grudging, purely pragmatic manoeuvre in the 'war against terrorism', would be a prison camp for the Palestinians, and would leave Zionist terror intact as an external prison guard. It would no more embody justice than the pathetic reservations to

which native Americans were confined by the expansionist United States. It would be seen as a betrayal of the birth-right of every Palestinian and would inevitably at some future point implode from within in the context of renewed anti-imperialist struggles.

It would be utterly impractical and wrong for communists and defenders of the rights of the Palestinians to demand that Israeli Jews give up their existence as a distinct people. We cannot demand that they liquidate their national consciousness and merge with the Palestinians in a unitary, Arab-dominated state; or, even worse, ape the more extreme secular nationalists - not to mention the likes of Hamas - in their call for Israeli Jews to simply leave, or face being driven out of, historic Palestine. Such demands for a fully consolidated nation to give up its right to exist are incompatible with democracy and help cement the hold of Zionism over the Israeli population. But what communists must demand, if any kind of Hebrew-centred Israeli national entity is to coexist with the Palestinian people, is a complete de-Zionisation of that Israeli nation.

A radically reworked Israeli national entity, living side by side with the Palestinian people, initially in a two-state arrangement, must abolish all its reactionary, discriminatory laws. In particular, it must end the chauvinist, anti-Arab so-called 'law of return'. This gives automatic immigration and citizenship rights to anyone of Jewish ancestry anywhere in the world, even if they have no connection with Israel and have never set eyes on the place. By the same measure it denies to literally millions of Arabs who were driven out in the Naqba (catastrophe) of 1948, and their descendants, the right to even enter the country. Israel's citizenship laws must be completely democratic and secular, as indeed must those of the sister Palestinian state that would be the outcome of a genuine 'peace process' coming from below, not Bush's fraud enforced in the name of the 'war against terrorism'.

There must be a right of all Palestinian refugees, from 1948 and after, to settle in either a Palestinian or the Israeli state - with the help of massive Israeli material aid to ensure a decent living standard. There must also be completely free move-

ment of both peoples (albeit without state aid) between the two states, and perhaps in time a joint citizenship, as a prelude to a genuinely binational entity coming into being and thereby dissolving the initial separate states.

Such a genuine peace process can only come from below, from the masses of the region, both Israeli Jew and Palestinian Arab. It must be fought for against both the imperialists and the Zionists on the one hand, and the various reactionary Arab regimes and the Islamist surrogates for a provenly impotent Arab nationalism on the other hand. For, although the nationalism of the Arabs contains a component that is against oppression - both directly in terms of the Palestinians, and indirectly in the sense of wider Arab sympathy for them and resentment at the legacy of colonialism and imperialism - nationalism as a political programme ultimately plays a counterproductive and therefore reactionary role in the anti-imperialist struggle.

At best it chains the masses to the illusions of common interests with Arab 'native' exploiters; at worst it provides a channel whereby foul elements of reaction can find their way in and poison the struggle against oppression: witness the growth of reactionary Islamic movements that particularly oppress Arab women, and the pollution of Arab movements, both religious and secular, by anti-semitic filth imported from Europe. This not only does a disservice to what should be a progressive struggle against oppression, but also through fear of anti-semitism, fosters the worst fascistic ultra-Zionist elements within Israel and renders a progressive solution to the Palestine-Israel question less likely.

If there is to be any hope of turning a movement from below into reality, the rebirth of genuine communism in the Middle East, among both Arabs and Jews, is essential. Indeed, such democratic demands, and gains to be fought for, can only be fully consolidated with the overthrow of capitalism itself and the beginning of a region-wide, if not world-wide, socialist order. That is the end to which progressive elements, both in Israel and among the Arab populations, must strive ●

Ian Donovan

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