



weekly **worker**

**Tommy Sheridan: SSP's
internal row. Nationalists
take on SW platform**

- English nationalism
- AWL school
- STWC activists
- CWI website

No 486

Thursday June 26 2003

Towards a new workers' party

www.cpgb.org.uk

50p/€0.85



Iran: Support the student protests

**Mehdi Kia assesses
June's rising and the
state of the opposition
- see back page**

Scotland and English nationalism

Yet again influential establishment voices have been raised, bitterly denouncing what is called England's grossly unfair treatment compared with Scotland. Not only the usual suspects in and around the Tory high command have joined in the hue and cry, but liberal media pundits and a certain Ken Livingstone too. London is exploited by Scotland, he grumbles.

Tony Blair's famously botched ministerial reshuffle has been eagerly pounced upon by those promoting English nationalism and fuelling short-sighted English resentments. John Reid - MP for Hamilton North and Bels-hill - is now minister of health. However, his remit only covers the national health service in *England*. Oh mortification and lamentation - the Holyrood parliament is responsible for healthcare in his constituency. According to English nationalists, this is a constitutional outrage of the first order.

Supposedly Reid's appointment confirms the dire warnings issued by Tam Dalyell 25 years ago. This oddball Labourite opponent of devolution coined the so-called 'West Lothian question': how can an MP elected in Scotland have authority over England in conditions of a devolved Scottish parliament? A complete non-problem, except for a brittle constitutionalist in search of a 'principled' argument.

Not that this is half of it. Scotland accounts for around eight percent of the population of the United Kingdom. Despite that, Scotland has a disproportionate number of MPs in the House of Commons, runs the standard English nationalist protest. Even when they are reduced from 72 to 59 at the next general election, Scotland is still set to enjoy a distinct advantage. We are told that a 'fair' number would be around 36. Furthermore, Scotland receives more per head in tax revenues. For every £1 spent on the English the Scottish get £1.25. Some of that money comes from England - and, say critics, it is profligately wasted. Students and the elderly in Scotland thereby get a marginally better deal than their counterparts in England. What a heinous crime.

The complaints do not stop there. Scottish politicians are said to dominate New Labour. Blair was born and raised in Scotland. As was Lord Falconer, the minister of constitutional affairs, who effectively replaced Lord Ervine - another damned Scot! Likewise the speaker of the Commons. Then there is Gordon Brown, Gavin Strang and Alister Darling. Ian McCartney, party chair and a Scot to boot, had the cheek to get elected from Makerfield, an English constituency!

All this is portrayed as a sinister Scottish takeover of England and proof of Scottish greed and perfidy. Non-sense, of course. But dangerous nonsense, which the left must vigorously combat.

The idea that Scotland with its five million population can, or does, lord it over England with its 48 million population is a joke. However, the people of Scotland and England can be turned against each other. The divisive and debilitating effects of such internal nationalisms can be seen all too readily in Canada, Italy and Belgium - eg,

Parti Québécois, Northern League and the Vlams Bloc.

Though it contradicts petty nationalist dogma, there is a British nation-state with origins in the 18th century, which incorporates England, Scotland and Wales. National consciousness is always complex and contested. But in the context of Britain it can certainly be described as dual - British-English, British-Scottish, British-Welsh. Till the middle of the 20th century Britain ruled a world empire and still ranks as an important imperialist power. Naturally there are mutual relations of interdependence but, to state the obvious, neither England nor Scotland are oppressed.

That so many Scots happily live in England and Scottish politicians occupy leading governmental positions is no bad thing. It testifies to integration. Our complaint is not over where someone happened to be born. That stinks of chauvinism and verges on xenophobia. Blair, Brown, Strang, Darling, etc are objectionable not on grounds of nationality, but because they are dyed-in-the-wool reactionaries who serve the capitalist system of exploitation. Class loyalty, not accident of birth, should be the criterion for properly assessing and judging politicians.

True, within Britain there is uneven economic development. Inevitable under the capitalist mode of production. South east England has grown faster and consequently sucks in waves of migrants. Twenty million now live there. Meanwhile traditional industries - such as steel, coal, shipbuilding and engineering - have declined. That particularly affected areas such as the Clyde and the central belt in Scotland, south Wales and northern England. Crucially though, over the last 30 years or so, even the semblance of class politics have been pushed to the margins. The defeat of the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike proved a decisive moment.

Nationalism, ethnicity and the politics of identity serve as a kind of substitute. These pseudo-solidarities vie with each other for crumbs before the beneficent state ... and play directly into the hand of the ruling class. Divided, the working class is much more easily ruled.

Every mainstream party in Scotland nowadays dresses itself up in tartan garb and together they help promote an entirely bogus history of antagonism with England and the English. Take Bannockburn and 1341. It is celebrated as a heroic blow for Scottish independence against England - not as a battle between rival feudalists. Worse, the Scottish National Party is not alone in encouraging the belief that Scotland would be better off separated from the English. Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes of the Scottish Socialist Party promote independence as the cutting edge of their programme for national socialism. Disgracefully members of the Socialist Worker platform have - with a few honourable exceptions - adopted an almost total diplomatic silence over this. The last SSP conference actually saw them voting as a bloc in favour of prioritising independence as an aim in election propaganda!

Obviously the stirrings of English

nationalism are a reaction to Scottish (and Welsh) nationalism. And for those below the results are bound to be equally barren.

Does that mean communists and revolutionary socialists should respond by dismissing the national question? In other words can nationalism be successfully combated by counterposing to it a national nihilism and an abstract socialism? No, it cannot. Socialism can only be achieved by wholeheartedly championing and massively extending democracy. Indeed socialism is victory in the battle for democracy.

Britain is not the last word in democracy - a cruel national myth. Rather it is quasi- or semi-democratic. The constitution is the least democratic our rulers can get away with. Democracy is hobbled and hollowed out by all manner of institutional checks and balances, such as the monarchy, the royal prerogative, the House of Lords, a presidential prime minister, judge-made law, etc. Above all the means of production and armed bodies such as the police and the army remain as far removed from democratic control as feasibly possible. That is why communists favour a through-going democratisation and giving democracy a definite social content.

This is summed up in our slogan for a federal republic. If there were no national question in Scotland and Wales, then reorganising the British part of the UK as an England-Scotland-Wales federal republic would be a profoundly retrograde step. In general, and as a matter of principle, communists favour centralised republics.

However, undeniably since the early-1970s Scotland and Wales have experienced growing and palpable nationalist sentiments. That demands a concrete programmatic answer. Trying to ignore nationalism is as good as useless, if not positively harmful. Hence, as part and parcel of the fight for extreme democracy, we advocate the right of people in Scotland and Wales to exercise self-determination through a federal republic.

Does that necessitate reinventing Scotland and Wales as oppressed nations? Hardly. Non-oppressed nations, such as the USA, Germany, France, etc, freely exercise self-determination - and so they should. Only an ignorant fool or an anti-democrat would argue differently.

Our plan for Scottish and Welsh self-determination is specifically designed to confront and defeat separatism, using the tried and tested weapons of unity and democracy. Hence, though nationalists are prone to imagine otherwise, self-determination does not automatically imply independence. On the contrary self-determination denotes the existence of a constitutional right to opt either for independence or unity - as the majority sees fit. For our part we urge ever closer unity.

Instead of merely weakening the existing UK state by breaking away a small component kingdom, our intention is to sweep away the whole royal-bureaucratic assemblage - making ready the launch pad for the CPGB's maximum programme of universal human liberation and communism ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

AWL and George

I am grateful to comrade Pete Radcliff of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty for his reply to my 'open letter' (*Weekly Worker* June 12).

First, a small point: Pete notes "many inaccuracies in [my] account of the relations between the AWL and the CPGB", but doesn't actually specify them (Letters, June 19). If I've made any factual errors, I apologise, but what actually were they? Pete clearly disagrees with my description of the AWL's course as "isolationist", and this may be all he means. In any event, isolationism, or rather its opposite, unity, lies at the heart of the debate, so this point I can take up.

Pete wrote: "The tack of the CPGB is to portray the AWL as being on an isolationist course. Why? Because we use the term 'fake socialists' for those who are not embarrassed by Galloway's politics. But, using Manny's own phrases, Galloway's politics are the 'the politics of supporting Arab dictatorships'. What else can one be, other than 'embarrassed' about being associated with such politics. So that can't be the issue, can it?"

"Despite the untruths printed in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* by the more factional of its contributors, we have never supported or advocated Galloway's expulsion from the Labour Party. But ... [he] is not and should not be our spokesperson at trade union conferences or elsewhere."

Now, either I've made a terrible job of explaining my view or (and I hope Pete will forgive the suspicion) the AWL just cannot take 'yes' for an answer! Assuming the former, let me try again:

I agree: George Galloway's politics are essentially Arab nationalist. His anti-US imperialism takes the form of supporting a dictatorship (and not the working class it oppresses) as the primary force against the unfolding 'new American century' project.

I agree: these are not the politics I wish to see supported by a new workers' party, or presented to the British working class. I would oppose the rumoured Socialist Workers Party attempts to create a popular front with Galloway, Arab nationalists, islamists and the Communist Party of Britain. We are communists and class fighters, not nationalists or religionists of any kind.

I agree: I do not think Galloway should be expelled from the Labour Party. As for the *Telegraph*, if I said the AWL had allied themselves with this reactionary bourgeois rag they would doubtless consider this a slander. They understand, as I do, that the *Telegraph's* attacks are not motivated by concern over the lack of a class base to his politics: the idea is ridiculous. The *Telegraph* hates the anti-war movement, and despises Galloway for supporting it and for calling on soldiers to disobey orders.

Neither the war criminals leading the Labour Party nor their apologists in the bourgeois press should find any allies amongst revolutionaries. Our criticisms of Galloway are (naturally) aimed at that part of his politics we *oppose*; their criticisms are based on that part we *support*. We defend him against the latter, and criticise the former. This is what we mean by *critical defence*.

Now, I have strenuously defended the AWL against the charge that they have allied themselves with our class enemy in attacking Galloway. Surely I was not wrong to do so? But if the AWL's attack is not that of the bourgeoisie, and they defend him against moves to expel him from Labour, then is that not critical defence? Has not the difference been one of emphasis? And are we really going to refuse to cooperate in the campaign our class desperately needs for independent

representation on such grounds?

Pete refers to the AWL alternative, the 'Network for Working Class Political Representation'. After the packed Socialist Alliance pro-party fringe meeting, the 'launch' attracted only 15 AWL members and four others. I can do little better than quote one of those four, the Revolutionary Democratic Group's Peter Morton:

"Comrade Thomas concluded his remarks by stating that the AWL should map out a positive political platform around which people can organise to retrieve what the SA was originally about: eg, to put up 'independent working class socialist candidates'. This opened the way for the first motion to be put, by comrade Matgamna - which is where I became confused. Was I in a meeting to decide AWL policy, or was I unwittingly being inducted into an AWL front, to rival any CWP [Campaign for a Workers' Party] initiatives currently being worked out?"

"Steve Freeman argued for unity between the pro-party groups (AWL, CPGB, RDG), but comrade Matgamna replied that these are propaganda groups who cannot unite if they are putting out radically different propaganda.

"The meeting took a short break and when we returned voting took place. The RDG elected not to vote (including not abstaining), as we did not want to endorse the process that it may now be claimed was taking place in that room."

At a time when Labour has abandoned the class which created it, and the SWP is dragging the SA into popular frontism, those of us who share the CPGB's and AWL's belief in independent working class politics wish to act, rather than leaving working class communities to the tender mercies of the British National Party.

If the SA is being hijacked, let us fight back! There are class fighters in the SWP: let us take the campaign to them too. And of course, we must take the argument out beyond the SA - to the union branches, the workplaces and the streets. But to do this we need a campaign to fight for and a paper to cohere that campaign, and the AWL and the CPGB could be producing it now. I repeat my call to every AWL member: question whether the reasons you are being offered justify our continued paralysis. Let us act.

Manny Neira
Surrey

'Fake left'

According to Wendell Payne, "the AWL has no place in anything remotely claiming to be the 'left'" (Letters, June 19). Apparently, this is because of our "first campism".

Perhaps Wendell could elaborate on this for me, because I just don't see it. Are we 'first campists' (essentially pro-imperialist) because we opposed the fascist regime of Saddam Hussein as well as the vicious imperialist war waged by the US-UK? Have we abandoned the working class because we oppose popular frontist collaboration with fundamentalists who advocate the execution of those who convert away from or leave the Islamic religion? Have we ended up in the 'first camp' because we believe that socialists have a duty of solidarity to the international working class, and not to its oppressors or its oppressors' apologists like George Galloway?

I am a member of the AWL not because I am a cheerleader for imperialism, but because I am a socialist and I believe that the fight for working class solidarity is absolutely central to the fight for socialism. The left has become irrelevant to so much of the class because it has lost its foundations - foundations that belong firmly in the struggle of the working class. As far as unity is concerned, I will work alongside any comrade who knows that it is from the class struggle that socialism will be built, and who wishes to re-anchor the

left firmly within that struggle.

When we speak of the “fake” or “pseudo” left, we mean those people who have forgotten the class and have placed in its stead whatever it considers to be the most suitably ‘anti-imperialist’ entity - be it islamic fundamentalism, apologism for brutal regimes such as Hussein’s, or cross-class popular fronts. Surely it is these people - people who have abandoned the working class - who have “no place in anything remotely claiming to the be the ‘left’”?

Daniel Randall
Nottingham

Not gossip

As far as ‘Weapon, not notice board’ is concerned, I read the *Weekly Worker* because it is engaged in a process of clarification of many left ideas (June 19).

It has many points of similarity to the tradition on the left I come from - notably on Europe and the Middle East, where the CPGB publishes democratic communist views, similar to the original First International Marxism. Personally, as a jaded leftist, I know enough left “gossip” without having to read any paper.

Comrades tell me that they also read the *Weekly Worker* for its genuine development of Marxist views (which in the detail one does not always agree with).

Andrew Coates
email

Keep printing

Though not particularly sympathetic to the CPGB’s politics, I often make it a point to glance at the *Weekly Worker*. The first thing I punch up is the letters column. I suspect a number of other ‘old leftists’ do likewise.

Most leftist sects these days have little idea of what it means to engage in an argument. They seem positively indignant when a mere statement of their views fails to command instant approbation; when challenged, they usually repeat themselves - more loudly and stridently. Polemics with other groups often amount to no more than name-calling.

Your letters column cannot accommodate extended arguments; the letters are of uneven quality and too frequently concerned with intricacies of British politics not easily grasped from where I sit. But ideas are exchanged and debates are had. In the comatose condition of today’s far left, the smallest signs of life are encouraging.

Your letters column is one such sign. Keep printing it!
Jim Cullen
New York

Too middle class

The problem with the left is that it is too middle class. The revolutionary socialist movement is severely hindered by a significant presence of middle class people who wouldn’t go near a council estate, preferring to unload the guilt of their backgrounds by wallowing in intra-left rhetoric, patronising us and boosting their own egos.

Knowing the theory is all very well, but if you can’t relate to the experiences, culture and circumstances of working class people, you’re pissing in the wind. History has provided some notable exceptions, such as Marx, Lenin, and Tony Benn. But such figures are few and far between.

George Thorne’s assertion that the BNP is representing working class interests is treacherous (Letters, June 19). That party’s fine for scabs, football hooligans, Nazis, fascists, rapists, convicted bombers, gun-runners, race-haters; and the disillusioned drawn into Nick ‘Cambridge-educated, lives off inherited income’ Griffin’s big plan for ‘intellectual fascism’ (surely a contradiction?). But for the class, it is a Trojan horse that would lead to our ultimate paralysis.

We need a working class party that is controlled by the rank and file, not some central committee. It should be based in

communities, not middle class universities or cross-class anti-war movements. It should be internationalist and revolutionary, but not weighed down by dogma. To be effective, it would engage and work within the class, rather than bellowing counterproductive liberal slogans like ‘Asylum-seekers welcome here’. It would recognise that prioritising paper sales and recruiting members is not a viable plan of action for making an impact amongst the class.

If the sympathetic middle classes want to help out, they should try to change the anti-working class ideas of people in their own class, rather than patronising us and damaging the credibility of socialist ideas.

Mick Creswell
Merseyside

Don’t trust ’em

Though I was a little surprised to see a letter from a supporter of the BNP in your paper, there were a few grains of truth in the Stockport fascist’s analysis of the British left.

I spent the 1980s as an activist in Militant, plus two years in the Socialist Labour Party in the in the mid-1990s, and have come to realise that all such groups are organically incapable of growing beyond a certain point because a real mass movement inevitably challenges their dominant ideology, and that will always be a threat to the fragile psychology of the self-appointed leaders of such groups.

Whilst I recognise that the CPGB is better than most, and I enjoy reading the *Weekly Worker*, it is my opinion that all that you hold dear - ie, the Party, the central committee, democratic centralism, the paper, Marxist-Leninist ideology - are merely alternative systems of control to those currently practised by the ruling world capitalist elite.

The masses in all but the most backward nations will never trust power to one of many so-called vanguard groups on offer, because they know instinctively that, were they to do so, life would be even less free and joyous than it is now. Banding together in some kind of meta-vanguard Socialist Alliance will not change this.

The disparate worldwide anti-globalisation movement is broadly on the right lines. Don’t trust leaders and parties. The people can show their power by such means as taking to the streets in their millions on issues like the recent war. By not playing the consumer game - ie, boycotting companies, not buying brands, buying second hand, making their own stuff, swapping, forming cooperatives, growing their own food, developing their own media as a forum for independent discussion, art and culture.

In short, we can practice human liberation now, not in some mythical future communist Shangri La. Be yourself. I’ve found that it is a lot more fun than trying to flog some dreary paper on a cold Saturday afternoon, or in engaging in endless discussion about the correct interpretation of Lenin’s shopping lists.

Tony Green
Liverpool

Queer equality

Queer emancipation involves much more than equal rights. Equality? No thanks! I have bigger, brighter, better aspirations.

Why would anyone want equal rights in our flawed society, where injustice is rife? Surely that would mean equal justice for all? Let’s face it, equal rights may be the cherished mantra of liberals and leftwingers, but in reality it is usually second best. Instead of opting for equal rights within our present unjust society, why not aim for a different kind of society, based on justice and human rights for everyone?

All minorities suffering social exclusion face a dilemma: to assimilate into the status quo or to push for the transformation of society. As a gay man, I loathe homophobic discrimination. But I also dislike the way most of the queer com-

munity has dumbed down its horizons to the limited goal of equal rights. Whatever happened to the lofty ideals of queer liberation and sexual freedom?

Ending anti-gay bias will not solve all the problems faced by queers. Some of our difficulties arise not from homophobia, but from the more general erotophobic and sex-negative nature of contemporary culture, which also harms heterosexuals. These destructive puritanical attitudes are evident in the witch-hunting of consensual under-age sex, the censorship of sexual imagery, the inadequacy of sex education lessons, and the criminalisation of sex workers and consensual sadomasochistic relationships.

Isn’t it obvious? Equality for queers is a political deal that leads to social assimilation. As a condition of equal treatment, queers are expected to conform to the straight system, adopting its norms and aspirations. The end result is gay cooption and invisibilisation. We get equality, but the price we pay is the surrender of our unique, distinctive queer identity, lifestyle and values - the important insights and ethics that we have forged in response to exclusion and discrimination by a hostile straight world.

Queer equality within the status quo is a flawed version of freedom. It betrays both queers and straights alike. Society - not us - needs to change. This social transformation is the key to meaningful queer liberation. Equality, yes. But on the basis of a new and different kind of society where there are wider, more expansive human rights for people of all sexualities.

It is time to rediscover the vision thing. That means daring to imagine what society could be, rather than accepting society as it is.

Peter Tatchell
London

Why so shy?

Thanks for your coverage of the CPB’s Communist University weekend school. I saw it advertised in the *Morning Star* - the so-called “daily paper of the left” - a few weeks ago, but was surprised to find no mention of it in that paper afterwards. Is the *Morning Star* not associated with the CPB? Maybe the editors did not think it important enough to include.

Comrade Andrew Murray recently asked in its pages whether we can build a left alternative to New Labour. This is an important question which should have been discussed at the CPB’s school, and those discussions should have been reported. The failure of the *Morning Star* to do so is inexplicable.

Zoe Elvin
London

Clampdown

On June 17, in a coordinated action, 1,200 ‘anti-riot’ police attacked the People’s Mujahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI) and the National Council of Resistance headquarters in France and arrested nearly 150 of its leaders and members.

The French government has called this an act against ‘terrorism’. If the French government is truly concerned about terrorism, it must shut down the embassies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its surveillance network in France. It must end its support and dealings with the islamic regime of Iran. The French government’s action is a clear attack on the opposition of the Islamic Republic. It is a clear collusion with the criminal islamic regime of Iran - and that too at a time when the people of Iran are on the street to overthrow it.

The Worker-communist Party of Iran strongly condemns the French government’s actions and demands that it release all the detainees. The WCPI calls on all opposition forces to strongly condemn the action of the French government, irrespective their closeness to or distance from the PMOI.

Worker-communist Party of Iran
London

ACTION

London Communist Forums

Sunday June 29, 5pm - ‘1945, climax of Labourism, part 2’, using Ralph Miliband’s *Parliamentary socialism* as a study guide.
Sunday July 6, 5pm - ‘Pluralism and legitimisation’, using István Mészáros’s *The power of ideology* as a study guide.
Phone 07950 416922 for details.

Unity demonstrations

Rally against the BNP. Saturday June 28, Burnley, Tipton, Halifax, Broxbourne. Anti-Nazi League, PO Box 2566, London N4 1WJ; unity@anl.org.uk

Socialist Alliance

South West regional meeting, Saturday June 28, 12 noon to 2pm, the Folk House, 40a Park Street, Bristol BS1 5JG. Recommended parking: Trenchard Street.
Agenda includes: Euro elections 2004, regional cooperation and combating the BNP. Open to all south-west SA members.

Stop the Sats

Campaign conference, Saturday June 28, 11.30am to 3.30pm, South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London WC1 (Near Kings Cross and Euston stations). Speakers include: author Alan Gibbons, NUT past president John Illingworth.
Organised by Hertfordshire NUT, 01727 835554.

Hornsey and Wood Green SA

Public meeting: ‘Guantanamo Bay, civil liberties and the war against terror’. Wednesday July 2, 7.45 pm, Muswell Hill Primary School (top of Muswell Hill). Main speaker: Louise Christian - civil rights lawyer, back from giving evidence at UN working party on Guantanamo Bay. Plus speaker from Halkevi Kurdish Centre. Chair: Weyman Bennett (Socialist Alliance). Bus routes: W7, 144, 102. PO Box 32142, London N4 4EZ; http://www.haringeysa.fsnet.co.uk

Not in our name

Independence Day events - Friday July 4.
Menwith Hill gatecrashers’ ball: 12 noon, Menwith Hill Road, North Yorkshire. Speakers include political satirist Mark Thomas. 01943 466405.
USAF Fairford gatecrashers’ stroll: Assemble 3pm, Fairford High Street (junction of Mill Lane and Park Street). Procession to main gate for handing over of ‘declaration of independence’. 07748 015601.
Lobby of parliament, demanding ‘independence from America’: 12 noon. 01234 400439; bvb@mailforce.net

‘Save our party’

Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs: conference, Saturday July 5, 9.30am to 4.30pm, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.
Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Ken Livingstone, Barry Camfield, Kevin Curran, Jeremy Dear, Billy Hayes, Joe Marino, Tony Woodley, Ann Black, Mark Seddon, Christine Shawcroft, John McAllion, Tony Benn, Diane Abbott MP, Alan Simpson MP, Alice Mahon MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, David Taylor MP, John Cryer MP, Mike Connarty MP, Ian Davidson MP, George Galloway MP, Kelvin Hopkins MP.

SA national council

Saturday July 19, 12 noon to 5pm, United Services Club, Gough Street, Birmingham. Book rail tickets early to keep down cost of pooled fare.

Tattoo demo

Demonstrate at Fairford military air show, Saturday July 19. Assemble 12 noon, Fairford High Street (junction of Mill Lane and Park Street).
Organised by Bristol Stop the War Coalition.

Echo and Narcissus

Fail Better Productions presents a play influenced by the theatre of Samuel Beckett. June 24-July 13, White Bear Theatre, 138 Kennington Park Road, London SE11. Tuesday-Saturday: 7.30pm; Sunday: 4pm. £8 (£6 concessions). 020 77939193.

Party wills

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

RDG

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

www.cpgb.org.uk/action

Communist University

This annual school for the thinking left will be debating a whole range of issues:

The global anti-war movement vs the New American Century ■ Iraq and the struggle against US-UK occupation ■ Origins of the Project for a New American Century ■ Socialism or barbarism ■ What future for the Socialist Alliance? ■ Independence for Scotland: a socialist demand? ■ Has Blairism finally taken the ‘labour’ out of Labour ■ Anti-semitism and the left ■ and many more

August 2 - 9, Goldsmiths College, New Cross, London
Places are limited. Reserve your place now by sending a cheque for £20 to the CPGB address.

full week (self-catering accomodation):
£130/£85 unwaged
first weekend (incl. one night’s accomodation):
£30/£20
one day (sessions only):
£15/£8,
one session: £6/£3



UNISON CONFERENCE

Committee for a Workers International
- <http://www.worldsocialist-cwi.org>

Virtual vanity

The website of the Socialist Party in England and Wales sums up everything that is unhealthy about the left in Britain (see *Weekly Worker* January 9). Providing its own opinions on every topic under the sun, the SP online is a polished exercise in haughty self-promotion, arrogance and conceit. Reflecting the behaviour of the organisation in real life, it would seem unlikely that the website of the Committee for a Workers' International (SP's international franchise) would be any different.

First impressions are very favourable. Giving the site a welcome international flavour is the option to read it in eight languages. Unfortunately all of these (bar Turkish) are European tongues, effectively limiting the potential audience to the western hemisphere. A more serious problem is the lack of evenness between the available languages - instead of one standard site being translated, the non-English pages consist merely of separate articles in German, French, etc. Particularly poor is the Turkish page, which carries only one piece. Clearly more resources need to be deployed if it is to become truly international.

Following the standard SP design, the site is both easy on the eye and effortless to navigate. Underneath a 'Join us today' preamble, the latest news from CWI correspondents from the last week is listed. Pleasingly this is regularly updated, the last posting bringing news from the EU meeting and simultaneous Greek Social Forum. Others from the previous seven days cover events in Iran, Italy, Israel, Nigeria and Ireland, and are of varying quality. The foot of the page lists the articles of the week before, and is followed by a link to an alphabetically ordered archive of hundreds of items.

Running parallel to the news are a number features. The first of these is 'Iraq', which offers news, analysis, activities and reports from February 15 and day X actions. All the pieces are generally culled from *The Socialist*, CWI statements, and the eyewitness reports from CWI comrades. The next is 'Venezuela - revolution and counterrevolution', a collection of articles from the last three years on the ebbs and flows of Chavez's populist course. Prominently displayed CWI statements on Iraq and May Day 2003 follow, along with more repeated material from the Greek SF.

'Featured CWI publications' of the moment are Tony Saunois's *Che Guevara - symbol of struggle* and *Planning green growth*. The latter can be downloaded and printed. Rounding off the column are 'Featured links'. The first carries 16 links to CWI affiliates, journals and campaign fronts such as *International Socialist Resistance*. The second is to *Marxist.net*, a more 'high brow' theoretical website. The 'Marxist archive' carries no less than 12 polemics with *Scottish Militant Labour/International Socialist Movement* over the formation of the *Scottish Socialist Party*. The next polemical missive is against Ted Grant's hapless *Socialist Appeal* crew over the specifics of "Militant's real history". The final item is *Marxism and Ireland*, a piece that essentially calls on Northern Ireland workers to bury their differences around economic struggles. The page also carries classical pieces from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and (surprisingly) James Connolly. Well, almost. Clicking on his *The friends of small nationalities*, one is redirected to more articles on Iraq. I'm sure this is purely an oversight on the webmaster's part, and has little to do with the CWI's notorious avoidance of national-democratic issues.

The navigation around the CWI site proper is pretty straightforward, in essentials being a no-frills version of the prominent right-hand bar. Particularly useful is the online publications link that allows for 13 pamphlets to be read, offering a relatively in-depth view of CWI politics. The 'In your area' link is uneven but interesting, listing 'official' chest-beating profiles of some CWI sections (my favourite has to be the *International Socialists in Scotland*, whose piece just cannot resist taking a sideswipe at the SSP). But this is nothing compared to the arrogance of the CWI webmasters, in their reflections on the site tucked away in 'About us'. We are informed that it "certainly provides the best socialist analysis and commentary". If this is the case, can we look forward to a CWI-sponsored discussion site that puts the "best analysis" to the test of open debate?

Overall, here we have a well designed website that does what it sets out to do. However, the vanity here is almost embarrassing, and sits uneasily with its self-promoted image as a serious working class organisation ●
Phil Hamilton

Sorcerer Prentis

The Unison conference, held over the weekend of June 17-20, went well for general secretary Dave Prentis. He and the NEC were able to constrain left pressure within acceptable limits, whilst giving notice that the heat was going to be turned up on New Labour.

At the local government conference he warned that "All of the public service unions will be working together in the forthcoming year to campaign for decent pay, be they fire, health, local government or teaching." He added: "Unison will be working closely with our sister unions to get more funding cash from government." This is very far indeed from the spectre of a 'general strike' that ludicrously occupied the imagination of *Times* journalists a couple of weeks ago. However, more strike action is on the leadership agenda.

Referring to "a growing confidence", Prentis nevertheless found it necessary to state, "When we threaten action, we must deliver". This, it seems to me, is an appeal to activists to deliver the rank and file as pawns to be used to further the ambitions of trade union bureaucrats. No doubt, there is some genuine desire to improve the lot of members - but via the corridors of power, wheeler-dealing and brinkmanship, not through empowering the rank and file. Unfortunately, an inexperienced and impatient 'united left', no doubt sincere in their intentions, also see this as an easy road to action and doing business for members.

In his subsequent speech to the main conference, Dave Prentis continued in the same vein: "If the local government pay commission is not funded, if the reforms in schools are not funded, if *Agenda for change* is not funded, then, Mr Blair, we will take strike action again." But will the sorcerer be able to conjure up mass support? The conference decision to boost the union's industrial action fund by annual top-ups of one percent of subscription income will be the means to finance this action agenda - the



Sticking it out to Labour

left was pushing for an even bigger action fund. However, experience so far - the ongoing London weighting claim is a good example - is that funding strikes in this way amounts to paying members to stay at home and doing little else.

Stewards will ask for pickets and get a few. There will be some recruiting and a little interest generated. However, most will passively accept the money on offer to stay off work. There will be little active participation in which to learn through the experience of struggle. There will be little winning of hearts and minds to the need to act out of principle. And everyone knows that there has been no further ballot because it would be lost. This is playing at class struggle.

The hot issue at conference was the political fund and the Unison-Labour link. The degree of anger at the government evident in the many motions and the vociferousness of speakers forced Prentis to go on the offensive. The NEC, having ruled many motions out of order and recommended remitting all orders not supported by the leadership, had significantly constrained debate in a way that favoured the leadership's 'stay as we are, but better' report. The three alternatives - continue the review process; allow the funding of other candidates;

and break the link - enabled Prentis and the NEC to tactically outmanoeuvre a disunited left - all went to the vote and were defeated. The NEC report was carried overwhelmingly.

Dave Prentis is amongst that growing band of general secretaries to declare the aim of winning back the Labour Party - but to what? Some mythical golden era, when Labour and trade union bureaucrats helped to jointly administer capitalism? The general trend is to try and trade at the top - using the membership as cannon fodder on the one hand, and selling them some cobbled up deal on the other. Most of the left get suckered into this top-down bureaucratic dealing - at least on the cannon fodder side - only to then cry sell-out when the deal is done. This is what happened with the national pay claim last year.

Unison has moved left somewhat, but has the membership? Certainly bureaucrats at national and local level have tapped into a mood. But a mood is not enough. There is a democratic deficit here. Delegates elected by less than a 10th of the membership moving and voting on resolutions that most will not ever see; long strung out disputes, maintained only by paying small groups to strike; activists devoting lots of energy and resources to issues where it is easy to get action - any action - whilst tougher, but much more dangerous issues are put on the back-burner.

Does this activate the membership beyond a few individuals? I do not think so. The education, agitation and organisation of the rank and file are almost entirely absent. That role which should be played by a Communist Party lies vacant. A divided and sectional left lacking in strategic vision inadequately squats in the vacuum. A start might be to actually consider the *strategic* goal of building a united *fighting* front of the working class. This will require a battle of ideas that engages not only left activists but members too ●

Alan Stevens

Communist University Wales

Day 1 - Saturday June 28 Day 2 - Sunday June 29

Session 1:: 11am - 130pm The New American Century and its opponents

Tina Becker looks at the politics of the new American imperialism, reactionary anti-imperialism and the anti-war movement. Was it ever in the position to stop the war? What role can a united left across Europe play?

Session 2:: 2.30pm - 5pm Lessons of the Scottish Socialist Party & the failures of the Socialist Alliance

The recent electoral success of the SSP is there for everyone to see. But what about the SA in England and Wales? Should we fight to transform it into a democratic and effective party - or is its current manifestation as a loose electoral alliance good enough?

Session 3:: 5.30pm - 7pm The myth of the Celts

Scottish and Welsh nationalists find historic justification in the idea of the Celtic peoples as the dispossessed inhabitants of Britain. Is this fact or fiction? Do the Celts survive in Scotland, Wales and Ireland or was the idea of a Celtic Britain an 18th century invention? Jack Conrad gives some answers.

Session 4:: 11am - 130pm When was Wales a nation?

Wales is often said to be an ancient nation. Plaid Cymru says it is an oppressed nation. Wales is undoubtedly a geographical expression. But its people have been traditionally divided. Between north and south, between Welsh-speakers and English-speakers, between protestants and catholics, between rich and poor. Bob Paul leads the discussion.

Session 5:: 2.30pm - 5pm Society of the future

Karl Marx did not leave us a ready-made blueprint for a post-revolutionary world. While we cannot plan every detail of a future society, we can, however, make provisions on how to get there - and influence the future. Mark Fischer looks at the debates around 'dictatorship of the proletariat', the question of the 'withering away' of the state and the role of communists to achieve this.

Details

Weekend: £20/£10 :: One day: £10/£5 :: Session: £5/£2.
Clwb Ivor Bach, Womanby Street, Cardiff (five minutes walk from Cardiff Central rail station).

DEBATES FOR THE SERIOUS LEFT

around
THE WEB

THE LEFT

Scottish Socialist Party SW platform rift

All is not well for the Scottish Socialist Party. A series of allegations have been made both by and against comrades in the Socialist Workers platform surrounding the election campaign in Fife. Complaints were made to the executive, which were then leaked to the capitalist press.

The problem centres on Linda Graham - a member of the SW platform - who was the SSP's list candidate for the May 1 Scottish parliament elections in Mid-Scotland and Fife. Comrade Graham missed being elected by just 126 votes. She effectively blames lack of communication, stating: "The interface between the party and the campaign here was troubled and confused" (complaint to SSP executive). She goes on to make reference to "reactionaries within the party", who "would rather not have a socialist representative than have me".

A few weeks before the election there was a demand for a vote of no confidence to remove her as candidate. The vote was taken and lost, and comrade Graham remained the candidate. She referred to this incident as "careerism and backstabbing", claiming that if the forces responsible were not "driven out", the party would "fester and pollute" (*ibid*). Yet she sees Tommy Sheridan as being amongst those who sought to have her removed. The *News of the World* quoted her as saying: "His role in the vote of no confidence in a candidate a few weeks before the election needs to be examined. Personally, I did not need the convenor to play judge, jury and executioner in deciding I was not capable of representing you when the region had already made up its mind" (June 15).

Comrade Sheridan told *The Scotsman*: "The SSP now has over 3,000 members and it's inevitable that, the bigger we become, the more diverse our membership, and everyone doesn't always see eye to eye. I regret the comments made by Linda, but she was probably disappointed at failing to be elected by a mere 126 votes."

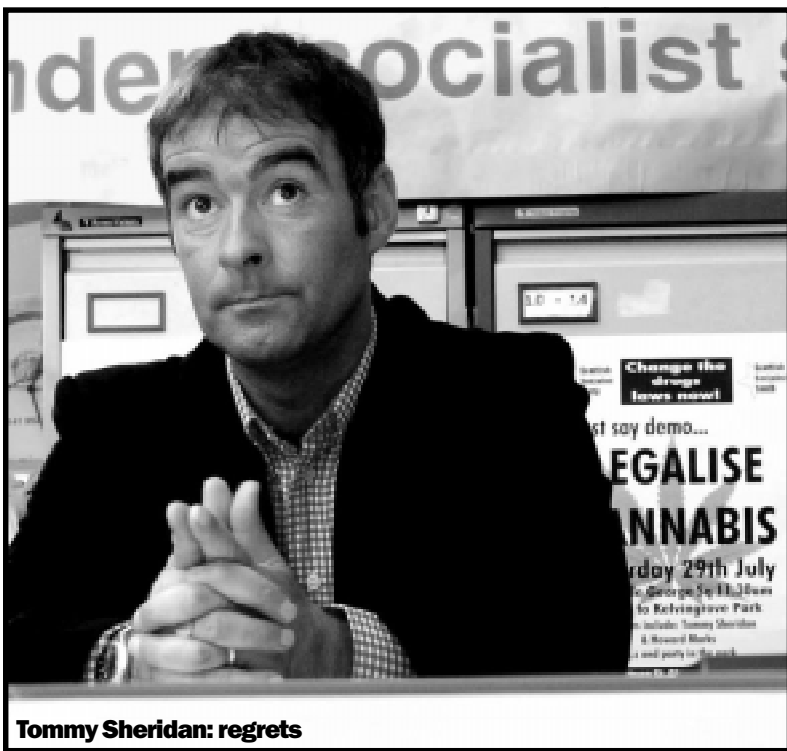
"The SSP increased its vote by over 200%, but we narrowly missed out in both Mid-Scotland and Fife and Highlands and Islands. However, I suppose the fact that an internal row now makes the news is a tribute to the development of the SSP as a political force in Scotland."

"The party and the executive are well aware of the situation and inquiries are underway" (June 16).

The problems in Fife are apparently deep-rooted and have been continuing over a long period. Comrades in the region seem unable to work together. Money is not being collected centrally, which has led to the regional organiser, Jock Penman, not being paid. Comrade Penman was one of the comrades who have apparently been on the receiving end of the attacks made by SW platform comrades. He told the *News of the World*: "I've let many negative remarks, attacks and tantrums from Linda Graham slip by unchallenged, but she has crossed the line this time. I therefore, sadly, must ask the EC to consider disciplinary action against her" (June 15).

Several complaints were made by other comrades in Fife regarding the SW platform, including from Benarty branch chair Lorna Bett, who wrote that the infighting had left her "physically sick": "Never in my life have I seen such a vociferous, poisoned bunch of people. I never understood why people were so up in arms about the SWP joining our party. Now I know why" (complaint to executive).

These were some of the quotes that the capitalist press chose to pick up on to highlight the factional infighting. The majority of papers that covered the story



Tommy Sheridan: regrets

used the same quotes, but the *News of the World* had more information and billed the story as an exclusive, which has led to speculation that someone within the party sold the story. While SSP members have the right to know the full facts of what went on in Fife, we should be able to get them from within the party, not have to rely on garbled versions in the capitalist press.

An SSP executive subcommittee has been set up to look into all the issues, but has had to be suspended, as apparently the appeals committee is now involved - on exactly what basis remains a mystery.

The situation in Fife could be part of what seems to be a more general rethinking of strategy towards the SSP on the part of the Socialist Workers Party. At last it appears to be revolting on the ground against the SSP's position for Scottish independence. This was briefly mentioned in one of the complaints made to the EC by comrade Jack Ferguson, who said that SW comrades had been campaigning publicly against independence during the election. According to comrade Ferguson, they were doing so in a manner that gave the impression that their position - whatever it was - had the status of official party policy.

It would, of course, be a big step forward if the SW platform actually came out in a principled manner against Scottish independence, instead of keeping quiet and going along with an "independent socialist Scotland". An open and democratic debate could potentially lead to a change for the better in the whole political direction of the SSP. However, it is not principled to back a motion at conference calling for independence to be the central campaigning issue and then, if comrade Ferguson's claim is true, go out and do the opposite.

The SSP's ultra-nationalists are undoubtedly out to get the SW platform. The real debate, of course, is not over who leaked internal executive documents to the capitalist press. No one is likely to own up anyway.

Allan Green, SSP national secretary, has speculated about the possibility of a split. The SW platform could walk out - and perhaps a section of the leadership in London would welcome this. Equally there could be a series of expulsions which would certainly have the ultra-nationalist wing whooping with joy.

Perhaps the SW platform's sudden discovery of "reactionaries" in the SSP and "backstabbing" is not simply down to Neil Davidson's pioneering latest book, *Discovering the Scottish revolu-*

tion, or his savaging of the Communist Party of Britain's hapless John Foster in the learned pages of *Historical Materialism* for his opportunist pandering to an entirely bogus Scottish history.

The SWP in England and Wales might have been rudely rebuffed in its negotiations with the *Morning Star*'s CPB. However, there still remains the Birmingham imams and the chance of 'peace and justice' popular front candidates. George Galloway is also still spoken of as a potential partner. He rejects the SSP's pro-independence politics as a matter of principle and could easily find himself deselected as an MP.

The SWP believes that it alone is the "revolutionary party". In reality it is a sect which toys with left unity when it suits its narrow interests. No matter. The best way to overcome such backward ideas is through unity in action and facilitating the widest, most open debate on all programmatic questions, not least Scottish independence. Our aim is clarity and breaking down the artificial mental barriers that sectarianism relies on for coherence and continued existence ●

Sarah McDonald

SWP-CPB talks Learning nothing

The statement from the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain on its meeting with the Socialist Workers Party, while short and anodyne, is nonetheless revealing. First, it shows that the move to discuss "a broad electoral alliance" was initiated by the SWP. Second, it shows the meeting took place nine days after the Socialist Alliance annual conference. Third, it shows the SWP outlined *proposals* to the CPB for its consideration. Finally, it shows a reiteration of the CPB's continued allegiance to the auto-Labourite strategy of its *British road to socialism* programme and an outright rejection of the Socialist Alliance.

While giving little away, credit has to be given to the CPB for at least releasing a statement. At the executive committee meeting of the Socialist Alliance on June 7, comrade John Rees of the SWP point blank refused to report back. He said that the talks with the CPB were "bilateral" and thus "confidential". Their sensitivity meant they could not be reported publicly. It seems that our 'official' communist friends are prepared to be more open than our Cliffe SA allies.

John Rees and the SWP must come clean. What were these "proposals" set forth to the CPB? Was it just an alliance between the SWP and the CPB (and perhaps some imams)? Or was the SWP negotiating undemocratically on behalf of the SA? We have a right to know. Obviously the role of the Social-

ist Alliance was laid on the table, but the SWP is refusing to inform us what this was.

The Socialist Alliance has now established a 'task force' to pursue the SA majority's "new left unity strategy". It apparently met on June 20, though no minutes or report has been forthcoming. The membership and the wider workers' movement have a right to know what is going on behind their backs.

The SWP and its satellites on the executive are increasingly treating the alliance as a mere negotiation chip. However, the CPB is very unlikely to 'get into bed with the Trots', no matter how bureaucratically the SWP treats its alliance 'partners'. CPB members and supporters at the organisation's recent Communist University showed no interest whatsoever in getting involved with electoral "diversions" away from the "main labour movement". We shall await the decision of the CPB on July 13.

It seems the SWP leadership has learned nothing from history. The anti-democratic antics of the Stalinists in the workers' movement during the 20th century were a tragedy. The SWP seems intent on repeating them as farce. Cutting out 'awkward' members from leading positions, treating the membership with contempt, making deals behind the backs of the working class: this is not the path to workers' self-liberation ●

Marcus Ström

Statement on talks

On May 19, representatives from the Communist Party met a deputation from the Socialist Workers Party at the latter's request.

The SWP leaders outlined a number of proposals concerning the potential for a broad electoral alliance in the Greater London Assembly and European parliament elections in 2004. The Communist Party's representatives set out our position on elections, including alliances, which reflect our strategic approach to the labour movement and the Labour Party. A full and comradely discussion ensued in which a range of views was

expressed. The Communist Party's executive committee will decide its response to the SWP's proposals at its next meeting, on July 11-12.

Statements have been published in some quarters claiming that (1) the Communist Party seeks to construct an electoral alliance with the Liberal Democrats; and (2) the Communist Party may join the Socialist Alliance. Neither of these possibilities was discussed in the meeting on May 19, and the Communist Party has no intention of doing either ●

CPB political committee,
June 23

Birmingham SA Re-elect Steve Godward

Not content with deposing comrade Steve Godward as vice-chair of the Socialist Alliance executive committee, the Socialist Workers Party seems set on staging a coup to oust him as chair of Birmingham SA.

Comrade Godward, an independent member of the executive committee and a sacked firefighter on victimisation pay, could pay the price for daring to publicly express minority viewpoints on the way forward for the SA. His recent article in the *Weekly Worker* (June 5) was too much for the control-freakery of the SWP and John Rees, its leading member in the alliance.

Birmingham SA is to have its annual general meeting this Tuesday, July 1. On the agenda is the way forward for the alliance in Birmingham and the election of officers. Leading members of the SWP in Birmingham have told comrade Godward they will stand a candidate against him due to his "minority positions".

This latest act of idiocy from the So-

cialist Alliance's biggest faction is designed to send out signals to the rest of the movement and beyond about who is in control of the SA. Birmingham is particularly sensitive for the SWP. It is here that negotiations with Salma Yaqoob and the Birmingham central mosque are taking place in pursuit of a deal for the European elections in June 2004.

However, not everything is going to plan. The membership of the BSA is opposing the SWP's scheme. Comrade Godward is being nominated for chair by the International Socialist Group, normally a compliant ally of the SWP. He will be seconded by Workers Power. All the groups and just about all non-aligned members active in the BSA will be supporting comrade Godward. The SWP will have to stack the meeting to get its way.

If they do this, we will have another nail in the coffin of SA democracy and inclusivity. At least one non-aligned member of the executive, normally close

to the SWP, is also supporting the removal of comrade Godward from the position of chair. However, rather than come out openly against his minority views, they have been hiding behind the claim that comrade Godward is not a very good chair. If this were the case, then surely the SA should aim to train up its "inexperienced" members - not do a hatchet job on them.

The CPGB calls on all pro-party members of the SA in Birmingham to attend this vital meeting and put a stop to the shenanigans. If we can halt the SWP's anti-democratic plans here, we can begin to reassert the rights of the membership across the alliance. These antics show that, more than ever, we need a campaign for a workers' party from within the SA and across the labour movement ●

Marcus Ström

AGM

Tuesday July 1, 730pm, Carrs Lane Centre, Carrs Lane, Birmingham B4.

WORKERS' LIBERTY

Sectarians preaching to the

We probably all have particular friends we have known so long that we have an idea of what they will think on most issues. It is part of friendship, of course: learning all those lovable foibles. And they are lovable, but ... Well, you would never dream of mentioning it, but they can drag just a little sometimes.

You see, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty held their Ideas for Freedom summer school this weekend, and in private a few of their comrades did wonder a little if the spark of previous years had gone out of this event. Even the closing singing of the 'Internationale' seemed rather downbeat. I overheard the comment, "That was a bit lacklustre."

"Well, it still had a certain dignity," I offered politely.

"It's not supposed to be dignified", came the reply. "It's supposed to be rousing!"

And, of course, it is. The whole event should have been. Was it really only four months ago that millions were on the streets of London, protesting against the prospect of a vicious, imperialist war? That police were forced to move to clear school students who refused to give way in their protests outside parliament? Yes, to make a fetish of mere numbers of protesters, without clear political direction, is a political dead end that we have charged the Socialist Workers Party with heading towards before: but, even while marching, we knew that one day we would be telling the young, 'I was there'.

And if we on the left failed to convert that raw anger at our lack of democracy in the United Kingdom into political organisation, how much was there surely, now, to say! The unions struggle with the contradiction of funding the very government party which is attacking them. The brave project of the Socialist Alliance is being dragged into popular front electoral opportunism by the SWP. The British National Party is growing and the left remains introspective and divided. Surely Ideas for Freedom, and the implementation of those ideas, have never been more important. How could this have missed?

And yet, somehow, it was. With up to three seminars running at any given time, I could only listen to part of the debate, but the fact remains that, had I prepared this report before the event, it would have required only minor edits to reflect the discussion which unfolded.

A little bit Zionist?

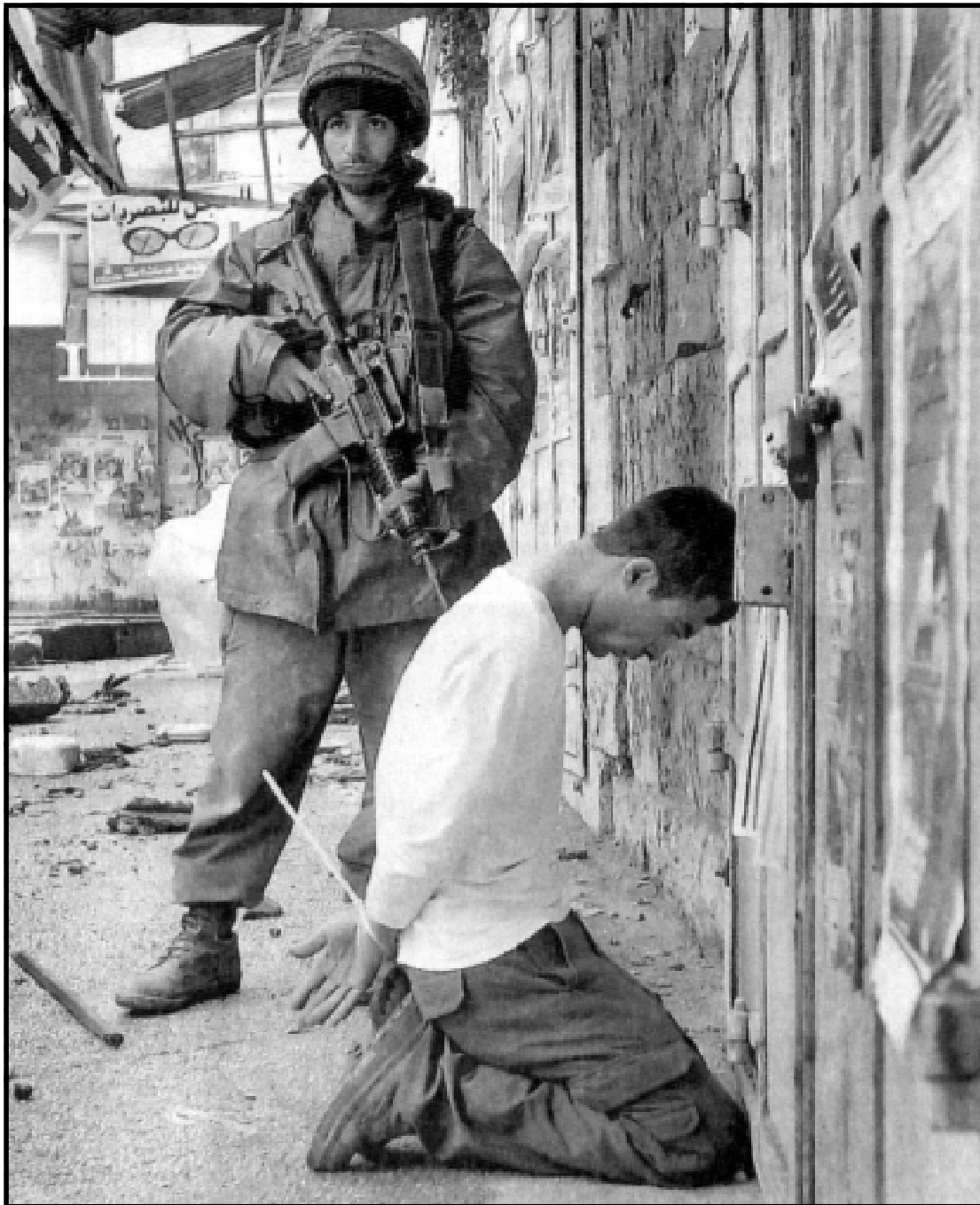
One defining attitude of the AWL has long been its attitude to Israel and the politics of the Middle East. The phrase "a little bit Zionist", attributed to comrade Martin Thomas, has now become positively notorious on the British left, and the misunderstanding and undeserved opprobrium this badly expressed position has brought on the AWL is now sustained with the grim satisfaction of martyrdom.

It was no surprise, therefore, that one of the two opening seminars was titled 'The rise of European anti-semitism - its rightwing and "leftwing" variants'. The quotes around the word 'leftwing' were in the printed programme: clearly, once again, the AWL was to be distinguished from the 'fake left'.

The speaker was *Guardian* journalist Linda Grant. She explained that three sources of modern anti-semitism could be discerned, and proceeded to describe them.

The first, and most familiar, was the far right. Without causing any major surprises, she touched on the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s, and the continuity of the tradition of anti-semitism in Europe to the present day.

She spent a little time discussing the modern BNP, whose overt racism is now directed chiefly at Muslims. This was, though, largely a matter of electoral opportunism: Jew-baiting is a vote-loser. She reminded listeners that Nick Griffin, leading light of the 'new fascism', was the author of the atrocious book *Who are the mind-benders?*, in which the "Jews in the news" are accused of "providing us with an endless diet of pro-multiracial, pro-homosexual, anti-British trash".



Anti-Zionism is not anti-semitism

The second source of anti-semitism was the 'Arab world'. Chiefly prompted by anger over the formation and actions of the state of Israel, some Arabs had adopted a form of anti-semitism "imported" from Christianity, and supplemented with pseudo-academic historical revisionism, denying the reality of the Holocaust. Some Arabs have even, bizarrely, revived the myth of the Jew as 'vampire', literally seeking the blood of gentiles to consume or for ritual.

But her main theme was the third source of anti-semitism: the left. She began by referring to Khrushchev's revelations in 1956 of the anti-semitism of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union under Stalin, and the purging of Jewish leaders. This prompted the shouted question, "So Stalin was leftwing?", which Grant rather stumbled over but did not address.

From the concrete example of Stalin, Grant then broadened her talk into a series of generalisations. The anti-semitism of the left was "deeply problematic". The left had focused on "Jewish capitalism" and "Jewish control of the media" in a way which was indistinguishable from that of the far right. The left had also nurtured "good and bad Jew" theory, characterising some Jews as 'good', but Zionist Jews as 'bad'. Grant argued that, as most Jews believed Israel had a right to

exist, the left considered them 'Zionist' and therefore 'bad'.

Rather suddenly, she returned to a discussion of the far right. She pointed out that many fascist groups used the language of 'anti-Zionism' as an excuse to express a hatred of Jews, and that they described the murder and oppression of Palestinians for the same purpose. Their lack of interest in any other form of imperialism or oppression revealed the insincerity of such arguments. By implication, it seemed, the left should not be using arguments which the right were using merely as a cover for racism.

She argued that many Jews now worried that, under the cover of opposing Zionism, the left was treading an 'old anti-semitic road'. Anti-semitism had become 'institutionalised' on the left by clichéd notions of the Jews and Israel.

If this argument sounds a little confused, it is because, frankly, it was. It set the tone for most of the interventions which followed, including that of comrade Sean Matgamna, which is worth recording.

Comrade Matgamna began by asking "What is anti-semitism? Is it Hitlerism?" His answer was "no". "But if you believe that an existing nation doesn't have a right to defend itself, to accept refugees or even to exist, then you are hostile to its people."

He continued "You *can* be anti-Zionist, for instance, against the occupation of the West Bank, and not *necessarily* anti-semitic, but, if you're hostile to the Jewish nation, you're hostile to the people. 'Zionist' has become a swear word on the left, not used against the non-Jews who support Israel, but against Jews. This takes the form of a savage historical demonisation."

This argument, like Grant's previously, seemed to rest on a confusion about the meaning of 'Zionism'. Essentially the argument ran

that, to most, Zionism was simply the assertion that 'the state of Israel has a right to exist'. To deny this was therefore to show hostility to the Jews of Israel and thus, probably, to be an anti-semitic.

Marxism is founded in an understanding of history, and we cannot use language without an understanding of the history it describes. The term 'Zionism' was coined at the end of the 19th century to describe a movement which believed that Jews had a right to sovereignty over the lands along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean - then Palestine - through ancient associations and even divine providence. At the time, the Jewish population of Palestine was small, and Zionists promoted a programme of immigration and land acquisition by Jews from Europe.

Under the protection of first British and then US imperialism, the programme prospered, despite the alarm and opposition of the Palestinians. In 1947, the UN proposed a state for the Jews in a region which covered most of Palestine, and now contained roughly equal numbers of Jews and Arabs. In 1948, when the British withdrew their forces, the Jews declared the state of Israel.

In short, Zionism sought and finally achieved the formation of a state through a process of colonisation, ignoring the national aspirations of the Palestinians and finally displacing hundreds of thousands of them, all under the protection of British and US imperialism.

Zionism is therefore not an ideology that any socialist could have supported or can support. I have little doubt, though, that it is not the intention of the AWL to support this nationalist doctrine. In opposing what they see as the danger of anti-semitism, it seems they have overcompensated, and now offer a definition of 'Zionism' divorced from its historical context. It is profoundly unhelpful to the debate, and aggravates the tendency of many to regard the AWL as 'first campist', while simultaneously allowing them to condemn perfectly sincere anti-Zionist comrades as anti-semitic.

The question of the rights of the modern Jews in the region does not rely on the concept of Zionism. They have now lived there for generations, and have the same rights as any other people to democratic self-determination and the maintenance of a democratic and secular state, if that is their wish. As was vividly expressed during the meeting, they are the 'children of a rape', and bear no guilt for the original acts which displaced the Palestinians. The recognition of their rights by socialists now, therefore, is in no sense 'Zionist'. It is also balanced by an equal recognition of the rights of the Palestinians, in the call for what is now usually termed the 'two-state solution', which the CPGB and the AWL both support.

However, even those socialists who call for a single, democratic, secular state to provide a home for both Jews and Arabs are not calling for the 'destruction of Israel', any more than they are calling for the 'destruction of Palestine'. To label them anti-semitic merely on these grounds is extremely odd, particularly considering that the AWL itself is quite open about the fact that it previously supported this 'single-state solution'.

As ever, a confusion in language is indicative of a confusion in thinking. Anti-semitism is a form of racism which argues that the Jews are inherently inferior, evil, undeserving of rights enjoyed by others or somehow genetically culpable for perceived crimes. On the other hand, Zionism is a form of nationalism - a religious and political ideology which attributed particular rights over territories to Jews on the grounds of their ethnicity and religion, overriding the rights of the Arab majority living there. Neither is consistent with socialism.

The belief that all Jews are Zionists is both defamatory and untrue: indeed, it is itself anti-semitic. The AWL does not assert this, but it does confuse anti-Zionism with anti-semitism, and unfortunately this actually aggravates this confused belief. Not all Jews are Zionists, and not all Zionists are Jews. The democratic

In opposing what it sees as anti-semitism, the AWL offers a definition of 'Zionism' divorced from its historical context. It is profoundly unhelpful to the debate

converted

rights of both Jews and Palestinians are founded on the same, socialist, principles of democracy, in which Zionism has no place.

The lesser evil

Slightly gloomy that I might not merely be a member of the fake left but now also an anti-semite in the view of the AWL, I consulted the programme once again. Hoping to redeem myself, I chose to listen to Norman Geras speaking on the subject of ‘After the holocaust - mutual indifference and moral solidarity’.

This seminar was based on his book *The contract of mutual indifference: political philosophy after the holocaust*. Geras explained that his study of the human indifference which made, say, torture possible during the holocaust led him to apply the same theories to the wider field of modern social relationships, and to the reasons for simple economic inequality.

He developed the theory of the ‘contract of mutual indifference’, which essentially was a generally unstated but nevertheless operative social sanction, allowing each individual to ignore the needs of others, at the cost of abandoning the hope of reciprocal support. Geras acknowledged that this contract did not operate consistently - altruism and human solidarity were also possible - but maintained that it was the norm.

Essentially, it allows enormous disparities of wealth to be borne by society. The footballer is paid in a week what the average worker may earn in a year. Film stars earn yet more. These economic differences, if allowed to exist by the wealthier parties, represented a kind of ‘mild torture’: a passively inflicted injury on the poorer. The images of millions in poverty so severe it threatens death are broadcast to us and, beyond token gestures of ‘charitable support’, we remain unmoved.

I reflected that this ‘contract’ which Geras had identified and condemned sounded remarkably similar to Ayn Rand’s speech in defence of capitalism in *The fountainhead*: ‘I came here to say that I do not recognise anyone’s right to one minute of my life. Nor to any part of my energy. Nor to an achievement of mine. No matter who makes the claim, how larger their number or how great their need. I wish to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for others.’

What Geras condemns and Rand glorifies is, of course, the ethic of individualism. While Geras vaguely concedes that it is not universal, he misses the key point. It is for a particular class that this contract is not universal: specifically, the working class. In educating and bringing together large numbers of people to feed its productive processes, capitalism created the working class, a class for whom a consciousness of their common interests is all but inescapable, as they work side by side, exploited by the same bosses: and a class which must overthrow capitalism itself.

Given this lack of class analysis, though, Geras’s remedy was unsurprising. Not revolution, but a new ethic: ‘strong’ economic equality, democracy and an acceptance of human rights, all to enable an “alternative moral logic based on rights to and duty to provide mutual assistance or solidarity”.

The conclusion of this petty bourgeois analysis, though logical, was still a startling thing to hear at a revolutionary summer school. Put simply, Geras argued that to prolong the Ba’athist regime by opposing the US-UK war on Iraq was to prolong the period the Iraqi people had to tolerate its oppression. Keeping Iraqis in danger of torture and other inhuman treatments was where he, personally, drew the line. In short, he supported the war on Iraq, and condemned the anti-war movement as immoral.

Even more surprising was the lack of opposition Geras faced for this analysis. Comrade Clive Bradley justified the AWL’s involvement in the anti-war movement on the grounds that it might build a movement which could do the Iraqi people more good than merely rescuing them from Saddam’s dictatorship. The extraordinary thing here, though, was that this answer implicitly accepted the

argument that the anti-war movement was not in the immediate interests of the Iraqi people - that is to say, that the US-UK invasion of Iraq was to be preferred to stopping the war. Comrade Bradley commented: “As it turned out, the lesser evil won.”

George Orwell

George Orwell being a favourite writer of mine, I was pleased to attend Chris Hickey’s seminar on ‘Why George Orwell is important’. This was a solidly researched talk, which focused on what are perhaps Orwell’s three most famous books: *Homage to Catalonia*, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. To summarise the enormous detail comrade Hickey walked us through would be impossible in the limited space I have available to me here, and I can do little better than to echo the advice which he gave: if you have not read these books, do.

One thing I could not help noticing, though, is that even in this session familiar AWL themes were not far from the surface. In *1984*, hero Winston Smith observes that “freedom is the freedom to say 2+2=4. If that is granted, all else follows.” In commenting on this, comrade Jim Denham noted that much of the left was inclined to forget this, over Galloway for instance ...

Afghanistan

The final session I attended on the first day was a debate between Jack Conrad of the CPGB and Sean Matgamna on the subject of ‘Stalinism and Afghanistan’. The historical event underlying the debate was the intervention of the USSR in Afghanistan, but it soon became clear that the real subject was the alleged tendency of the CPGB to change its policy without ‘properly accounting for it’.

Comrade Conrad began by commenting on a paper comrade Matgamna had prepared on the subject to be discussed. He characterised the AWL as “debating with ghosts”: not tackling the position of their opponent as it is now, but as it was in the 1980s. He explained how his view of the USSR had changed over the intervening period. Initially, he had seen the USSR as a workers’ state, though one in which the gains of the revolution were threatened by the bureaucratic regime. His view was that those gains might yet be protected by the spread of the revolution.

Eventually, though, he abandoned this position, as it became clear that the first five-year plan had essentially constituted a social counterrevolution. The remnants of workers’ power had been wiped out, and Stalin had created a new social formation based on the exploitation of the workers and peasants. This, naturally, had changed his perspective on Afghanistan. He went on to explain in detail how his view of the events in Afghanistan had been reinterpreted in view of this new understanding.

Comrade Matgamna was not satisfied with this explanation: “The problem with arguing with Jack is that he isn’t serious about the truth. If he were, he would admit it when he changed his mind.” This was to set the tone for what was, to be honest, a somewhat pointless, if lively, show, in which comrade Conrad attempted to field repeated accusations of bad faith with repeated explanations of the same basic change in perspective. Having joined the CPGB a few months and not 20 years ago, it was difficult for me to intervene in his support: a pity which comrade Conrad commented on somewhat wryly himself, as he faced a room packed with members of the AWL in which I was the only fellow member.

Doubtless my conclusion will be considered partisan by the AWL comrades present at this event, but if they had hoped for a crushing political victory aided by their own choice of subject and a 30-to-one numerical advantage, they failed to secure it. My chief sadness, though, is that this sort of contrived sectarian blood sport is considered worthwhile.

The future

The second day of the school bought a far more important debate: on the ‘Future of the Socialist Alliance’. Comrade Pete Radcliff of

the AWL spoke from the platform.

He began by analysing the Socialist Alliance’s electoral performance. This did not take long. Both the 2001 and 2003 votes gathered were derisory. The alliance had clearly failed to do the necessary work to engage either with the trade unions or working class communities. Indeed, if any organisation was filling the gap left by the lack of working class representation, it was now the BNP.

He then looked at the direction the SWP might be planning to impose on the SA. Co-operation with mosques, already a feature of some SWP work, seemed likely to increase, talks with the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain had already been announced, and finally the involvement of George Galloway remained a persistent and much feared rumour. In looking at the role of the SA in the anti-war movement, the SWP had again clarified the issue by simply not giving it one. The entire campaign had been coordinated by the SWP itself.

In short, comrade Radcliff characterised the SA as now being entirely and openly in the power of the SWP, and dying for want of working class politics. Many independent members had already voted with their feet.

He finally mentioned the argument for a coherent pro-party minority to organise itself within the Socialist Alliance, raised by both the CPGB and the Revolutionary Democratic Group. He said that the more serious task was to concentrate on working with the trade unions and in working class communities.

Steve Freeman of the RDG and I both spoke in favour of organising that substantial minority of the SA which had supported motions for an SA paper and a campaign for a workers’ party at the last conference. I pointed out that this was not an alternative to working to build a base for such a campaign in the class, but rather a vehicle through which it could be done. Daring to venture onto the subject of Galloway, I asked the assembled AWL comrades to consider two questions: firstly, was the position of the AWL really so different from the line of ‘critical defence’ adopted by the CPGB, and second, whether it was or not, was this really a sufficient argument to prevent the united action so urgently needed?

I was politely received, and then, still fairly politely, criticised first by comrade Matgamna and then by a series of other speakers for suggesting an unprincipled alliance: the CPGB, apparently, still “doesn’t get it about Galloway”. In perhaps the most surreal argument of the entire weekend, one AWL speaker even suggested that anyone prepared to offer critical defence to Galloway might as well offer it to the BNP. After all, they had opposed the war too, hadn’t they?

The fact that they opposed it on the grounds that it wasn’t worth throwing away the lives of white soldiers over a bunch of Arabs went unspoken.

Conclusions

In the real world, the historical struggle between oppressor and oppressed continues unabated.

Those politicised by the historic demonstrations in February have either fallen into inactivity or found other avenues of political action than socialist organisation. Some working class communities, abandoned by Labour, and contemptuous of the SA’s electoral opportunism, are expressing themselves through the BNP. The unions continue to struggle with the contradiction of funding the very government which attacks them. The US continues to roll out its terrifying ‘new American century’ project.

Meanwhile, in London, this weekend, a group of revolutionary socialists argued about George Galloway, the events of Afghanistan in the last century, George Galloway, how anti-Zionism is secretly anti-semitism, and (above all) George Galloway.

This was, perhaps, not our finest hour ●
Manny Neira

Jews v Zionism

On June 18 around 100 people crowded into a meeting at the University of London Union, called by of Jews Against Zionism, to hear Lenni Brenner, Haim Bresheeth and Alice Coy speak about various aspects of the Middle East question.

The publicity for the meeting noted that Jews Against Zionism believes that “... the conflict in Palestine cannot be resolved without a return of Palestinian refugees and dismantlement of the Zionist structure of the state of Israel; and that this is impossible in the context of ‘two states’ and a repartition of Palestine.” But, while the first of these contentions was not particularly controversial among those who attended, the second will likely give rise to lively debate at future meetings promised by the organisers to follow up this successful event.

The first speaker was Alice Coy, a young Jewish member of the International Solidarity Movement, who has been active as a ‘human shield’ in the occupied territories, seeking by the presence of herself and her comrades to inhibit Israeli ill-treatment and killing of the Palestinians suffering Israeli rule. She gave a moving account of the ISM’s activities, and of the callous manner in which the Israeli forces, as well as inflicting untold suffering on Palestinians, have killed international volunteers such as Rachel Corrie and left others like Tom Hurndall in a coma. She spoke at length about the Palestinian experience of living under Israeli military occupation and about the very positive response from many Palestinians to the presence of Jewish activists among the international volunteers who have come to express solidarity with them.

The second speaker was Haim Bresheeth, professor of cultural studies at the University of East London and an activist and film-maker of Israeli origin. He made very clear that he personally had developed politically from someone who had originally, as a peace activist, gone from sincerely believing that at least a wing of the Israeli establishment wanted some kind of peace with the Palestinians, to a complete rejection of Israel as a national entity that can exist other than in perpetual conflict with the Palestinians. He was therefore very much in favour of a single Palestine and Israel’s ceasing to exist.

Although he made many powerful points about the reactionary nature of Zionism, the conclusions he appears to have drawn seem to imply a lack of any role for the Israeli population. He stated that Sharon’s policies were ruining the Israeli economy to the point that somehow Israelis must be driven ‘to their senses’ - which seems to me to be a bit Panglossian - economic collapse may bring not progress, but an intensification of reaction. All in all, a thoughtful speech, full of justified hatred for Zionist atrocities, but very much the perspective of someone who has left Israel, I thought.

The main speaker, however, was Lenni Brenner. The author of a number of books about Zionism and the Jewish question, including his notable *Zionism in the age of the dictators* from the 1980s, a book which provided the factual material on which Jim Allen’s controversial play *Perdition* was based. He was there to promote his new, seemingly weighty work, *51 documents on Zionist collaboration with the Nazis*. His speech was based around a number of these documents, which comprise original source material initially gathered for *Zionism in the age of the dictators*, among which was a highly revealing passage, in which the Nazi mass killer Adolf Eichmann praises Zionism, to the extent of saying that ‘if he were Jewish’, he would be ‘a fanatical Zionist himself’ or words to that effect.

The damning historical implications of this statement were not lost on the largely Jewish audience, but nor was the humorous side, as related by comrade Brenner - the ultimate ‘celebrity endorsement’ in the American fashion, as he called it, bringing forth considerable laughter.

The discussion period consisted of a number of questions, and one or two contributions from Israeli-derived leftists such as Just Peace (UK), whose presence was really an indication of the impact of the events of the past few years in stretching the loyalty of progressive Israelis to ‘their’ state. The historical focus of the main speakers meant that the discussion was more confined to these historical topics: the vast and potentially very productive subject of socialist political strategies - one state, two states, binational states, the relationship of the national question to the socialist revolution, etc - will be discussed at future meetings promised by the organisers, to which I for one am looking forward.

Of note was the absence of comrades from the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty in the meeting. The AWL had a team of paper-sellers outside at the start, but apparently, given the large, mainly Jewish audience, were somehow reluctant to play out their usual, rather stupid trick of denouncing the organisers as being ‘left’ anti-semites. Maybe they (correctly) considered that such an intervention would have gone down like a lead balloon with this particular audience ●

Kit Robinson

WORKERS' LIBERTY

Descent into cultism

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty has unintentionally laid some of its cards on the table, in a reply - signed by Cathy Nugent, but bearing the political fingerprints of Sean Matgamna - to my letter protesting about the previous appearance of crude, apolitical abuse, directed against myself, in the pages of *Solidarity*, the AWL's fortnightly newspaper (May 15). In that issue I was called a "lunatic" and a "nut".

The reply - published beneath my protest - is self-evidently not meant to convince the socialist public at large that my views are wrong and the AWL's are correct. Rather its whole purpose is to lay down the line to those under AWL discipline to believe whatever the leadership says, no matter how ridiculous and at variance with social and political reality. In this respect, this rather peculiar tirade is evidence that at least part of the AWL's cadre has degenerated to the point of cultism, in the manner of such organisations as the Healyites and the Spartacists before them.

Take the following contention, in reply to one of my earlier *political* criticisms of the AWL: "When people write things as stupid as 'It is quite obvious that the AWL doesn't really like Arabs very much' - really, how can you respond? One can say, 'That's an outrageous slander', as indeed it is, and make a detailed reply for the record, or you can take the attitude, as we did, that no one in their right minds can take this seriously" (*Solidarity* June 12).

Quite a laughable response, really, to a serious political point - moreover a viewpoint about the AWL that is rather widely shared. That this view is very common among socialists who are *not* supporters of the AWL is tacitly admitted by Matgamna/Nugent later on in the same tirade: "Donovan says that if the rest of the left think we are anti-Arab chauvinists then it must be true. Well reasoned!"

Well, no: the fact that a viewpoint is widely shared - on the left or for that matter elsewhere - does not necessarily make it true, actually. It does, however, make that particular idea a material force: something that has to be reckoned with seriously, something that if it is not true is the product of a widely shared false

consciousness. It appears that, far from being something that "no one in their right minds can take seriously", it is something that many people, of necessarily many different states of mind, do indeed take seriously, and agree with.

If this widely shared view is the product of false consciousness, then surely the task of a socialist or communist organisation that is confident of the correctness of its political positions is, in the words of Lenin, to "patiently explain" its viewpoint, over and over again, a million times if necessary, to defeat this false consciousness and replace it with a correct, scientific viewpoint. If the AWL were confident that this widely shared viewpoint is wrong, it would see these criticisms as an opportunity to explain its views in depth to the wider public, to win a broader hearing for its case, to win over not only myself, but also the many others on the left who share the same alleged misconceptions of the politics of the AWL.

Hysterical

But no, instead we see a hysterical reaction, a reaction that basically says, 'Anyone who criticises us in this manner must be mad' (while admitting that there are many who do). The AWL is saying, in effect: 'We are sane; everyone else is mad' - a remarkable assertion that really is redolent of the practice of inward-looking sects, worried about the 'impure' thoughts that may be polluting their own followers, not of serious socialist organisations. Indeed, you could call it solipsism, or evidence of a psychosis, according to the old cliché that, whereas neurotics merely build castles in the air, psychotics *live in* castles in the air. Whatever, this self-obsessed nonsense is a morbid symptom.

So Nugent/Matgamna concludes: "The truth is that Donovan is not politically or intellectually serious - neither are those who give house-room to his ramblings." The AWL's rage against the

anti-Arab chauvinism is a product of its inability to refute the alle-

gation itself. What else other than anti-Arab chauvinism can one say of an organisation that militantly opposes the right of Palestinian refugees to return to what is now Israel - territory from which they were brutally expelled more than half a century ago - as part of a democratic settlement in the Middle East? Even the more leftwing, Israeli-derived socialist groupings with a Zionist origin, such as Just Peace (UK), are prepared to address the question of the right to return, unlike the AWL, for which it is anathema.

At the same time as it rubbishes the *Palestinian* right to return, the AWL supports the explicitly discriminatory, indeed arguably racist, so-called 'law of return' of the current Israeli state, which gives automatic Israeli citizenship to Jews, even if they have no connection with the country and have never set foot in it in their lives.

What else can one say about a 'socialist' organisation that jumps up shouting, 'Israel has the right to defend itself', when that country is threatened - not with invasion and conquest, but merely with a few decrepit and antiquated Scud rockets, as in 1991? But which refuses to defend the right of the people of an Arab country such as Iraq to resist *outright conquest* by forces including that of its 'own' imperialist government? The double standards here, regarding the national rights of Arabs *vis-à-vis* non-Arabs, are so inescapable that it is no wonder that the AWL can only splutter with rage when they are pointed out. This is self-evidently vicarious Zionist, anti-Arab chauvinism.

Matgamna-Nugent lampoons the supposedly "fuckwit" view of the left that equates Zionism with anti-Arab chauvinism: "Now, the vast majority of Jewish people in the world are at least a little bit Zionist. Does this make all those people anti-Arab chauvinists? No, that would be a stupid generalisation, and a condemnation of a whole people." In terms of idiocy, not to mention actual stereotyping of Jewish people, this really does take the biscuit. Whoever said that 'Zionist' could simply be equated with 'Jew'? Only the AWL, it seems. In fact, for many Jews, Israel is seen these days not as a beacon of light, but rather as a potential death trap and certainly a source of disgrace for a people who were once in the vanguard of many struggles against oppression around the world.

Many of the most ardent supporters of Israel and Zionism historically have been various great powers and exploiter regimes of decidedly non-Jewish origin - people who certainly care little or nothing for the well-being of the Jewish people. A contemporary example of this is the mass phenomenon of christian-Zionism in the United States, which supports Israel as a manifestation of biblical prophesy in the book of Revelation, a prophesy which begins with the destruction of the hold of 'satanic' islam over the Middle East through the agency of Israel, but which eventually involves the conversion of a large section of Jews to christianity and the annihilation of the rest!

A more secular manifestation of this trend was the advocacy of mass expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied territories by Dick Armey, the Republican leader in the US House of Representatives last year: evidently a militant Zionist, but also a christian Reaganite fanatic. The Israeli right, in turn, trumpets its approval of this 'support' for its bloody deeds by enemies of the Jewish people.

Far from being representatives of some soft-focus Leon Uris stereotype of the

desperate Jew embracing Zionism as his/her salvation from a world bent on persecution, in reality these manifestations of Zionism in the US-Israeli context have more in common with the Ku Klux Klan, the historic persecutors of Jews in America, from the dark days of 1913 and the lynching of Leo Frank onwards. Yet the vicarious-Zionist AWL has issued not one word of criticism or analysis of this ultra-reactionary phenomenon, which is one of the key, concrete manifestations of Zionism today.

Red herrings

Matgamna-Nugent's piece is stuffed full of pathetic red herrings consciously designed to obscure, not clarify, the political issues at stake in the disputes between the AWL and CPGB over the Middle East (and indeed many other issues). The claim that the main point of my critique of the AWL over George Galloway was that I accused the AWL of wanting to see him hanged is a case in point. Any literate person can see that this was merely a rhetorical drawing out of the political logic of the AWL's approval of Galloway's persecution by the bourgeois media, their equation of Galloway with Nazi sympathisers in World War II, etc. Matgamna-Nugent's synthetic rage over this statement is a feeble diversion that only a cultist could take seriously for a second.

The AWL claims *it* is being "heresy-hunted" over Galloway, because it is being criticised by the left for crossing class lines in its evident approval of the bourgeois press's witch-hunting attacks. It harks back to the time when Gerry Healy and Vanessa Redgrave attempted to bankrupt Matgamna's *Socialist Organisation* through the courts for the crime of merely criticising Healy's own political activities. The AWL says that, since Galloway is being accused of being in the pay of Iraq, and also Healy was without question funding his mercenary activities against the left through 'arrangements' with a variety of bourgeois regimes including Iraq, then the two issues are the same - and the AWL therefore deserves support for its campaign against Galloway, as it once did against Healy.

In evaluating whether or not this accusation is true, it is useful to ask a simple question here. Who stands to be victimised as a result of the campaign being waged by the rightwing media and the Blairites against George Galloway? The answer is obvious: George Galloway (though things are looking more hopeful in terms of defeating the witch-hunt as a result of recent developments). The AWL does not stand to be victimised over this: if anything, it appears to be hoping against hope for Galloway to be destroyed, politically and personally, by this witch-hunt.

In reality, it is the AWL that is behaving like Gerry Healy - though not in the sense of the Healy group in the particular case when Matgamna's organisation was sued by Redgrave. Rather, it is playing an identical role *vis-à-vis* Galloway as the Healy group played in witch-hunting Arthur Scargill, in tandem with the whole of the reactionary and gutter press, at the 1983 TUC for the crime of denouncing Lech Walesa and Polish Solidarity as "anti-socialist".

If Healy's WRP was an unsavoury, scabby little cult in its 'exposés' of Scargill then, the AWL is playing a similar role today. Indeed, it is worth recollecting that in the reprise of the anti-Scargill witch-hunt in 1992, when Scargill was set up by MI5 agent Roger Windsor for similar allegations to those being levelled at Galloway - ie, taking in this case Libyan gold for personal gain - the Matgamna group was indistinguishable in its conduct from the Healy group in the earlier

witch-hunt. Basically, they declared Scargill was guilty then, just as they declare Galloway guilty today. Thankfully they do not have a daily paper to promote their treachery in the way Healy did.

Of course, as left reformists themselves, the likes of Scargill and Galloway are also capable of crossing class lines. Scargill boasted immediately after the last general election of having written to David Blunkett demanding that the Socialist Alliance and Scottish Socialist Party be banned from having election broadcasts because of their nature as 'federal' blocs of disparate leftist currents. Galloway has on at least one occasion threatened to sue Matgamna's organisation in the courts when it slandered him as an anti-semitic. We oppose all such actions that cross the class line, and defend the entire left and the workers' movement against the courts, or the witch-hunting reactionary press and the sinister forces that stand behind them. At this point in time, however, the matter in hand is to defend Galloway against the bourgeois witch-hunt.

Feeble

The remainder of Matgamna/Nugent's piece is pretty feeble. They congratulate themselves on their 'empathy' with people who "react strongly to child abuse" (although they are "hardly in favour of lynch-mob justice" of course). The AWL also "empathise with" people who would like to censor and ban leftwing criticism of existing bourgeois norms on sexual relationships when they conflict with arbitrary age-of-consent laws. Like Steven Davies, the AWL's hanger-on in Birmingham, who wrote to the *Weekly Worker* demanding that the mere expression of views on the age of consent that contradict his own bigotry should be grounds for expulsion from a socialist organisation.

The AWL's representative then wrote in to agree with him that the CPGB's views were pro-"child abuse", demurring only from the outright ban this bigot was demanding (on grounds of free speech even for those with "odious" opinions). To characterise Davies's views for what they were - reactionary bigotry impinging on BNP territory - was beyond the capability of the AWL. On the contrary, their spokesperson made it clear she *agreed* with most of what he said. Even bourgeois journalists in some sections of the more liberal capitalist press have shown more courage in standing up to this kind of reactionary outcry than the 'revolutionary socialists' at the top of the AWL.

Whether over Galloway, the question of the Iraq war, Israel-Palestine, the Socialist Alliance (where it has squandered an enormous opportunity to be joint initiators of a genuinely broad paper of a pro-party minority), the AWL is retreating headlong back into the most bizarre and unsavoury forms of sectarianism.

Increasingly this is of a rightwing coloration: with its posture on Galloway, for example, if it were to decamp back into the Labour Party now, its members would rightly be regarded by much of the Labour left as pro-Blair witch-hunters. One can only hope that this bizarre evolution will call forth its own negation from within the AWL itself - *someone* must have once taken seriously Matgamna's fine words about left unity and the arguing out of differences in a democratic, joint leftwing organisation that was the stock in trade of the AWL in 1999.

This retreat into cultism, with its 'distinctive' positions that are more often than not simply reactionary, is no road to building any kind of united left challenge to Blairism, or indeed anything worthwhile at all ●

Ian Donovan

STOP THE WAR

Activists' conference

Good little Stalinists

On Saturday June 21 the Stop the War Coalition held an 'activists' conference' in Hamersmith town hall. In fact, the meeting would be more accurately described as an extended rally or series of rallies. In both the plenaries and the 'workshops' the time was dominated by the platform speakers, with short contributions from the floor; the final plenary consisted of more platform speakers and a little more discussion, rather than report-backs from workshops.

There seemed, on a rough count in the plenaries, to be around 400-500 people present; Lindsey German claimed that between 600 and 700 had attended all or part of the day. Given the number of people who are still turning out to local STWC meetings and events (let alone the size of the campaign at its height), these are pretty small numbers. From superficial appearances, especially age, it seemed likely that, of the two main constituents, more of those in attendance had been mobilised by the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain than by the Socialist Workers Party.

The opening plenary heard speeches from STWC chair Andrew Murray (CPB), the general secretary of the Japan Movement for Democratic Socialism and Tony Benn. In the second plenary, we had John Rees from the SWP, Kate Hudson, vice-chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and Jeremy Corbyn MP. The final plenary heard STWC national organiser Lindsey German (SWP), followed by George Galloway MP, who attracted standing ovations (your correspondent was not moved to participate ... the fact that Galloway is being witch-hunted by the ruling class does not mean that his politics deserve an ovation).

The speeches in general were highly rhetorical, and Lenin's tag, 'Better fewer, but better', seemed at several points an appropriate response. There was a good deal of mutual back-slapping about the (genuine) importance of the mass anti-war movement. Galloway in particular remarked that Andrew Murray and Lindsey German had led the movement in an "exemplary way" and had forged a "remarkable unity" which would have been difficult to imagine in years gone by in the light of ideological differences.

Without a certain amount of decoding, this statement would be flatly false. The SWP collaborated with 'official' communists - and forces in the Labour Party and elsewhere influenced by this tendency - in the Anti-Nazi League in the late 1970s and in CND in the 1980s. Galloway's statement *can*, however, be decoded.

What has changed from years gone by is that the SWP leaders who spoke from the platform at the meeting endorsed a global vision consistent with the *Morning Star's* and Galloway's. In the second plenary, John Rees called for us to build a "mass movement for peace and justice"; Jeremy Corbyn ended by saying that we must "aim for a world of peace and justice". Similarly in the final plenary, Lindsey German ended on a call for a "project for a different world in the 21st century", in which all would have clean water.

Galloway, the better phrase-monger, finished by quoting a banner from the Evian demonstrations: "They say the 21st is the new American century; we say the 21st is the new *human* century." He concluded: "Let us not rest until we have a world where nobody is short of clean water while others drink champagne, nobody starves while others feast, and nobody goes round the world burning millions of dollars in weapons of mass destruction dropped on poor people."

There was, too, a markedly common assessment among the platform speakers of the underlying fundamentals of the world situation. They agreed (Tony Benn was a little more cautious) that the drive to war was a product of US economic weakness rather than US economic strength. They agreed that there will be more wars. They agreed that Blair's government has become vulnerable. Much of this was banal.

However, the emphasis on the role of US capital had another sub-text. In his opening speech Andrew Murray had said that the task of the STWC was to

"disengage Britain and the British government from the imperialist project". In the 'war and globalisation' workshop, a comrade of south Asian extraction speaking from the floor correctly pointed out that Britain has an imperialist history and legacy of its own and still has independent imperialist interests, though these currently march in step with those of the USA. The response was a sharp intake of breath from many of those present and a good deal of silly criticism of the comrade. These CPB types and others whose politics is grounded within the framework of British nationalism

share the utopian dream that Britain could somehow be extracted from its imperialist role without the actual overthrow of the British state and British capital.

Some differences remain. In the workshop on the current situation in Iraq John Rees, speaking from the floor, emphasised the specific importance of a proposed trade union delegation to Iraq. Platform speaker Nick Buxton, responding to the discussion, "agreed" with John Rees but went on to argue that activists should "use all their community networks - mosques, women's groups,

and so on" - in effect distancing himself from the limited class politics expressed by Rees's emphasis on the trade unions.

Comrades Murray and German laid out the STWC steering committee's views of current tasks. They plan to call a new People's Assembly to "indict Blair" in late August or early September. There will be a national demonstration on September 27, co-sponsored by the Muslim Association of Britain, under the slogans, 'End the occupation of Iraq' and 'No more lies'. They want us to build a delegation for the recalled Cairo Conference, which is set for the end of October or early November. And they want to build a trade union delegation to Iraq (no date set).

Comrade Rees was almost certainly right to emphasise the trade union delegation proposal in his contribution from the floor. The People's Assembly in the spring was a good initiative at the height of the divergence between the government and public opinion, but the STWC leadership turned it into a mere rally and threw away the potential to build in the localities. A new national meeting at the height of the silly season is unlikely to have much impact. The Cairo Declaration is a classic piece of Stalinist classless utopian waffle; it also has the hallmark of anti-semitic anti-Zionism: ie, that the USA is treated as an instrument of the Zionists, rather than the Zionists as an instrument of the USA.

A recalled Cairo Conference will be a valueless jamboree. Lindsey German argued that building a delegation would "show the people of the Middle East that the British people opposed the war"; in reality, it is building concrete solidarity in Britain which will do that. The September 27 demonstration is a big gamble; it may pay off, but seems more likely to expose the relative decline of the movement since the outbreak of the war. The big demonstrations in the spring mobilised many trade unionists, but they did not attend as *organised trade unionists*. What opponents of the US-British occupation of Iraq need to do now is to sink roots in the rank and file of the trade union movement in Britain and to build solidarity with workers' class organisations in Iraq.

More generally, the meeting made very clear that the leadership of the SWP, the Murray wing of the CPB directly involved in the STWC and a small element of the Labour left, apparently including Galloway and Corbyn, have some aspiration to replay the 'official' CPGB's repeated efforts to create 'broad movements' modelled on the 1930s people's fronts (but on a much smaller scale). The utopian rhetoric of "peace and justice", and "another world" with "clean water for all" is to be the political basis of this 'broad movement'. Its organisational character is presumably to be deduced from the character of the People's Assembly and Saturday's 'activists' conference'. In other words, undemocratic rallies, which leave the leadership with a completely free hand as an alternative to democratic forms of organisation.

If such a movement were to come into existence it would be the *opposite* of what the working class today actually needs, which is democratic political organisation of the class itself, based on a programme which represents its interests. It would repeat yet again the repeatedly disproved policies of Stalinism. We already knew the *Morning Star* had forgotten nothing and learned nothing; it is disagreeable to watch the leadership of the SWP learning from them how to be good little Stalinists.

Mike Macnair



Next demonstration: September 27

Speak out and be damned

L eading members of the STWC are quick to point out the undemocratic nature of Blairism. In Saturday's afternoon session Lindsay German declared that "the vast majority of people in Britain were denied their democratic voice" during the war. She argued that the "movement of the immense majority need to assert our values". Quite right. But what about democracy within the coalition itself?

Having been kept off the steering committee, the CPGB (an affiliate organisation of the STWC) is still being denied the right to send even an observer. All sorts of excuses are being used. When sympathetic members of the steering committee asked what was going on, they were told we were making it all up - there is no exclusion of observers. But when I put this to Andrew Murray on Saturday, he informed me that only *invited* observers are allowed to attend - and we are not invited.

The reason? Well, we have a reputation of publishing reports. Bad. And we have printed articles in the *Weekly Worker* that criticise George Galloway. Very bad.

A particularly offending article was written by a certain Dave Osler (*Weekly Worker* April 24). Not a CPGBer, but a member of the

Socialist Alliance and author of *Labour Party plc* - with a foreword by Paul Foot.

Readers might recall how this article critically defended Galloway against *The Daily Telegraph's* campaign. It also pointed out the dangers of accepting money from dubious sources. But mostly it argued for political independence. For Murray none of that mattered - merely printing such an article had effectively put us on the same side as the *Telegraph*. We - and perhaps the SWP's comrade Foot - were guilty by association.

So comrade Murray brooks no criticism. Naturally therefore, there must be no objective reporting of the STWC steering committee meetings. As with the aristocratic parliament of the 18th century, there is a visceral fear of being held to account. Issuing anodyne pronouncements is more than enough for the rank and file. What more do they need?

The idea of openness is clearly utterly alien for comrade Murray. He adheres to the tradition of Stalinism, not Leninism - the passionate disputes of Russia's soviets, party congresses and conferences were, of course, reported in painstaking detail. Lenin insisted upon it. It was Stalin who reduced them to mere rubber-stamp bodies and killed

honest debate. He also liked to plot and plan in secret.

Of course, MI5 will have its agents and bugs. The government and the secret state will know everything they need to know. Depend on that. It is the anti-war movement that is to be kept in the dark, denied the insights and analysis that has won the *Weekly Worker* such high esteem and such a big readership.

I assured him that we shall continue to fight for democracy in the STWC and specifically for the right to attend as observers. Exclusion disempowers the rank and file membership and sends all the wrong messages to the public. Comrade Murray did agree to put the matter on the agenda for the next steering committee meeting. However, he assured me that we did not have a hope of winning. He might be right - unfortunately. He certainly is determined to keep us out and keep the STWC's debates and decision-making processes hidden and underhand.

We trust that all members of the steering committee concerned for the health of the anti-war movement will take a stand against exclusion and treating the STWC as the private possession of comrades Murray, German et al.

Anne Mc Shane

CHURCH

SUMMER
OFFENSIVEBe
ruthless

I should not have boasted so much about how well we are doing in this year's Summer Offensive (Weekly Worker June 19). A much quieter week, this one - although a £400 donation from a comrade in Wales that came in as these words were written did cheer me up. This pushed the total this week up to £1,213 and the overall figure up to £6,922. Good, but we need to pick up the pace as we move into the second half of the campaign.

To encourage people, we will be sending over a thousand individual 'donate now!' letters next week, but if you send some cash in now you will save us the price of a stamp (you can now make donations via the web - click on 'Make a donation').

SO novices have asked us how some comrades are raising their targets this year. Here are some ideas:

- **Are you a junk monkey? C'mon, be ruthless with yourself. A car boot sale beckons, surely?**
 - **Remember, you have family and friends. Hopefully. Now is the time to badger them for support. Monetary donations can be hard to get, but material for a car boot sale might be easier to come by.**
 - **Get sponsored - bike rides, swims, runs, etc do attract support. They need more of a political argument about why the work of the organisation, the role of the Weekly Worker is important. But the SO is about politics, not just the cash.**
 - **Remember - every paper, badge, sub or book you sell during this period counts towards your total, so ...**
 - **... make sure you get others to come to the Communist University. The tickets they buy from you will count towards your total.**
 - **The SO shouldn't be grim - organise an SO dinner party, social or video evening. Serve nibbles and charge a tenner each (person, not nibble). Sell booze - you're bound to make money and have some fun.**
 - **We accept gifts in kind! In the past, comrades have donated computers, photocopiers, cameras, etc. If it works and we can find a use for it, we'll have it**
- Tina Becker**

■ **Halfway social**
July 12, 7pm, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnauburgh Street, London NW1 (nearest tube: Great Portland Street, Regent Street).

■ **Celebration meal**
Saturday August 2 (first evening of this year's Communist University), 7.30pm, Goldsmiths College, Raymont Hall, 63 Wickham Road, London SE14 (nearest tube: New Cross). All donors and friends welcome. Tickets: £25 (solidarity price: £50; unwaged: £15).

Homosexuality and

The bitter controversy surrounding the appointment of canon Jeffrey John, a homosexual, as the next suffragan bishop of Reading, is something we should take note of. The furore has served to cast a damning spotlight on all the hypocrisy, the prejudice and the mass of contradictions and inconsistencies in the church hierarchy's attitude not just to homosexuality, but to human sexuality in general.

Canon John has been in a loving relationship with his partner, father Grant Holmes, for the last 27 years. Ministering in separate parishes meant that they could never actually live together, but they were and are otherwise pretty inseparable. Trusted friends and colleagues no doubt knew about their relationship years ago, but they, like the men themselves, were discreet. Not just a matter of pastoral professionalism - it was the couple's choice and their right, in these circumstances, not to 'come out', or indeed to be forced out.

But once it became known that canon John's appointment to the episcopate had been approved by Downing Street and the palace (itself, of course, a reflection of the bizarre constitutional position occupied by the 'established church'), a coterie of nine bishops plus assorted suffragans determined to prevent his consecration at all costs, and effectively *outed* him by publishing an open letter "concerning the appointment of the bishop of Reading".

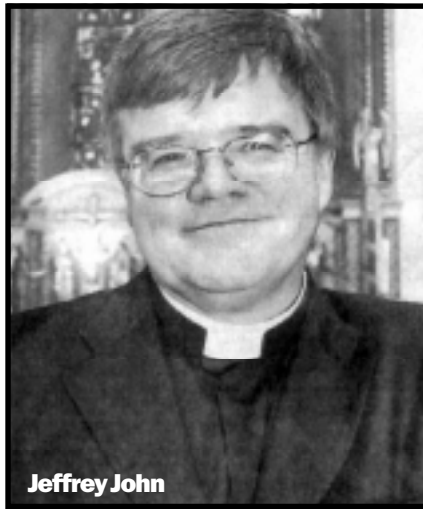
The aim of this pernicious little missive, drafted by his lordship Graham Dow, bishop of Carlisle, a third rate see if ever there was one, was to intimidate the canon into rejecting his preferment. "By his own admission [note the loaded language of the prosecuting counsel, as if being gay were still a criminal offence], he has been in a same-sex relationship for 20 years" - a relationship obviously far from the ideal of "the order of creation where men and women are seen as complementary. Sexual intercourse within the life-long relationship of marriage is the sign and beautiful expression of that union. Intercourse outside marriage undermines that sign."

In other words, stripping away the civil service prose masquerading as theology, and getting down to what these ecclesiastical troglodytes actually think, valid sex needs three things: a man, a woman and a marriage licence. Anything else and you are damned; sorry, but that is what evidently constitutes "what is acceptable sexual behaviour in god's sight"; though god, as a sort of celestial umpire, could conceivably give you the benefit of the doubt and let you have another go.

We have been here many times before. *They* pretend the world is one thing, and *we* know it and live it as something rather different. But with truly unspeakable hypocritical effrontery, their collective lordships go on to say: "We value, of course, the gift of same-sex friendship and if this relationship is one of companionship and sexual abstinence, then we rejoice. We warmly commend such relationships to the church as a whole."

"Value" and "of course"? No more than a ritual genuflection in the direction of political correctness, unavoidably forced upon these comfortable ecclesial parasites by the objective conditions of society. And "*Rejoice*"? That men and women who find themselves in same-sex relationships must confine themselves to living as brother and brother, sister and sister, in a life of "companionship", foregoing any physical expression of their mutual love in *this* world, in the interests of their salvation in the *next*?

One of the more ironic aspects of the situation is that canon John's evangelical and 'traditional' detractors question the sincerity of his commitment to a document called *Issues in human sexuality*, published by the synod of bishops of the church of England in 1991, which at the time, in however contradictory a way, actually represented a significant breakthrough by the liberal wing of the church: lay members of the C of E who were homosexuals could have sex, but, regrettably, gay clerics could not. In the latter case, it was a matter of self-sacrifice, 'discipline' and 'setting a



Jeffrey John

good example'. It was perhaps in the light of the decisions contained in *Issues* that John and his partner ceased to have a physical relationship.

The irony is that those who 12 years ago regarded this document as a despicable concession to modern pagan mores, who warned that it presaged the end of the world as we know it, now seize upon the same document as an exhibit for the prosecution, a proof of the canon's apostasy, because he publicly acknowledges his support for and commitment to the notion that the church should give formal recognition to same-sex relationships among the clergy as well as the laity. Nonetheless, as a matter of discipline, he will refrain from propagating this view when he becomes a bishop, and will remain celibate. What more could their lordships want?

The canon's real 'sin' is that, having been outed, he has decided to stand firm, thus raising the spectre of a schism within the anglican communion and the possibility of mass defections in the diocese of Oxford. Good. Just as in our world of socialist politics, when a split is threatened, the opposing sides should argue their platforms in front of the working class, so in this case opposing sides in the church should argue their respective positions in front of their flock. A frank debate about religion and sexuality is overdue.

The bishops who denounce canon John claim to represent "the church's constant teaching in the light of scripture". Just what does this "teaching" consist of, how "constant" has it been and what is its scriptural basis?

You could argue that the problem of human sexuality began in the mythical garden of Eden. When Eve ate an apple from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and tempted her husband to do likewise, then "the eyes of them both were opened and they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7 - all biblical quotations from the King James bible). Their first reaction was *shame*. They covered themselves and tried to hide from god. Surely this is an archetype of all the shame, guilt and confusion that has surrounded sexuality throughout the judaeo-christian tradition?

By the 19th chapter of Genesis (vv 1-29) we get to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah - a strange narrative that seems to be about a would-be homosexual gang-rape. Abraham's nephew Lot is visited by two angels in the guise of men. A group of locals gather outside Lot's house and demand to "know" - ie, to have sex with - the visitors. Let us take the story at face value. If Lot's visitors had by chance been women and the locals had demanded to have their way with them, would this be used several thousand years later as divine proof that all *heterosexual* acts are intrinsically evil? Er, no.

Yet this puzzling, perhaps corrupted, text is still ludicrously and disingenuously used by the catholic church, and by many protestants, to justify their 'divinely' sanctioned condemnation of homosexuality: 'It's in the bible'. In the same chapter of Genesis, incidentally, we have the daughters of Lot getting their father drunk so that they could have intercourse with him and conceive children, but our zealot friends pass over this and many similar oddities that serve no purpose in sustaining their

struggle for orthodoxy.

The main old testament basis, such as it is, for condemning homosexuality comes from the book of Leviticus - a tome obsessed with 'uncleanness' of every kind. "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination ... If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (18:22; 20:13).

Had we the space, we could put such blood-thirsty stipulations into their material and historical context, as a manifestation of how specific emerging societies such as the Israelites dealt with specific problems. It is surely the case that in the period covered by the Torah, there was no concept of 'sexual orientation' ("man and woman he created them both" and their procreative function was self-evidently determined - sexual preference was never an issue); nor, more fundamentally, was there any notion, biologically speaking, that the female was anything other than a receptacle for the male's life-creating seed. Hence the condemnation not just of homosexuality but of any act (*coitus interruptus* for example, in the case of Onan, who declined to impregnate his dead brother's wife, and by association male masturbation) which thwarted the purpose of procreation, of bringing more Jews into the world.

The point, however, is that today, in the 21st century, for millions of christians and jews, such texts still represent nothing less than the divinely revealed, literal word of god and consequently must constitute the basis of not just the moral but the civil law.

Having exhausted the threadbare 'arguments' contained in the old covenant, they will point to St Paul as new testament confirmation of their belief that homosexuality is an abomination. He speaks of "men, leaving the natural use of the woman", men who "burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet" (Romans 1:27). Elsewhere, he makes reference to "the effeminate and the abusers of themselves with mankind" or those who "defile themselves with mankind". Perhaps Paul had problems with his own sexuality, but his writings remain the principal scriptural bulwark of the orthodox case against homosexuality.

What did his master, Jesus Christ, have to say about homosexuality? Nothing. In the biblical account he seems to have deliberately sought out and associated with those whom the scribes and the pharisees, the great arbiters of the law, damned for their sinfulness - adulterers, prostitutes, tax-gatherers for the Roman occupiers and so forth. It is difficult to imagine that this motley company of the religiously and socially excluded, and of humble workers like fishermen, whom Jesus literally and metaphorically embraced, did not include homosexuals, perhaps even among those very close to him.

Forensically speaking, what the bishops call "the constant teaching of the church in the light of scripture" would never get past a jury. It was not so much scripture, but tradition - ie, the writings of the church fathers and theologians - that shaped the church's attitude to homosexuality.

Foremost among them was St Augustine of Hippo. Having fornicated his way around Africa and the Middle East for half his life, he converted to christianity and decided that sex was bad, very bad. Even christian married couples, for example, engaged in conventional copulation were sinning if they derived pleasure from the experience.

It really is impossible to overestimate the influence of Augustine. It certainly informed the sublime, neo-Aristotelian, natural-law moral theology of St Thomas Aquinas, with its impeccable logic, which remains the theological basis of the present pope's approach to all questions involving sex, and can be roughly summarised thus.

Divine providence provided us with the act of sexual intercourse as a means of reproducing the human species. That is its only pur-

Target: £25,000

hypocrisy

pose (though, in fairness, it has to be said that, departing somewhat from Thomas himself, a certain measure of acceptable mutual conjugal felicity in the act itself has recently been conceded as not inherently sinful). But it remains the case that anything which interferes with the natural law of human reproduction as described in Aristotelian terms - contraception, for example, let alone buggery - is intrinsically sinful and therefore grounds for damnation.

Any form of sexual activity outside marriage is a mortal sin. Even within marriage, *any* sexual act that does not facilitate reproduction is again “intrinsically evil”. Obviously, *all* homosexual and lesbian sex acts are “intrinsically evil” and lead to damnation, though the pope has been kind enough to tell us that a homosexual *orientation* is *per se* not sinful, though you must struggle manfully/womanfully against this ‘perversion’ and must not put it into practice - ever.

For obvious reasons, given its peculiar relationship to the crown and state, the special circumstances of its very English and prag-

matic emergence as an answer to the marital difficulties of Henry VIII, and its theological and political rejection of ‘popery’ under Edward VI, Elizabeth I and beyond, the C of E has not been given to the codification of the minutiae of moral theology.

Nevertheless, the enormous changes in society over the last few decades have obliged the church to define its position in relation to such matters as marriage and sexuality. *Issues in human sexuality* might have been intended to be a good old anglican compromise, but in reality it was a ghastly fudge. If homosexuality stands biblically condemned as a sin and an abomination, then how can the church conceivably sanction gay sex, albeit *only* between lay persons - those in holy orders being obliged to practise celibacy as an example to the rest? It is a nonsense. At least the catholic position is consistent: if you have the ‘orientation’, then bad luck, but as long as you do nothing about it, you are alright with god.

The church’s approach to human sexuality, as with so much else, is ultimately life-de-

nying. For us Marxists, sexuality in all its diversity and complexity, rooted in the materiality of the human condition as it *exists*, is an intrinsic part of what it means to be a human being.

The CPGB includes a section on religion in its draft programme. In terms of immediate demands, it calls for the complete separation of church and state - this means not just the formal disestablishment of the Church of England - ie, the abolition of the link between the church, crown and parliament - but also the removal of all special privileged status accorded to this or any other religious body in the political and social life of the state, including the conduct of state-sponsored, legally-enforced religious propaganda activity in schools and colleges.

The freedom to propagate and practise religion, along with the freedom to conduct atheist propaganda, is, it need hardly be said, inseparable from that commitment to consistent democracy that characterises a genuine communist programme ●

Michael Malkin

ORWELL CENTENARY

Ironic unpredictability

If George Orwell had lived, he would have reached his 100th birthday in the last week of June. His novels, essays and articles have converted thousands of people to socialism, yet many British communists still seem to loathe him with a passion. Even now, nearly 70 years after Harry Pollitt’s famously bad-tempered review of *The road to Wigan Pier* (*Daily Worker* March 17 1937), he is still ritually denounced in our publications as a bourgeois maverick who aimed to destroy socialism from within - a sort of Tory fifth columnist in the camp of the working class.

Why have communists been so blind to Orwell’s greatness? The obvious, but slightly uncomfortable answer is that he had a genius for satirising our faults. On most of the occasions when he attacked us for our ‘leader-worship’, our dishonesty or our craven attitude towards the USSR, he was right and we were wrong - the truth is as simple as that. Yet many communists still believe that they have a very good reason not merely for hating Orwell, but for branding him a ‘police spy’ and a ‘stooge of the intelligence services’.

This is the so-called ‘revelation’, featured in *The Guardian* back in 1996, that towards the end of his life he supplied a list of communist sympathisers to the information research department (IRD), an obscure organisation on the margins of the British foreign office. Perhaps the most useful tribute we can pay to Orwell in his centenary year is to show that even here, on the most controversial territory imaginable, his behaviour was by no means as dishonourable as his critics have claimed.

The IRD was established by the Attlee government in 1948. Its brief was to produce anti-communist propaganda materials that could be used throughout Europe. In March 1949, while receiving treatment for tuberculosis at a sanatorium in Gloucestershire, Orwell was approached by the IRD and asked to write a pamphlet. His contact was Celia Kirwan, an old friend to whom he had unsuccessfully proposed marriage after the death of his first wife.

Already too ill to take on new work, Orwell offered to supply Kirwan with a list of British intellectuals whom he suspected of communist sympathies. His professed motive was to ensure that the IRD did not inadvertently employ people who might be tempted to subvert its goals. His love for Kirwan might also have had something to do it.

Not many of the 45 names on the list would have taken Kirwan or her colleagues by surprise, as Orwell himself acknowledged, but

some of the marginal comments revealed a happy talent for skewering an entire personality on a handful of words. Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*, was mordantly described as a “decayed liberal - very dishonest”. The poet Stephen Spender was characterised as a “sentimental sympathiser”, who was “easily influenced” and had a “tendency towards homosexuality”. And in a wicked piece of innuendo that puts *The Daily Telegraph*’s reporting of the Galloway affair to shame, Orwell observed that the great radical barrister, DN Pritt, was “said to handle more money than is accounted for by his job”.

So why are Orwell’s leftwing critics so mistaken when they describe this relatively footling matter as evidence of high treachery? The most serious charge which can be levelled against them is one of gross dishonesty. Scores of Marxist and *Marxisant* writers, including several who really ought to know better (eg, Terry Eagleton, Scott Lucas and Paul Foot), have insisted that Orwell was collaborating with the intelligence services when he was clearly doing nothing of the sort. The IRD was not in the business of spying on dissidents, nor was it involved in law enforcement or supplying information to employers or other government departments. The last point is especially important. As Peter Davison, the editor of Orwell’s *Complete works*, has recently made clear, “... the names remained within the IRD and were never passed to the secret service”.

Indeed, at the time when Orwell sent Kirwan his list, the IRD might reasonably have been described as a sort of state-funded adjunct of the Labour left. As Christopher Hitchens has pointed out in his recent book *Orwell’s victory* (Penguin, 2002), most of the people who worked for it in its early days were *Tribune* socialists whose main purpose in life was trying to persuade the Attlee administration to take a more radical line. None of these people opposed communism because they wanted to shore up British imperialism or the rule of the stock exchange, but rather because they saw the ‘deformations’ of Stalinism as the main factor impeding the advance of socialism. Nor were they slow in defending the rights of communists when they appeared to be under threat. Orwell himself signed a petition in 1948 which protested against discrimination towards communists in the British civil service, and publicly objected to the length of the sentence meted out to the nuclear spy Allen Nunn May in 1949.

All of which brings us to a historical irony

of the first order - one which Orwell would surely have rued. In the final analysis, no one benefited from the anti-communist onslaught of the IRD and its Bevanite allies as much as the Communist Party of Great Britain. At the onset of the cold war, in spite of their remarkable achievements since the mid-1930s, British communists were still willing to do almost anything to appease their sponsors in the Kremlin. In 1948 alone they cheered the defenestration of Jan Masaryk in Czechoslovakia, defended Stalin against charges of anti-semitism and acquiesced in the myth of Tito’s treachery.

It was only a major change of heart, an outright repudiation of what Orwell called its “sentimental Russophilia”, which allowed the CPGB to recover its influence in the labour movement and go on to lead the massive industrial struggles of the 60s and 70s. The shift away from uncritical pro-Sovietism was obviously caused by a variety of factors, including the traumas of 1956 and an easing of the cold war, but it is clear that sustained exposure to Orwellian invective also had its part to play.

Orwell’s work for the IRD also raises the issue of the left’s attitude towards the state. The unspoken premise of Orwell’s critics is that any attempt to exploit the resources of the state, even in a conscious effort to advance the socialist cause, is somehow to sell out to the forces of reaction. It hardly needs saying that this Disneyland caricature of Marxism can only lead to disaster. As Orwell knew very well, no real shift in public attitudes can occur without some sort of effort to ‘occupy’ the bourgeois state and bend it to radical purposes. The only alternative is to retreat into a syndicalist or anarchist bunker, where political impotence is the invariable consequence of theoretical purity.

George Orwell would have been the last person to say that there are no enemies on the left. There is no question that he hated the Communist Party and wished to see its influence destroyed. Yet it was his own acute critique of Stalinism, amplified by his colleagues on the *Tribune* left and the solemn pamphleteers of the IRD, which helped to knock the authoritarian edges off the British communists and bring them into a creative relationship with wider forces on the left.

As we celebrate the work of one of England’s greatest radicals in his centenary year, this amusing example of the unpredictability of history should serve as our starting point ●

Philip Bounds

What we fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, anti-capitalists 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 oppose the neo-conservative war plans of the Project for the New American Century and all imperialist wars 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 working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national 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.

Become a Communist Party supporter

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

weekly Worker

Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

www.cpgb.org.uk

Imperialism: no friend of democracy

Mullahs rejected

The students could not wait for the demonstrations called to mark the fourth anniversary of the July 9 1999 uprising. Hearing reports that the universities are to be privatised, they protested.

And their protests were taken up in the streets outside the university, and way beyond, by large numbers of ordinary Tehrani residents. For five nights the streets and adjacent freeway were blocked by hooting cars, while tens of thousands gathered. This time the slogans were not just directed at the supreme leader, the hated Seyyed Ali Khamenei, calling for his removal and even death, but also at the 'reformist' president Khatami.

If any proof were needed of the utter fizzling out of the 'reformist' movement within the Islamic regime, this was it. Even those 'reformists' who had tasted prison or survived death sentences were sidelined. The people had given the thumbs down to the reformists in the recent municipal elections by staying at home in their millions, handing the city councils to the ultra-conservatives. This time they verbalised their rejection in the slogans, 'Khatami, resign, resign', 'Free political prisoners' and 'Tanks, bombs, *basiji* have no effect any more'.

The *basiji* are the thugs in civvies who roam Tehran on motorbike, mobile phones in hand, beating up demonstrators with chains and clubs - and who are now frequently getting beaten up themselves. The street skirmishes have caused hundreds of injuries, some serious - scores have been admitted to Tehran hospitals as a result.

Within a few days other cities followed. Shiraz saw women taking off their veils and dancing in the streets. They were attacked and one person was shot dead. In Isfahan, Mashad and many other towns demonstrations followed, not just in the universities, but with the support of the public.

Initially the security forces merely watched and blocked roads leading to the university. They left the thuggery to the chain-wielding *basiji*. But after four successive nights, Khamenei intervened and ordered the security forces to move in. His tone was vicious and blunt. Never before had he ordered a crackdown in such harsh terms.

And crack down they did. Hundreds were arrested. Hooting cars were smashed up. Demonstrators were beaten mercilessly. By the sixth night - significantly all the demonstrations had taken place after dark - Tehran was relatively quiet. But in many other towns the protests continue to this date. In Hamedan the thugs attacked students with clubs and knives. Three students died.

One of the features of the demonstrations is their palpably spontaneous and uncoordinated nature. The reasons are not hard to find. The student movement has not recovered from the massive repression after their magnificent 1999 uprising, which saw large sections of the inhabitants of the capital following suit, threatening the very existence of the regime, 'reformists' and all. This led to the fragmentation and virtual collapse of what was called the Khoradad 2 (May 23) movement - the movement for reform

The students are fragmented and, worse, all those ostensibly working for democracy do not see the essential need to link in with the labour movement

around Khatami's election campaign for the presidency.

In fact there is no serious *organised* movement of opposition to the regime. The labour movement has yet to find its trade union voice, let alone a national, political one. The students are fragmented and, worse, all those ostensibly working for democracy do not see the essential need to link in with the labour movement. The latter too, despite its amazing record of resistance, has neither formed trade unions nor joined forces with the democratic movement. Meanwhile there are potentially catastrophic tensions within the various nations making up Iran, fanned by chauvinists within the administration (including the so-called reformists), as well sections of the opposition abroad.

A further major weakness is the tragedy that the revolutionary discourse in Iran has found itself in a 20-year time lock. It exists in a bubble totally isolated from the anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movements. Furthermore, many intellectuals and political activists, including in the student movement, have illusions in the 'liberating' role of US imperialism in the region. They have noted the events in Iraq and look to the US to get the Iranian movement for democracy out of the impasse it finds itself in. This is best illustrated by the resolution of the Students of the Office for Consolidating Unity, which saw US intervention as a lesser of two evils - the usual story of 'bad and worse', which inevitably leads to disaster.

The monarchists, various republican and even some 'left' currents too are looking to the Americans as their conduit into power. In a televised press conference on May 19, US senator Sam Brown unearthed a \$50 million budget to aid the Iranian 'opposition'. Rumsfeld moaned about Tehran's nuclear weapons programme, and Bush used his meeting with Putin to bully him into downgrading his support for the construction of a nuclear reactor in Bushehr, Iran. The international atomic energy commission gave official warning that Iran was indeed engaged in producing weapons-grade uranium in Natanz - the Iranians have refused access to the site for inspection.

Bush then intervened directly, asking for the arrested demonstrators to be released. The picture given to the outside world appears to be of a coordinated effort to get the mullahs out and - as the monarchists hope - to get 'crown prince' Reza in as the next 'elected' shah.

The reality is more complicated. Nowhere on the streets were there any slogans of support for the aspiring monarch. This is not to say that the monarchy has



no roots inside Iran. In the absence of a coherent opposition, and specifically of a social movement for radical change, the way is open for whatever demagogue has the ear of the people. And the monarchists have their television programmes satellite-beamed into the country and widely watched.

If the left does not get its act together, it faces a much longer period in the wilderness. The generation gap between the pre-revolutionary left - now dead or 20 years in exile - and the new generation of Iranian youth, who are frustrated and angry but without clear ideological direction, is one factor. The other is the nature of the fragmented left itself - it badly needs to clean up its own house. One part is beguiled by parliamentary democracy - without any understanding of what that means in the 'new world order'. The other is stuck in a Stalinist stone age, bickering and in disarray, and equally incapable of mounting a challenge. The left has yet to learn the importance of grassroots democracy, to think pluralistically, to transcend narrow national horizons and see the global picture.

Above all the working class is still not a class in itself, while the broad, multi-faceted, but fragmented democratic movement does not understand that the fight for democracy is futile without one for equality. This truism is more relevant than ever in our interdependent world ●

Mehdi Kia

Defend Iranian students

International Campaign in Defence of Iranian Students petition

Since June 10, Iranian students at the universities of Tehran, Isfahan, Ahvaz, Shiraz and many others have protested against theocratic dictatorship as well as plans to privatise higher education in Iran. On a number of occasions protesters have been attacked by the security services and fundamentalist thugs wielding clubs, with many students badly injured.

**We, the undersigned,
● Demand the immediate, unconditional release of all the students**

**arrested in this and other protests.
● Demand an end to the continued harassment and detention of political activists in Iran and to the terror unleashed by the security forces.**

**● Strongly support the students' demands for freedom, and their struggle against dictatorship and privatisation of higher education.
● Note that the current struggles are not only against theocratic dictatorship but also against privatisation and neo-liberal**

economic policies.

● Call on all trade unions, political organisations, student groups, political and cultural personalities, academics and scientists to join the international campaign to defend Iranian students and actively protest at state-sponsored repression in Iran ●

To sign the statement or for more information, contact Alan Clarke: alanmclarke@postmaster.co.uk; 07880 968640.

Subscribe!

Subscription £ _____ € _____

Donation £ _____ € _____

Cheques and postal orders should be payable to 'Weekly Worker'

	6m	1yr	Inst.
United Kingdom	£15/€24	£30/€48	£53/€85
Europe	£20/€32	£40/€64	£70/€112
Rest of world	£40/€64	£80/€128	£140/€224

Return to: Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, United Kingdom

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Email _____

Telephone _____ Date _____

Special offer for new subscribers

3 months for £5