



weekly **worker**

Labour left: Socialist Campaign Group's 'Save our party' conference

- RMT conference
- Alex Callinicos
- Marxism fringe
- Socialist Alliance

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Towards a new workers' party

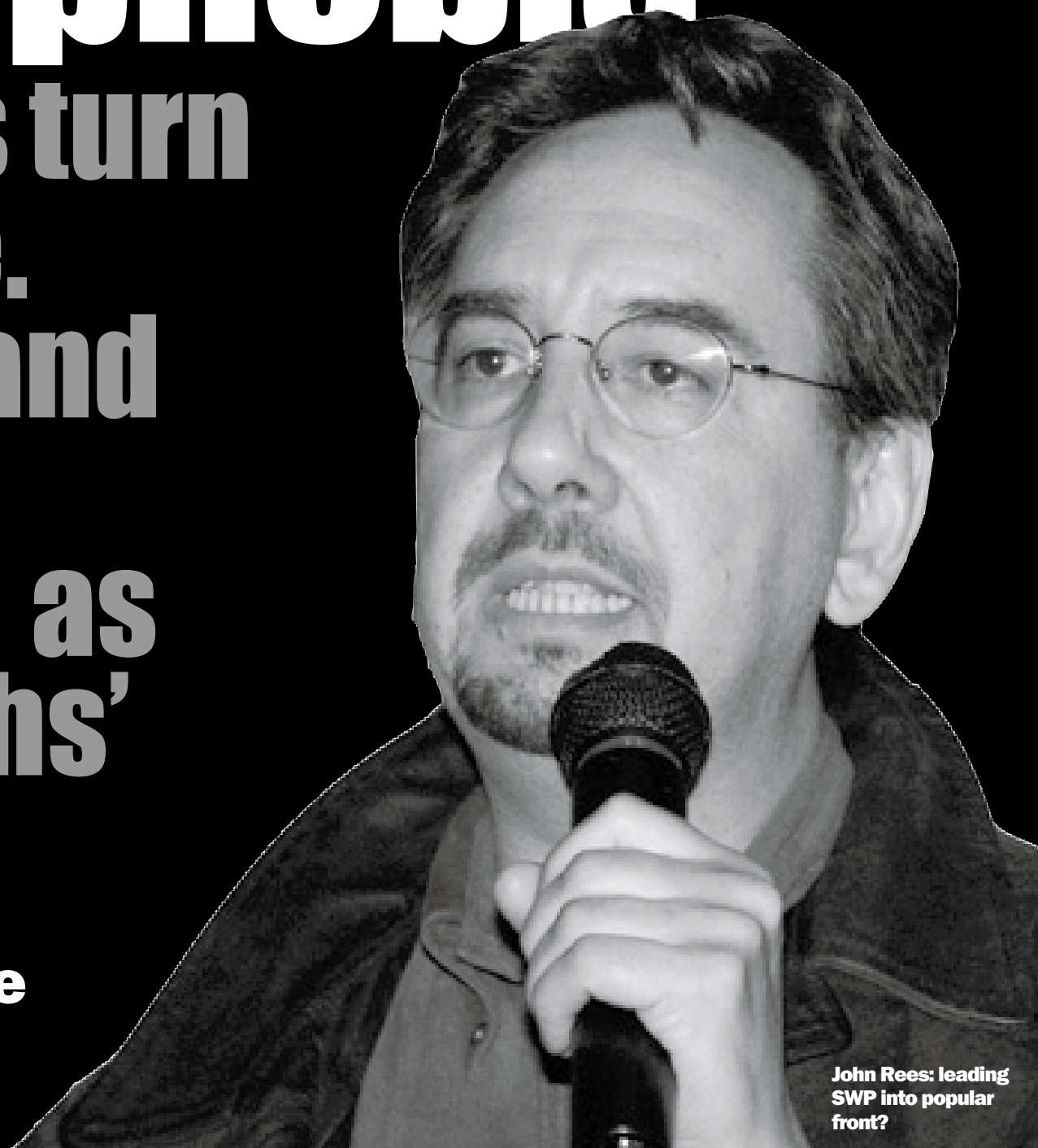
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No compromise on sexism and homophobia

**John Rees's turn
to mosque.
Womens' and
gay rights
dismissed as
'shibboleths'**

**Reports from this
year's Marxism - see
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John Rees: leading
SWP into popular
front?

No compromise on sexism and homophobia

Deeply frustrated by their lack of social purchase, the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party are increasingly prone to the wildest opportunist zigzags. Once SWP members were habitually told to automatically vote Labour in elections. Now John Rees and Lindsey German are bombastically urging joint candidates with the mosque and are prepared to expunge so-called “shibboleths” such as women’s and gay rights from any manifesto/platform.

These comrades were fervently convinced that their time had come with the spontaneous anti-war upsurge. London saw three unprecedented demonstrations - two million rallied in Hyde Park on February 15. However, that has translated neither into any discernible increase in Socialist Alliance votes nor into SWP recruits.

Unsurprisingly SWP tops refuse to grasp a simple truth. The problem lies entirely with themselves. The SWP is not an attractive organisation for radicalised youth or militant trade unionists. The opposite is the case.

The internal regime is routinely described as democratic centralism. Untrue. In reality the SWP practises bureaucratic centralism. Control-freakery rules. Serious minority opinions are barred from any expression in *Socialist Worker* or *Socialist Review*. Indeed dissidents are expected to gag themselves in public.

What of the SA? If the SWP had followed the partyist line consistently advocated by the CPGB and learnt from the Scottish Socialist Party and Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, surely things would have turned out differently. Instead of being confronted by a confusing medley of rival groups, the anti-war movement could have been greeted with a single message - join the SA.

It was not to be. Due to SWP misleadership the SA was effectively shut down for the duration of the war. As a result membership remained stagnant, no paper was launched and votes in subsequent elections have been depressingly marginal. Preston is merely the exception that proves the rule.

The majority on the SWP’s political committee have responded with a futile attempt to recreate the Stop the War Coalition at the level of electoral politics. Having been rebuffed by the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, SWP *primus inter pares* John Rees is banking on a joint “platform” with islamic clerics. Not that the SA’s executive is supplied with any information about any of the negotiations.

The SA is treated as factional private property. Neither opposition to nor even questioning of the new turn can be tolerated. Inevitably the SA’s constitutional principles of political balance, inclusivity, toleration and transparency have been contemptuously trampled under the heel of a crushing SWP majority.

The SWP dramatically increased its numbers on the SA executive committee from three to 13 at May’s conference. In tandem an attempt to purge the awkward squad has begun. Having failed to remove the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty’s Martin Thomas from the executive and the CPGB’s Marcus Ström as nominating officer, the SWP successfully swept the board

in Birmingham. Victimised firefighter Steve Godward was ousted as chair and all potential opposition voices were removed from positions of responsibility. Packing the AGM with newly signed-up members did the trick.

Birmingham is vital. Comrade Rees hopes it will serve as his launch pad.

SWP leaders maintain that the most radicalised people in Britain are muslims. By which they generally mean someone who obeys the imam’s call to prayers. Therefore comrade Rees’s new alliance is to be built not by winning individual muslims to socialism (which would be highly positive and welcome). No, the SWP is set on liquidating the SA in favour of “Peace and Justice” candidates run jointly with the mosques.

There is no possibility whatsoever that the programme of any such bloc would be based on working class socialism and consistent democracy. To say that is not islamophobia: it is a simple statement of fact. Neither church, chapel, temple nor mosque organise workers as a class. Such institutions might contain many workers in their congregations. However, they are typically dominated by middle class professionals, owners of small businesses and traditional intellectuals.

Owing to their ambiguous position in British society mosques tend to be eclectic politically. Mutual aid and demonstrating against the US-UK neo-colonial assault on Iraq go hand in hand with deeply reactionary attitudes towards women and gays. Islamic socialism might rail against the effects of capitalist monopolisation, but salvation is sought in an idealised past, not working class solidarity and the future. It is a form of clerical socialism: half protest, half ludicrous.

To march alongside those mobilised by the mosque against US-UK warmongering is good politics. Communists and revolutionary socialists thereby gain a hearing and bring forward the cleavage of the muslim ‘community’ along *class* lines. What we object to is not unity in action with non-working class forces, but the watering down or abandoning of principles for the sake of what can only be fragile and fleeting. To strike an electoral - ie, programmatic and governmental - alliance with the mosque would also be to decouple from those millions who are looking for a socialist alternative to Blairism and ruin any prospect of broadening the SA through winning support from left-moving trade unions such as the RMT, the FBU and PCS.

The signs are worrying. At Marxism 2003 comrade German made the plea that women’s and gay rights should not be treated as “shibboleths”. The message is clear. Peace and Justice candidates are expected to stand on a minimalist platform which steers round such fundamental questions. How can it be otherwise? The *Koran* defines women as lesser human beings and forthrightly condemns homosexual acts as abominations.

There is, of course, nothing dated, dogmatic or sectarian about defending women’s, gay and lesbian rights. The worth of any movement or society can be judged in the attitude it takes towards equality. The SA’s 2001 general election manifesto demanded “equal

rights for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals” and an end to “discrimination against women” - the relevant section was carried under the banner, “No compromise on equality” (*People before profit* London 2000, pp13, 14). Quite right.

Our vision of socialism certainly includes freeing people from the stereotyping and straitjacketing of capitalist society. Indeed it is correct to say that there can be no socialism without the liberation of women, gays and lesbians.

Doctoring, abandoning or putting aside demands so as not to upset the sensibilities and prejudices of the mosque is not only crass opportunism, but is actually to give up on the struggle for democratic rights in the here and now - a struggle that alone provides the bridge to the desired future.

Keeping quiet on such questions is not a sign of sophistication and strength. Rather it stems from profound programmatic weakness. Opponents are bound to go for the jugular. They will demand to know where Peace and Justice candidates stand on abortion, cohabitation, divorce, homosexual adoption and equality before the law. Ironically Labour candidates could hold a more progressive position. New Labour has after all made great play of its commitment to women’s quotas, scrapping the notorious clause 28 and introducing a form of same-sex marriage.

Certain SWP cadre have given a frightening glimpse of how they intend to counter criticisms. For example, they are saying that too little attention has been paid to the women’s question. Undoubtedly correct. There has been 50-50 tokenism aplenty, but precious little substantive campaigning (which should as a matter of course involve men as well as women). But what is the SWP’s proposed solution? There is talk of picketing lap-dancing clubs. Obviously such antics pander to the moralism of the mosque.

Capitalism constantly strives to commercialise every aspect of human activity. Virtually no area is off limits. The result is invariably degradation for all concerned. However, the answer is not to line up with the moralists who demand that strip clubs, prostitution, pornography, etc be banned by the state. Vicars, priests and mullahs have been doing that for centuries, along with a whole pack of bigots, hypocrites, censors and charity-mongers.

Instead of siding with reactionaries, Marxists have sought to empower the powerless through democracy, solidarity and the class struggle. For instance, the GMB has set about unionising sex workers. Totally inadequate, yes. An initiative which also carries the inherent danger of legitimising the trade in sex. Nevertheless far better than any pious moralism.

Many SWP comrades are deeply perturbed by the imminent prospect of entering into what amounts to a popular front. Doubtless most have a passionate commitment to the rights of women, gays and lesbians. If such “shibboleths” are to be put on the back burner for the sake of electoral expediency, what next? Surely this is a ‘clause four’ moment. That is why from top to bottom SWPers have a duty to rebel ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

Stalinist banditry

Marcus Ström’s article on relations between the Socialist Workers Party and the Stalinists is worth a comment (*Weekly Worker* June 26). It is not an accident that the central committee of the SWP have approached the Communist Party of Britain for joint work. It is where they have been going politically for some time.

In recent years the SWP have become closer to the CPB than any other left organisation, both in methods of work and how they view the world. The Stalinists retreated from the idea that the working class was the central agency for change decades ago. In its place they created a world view that divided it into good camps and bad camps and good nations and bad nations instead of classes.

Today the SWP demonises the United States and Israel to the point of picketing Jewish-owned shops and not recognising the latter in spite of Israel having one of the biggest solidarity movements in the world. The Stalinists also had a much distorted means-justify-ends view about legitimate methods within the labour movement. The end of organisational advantage justified all sorts of opportunistic, undemocratic, dishonest, sectarian methods.

Today the SWP attempts expulsions of Socialist Alliance members who do not conform to their methods and politics and pack out AGMs with sympathisers new to politics to take control: eg, Birmingham SA. It is a form of banditry that is part of a Stalinist tradition and not an anti-Stalinist one.

It was the Stalinists, as the SWP know full well, who built cross-class popular fronts, with such disastrous consequences for the working class and humanity, in the 1930s. The modern-day form consists of alliances with fundamentalists, nationalists and liberals organised by the SWP within the Stop the War Coalition. And they hate nobody more than those within the anti-Stalinist left who remind them of where these methods and flawed tactics lead.

Flawed politics, tactics and methods have theoretical roots. In part it can be seen in the work of leading SWP theorist Alex Callinicos. In a half-hour lead-off on his latest work (*An anti-capitalist manifesto*) recently in Edinburgh, neither socialism nor the working class were mentioned once. On being challenged about this, he argued that the working class were only one source of change, but there were other important elements. It represented a return to pre-Marxian utopian socialism.

This retreat from class has been combined with a continuation of the Cliffite dogma that ‘tactics contradict principles’. While most of the rest of the left believe in being firm in principle and flexible in tactics, Cliff stood this on its head. The damage this legacy is doing can be seen most starkly in the demise of the Socialist Alliance and the rise of the British National Party.

The Socialist Alliance has to develop into an organisation which campaigns on all the issues that are important to workers on a week-to-week basis over the next four years under its own banner. It needs to be identified clearly with resistance to this government. It should also initiate and support broad-based, non-sectarian, democratic, single-issue campaigns that are in the interests of the working class and measure success by how much change takes place on the given issue in our class’s interests.

Have we repealed the anti-union laws, stopped wars, reversed asylum legislation, unionised sweatshops, etc as a result of our campaigning? Recruitment should be seen as a secondary goal. Ironically success on any of these issues would see much greater recruitment to

the left. Greater left unity in England and Wales would also help undermine the increasing nationalism within the Scottish Socialist Party.

Someone on the SWP central committee really ought to make a Khrushchev-style speech about the Cliff era and its legacy. While it would not save the SWP from sharing the same fate as the old Soviet Union, it certainly would make the left a far more productive, less frustrating place to be. The question is: has anyone got the guts?

Peter Burton

Edinburgh AWL

Middle class

I thank comrades Clarke and Campy for their replies (Letters, July 3), but they reveal the crisis of class identity within the revolutionary movement.

Comrade Clarke says: “The left is not too middle class”, whilst comrade Campy concludes that marginalising “non-working class comrades ... would kill off a big section of the left”. It is telling that both comrades dismiss and laugh off as infantile any criticism of class composition, and the effect it has on our ability to win over the working class to our ideas.

There is a vast difference between understanding “left values” and being able to communicate and relate them to the class. I use my council estate analogy to demonstrate how passive, middle class sensibilities are reflected in much of the left. I did not make the point that “one’s social class changes just because of qualifications”, but that recruiting from predominantly middle class universities seems more comfortable to many on the left than activity in working class communities.

As comrade Dave Martin wrote last week, there are endless “debates, forums, marches and pickets” aimed mainly at recruiting people to different sects and selling their respective papers. What is achieved by this? The same old faces come along for a pep talk, to hear the same arguments about why the war was a bad thing; or another march where 12 papers were sold; or we’ve gone along and shouted at the slowly increasing number of fascists sitting on our town councils. Middle class activists flex the managerial and academic tendencies their class are disposed to, but they do not equip the class to confidently stand up and fight for itself.

I remember Joe Ashton and Dennis Skinner formed a short-lived parliamentary group for the few working class MPs left in parliament at the time. It soon attracted professionals and well-off Tories who insisted that because their dads made them ride the shop bike when they were lads, they must be working class and could identify with us.

That’s a lot like the revolutionary movement today - the self-proclaimed ‘vanguard’ consisting of people from relatively privileged backgrounds, whose anger, or more precisely sympathy, is a result of rebelling against ‘mummy and daddy’, rather than the injustice inflicted on the class.

Instead of justifying this with a straitjacketed interpretation of Marxism, let’s be realistic. The sad truth is the left is being influenced more by the upturn in Middle England radicalism than working class militancy. This surely creates a detrimental conflict of class interests and perspectives.

Class does have a cultural dimension, and it can’t just be assumed to satisfy personal rebelliousness. A conscious working class is unlikely to see a mirror of itself in the left, but an alien entity autonomous of it. There can be little doubt that we are seeing the gentrification of the revolutionary working class movement, particularly at the top, meaning the revolutionary left will become more detached and irrelevant to the class, and more inclined towards like-minded movements of assorted, well-meaning liberals.

But, as the ex-Tory MP Matthew Paris

put it, “The middle classes ruin everything”. It’s time we realised that, and organised ourselves, rather than be managed by the managing classes.

Mick Creswell
 Merseyside

Party v workers

Tony Green argues that many sects “offer alternative systems of control of those currently practised by the ruling world capitalist elite” (Letters, June 26). The points he makes are given weight by the very idea and practice of ‘democratic centralism’.

This concept explains what I mean by ‘sect’ and is a process of substituting working class debate and democracy with dominance by a ‘party’. If there is a positive, healthy side to ideas like ‘vanguard’ and ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, it is precisely as a working class weapon against substitutionist party dominance.

The Russian Revolution was sabotaged by a party that lifted ‘All power to the soviets’ from other groups, only to crush future demonstrations advocating returning to the slogan. Today sects snidely get together before public meetings trying to skewer democratic decision-making. Their members are expected to support the sect, irrespective of working class interests coming from open, honest debate with party and non-party workers. The CPGB has even defended the practice of sects’ organised heckling to stifle free, ongoing debate, under the misconception that it is thus furthering robust, proletarian debate!

Democratic centralism is based on an attitude of snide rather than intellectual misunderstanding. The CPGB have revealed they really do understand the dodgy practice of segregating concepts which are actually related in life: eg, ‘political support’ and ‘military support’. Yet no consideration is encouraged of how ‘activity’ is somehow so different from ‘communication’.

The CPGB booklet *Problems of communist organisation* reveals how ‘centralism’ is a practice that puts some restrictions on ‘democracy’. For developing the self-liberation of the working class for themselves and by themselves this is not good. Lenin overruled democratic centralism when it came to the crunch in a revolutionary situation. Today, if the Socialist Alliance had a ‘partyist’ democratic vote (against working class interests) to support the British pound, the CPGB would go along with making a statement of voting with patriotism. However, when a democratic ‘partyist’ decision went against the CPGB’s sect interest (deciding not to have an SA paper) you just try to go ahead with that action anyway.

The whole point of influence and organising should be for any group to further working class freedom and power and not use underhand ways to increase party dominance over workers, as well as restricting the free-thinking process among party members.

Bob Harding
 Norwich

Petty theory

What on earth is going on? What are all the divisions for? I thought we were all Marxists - we should be liberating the proletariat from bourgeois alienation, not arguing about how we apply it. Whilst we focus on petty issues of theory, we forget about important issues of action; nothing is being done to win the hearts and mind of the proletariat because the socialist and communist parties are too busy arguing with each other.

What do I see in my newsletter from the CPGB? Not ‘Socialism marches forward’, but ‘Crisis for Socialist Alliance’. Marx did not say, ‘Working men of all countries, stay oppressed, because your socialist leaders should argue about what constitutes Marxism and how our parties should be separate.’ No wonder the bourgeoisie thinks socialism is dead.

Socialist and communist parties, hear

me - wake up! Rather than focusing on what ideological aspects differ between us, we need to focus on what ideological aspects unite us all! We will be stamped out by the bourgeoisie unless we unite. We should not look around for enemies. We should look around for comrades for the final endgame struggle.

Luke Harrington
 email

Racist state

Outside this year’s Marxism - annual education event of the SWP - I was told by a member of the Spartacist League that the *black* bourgeoisie in South Africa is “racist” against the *black* working class, and the South African state, now run by the African National Congress, is just as racist as it was under apartheid.

Of course, this is nothing more than an exquisitely stupid expression of an article of faith of much of the left - that a capitalist state is *by definition* “racist”, as is the ruling class whose interests it serves.

I was just wondering if any reader could top this as ‘idiotic quote of the month’? Perhaps the *Weekly Worker* could give prizes?

Mark Franks
 London

Not changed

Picking up last week’s *Weekly Worker*, it was refreshing to see that some of the things on the left never change. I was highly amused to see Cathy Nugent make reference to her terrible days in York Labour Party Young Socialists all those years ago.

I vaguely remember Nugent’s activities in York. Frankly she was widely regarded as a slightly dishonest sectarian, with a habit of wagging her finger in her opponent’s face, and it’s heartening to see she hasn’t changed in nearly two decades.

Hardly world-changing events, but Nugent was elected chair of her YS branch because at that time it was dominated by supporters of *Socialist Organisation* - which would of course explain how she achieved that position in the first place. She was of course right, in so far as her colleagues at the time certainly did enjoy spending hours “shite-talking”, which was why she then or now never managed to be part of an organisation capable of growing.

I’m sure Ian Donovan was devastated by her ever so political name-calling. Try growing up, Nugent. Twenty years down the line one would have thought you would have evolved a little bit, but, still being in the same sect all these years, I guess that’s too much to hope for.

Andrew Luther
 York

Galloway

George Galloway is the epitome of the kind of ‘representative’ who has bled the

workers dry in the name of socialism (‘Defend Galloway’ *Weekly Worker* July 3).

He is up to his armpits in supporting personally madman Saddam, describing him as “indefatigable”, although he is not, in common with most of the anti-war brigade, in danger from the Iraqi secret service, Republican Guard or the private security thugs of Uday and Qusay.

You, along with all socialists and communists, should want to crawl away and hide after supporting a ‘man of the workers’ whose idea of paradise is a modern-day version of Stalin’s Russia and Hitler’s Germany.

Finally Galloway is elected to represent his constituents - not to piss about with Tariq Aziz in the lap of luxury whilst the Iraqi masses starved and died in a set of circumstances brought about by Saddam.

Tom Mann
 email

Distortions

Having read Phil Hamilton’s column, I checked out the Committee for a Workers’ International website ready for embarrassing vanity, but I still do not know what the hell Phil Hamilton was talking about (‘Virtual vanity’, June 26).

From previous issues of the *Weekly Worker* I thought the line was that the CWI had given in to nationalism in Scotland. Now I find it avoids “national-democratic issues”. Then I checked out the CWI’s piece on Marxism and Ireland. To dismiss this as “essentially calls on Northern Ireland workers to bury their differences around economic struggles” is as about as fair as saying that the CPGB wants them to shoot the shit out of each other over national struggles.

Why bother to review websites if you are just going to distort them?

Steve Williams
 email

Leftist stalking

Despite my writing “pointless rubbish”, Phillip Alan feels moved enough to pen a silly defence of the CWI website (Letters, July 3).

Actually, instead of criticising my review of his sect’s online vanity, he chooses to latch onto one throwaway remark concerning the Socialist Party’s prolier-than-thou sectarianism. If proof is needed of this self-promoted image, I suggest the comrade looks over the contributions CWI members have made to various discussion lists over the years. It is not uncommon to find posts boasting about x amount of SP councillors, y amount of leading union activists, the glory days of Liverpool city council and the Anti-Poll Tax Federation. This being the case, comrade Alan really needs to ask himself why the SP feels the need to play these cards to the point of absurdity, if indeed it is a *serious* working class organisation.

I was also tickled by my attributed “celebrity-left” status. You’d really have to

inhabit a rarefied world characterised by a constant preoccupation with a small number of leftist e-lists to believe that I’m some sort of ‘star’.

Despite having never met me in real life or online, Phillip nevertheless thinks he knows everything there is to know about my offline activities. I can only conclude that I’ve attracted one of the unwanted trappings of fame: my very own celebrity stalker.

Phil Hamilton
 Stoke-on-Trent

Sectarianism

Coming from (though not currently resident in) Scotland, I can testify that religious sectarianism is alive and well north of the border (‘Anti-working class cancer’, July 3).

At the end of the 1970s, coming home from school one day, I saw a loudspeaker van parked outside my local catholic church. It was playing a tape of one of the speeches of the reverend Ian Paisley. I suppose you could call it an attempted provocation.

In 2001, a few hundred yards along the very same road, I was walking past when a bus full of Orange Lodgers with musical instruments stopped for a break and its occupants got out (it was a summer day not long before July 12). One of them saw me and threatened me, though I had said not a word to them. My crime? I was wearing a dark green T-shirt, clearly not the sash their fathers wore.

My perception is that the Scottish Socialist Party has sidestepped the issue for tactical reasons. But in Scotland, whether you are by origin protestant or catholic still matters in a way it does not in England, though I believe a similar situation used to exist in Liverpool and some other places. It is certainly a circumstance that makes Scotland different from England, though not more progressive.

Wendell Payne
 email

Loach award

When awarded a prize, one must check who is giving it, what is their background, and whose money is behind it.

On July 4 the mass media announced that five artists have been selected for the Praemium Imperiale global arts prize, awarded by the Japan Arts Council - including filmmaker Ken Loach. This prize is awarded by the most rightwing people in Japan. It is supported by the *Sankei* daily paper, which is the most militaristic of the mass media. Yasuhiro Nakasone, almost the highest ranking of the Japanese right wing, is among the judges - the only Japanese - for this prize.

Will Ken Loach receive this prize with his head bowed? That would be totally indecent. I hope Loach supporters in Britain and in the world will not celebrate this tainted award. Please inform Loach’s office about the background of this prize!

Viola
 Japan

Communist University 2003

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 ■ Trade union lefts and alternatives to New Labour ■ Marxism and religion ■ Daring to dream - science fiction and social reality ■ Is islam a backward religion? ■ The Labour left and the programme for socialism ■ Fundamentalism - a present danger east and west? ■ Road maps for Palestinian liberation. One state and two state solutions? ■ Oil, rogue states and the capitalist crisis ■ Artists against the war - art and commitment ■ Popular fronts and Marxism ■ Polemics - hard and soft ■ Steven Jay Gould and lines of division within evolutionary theory ■ and much more

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



ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday July 13, 5pm - ‘Pluralism and legitimation’, using István Mészáros’s *The power of ideology* as a study guide.
 Phone 07950 416922 for details.

Socialist Alliance

North West regional meeting, Saturday July 12, 1pm to 4.30pm, Little Fifteen, Wallgate, Wigan. Agenda to include: youth issues; anti-capitalism and globalisation; organising against racism and the BNP; union activity; lessons of local elections; Euro elections and NW assembly referendum. 077666 01381.

Defend detainees

Demonstration, Harrow crown court, Hailsham Drive, Monday July 14, 9.30am. Nearest station: Harrow and Wealdstone. Free Yarl’s Wood defendants - victims of false imprisonment. 07786 517379;
 sady_campaign@yahoo.co.uk

SA national council

Saturday July 19, 12 noon to 5pm, United Services Club, Gough Street, Birmingham.

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.

New Interventions

Annual general meeting, Saturday July 19, 2pm to 5pm, Calthorpe Arms, Kings Cross, London (corner of Grays Inn Road and Calthorpe Street; nearest tube: Kings Cross). Speaker: George Binette, Committee to Defend Asylum-Seekers, on ‘Asylum-seekers and racism in Britain today’. Motions, comments, suggestions: drdavidspencer@aol.com

Echo and Narcissus

Fail Better Productions presents a play influenced by the theatre of Samuel Beckett. White Bear Theatre, 138 Kennington Park Road, London SE11. Tuesday-Saturday: 7.30pm; Sunday: 4pm. Ends Sunday July 13. £8 (£6 concessions). 020 7793 9193.

Eastern Region SA

Meeting to discuss European elections, Sunday August 3, 2pm to 4pm, Lutton Bush Centre, Harlow. Agenda: Practical tasks; feasibility of standing; preliminary short list; non-SA candidates; tasks and responsibilities for ERSa members. More information - 07956 605634; jimjepps@hotmail.com

Remember Larkin

Sixth annual James Larkin commemoration, Saturday September 6. Assemble 12 noon, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool. March to city centre rally.
 webmaster@jlrfb.com

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.

RAIL, MARITIME AND TRANSPORT

RMT - www.rmt.org.uk

Online derailment

Once again over the last week, Bob Crow of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union has been grabbing the headlines for his uncompromising opposition to New Labour. Indeed the ruling class and their Fleet Street hacks have reason to be concerned, when you consider that the RMT has a strategic importance way beyond what the union's membership of 60,000 suggests.

Logging onto the union's website, first impressions are dull and colourless. It is not that the site is shabby, but it does come over as sanitised. The home page consists of one screen, a few photographs, a couple of features, and 20 or so links. In other words, a fairly dull but professionally built site that conforms to a standardised corporate design template.

Starting with the features, 'What's new?' is a very brief statement advertising the July 15 'Save mail on rail' lobby of parliament and website. The next box is the latest press release (from June 16, three weeks out of date), dealing with the shambles that is the Strategic Rail Authority and forthrightly attacking "the privateers that have sucked out billions from the industry in profits".

Turning to the navigation column, 'Join the RMT' and 'RMT home' are self-explanatory. 'Tell your friends' enables you to send a standardised email to a number of addresses. The message itself is an uncontentious outline of who the RMT represents, what it does, and makes the usual inclusive noises around race, gender and sexuality (though curiously, the union is only spoken about in the third person). Leaving out the members-only 'Pay and conditions database', 'About the RMT' adds a little more flesh to the bare bones of the introductory email. Split into four parts, we are treated to a series of short statements providing vague outlines of union activities, structures and history. 'Services and benefits' focuses on the financial benefits accruing to a member (or their family) in the event of accidents, retirement and death; and 'Who to contact' provides a national breakdown of regional offices.

Likewise, the news section is split into four. 'Latest news' carries RMT press releases from the last year and appears to be regularly updated (the last item being entered on June 30). The 'Press archive' holds more items running back to January 2002. 'RMT news' and its archive carries 10 editions of the union's magazine. Unfortunately they are only

available in pdf at present.

Skipping the members-only services pages, the links grouped under 'Your workplace' are a genuinely useful addition to all concerned with the transport industry. The four specialist sections on rail, tube, road and shipping each contain dozens of press releases and union circulars on latest legislation, recognition battles, changing employment conditions, etc. It is to be regretted that the blank page greeting those who click on 'Newsletters' mars this crucial online resource. Nonetheless these pages deserve bookmarking and regular viewing.

'Legal issues' offer basic legal advice concerning employment tribunals, police powers and the services available from the union. 'Equality issues' take on a similar format, outlining the RMT's policies, how to deal with cases of discrimination, and frequently asked questions on regulations covering parental leave. These pages could do with updating, as there is a call for 'harassment representative' applications, but unfortunately the positions closed last September. 'Political campaigning' provides a general account of the RMT's historical relationship with Labour (but has yet to be updated to reflect its reduction of party funding). Once again, this is another area stuck in a time warp - the March 29 demo to repeal union laws is the most recent action advertised.

'Health and safety', 'Research', 'Education' and 'Pensions' contain further FAQs, policy proposals and detailed employment information. Though once more the tendency not to update rears its ugly head on one or two occasions. 'The constitution' pages have been static since January, but give a comprehensive run-down of all the RMT's elected positions. More interesting is a full online edition of the rule book, which covers all aspects of the union, from the general secretary to orphan benefit. Finally, we come to the 'useful links' section, which is very much a mixed bag. Tribune and Anti-Nazi League links sit uneasily with Bridge McFarland solicitors and "endorsed" credit card information.

The RMT website is a hit and miss affair. It is certainly an important transport-related resource for the wider labour movement, but the failure to update all its pages consistently amounts to an online derailment ●

Phil Hamilton

Where now for rail union?



Mick Rix (Aslef) and Bob Crow

As a young militant many years ago in the West India Docks I witnessed a crane driver pissing from his lofty cabin onto the head of a docks manager during a light shower of rain. It was one of those deeply satisfying moments when a worker vividly expresses the contempt held for a complete arsehole.

Last week's conference of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers had a whiff of that admirably contemptuous approach about it. But it was not just some bravura performance in the face of an enemy - it was the outpoured rage of living through a thousand Blairite-inflicted injuries, and not only injuries against members of the RMT. Here was represented the anger of a class.

Though the RMT conference has set upon a different course to those big union 'reclaim Labour' conferences, the anger, frustration and thirst for an alternative is a general phenomenon. The unifying theme that runs across the whole union movement is that everyone has had enough of New Labour.

In the conferences of the big general unions the anger and frustration of activists and members with New Labour was constrained within a critical status quo. The left scored some points but were outmanoeuvred with relative ease and left-talking leaders were able to steer

a course which saw Labour as the 'only credible' alternative.

The RMT conference was fiercer in its criticism and not prepared to be so constrained - and general secretary Bob Crow was less inclined to apply the brakes. Never a child of old Labour, he was not disposed to reclaim it. In any event he considers the campaign to reclaim the party to be a lost cause - a view shared by Mark Serwotka of the PCS, which is not affiliated to Labour.

At the conference the RMT voted to take the unprecedented step of allowing branches and regions to back candidates standing against New Labour. Branches and regions are also allowed to affiliate to other political parties. Bob Crow urged affiliation to the Scottish Socialist Party but also, much more controversially, closer links with Plaid Cymru and the Greens. Support for Ken Livingstone and George Galloway is also on the cards.

However, there were a number of seemingly contradictory positions taken. As well as democratising the political fund, the conference voted for the inclusion in the rule book of affiliation to Labour (previously it was policy, but not rule). At the same time Bob Crow successfully managed to restrict nominal affiliated numbers to 5,000. Funding to Labour was again cut - this time in half to £12,500. Two years ago it was £180,000. A motion

to remove the full-time RMT representative on the Labour Party NEC, Mick Cash, who frequently does not argue RMT policy, and replace him with someone who would, was opposed by Crow. It seems that a foot is being kept in the Labour Party door. This appears to be a tactic to maintain an organic link to the 'reclaim Labour' grouping whilst the struggle unfolds.

Opposing Labour candidates would put the RMT on a collision course with the party leadership. Expelling the RMT could inflame an already volatile situation; doing nothing could encourage other unions to follow the RMT lead. Already the broadcasting union, Bectu, is balloting for disaffiliation and, had the Fire Brigades Union not cancelled its conference, moves to break the link would have been on its agenda too. This is a difficult problem for Labour, but there exists the risk of a split in the movement. There is also an historic opportunity and how that opportunity is seized or lost could determine the shape of struggle for decades.

With RMT branches able to propose support for an assortment of left Labour, nationalist, working class and non-working class candidates and parties, we could see a disjointed free-for-all. This contrasts starkly with the collective political voice initiated by the forerunner of the RMT when it proposed the historic resolution that led to the establishment of the Labour Party a century ago.

However, it would be too easy to merely criticise what is the reaction of the RMT to real problems. The RMT decision neatly expresses the fact that the labour movement is at a crossroads. While others are holding back, the RMT is not willing to do so, but is unable to see a viable alternative route and makes do with hitting at New Labour with any stick that comes to hand. Voices at the conference (as in other union gatherings) demand the building of a socialist alternative - but how? On this the class needs clarity, but confusion and nostalgia reigns.

All this exposes a serious political weakness: the fragmentation, lack of strategic vision and consequent pick 'n' mix tactics of most of the left ●

Alan Stevens

Europe: meeting the challenge of continental unity

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



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REVIEW

Valuable but flawed

Alex Callinicos **An anti-capitalist manifesto**
Polity, 2003, pp180, £13.99

This smallish book by the Socialist Workers Party's chief international spokesperson is evidently aimed at bringing some sort of understanding of Marxism to the anti-capitalist movement.

Comrade Callinicos begins by saying that it was "conceived and written on the run"... between various summits and the counter-mobilisations that inevitably accompany them, as well as more general gatherings of the anti-capitalist milieu, the social forums, etc (pvii). In terms of explaining some basic concepts of Marxism, there is much that is positive in this book - it no doubt will gain a certain readership among those whose eyes have been opened to the iniquities of modern-day capitalism, and will add to the stock of useful literature for any further radicalisation of that diffuse movement.

Callinicos's own understanding of the significance of the anti-capitalist movement is quite subtle: "The distinctive character of the contemporary anti-capitalist movement reflects its emergence in an ideological climate defined by the apparent triumph of liberal capitalism and the eclipse of Marxism (p84) ...

"The anti-capitalist movement is undeniably a new movement. But, as it has developed, it has begun to confront some old problems - problems that have in one form or another faced every great movement for transformation over the past two centuries.

"In many respects, implicit in all these problems is the ancient dilemma of reform or revolution: is the aim of the movement gradually to humanise the system or completely to replace, and if the goal is the latter, can this be achieved without what Susan George rejects - the forcible overthrow of the main institutions of capitalist power?" (p86). Callinicos rightly makes quite clear his view that George's views are utopian, and thus to his credit comes down clearly on the side of "forcible overthrow".

On show in this pamphlet is the SWP's most leftwing face. It obviously sees anti-capitalism as a movement that has much in common with the historic origins of most of its leading cadre - something very much like the 1960s new left: a large protest movement that can sometimes, albeit episodically, move masses, and consisting in its activist layers to a very large extent of radical youth without much in the way of material bonds or ideological commitment to the organised working class. They are there to be won to the SWP's particular brand of socialism.

In seeking to provide the political framework for this, Callinicos elaborates at the end of the book what he himself subtitles as a "transitional programme" - something of a departure for an organisation whose founder, Tony Cliff, prided himself in rejecting programmes almost as a matter of 'principle'.

The programme elaborated by Callinicos, unfortunately, is rather a dog's dinner. It is comprised of a mixture of supportable and useful democratic and economic demands with some canards of the less radical sections of the anti-capitalist movement that really do not belong in a socialist programme, being at best irrelevant, at worst harmful.

Callinicos is so keen to appear as an orthodox Marxist that some insights that do not normally find their way into the SWP's more routine political activity get an airing here. Cliff's assertion of Soviet 'state capitalism' - that the cold war was really a manifestation of 'competition' between two different forms of capitalism - is somewhat contradicted by Callinicos's own potted rendition of capitalist and imperialist history.

He writes: "... in both world wars German imperialism sought to use its military might to carve out a zone in central and eastern Europe, in which it would gain privileged access to markets, resources and labour; the US used the second world war to ensure that the outcome would be an open world economy, in which American capital and goods could freely flow.

"After 1945 the patterns of competition diverged: the Soviet Union was a geopolitical and ideological rival to the US, but not, on the whole, an economic threat. The cold war gave Washington both the incentive and the means to unite the other major capitalist states - western Europe and Japan - under its political and military leadership. The long post-war boom saw Germany and Japan emerge as serious economic competitors to the US, but this conflict remained relatively muted politically, in large part because of Bonn's and Tokyo's dependence on the American military shield ..." (p58).

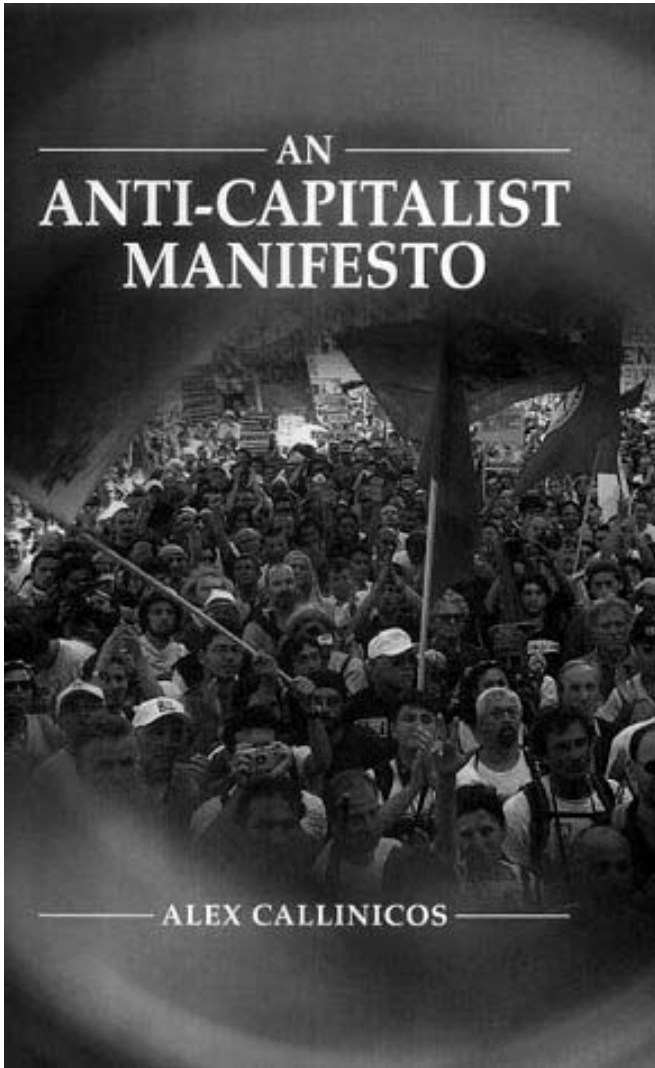
A fairly unexceptionable sketch, but hardly one that sits easily with Cliff's theory that the cold war represented competition between different forms of *capitalism*. It appears that increasingly Cliffite dogma is semi-expendable for the post-Soviet, post-Cliff SWP, as it seeks to 'build the revolutionary party', but somewhat without the demarcations he insisted upon, based on his particular theory of the Soviet Union as the "highest form" of (state) capitalism. Given that this whole question is retreating into the background - and even, as the passage quoted above from Callinicos illustrates, tending to be absorbed into a more generic Marxist understanding of the post-war history of imperialism (conceived, in a way, as a pre-history to the post-Soviet world of US imperialist hegemony and the self-contradictory globalisation of capital in which we now live) - it is legitimate to wonder *how* the SWP justifies its existence as a separate Marxist organisation.

Separate, that is, from the numerous other international and national sects that make up the left, that would seem in a world of competing versions of the sect paradigm to have at least as much claim to some sort of 'revolutionary' credentials as the post-Cliff SWP. Perhaps it is the lack of any coherent justification for its own existence - combined with the bureaucratic inertia that inevitably accompanies a largish and reasonably successful mono-ideological sect, whose cadre and material assets were assembled in a different historical period - that explains the SWP's recent gyrations from one extreme to the other. One gets a hint of this when Callinicos praises the United Secretariat of the Fourth International and even the ex-Stalinist Rifondazione Comunista for their flexible approach to 'anti-capitalism':

"While some Trotskyist tendencies reacted to the emergence of the anti-capitalist movement in a characteristically dogmatic and sectarian fashion, the two main international Trotskyist currents, the Fourth International (FI) and the International Socialist Tendency (IST) quickly recognised the potential of the movement. Activists of the FI's leading European organisation, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, performed an important role in Attac from the start; supporters of the FI from both Latin America and Europe have been heavily involved in the World Social Forums at Porto Alegre

"In Italy, however, a socialist version of anti-capitalism has been taken up by a much more substantial organisation, the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) ... In the summer of 2001, the PRC mobilised heavily for the Genoa protests and both participated in and benefited from the subsequent radicalisation ..." (pp84-5).

In its own way, this underlines the dilemma of the SWP. All these organisations have fundamentally different political histories and traditions from the SWP, yet the logic of this narrative is that very little separates these different forces in terms of their shared 'socialist anti-capitalism' - they really ought to be acting as one force, you could surmise. Surely they should come together in a pan-European socialist bloc or, if you like, a European Socialist Alliance - whose logic in turn points to a Europe-wide working class party: ultimately



Explaining basic concepts

a Communist Party of the European Union.

The SWP's partial, contradictory going along with this process, both in Britain and on the level of the European anti-capitalist movement, shows that the organisation at least partially recognises that sect politics is no longer remotely sufficient. Yet because of its whole sect tradition, the SWP is incapable of providing leadership to such a transitional bloc or pre-party formation, judging by the treachery the SWP has inflicted even on its supposed allies, the British co-thinkers of the French LCR, the International Socialist Group: for instance in Birmingham Socialist Alliance, where a supporter of *Resistance* (a monthly paper whose main backer is the ISG) was voted out of office as part of the SWP's purge of those in the Socialist Alliance who hold 'awkward views'.

Despite the evident fact that the SWP no longer has a clear conception of what the real lines of demarcation defining its sect actually are, nevertheless the moment a perceived opportunity for organisational advantage arises, the SWP snaps back into its worst sectarian mode with a form of perverse dynamism which I suppose you could compare to *rigor mortis*.

Contrary to the rather odd claims of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Paul Hampton in his review of this book, *An anti-capitalist manifesto* is not short of correct and useful explanations of why the working class is the central agent of revolutionary social change (*Solidarity* May 29). In a short book aimed at radical youth, who are in many cases alienated from the labour movement, this is unsurprising. What is a weakness, however, is the 'transitional programme' that Callinicos cooks up at the end. The role of an action programme, which is what this is presented as, should be to express things as they really are, to point a real way forward for the movement and for the working class, and to fight against false and pernicious notions that have the potential to cripple future class struggles.

... this book epitomises the contradictory character of the Socialist Workers Party today

Callinicos's programme contains a number of laudable points: the demand for the cancellation of third world debt (though the impact of this without the prior overthrow of capitalism should not be overestimated - new debts would be quickly generated); the introduction of a universal basic income; reduction of the working week; the defence of public services and the renationalisation of privatised industries; progressive taxation; the abolition of immigration controls and extension of citizenship rights; a programme to forestall environmental catastrophe (much of which is green-tinged and problematic, but nevertheless has a progressive core in terms of a rational preservation and restoration of the environment); dissolution of the military-industrial complex; defence of civil liberties. These points - obviously skeletal as presented here - are all basically supportable, and, if fought for and won by an international, working class-centred, anti-capitalist movement, would radically shift the global balance of class forces in the direction of labour from capital.

Good and progressive, as far as it goes. In Callinicos's words, "This list of demands is merely indicative. Others could come up with more extensive and imaginative programmes, and the one outlined here no doubt reflects to a significant extent the preoccupations of intellectuals and activists in the north" (p139).

More to the point than this, however, is the inclusion of two other demands in Callinicos's programme: the introduction of the Tobin tax on international currency transactions and the restoration of capital controls. These demands are panaceas of nationalist perversions of socialism and of the more utopian, programmatically rightwing and reformist sections of the anti-capitalist movement. If implemented, the Tobin tax might raise a bit more money for national governments to use to promote various reforms, but both demands are aimed in their fundamental thrust at rolling back capitalist globalisation - back to the old paradigm of 'national' capitalism. This opportunistic absorption of rightwing, national-reformist canards into its 'internationalist' programme is another example of the SWP's opportunism.

It is of a piece with its support for a 'no' vote in the projected referendum on the euro in Britain, which again embodies an adaptation to forms of 'working class' nationalism (that are tinged with class sentiment, to be sure). Incapable of elaborating a way to separate the class sentiment from the nationalist expression of it, the SWP ends up adopting elements of reformist nationalism in its own programme.

Also it should be noted that in its logic this kind of national reformism contradicts the thrust of the most progressive demands in Callinicos's 'transitional programme' - most notably the demand for the abolition of immigration controls. Reformist national governments implementing such policies as capital controls also tend to be hostile to the free movement of labour, as the history of British Labourism certainly shows.

All in all, this book epitomises the contradictory character of the SWP today: as an organisation that claims to represent 'the revolutionary party', yet which vacillates at different times between an abstract, revolutionary phraseology (even trying to outdo the anarchists in slogan-mongering and bravado, as with its 'F**k capitalism' bullshit - radicalism so daring it flinches from spelling out the word 'fuck') and opportunistic national reformism. All the time it seeks to keep the inherently incompatible political logic of these complementary deviations at bay by bureaucratic and sectarian means.

Thus, while this book contains some undeniably valuable arguments and explanations of Marxist concepts, overall the political perspective being advocated falls far short of what the anti-capitalist movement, and indeed the international labour movement, needs. That is, a perspective of open political struggle, freedom of criticism and unity in action, leading to the rebirth of a genuinely revolutionary democratic communism on an international scale •

Kit Robinson

MARXISM 2003

Marxism 2003 - the Socialist Workers Party annual seven-day school - could be a watershed, but you would not know it from either the programme or from the atmosphere surrounding it.

On one level, this is a fairly routine Marxism. Numbers are not significantly up or down on recent years. The audience remains broadly the same, perhaps with a few younger faces. The usual wide spread from ‘What is capitalism?’ to ‘Nazis and Sherpa porters in the Himalayas’. Similarly, the general format has been familiar, with top SWPers lined up to debate with those from left reformist backgrounds on topics where even a vulgarised version of Marxism scores heavily - Chris Nineham of the SWP took on Hilary Wainwright of *Red Pepper* on ‘Can we reclaim the state?’, for instance.

Yet between last year’s Marxism and this, SWP leaders have found themselves on the Stop the War Coalition platform looking out over two million protesters in Hyde Park. When that mass movement receded, it had not delivered appreciable gains for the revolutionary left, the SWP included. Why? Shouldn’t we be examining the reasons rather than congratulating ourselves on what was and is no more?

Now, in the aftermath of that huge social explosion, the SWP has embarked on an opportunist overture to secure an electoral alliance with a section of the mosque - “shibboleths” such as women’s and gay rights are now regarded as expendable in order to secure such a bloc. In order to facilitate this new turn, the SWP leadership has begun the process of clearing the decks of all those in the Socialist Alliance who do so much as question it.

Does everyone in the ‘party’ - at every level - simply *agree*? Are there not some rather important questions of theory and principle that need to be rigorously explored? But none of this is up for open discussion at Marxism - not one session was put aside for debate around the SA, for example, and there are no officially designated SA speakers.

Nor does Marxism reflect differing strands of thought within the SWP itself - very little *life* in fact (as always, it is only the non-SWPers lucky enough to be granted three minutes from the floor who raise the controversial questions). Surely more must be going on beneath the surface?

All of which simply underlines once again what a deeply unhealthy and undemocratic culture the SWP has.

Ian Mahoney

Rees lays it on the

JOHN REES'S OPENING REMARKS

We are in the midst of a rebirth of radical ideas, of the birth of huge global movement in resistance to globalisation and war. This is a chance. These are conditions which have not existed for the left since the late 1960s ... what we choose to do will make a difference to the future and the possibility of lasting social change

... we want to construct from this movement the largest possible group of people who will work with other people but at the same time will propagate this argument [the need for revolutionary change] ... Now you don’t have to choose between being broad and radical - you can be broad *and* radical. And this is what we want to do.

A movement isn’t a creation of the party - it is much greater and bigger than the party. But the party can assist the building and shaping of that movement. [If we do not do this] there will be no movement worth the name ... It has to reflect what the non-revolutionaries in the movement want to do, and that’s why the question of working in the broad movement is so critical to us now. This is the tactic of the united front. Yes, we want more revolutionaries, but they are only revolutionaries in any meaningful sense if they act with others ...

We brought a narrow band of the left [together in the Socialist Alliance]. But the Stop the War Coalition has brought in new forces ... The prospects of knitting together the left and the unions, ... many people in the muslim community and the existing forces in the SA will not be easy to achieve, but it does stand there now, waiting to happen... it is a pressing and urgent task in front of us... this is the spirit of the age.

STUART KING OF WORKERS POWER INTERVENED IN THE DEBATE

... What we can’t do is stitch together the Stop the War movement as an electoral alliance: there are real differences between us. The drive in Birmingham towards a Peace and Justice alliance covers over a number of key differences. Where do these organisations stand on gay and lesbian rights or secular education? When we stand in an election we put forward an alternative vision of society. These are important questions which cannot be covered over. We can’t

Marxism - the fringe

The Communist Party of Great Britain once again took the lead organising Marxism - the fringe. We hope to greatly expand and develop the event as a space where the contentious ideas, latent divisions and theoretical problems of the left can be honestly explored and debated. The culture of the Socialist Workers Party does not allow for that.

One young SWPer commented after the first meeting that he had learned more in that single gathering than months of SWP education had taught him. Pleasing in its way, but also worrying from the point of view of the cultural level of our movement.

Just under 40 comrades attended the meeting on ‘The failure of the Socialist Alliance and the need for a workers’ party’. On the platform were Steve Godward, until recently chair of Birmingham Socialist Alliance, Marcus Ström of the CPGB and SA executive, and Steve Freeman of the Revolutionary Democratic Group. The topic - the grave crisis facing the unity project after the SWP’s purge of the SA leadership in Birmingham and its clear orientation towards an unstable ‘peace and justice’ popular front.

Discussion from the floor centred on how the task of building a genuine workers’ party could be concretised and whether the Socialist Alliance ever had the capacity to be the basis of such a project. Comrade Stuart King of Workers Power suggested that organising amongst youth, the trade unions and agitating amongst the class was the task in the coming period. Mark Fischer of the CPGB bluntly



cover over the deeply held prejudice in many mosques against gay rights.

LINDSEY GERMAN COUNTERATTACKED FROM THE FLOOR, TO STORMY APPLAUSE FROM ASSEMBLED SWPERS

Comrades, I really think that in this debate and in the wider debate that we’re having there’s really two ways in which the left can go. Either the left can maintain itself in its sectarian isolation, nitpicking against everyone else, criticising people because they are not socialists (or not pure enough socialists), or we can throw ourselves into the movement, and out of that build a viable alternative revolutionary presence, and it is that second option that the SWP

is committed to.

I think we need to ask questions about some people in the SA. Stuart King says some muslims are anti-gay, and this is perfectly true, but it is not a question we pose to christians who join the Socialist Alliance, is it? Now I’m in favour of defending gay rights, but I am *not* prepared to have it as a shibboleth, [created by] people who ... won’t defend George Galloway, and who regard the state of Israel as somehow a viable presence, justified in occupying Palestinian territories.

I do think it’s a very serious question for the SA, but - let’s be honest - there are people in the SA who don’t support the STWC, who don’t support the muslim community in opposition to the war - that is the real dividing line on the left, as far as I’m concerned. And out of that we have to build an alliance which moves outwards and takes on serious forces, and doesn’t become a sectarian talking shop. About a quarter of the people at the recent SA conference did not want to leave the room and engage in the real world.

In the SWP we are *moving into the new left*. When you talk about the forums we’re having, the test for the SWP is, do we want to lie back in the ghetto with these people who don’t want to relate to the real world or are we prepared to link in with the new forces in this society in order to change things?

JOHN REES'S REPLY

... the anti war movement has created an absolutely new political condition on the left in this country and I do believe that out of the anti-war movement it is possible to build a bigger and broader alternative to New Labour than we have at the moment.

This is possible, but it is not automatic - it is an act of imagination. It’s popular to get up and say that we want unity. But anyone who has done this sort of work in the trade union movement or in any campaign knows that the precondition is that you do not let people who represent very little stand in your way. When the chair of the Socialist Alliance in Birmingham wrote in a leftwing paper that he did not wish to work with the muslim community or the Communist Party of Britain, that was time for the people who *did* to take on the leadership in that city.

As a result of this we had the largest meeting our movement has ever held in that city in a generation, and I was proud to be on that platform alongside George Galloway representing the SA.

That is the future: the rest is the past ●

Alan Fox

line Magical mystery tour

“Do not let people who represent very little stand in your way”

What kind of ‘new left’?

The most telling session at this year’s Marxism was ‘Revolutionaries and the left: results and prospects’, presented by John Rees. As our extracts illustrate (left), he outlined in pretty blunt terms its plans to junk the Socialist Alliance in its current form for an inherently unstable amalgam with a section of the mosque. This - perhaps along with the *Morning Star*’s decidedly lukewarm Communist Party of Britain - is what is presented as the “new left”, in contrast to the existing SA’s revolutionary groups: sects that now belong to the “past”.

Breathlessly asserting that conditions today have not been as ripe for the revolutionary left since the 1960s, comrade Rees declared that we “don’t have to choose between being broad and radical” any more - now we can be both.

In fact, the concept of “broad” is a relative one, as evidenced by the recent developments in Birmingham, alluded to with a degree of what seemed like *pride* by the comrade, where awkward independents and others where all replaced by SWP members or their allies. Unless you are gung-ho for the SWP’s latest turn, you are out - comrade Rees tells us that success follows when you “do not let people who represent very little stand in the way”.

So we have a “broad” alliance which might just about bring in a section of the mosque - a non-working class social formation - and an accompanying minimalist programme which discards “shibboleths” such as defending women’s and gay rights.

There is clearly deep unease amongst many SWPers about this reckless turn. No wonder the leadership tried to stop CPGB comrades handing out a leaflet condemning it (we were called “racists” and SWP cadre were placed in front of us, barking instructions not to read our leaflet).

Comrade Rees says that no person or group must “stand in the way” of the new policy. Neither should little matters like gay, lesbian and women’s rights, it seems. SWPers must be wondering, ‘What’s next?’ Where is the organisation going? ●

James Bull

On flicking through my Marxism 2003 programme last Saturday morning, I read the following: “What is the alternative to New Labour? George Galloway and John Rees.”

“Surely not,” I thought. It took my shocked mind a moment to refocus: the programme was advertising speakers, not suggesting an answer to the question. Looking back on the event, though, I think I probably read the programme right the first time.

Logan Hall at 3.45 on Saturday was packed. It seats nearly a thousand, and I could see very few empty places. For the SWP, this was clearly the ‘main event’. George and John took the platform to cheers which could not have been louder had they had Paul and Ringo with them.

Comrade Galloway spoke first, and with a polish so high it was difficult to look directly at him. The man is good. “Brothers, sisters, comrades and friends. William Gallacher, the last communist MP, used to begin speeches by addressing himself to ‘comrades and friends’, and add that by the time he’d finished speaking, he hoped there’d be no friends left. Well, that sometimes happens to me.”

With the timing of a comedian, he rode the laugh. “He meant, of course, that he hoped they’d all have become comrades and joined the party. Well, I have no party, but I have a voice.”

He used it to handsomely praise the Socialist Workers Party for the Marxism 2003 event - “this great festival of ideas” and their leading role in the Stop the War Coalition. The SWP, he announced, deserved the congratulations of everyone on the left for the unsectarian way in which it had all been done.

It was at this point that a slight feeling of unreality came over me. I had spent the morning distributing leaflets advertising a fringe meeting at which Steve Godward was to speak. Comrade Godward is a Socialist Alliance independent and FBU militant. Yet the unsectarian SWP removed him first from his post as SA vice-chair, and then as chair of the Birmingham SA. SWP comrades packed the meeting with newly signed recruits who loyally voted out every officer questioning the latest turn.

The story of the STWC was the same. Had the SWP taken a tighter grip they would have broken their fingers.

But, back in the present, Galloway was warming to his theme of warming to his new political partners. He and John (and they both used each other’s first names throughout) had been out speaking every night, addressing “meetings full of determination, full of hunger for what comes next”.

I can only imagine that these meetings remained hungry, because no clear answer to the question ‘What comes next?’ was forthcoming. Comrade Galloway rightly lambasted Blair’s recent attempts to paint himself as a ‘progressive’. He spoke in defence of the Fire Brigades Union, Labour affiliates for 75 years, striking on the strength of a 90% ballot in spite of threats by the state of bans and imposed settlements. He raised the plight of students reduced to poverty and debt through the system of loans. He attacked Blunkett for the appalling suggestion that immigrants should speak English, and not their own language, even in their own homes.

He ended on a Shakespearean quote, describing Blair:

“Now does he feel/His secret murders sticking on his hands/Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach/Those he commands move only in command/Nothing in love: now does he feel his title/Hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe/Upon a dwarfish thief.”

The politics were sound, the rhetoric excellent, but this was a rally speech and not a political discussion. As the hall gave him a standing ovation, I waited to see if comrade Rees would be any more forthcoming.

He wasn’t. He took comrade Galloway’s speech, which had little new content but wonderful style, and removed the style. The theme of mutual admiration, though, flowered: “That response you’ve given, George, has been mirrored at all the meetings we’ve spoken at - especially since he has been attacked and vilified by his own party. Few would have stuck to their positions with his guts and his courage.”

I began to feel embarrassed. John and George had found each other, and while this was undoubtedly a rare and beautiful thing to observe, was there yet to be any discussion of politics today?

It’s a measure of my mood that I grew nostalgic for the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty’s passionate distrust of comrade Galloway. It made no more sense than this did, but a quick AWL walkout would have broken the mood. I could see their comrade Martin Thomas a couple of rows in front of me, his head in his hands, and perhaps felt more sympathetic than I had previously.

Comrade Rees spoke of the new political orthodoxy: that the lives of working people should not be under their own control, but under that of the ‘markets’. He highlighted the message which New Labour echoed: if there is a failure, if you are unemployed, or sick and untreated, or poorly educated, the problem lies not in the market, but in you. You have not tried hard enough. You are not fit for the market.

There were hints, though, of what he thought we should do about it: “The STWC had the biggest demonstration, the second biggest demonstration, and the biggest demonstration in wartime. At the last general election, though, turnout was historically low. It is not that people don’t want an alternative, but they see none, and they are cynical about those who claim to speak in their name.”

He returned to the theme of the STWC as a basis of a political movement at the end of his speech: “Stop the War was not a party but a coalition, but from it we went to the muslims, the trade unions, the labour left: to those who understand the need to forge something broader than was done with the Socialist Alliance. This is our work, to go to our unions, our communities. Now is the time to construct a political alternative to New Labour. If not now, when? If not us, who?”

On these questions, he sat down: if not to a standing ovation, at least to warm support.

What little light this meeting shed on the plans of George and John was switched on during the summing up of the debate. Comrade Rees spoke first this time, addressing himself to the links between the trade unions and New Labour:

“The RMT didn’t disaffiliate from the Labour Party. They decided that they would support Labour *and* other organisations. That needs to be the model for other unions. We must have the humility to understand that we cannot yet replace the Labour Party, and socialist Labour MPs like Jeremy Corbyn and others should continue to get support. In this way, the trade unions can support the whole left, *inside and outside* Labour. Our message cannot be simply ‘Join the SWP’, or even ‘Join the SA’. We must build a larger project as an alternative to New Labour.”

Comrade Galloway’s summing up also addressed the question of the Labour Party: “The Labour Party has been 103 years in the making. It is a brand recognised in every home. It has the electoral allegiance of millions. It has the affiliation of millions of trade unionists, and millions of their funding. It has thousands of councillors, and hundreds of MPs. It has many fine comrades, some known, others not. No left movement is possible unless we win them.”

But he seemed genuinely unsure about any project to ‘reclaim’ Labour: “Can we reclaim the party? Maybe the answer is ‘no’, but we cannot approach it as if we *want* it to be ‘no’. This will place us in opposition to some Labour MPs who are amongst the finest socialists in the movement today.”

He ended the session by emphasising the urgency with which the political alternative to Labour must be built: “Do we reclaim Labour, or build a new alternative? Each project is an Everest. But time is short. We cannot take decades, or even years, to decide. We have months. There will be important events next year, where our alternative will be tested. There must be the most intense discussion amongst ourselves, in the most comradely manner. The agenda must be the fundamental changing of society. They may say that this is the ‘new American century’. We say that it will be the ‘new socialist century’” ●

Manny Neira

Shared future?

Some hearty mutual backslapping was also witnessed the following day, when comrade Galloway was joined on the platform by Lindsey German of the SWP and Andrew Murray, chair of the Stop the War Coalition and a member of the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain.

Comrade Murray stated: “I would like to pay tribute to the SWP for their outstanding part in the anti-war movement.” He concurred with *Socialist Worker* sellers whom he had heard shouting out their description of the SWP and its paper as being “the heart of the anti-war movement”, but wanted to take the anatomical analogy further: “They provided much of the brains too.” Comrade Murray poured scorn on “one comedian” who wants to build another anti-war movement without the SWP - that would be doing the imperialists’ work for them.

Continuing in the same vein, he stressed how “very fortunate” we were that comrade Galloway “didn’t buckle” in the face of smears and slanders: “He built the anti-war movement in every town and city.” Comrade Galloway himself, who again received enthusiastic standing ovations before and after his speech from the packed hall, said he wanted to “second Andrew’s motion to thank the SWP”.

Although the session was entitled ‘The future of the anti-war movement’, none of the three speakers addressed themselves seriously to that question. Comrade German, who remarked that she had “worked closely with Andrew despite ideological differences”, for the most part concentrated her fire - often wittily, it has to be said - in uncontroversial attacks on Bush and Blair.

Comrade Galloway made

some cutting and principled remarks in support of “the poor ordinary people who have taken up arms against a foreign invader” in Iraq, and demanded the immediate withdrawal of the troops - “not because we hate our armed forces. Quite the opposite: we don’t hate you. But we don’t want to see you killing or being killed.”

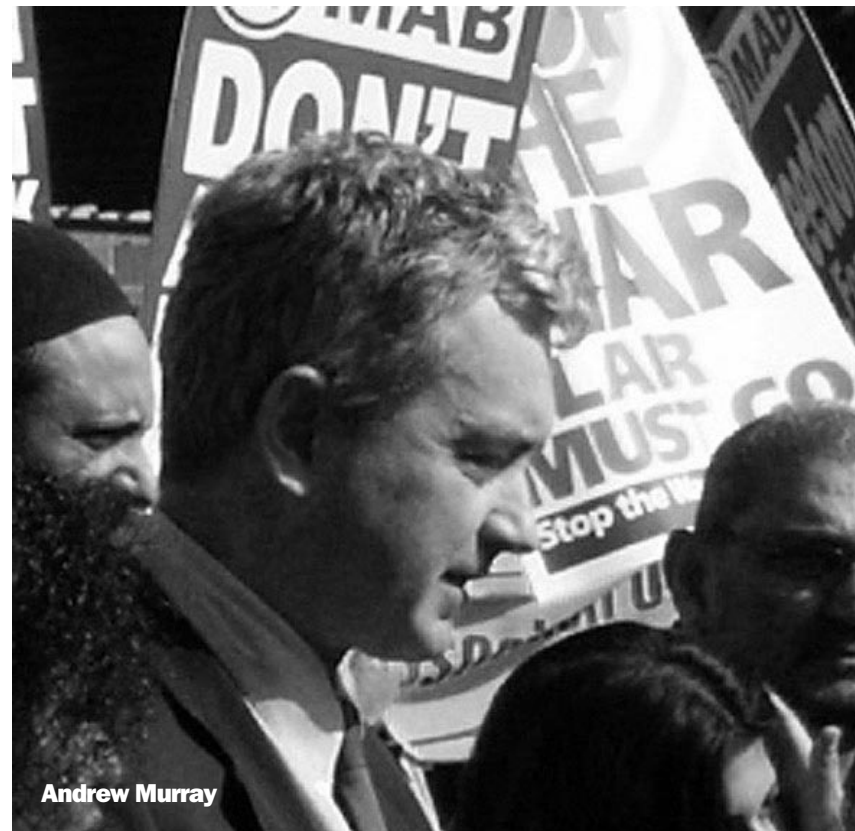
Only comrade Murray attempted to deal with some of the internal disputes experienced by the STWC. Having responded to the comedian and former SWP member, Mark Thomas, without actually naming him, he went on to deal with some of the criticisms coming from the left. For example, to declare ourselves not only against the war, but against islamic fundamentalism too would have “cut ourselves off from muslims” - as if more than a tiny minority of muslims in Britain have any time for the likes of Al Qa’eda.

He also defended the decision to allow Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy, who was “begging to be on a left platform”, to speak in Hyde Park and opposed - this time correctly - the kind of anti-war ‘direct action’ whose aim appeared to be to “piss off the most people” rather than actually hit Blair’s war plans, such as the proposal to block all London’s bridges on the Saturday before Christmas.

There is no doubt that all three are accomplished speakers - and well accustomed to sharing the same platform. However, apart from comrade Murray’s call for a “much deeper implantation of the anti-war movement in the trade unions”, there was no other reference to the subject they were supposed to be addressing.

What shape will their common efforts take in the future? ●

Peter Manson



Andrew Murray

NEW LABOUR LEFT



George Galloway: behind him the reformist icons of Keir Hardie, Clement Attlee and John Smith, in front of him the "new left majority"

molly cooper

Labour left gains in confidence

On July 5 the Labour left came together for a well attended conference called by the Socialist Campaign Group. **Mark Fischer** reports

Packed into the lower hall of Congress House, in central London the 500-strong audience heard an impressive range of trade union leaders and prominent Campaign Group MPs pledge themselves to "work together to reclaim the party", as Tony Woodley, newly elected general secretary of Transport and General Workers Union put it.

Convened under the slogan 'Save our party!', the meeting underlined that the reconstitution of the Labour left has gathering substantial momentum. Compared with the previous conference last July, this represented a big step forward. Not simply in terms of numbers, but hammering out a political strategy.

This year's event reflected a more cohesive approach to politically challenging the New Labour leadership. The election of a string of leftwingers to top trade union positions over recent years has massively reinforced the once beleaguered parliamentary Labour left and has moved things beyond the verbal criticism of Blairism. Of course, whether the battle plans of Labour's new left will result in

victory or not remains to be seen. What cannot be denied though is the growing confidence.

This found its expression in self-perception. Communication Workers Union leader Billy Hayes advocated burying the phrase "awkward squad" in favour of the "new left majority" - a suggestion that struck real resonance with delegates. While conference chair John McDonnell is no doubt correct that we are seeing the accumulated effect of growing disillusionment over a whole range of issues, the war has been the catalyst.

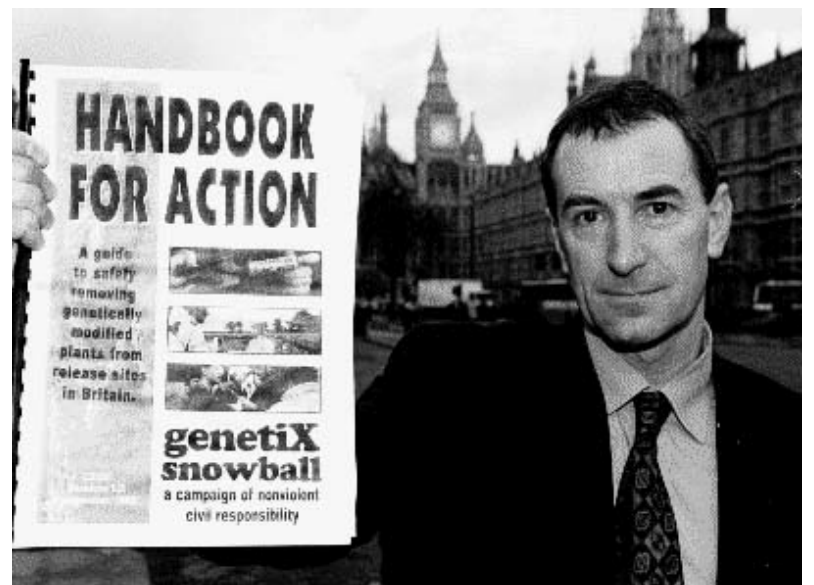
There was some talk of coordinated fringe meetings at the Labour Party conference in September and joint interventions. Other plans include for a national campaign for unions to affiliate to Constituency Labour Parties; forcing representatives to actually vote according to union policy; and a nationwide alternative policy road show.

True, many admitted that constituency organisation is at an historical low. The Labour Party has been "hollowed out" by Blairism, as one comrade said. Unlike the 1980s, the constituencies are trailing behind developments in the trade unions.

It is surely inevitable that the growth of the left in the trade unions will soon impact upon the Labour Party in a profound way - it does after all remain a bourgeois workers' party with organic links to the organised working class, not least via the trade unions. Things could go in a variety of directions. Perhaps we will witness the final, apocalyptic mother of all political battles that sees Tony Blair finally severing the party's links with the working class. On the other hand, perhaps the "new left majority" will sweep aside Blairism.

Then again, the renewed left-right battle in the Labour Party opens up the opportunity for revolutionaries to gain a hearing and the prospect of a totally different - genuinely proletarian - stripe of politics winning hearts and minds. The result is not a foregone conclusion, but the product of struggle ●

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EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS

Mark Fischer spoke to **Alan Simpson MP** just before he rushed off to another meeting

Has today been a good day for the Labour left?

This is a real sea change for the Labour Party and the wider labour movement.

The most significant development was that we had a *queue* of the major trade union leaders wanting to be on the platform and wanting to say two things. First, that they are passionately committed to the link between their union and the Labour Party. But at the same time they are equally clear that this stance implies *no* endorsement at all of the policies identified with New Labour.

Last time we spoke, you emphasised that the trade unions were the key to the fight against Blairism in the party. You must be encouraged by recent developments.

I am. We have spent the last year working with all of the major unions, trying to bring home the message that they are the key to what happens to the party in par-

liament and the country. Now, critically you have seen a *massive shift* in the position of the trade unions.

If people now stand on a New Labour ticket in any union leadership election, it is the kiss of death! You just can't win it - even if you are the only candidate! The union leaders are now picking up very different messages from their membership. In turn, the members are much more assertive about taking a more militant stand. They have begun to realise that many of the union representatives have been going to Labour's national executive and policy forums and voting *against* the agreed policies of those who sent them there.

So the democracy that people are talking about in the party is also a renewal of the democracy inside each of the respective unions. And that now provides us with a real, credible platform to make the party and the movement accountable. That is genuinely exciting ●

NEW LEFT MAJORITY

John McDonnell MP chaired the Congress House conference

Is this a step forward?

Easily. Five hundred delegates. The largest left Labour conference for perhaps 15 years. Trade union general secretaries from every major trade union. Everyone committed to one objective - reclaiming the Labour Party - and with a remarkable level of agreement on the key policies we need to be driving for. Today's conference is a major breakthrough.

Does the impetus come from the protests against the war?

This is more an organic development of the left in the party. There has been a coalition formed, issue by issue, of people who have realised they have a common interest - that is, developing a policy platform from the left that can also win the next general election. Another key element has been an interest in re-establishing democracy within the party.

The war was a mobilising factor for people who were disillusioned with the Labour Party but realised they had to get back in to fight back. New progressive forces also appeared that realised that, if things are going to be changed, you have to have power, and the way to that in this country is via the Labour Party. And there's been a coming together of industrial workers who have been involved in individual disputes and sections of the trade union movement who have been negotiating within their industries for progressive policies that the government has not delivered.

So it's wide-ranging coalition that no one can now ignore - certainly not the Labour leadership.

A key development surely is the attitude of the trade unions and sections of its leadership. Do you see more cohesion amongst the 'awkward squad'?

Tony Woodley of the Transport and General Workers Union described this as

a 'united front' in development. Billy Hayes from the Communications Workers Union talked of a "new left majority" - and that's the phrase we'll use in future because we *are* the majority and we *are* the left.

What organisational form will this take? The first thing is how we organise the policy debate we want to have. It's about linking up - for the first time for a long period - with socialist academics and specialists. So we are looking at how we conduct that policy debate - not within smoke-filled rooms, but through an extensive policy discussion with the movement itself.

That means going on the stump around the country in trade union and party branches, and bringing that to a head through some form of intervention at the Labour conference. That is beginning to happen already.

The second question - what organisational form do we need in order to reinvigorate the grassroots of the Labour Party? I think that is a matter of trade unions, Labour Party activists, rank and file socialists coming together constituency by constituency and ensuring the unions affiliate to that constituency party. Left members of the party must volunteer to serve as chairs and similar positions. In this way we can incrementally reclaim the party - again it's happening already.

I'll give you just one example. The one bastion of New Labour control was London. The regional board is now controlled by the left. It is faced with the dilemma of what happens in next year's mayoral elections with the controversy over Ken Livingstone. I think there is a majority position on that committee to restore Ken's membership.

So it is happening at the grassroots level. Our problem is that so many people have left the party as a result of the war. Officially, we are meant to be down



"New Labour bankrupt"

to 250,000 members; I doubt that we are much more than 150,000.

I think via conferences like today's, via left Labour MPs and trade union general secretaries standing up and saying, 'We're within the Labour Party, its ours and we are reclaiming it', we'll both attract people back and recruit new members as well.

How strong do the Blairites remain?

Theoretically, they are bankrupt. They

can't control policy debate any more and they can only control the party on the ground and the Parliamentary Labour Party from above. The Blairite apparatus hasn't won anyone's hearts and minds.

For example, in the Campaign Group we have about 40 members. But on a regular basis, there is a left, or an anti-New Labour, vote of anything between 60 and (on the war) 150. On hunting, for example, it was interesting to see the government withdraw its own legislation. On foundation hospitals, they're in exactly the same position - on the run, having to give concessions and at the end of the day they know their policy won't work anyway.

It's beginning to have its effect even within the PLP, which was the bastion of control for New Labour. I don't think there will be many candidates going into the next general election who'll have on their manifestos that they're New Labour, do you? Just as in trade unions at the moment, anyone who brands themselves New Labour loses the election.

So we are beginning to mobilise, negotiate and activate from a position of left strength ●

CONCRETE ACTION REQUIRED

Graham Bash is on the editorial board of *Labour Left Briefing*

For all the obvious presentational faults - like having an all-male platform, or no speakers from the floor in the plenary session - today's conference is a real development.

It reflects the growing alliance between the left of the constituencies and the parliamentary party and the emerging left in the trade unions, expressed through people like Woodley. What we've seen here is a sizeable increase from last year's conference, probably because of New Labour's weakening hold on the party.

We've had a lot of good speeches today - I say that without any cynicism. It's a start, but I do think it's got to be translated into a more organised resistance. The embryonic alliance we are seeing here today now has to be *organised*. People are sometimes afraid of organisation - a 'party within a party' and all those sorts of phrases leap to mind. But I don't see that there's any alternative. Unless we organise, we just remain at the level of speeches and words.

It is heartening that there seems to be a real commitment amongst the trade unions to fight for the basic trade union and Labour programme against New Labour and to call their representatives in the party to account. However, we need to organise not only at the trade union leadership, but at the rank and file level - in the trade unions and the party.

This is not easy, but it must be done. The organisational form of that I can't foresee, but we can't avoid the process. What we are talking about is building an alliance as broad as the party itself, excluding New Labour.

This will have the result either of saving the party - the preferable option - or building a new Labour Party, if the Blairites succeed in destroying it. And what we are talking about is rebuilding or saving a *Labour* party, not a narrow sect.

That is what this conference is about - saving it if possible, rebuilding it if necessary. This needs not only the embryonic alliances and programme discussions we are seeing here today. It needs the trade union to put the funds into building real structures and think tanks that can develop an alternative Labour programme.

At the same time, we shouldn't underestimate New Labour. Yes, its hold is diminishing. Yes, on a whole number of issues the people at today's conference speak for a majority for the first time for a generation. But New Labour still has an enormous organisational stronghold which can't be just wished away. We have to *organise* to reclaim the party - as John McDonnell said at the Labour Against the War conference, ward by ward, constituency by constituency and trade union by trade union. That needs cementing the embryonic alliances we have seen here with organisation and funds.

Today's conference is excellent, but it's a question of what we do from here.

For the moment, I am appreciating the words that are coming from Tony Woodley and others about the 'awkward squad' becoming more proactive in the fight. But we must ensure that this is actually put into practice. The way we do that is not to attack the people coming out with these statements, but to build at the base of the trade unions an organisation that will ensure that these words are carried out and these leaders are held to account - to encourage them to translate their fine words into concrete action ●

Galloway solidarity

Conference gave a standing ovation to witch-hunted Labour MP George Galloway. The comrade's eloquent and inspiring speech perhaps reflected a reaction to the more bullish political mood on the left of the party since he addressed the Labour Against the War conference in March. Then he raised the question, "Are there enough of us left inside the party? Have most of us already gone? ... Is there enough democratic space left in the party to reclaim it?"

Now Galloway concentrates

his fire on the hypocrisy of Blair's gang and their attacks on him and their contemptible role in the war. He told us that, had he known the Labour leadership were listening to an obscure Arab TV station, he might have thought twice about comparing Bush and Blair to wolves: "No wolf would ever have inflicted the savagery on the innocent and virtually defenceless people of Iraq ... This New Labour government ... is bringing the Labour Party into disrepute," he said to thunderous applause ●

A DIFFERENT ORDER

Maria Exall is a member of Communication Workers Union national executive committee and a supporter of *Solidarity*, paper of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

How do you see the meeting today?

Good. It's the fourth one they've had. The one last year was pretty good, but this one is of a different order. There are a lot more people here and obviously the involvement of the mainstream trade union leaders is the thing that makes all the difference.

Is that added to by the fact that Tony Woodley was talking about a new sense of cohesion amongst the 'awkward squad', the idea that they are going to organise action at the Labour conference, etc?

I think it's obvious we don't take everything they say at face value, but, yes, it is important to recognise that this does represent a change. In the context of the TGWU, Woodley is obvious a very different political animal to Morris. The Woodley stance plus the existence of the 'awkward squad' - with all the reservations it is still correct to have about them - demonstrates a recognition by the leaders that they need to represent their members, both industrially and in the field of politics.

Obviously, something has gone on to produce this shift at the top of the unions. An atomised rebellion by disillusioned union members in the ballot box ...

... and the collapse of the right in many unions ...

OK, but has this produced any stirrings amongst the Constituency Labour Parties?

That's yet to come. That's what's going to be interesting. That will be the



"Need for democracy"

proof of the real importance of this conference.

I was in the workshop on the anti-union laws and we noted that the trade union movement is formally committing itself to actually campaigning to repeal the anti-trade union laws. But the key issue is whether that will translate into different CLPs. Will trade union activists take it along to those CLPs? Will they think there is anything worthwhile there to take it along to?

I'm optimistic, actually. Things are quite different now. Any trade unionist who is political looks for a way to express their politics. I think the fact of Blairism's total dismissal of the union movement - either by not talking to them or by ignoring what they say - leads to some hard

thinking. These people still need political representation, whatever Blairism is saying and doing.

That's why I'm optimistic. This is a genuine attempt by people in the trade unions - from the bureaucracy and the rank and file - thinking about how that political representation is going to be remade.

But what about democracy in the party? Is there the space to do so in the structure of today's New Labour?

I thought George Galloway made a very good speech at the Labour Against the War conference. He asked the hard questions that needed answering. His comments were very appropriate.

Obviously, the Blairites have 'hollowed out' the party in all sorts of ways. They treat democracy in the party with contempt. But you can only control things organisationally up to a certain point. If something is real, it finds its own expression. I would argue that one of the problems is the union's lack of involvement within the party. They just don't see the point of CLPs. If they brought along their problems, the local MPs take no notice of them - so why bother?

But you don't know until you fight. In a few year's time, if everything is still blocked in Labour, then people will have to reassess. So far, a lot of the agitation on democracy in the party has been geared more to CLP than trade union activists. Now, because of the changes in the trade unions, there is a heightened awareness of democracy and the need for it. Given the political generation they

come from, there is more of a consensus amongst trade union leaders about the need for democracy in the party and CLPs, although they still have a different angle than many of us of course.

What about the left outside Labour? What should it be doing and saying about developments like today's conference?

The key thing for the future is going to be working class political representation. That is the criterion by which we judge developments or our tactics in relation to elections. So the idea that the Socialist Alliance should simply stand anywhere and everywhere that it can, in isolation from what's happening in the Labour Party, would be absurd. The RMT model of potentially supporting Plaid Cymru or the Greens is *not* the model of the future. We must have something class-based and the recognition that because of the ongoing connection between the Labour Party and the trade unions there is still the scope to fight in it.

The involvement of organised trade unionists, revolutionaries and the left in the Labour Party raises democratic questions, but they are not really separate to questions of democracy in the trade union movement itself. Part of the failure of the unions to find a voice in Labour is the fact that the unions themselves haven't been organised in a democratic way.

You cannot separate the general question of working class democracy and that of how the Labour Party and the trade unions work - they are interconnected ●

DEBATE

SUMMER
OFFENSIVEMini
crisis

The total for this year's Summer Offensive - the annual fund raising campaign of the Communist Party - crept up by only just over £350 this week. Numerous comrades contributed small amounts (many thanks to comrades RW and TS in particular for their £25 and £35 respectively). However, we are beginning see the possibility of a mini-crisis looming for our 2003 SO.

Now I am reassured by the knowledge that crises are not necessarily bad things. That people and political movements can move forward through and beyond them. The thing is, though, to fight to ensure that it is resolved positively.

So I am looking forward to a bumper postbag next week. We know there are many readers, supporters and sympathisers who fully intend to contribute to the fund, but have not quite got round to it yet. Now is the hour, comrades.

After a good start, we have faltered quite badly these last two weeks. I'm confident that comrades have much more to come, but I repeat my plea of last week - don't sit on it, comrades! Send it in today!

Our total is now £8,035 with only three weeks to go ●
Tina Becker

■ **Halfway social**
July 12, 7pm, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaaburgh 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).

The fight for party

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group identifies two camps in the workers' movement

The formation of the May 3 Committee provides the best way forward for those in the Socialist Alliance campaigning for a new workers' party. That was the positive message from the CPGB's July 5 fringe meeting at Marxism 2003. This is particularly important because the struggle for a new party is hotting up and the old Labourites are on the offensive.

This struggle takes many and varied forms. At the recent Alliance for Workers' Liberty summer school, for example, AWL comrades debated their attitude to the Labour Party and trade union political funds. Tom Rigby was one of the leading advocates of the old Labour perspective, with a very different line to the Revolutionary Democratic Group. It was nevertheless surprising, although quite logical, to hear that Tom had made a stinging attack on the RDG.

Sean Matgamna mentioned Tom's speech to me when I bumped into him in the coffee bar. He was concerned that I might have been offended by the rather contemptuous way Tom had spoken about us. I assured him that I had not been at the meeting and in any case a few insults were only to be expected.

Perhaps Tom was getting carried away with his own rhetoric when he compared the mighty Transport and General Workers Union, organising millions, to the tiny RDG. Should the AWL orientate towards the working class or mess about with poxy little groups? Posed in this way, the answer seems obvious. But is it?

It would be easy to dismiss Tom's attack as sectarian nonsense. But I am inclined to take the point seriously and analyse what is behind it. Perhaps Tom is making a more astute observation than is obvious at first sight. Surely the reference to the RDG and TGWU are metaphors for something else? We need to decode his message.

Those with an eye for history might see in this the argument between reform and revolution. In 1903 there was a debate in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party between Lenin and the economists, which focused on the distinction between the 'organisation of workers' and the 'organisation of revolutionaries'.

Lenin defended the 'organisation of revolutionaries' as the politics of the advanced section of the class. The economists on the other hand fell over themselves to praise trade 'organisations of workers'. But, as Lenin pointed out, trade unions represented the bourgeois consciousness of the average worker. Comparing the politics of the TGWU to those of the RDG is like comparing reformism to Marxism. We could just as well substitute the AWL or the CPGB for the RDG and the same point would be valid.

A more likely interpretation is that the TGWU and RDG are metaphors for the Labour Party and the Socialist Alliance. We must conclude that Tom wants to reorientate the AWL towards the Labour Party. Over the last few years the AWL has moved away from Labour towards working in the Socialist Alliance. More than anything else it is the Socialist Alliance that has brought the AWL and the RDG into a much closer political alignment.

At present the Labour left seems to be reviving and the Socialist Alliance is more divided than ever. The ousting of Steve Godward as chair of the Birmingham SA by the Socialist Workers Party has done considerable damage to the credibility of the alliance. For most of the SA 'independents' the actions of the SWP spell the end of the SA.

In these circumstances the line of least re-

sistance leads back to the Labour Party. Such a conclusion would be short-sighted. It fails to understand that the SA is not a party, nor is it the finished project. It is a process. The only way to understand the SA process is by seeing its evolution as a struggle between opposites.

The SA was fundamentally a left unity project. Originally the SA was a non-party organisation linking the Socialist Party into a red-green milieu of local activists. This was symbolised by the leading roles of Dave Nellist and Pete McLaren. It followed developments in Scotland, where the Scottish Socialist Alliance grew out of the unity built up in the struggle against the poll tax. It was neither a party nor had anybody in it any intention of turning it into one.

In England, the Socialist Alliance was very nearly eclipsed by Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, which began to unite militant sections of the left who wanted to fight New Labour and were not afraid to launch themselves as a party. However, the optimism generated by the SLP soon floundered on the rocks of 'Scargillism'. So the Socialist Alliance got a boost with the arrival of pro-party refugees from the SLP. At the same time the SWP was awakening to the necessity of an electoral challenge to Labour and joined the fray.

The creation of the SA programme *People before profit* in 2000 and the general election in 2001 was the high point of SA unity. But by the December 2001 conference, there had been a change. The exit of the Socialist Party was the first real setback for the unity project. Did the SP jump or was it pushed? Comrades have different views on that score. What was clear was that the SWP were not trying to keep it on board. Changes in the SA constitution also excluded supporting organisations from representation on the national council.

Less than a month later the Bedfordshire Socialist Alliance became a battleground between the SWP and a bloc of 'indies' and RDG supporters. What happened in Bedfordshire prefigures the current events in the Birmingham SA. The SWP recruited about 25 new members who turned up at their very first meeting determined to remove the three leading comrades who had set up the BSA. They voted out the BSA's democratic constitution and refused to adopt a new one. However, the indies and RDG would not work with the SWP without the safeguards of a democratic constitution.

To avoid a split, the BSA officers requested an urgent meeting with the SA executive. But the executive, represented by Liz Davis and Will McMahon, refused to meet the officers, took over the BSA and handed it to the SWP. Within a few months the SWP were trying to expel comrades Danny Thompson and Jane Clarke. The BSA has not met since January 2003.

One result of this struggle was the formation of the BSA Democratic and Republican Platform. This merely highlighted the fact that there was no national platform and therefore no alternative national perspective. With the exit of the SP, the other political groups were incorporated into the SA executive. Their position seemed secure and they were able to have a dialogue with the SWP. The problems in Bedfordshire were presented as a little local difficulty rather than a political issue facing us all.

However, the contradictions within the SA did not let such complacent thinking rest undisturbed. During 2002 we saw the resignation of Liz Davis and the alienation of such prominent indies as Mike Marqusee and Anna Chen. But more significantly was the

failure of the SA to intervene effectively in the firefighters' dispute and anti-war movement. The latter produced the largest mass mobilisation in our history. But beyond 'Stop the war' the SA had nothing significant to say about where the movement should go.

This year's annual SA conference on May 10 was a significant step forward. The SWP and its allies took over. Far from this being a setback, as some might think, it simply made everybody face reality. It marked the end of all illusions in the SA. Surely that is the beginning of real wisdom. The SWP majority were now officially in charge and we could no longer pretend anything else. For some the shock was too great. But for many of us it is the beginning of progress. The majority won the right to relaunch the SA as a broader alliance orientated towards those the SWP worked with in the Stop the War Coalition. But at the same time a much clearer minority proposed that the SA should begin campaigning for a workers' party within the socialist and trade union movement.

In this respect the creation of the May 3 Committee was the obverse of the SWP taking power. The May 3 Committee was named after a meeting held on that date, involving the AWL, CPGB, RDG, the Beds SA Democratic and Republican Platform and pro-party SA indies. This meeting produced a compos-

Apolitical

Last week's letters page opened with three misaimed contributions: the first from Cathy Nugent, editor of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's fortnightly newspaper, *Solidarity*, and trusted follower of the AWL's patriarch Sean Matgamna; another from some person named Martin Ohr, who from the content of his letter is evidently a sycophantic AWL member or supporter; and one from Steven Davies, a rather erratic individual who inhabits the Birmingham left, and at times hangs around the AWL (*Weekly Worker* July 3).

All these letters were replying to my article in the previous issue (*Weekly Worker* June 26), which drew out some lessons from the response of the AWL to criticism over the Middle East and the recent war against Iraq, mainly by me in the pages of this paper. Instead of responding politically, the AWL has simply gone off at the deep end with a tirade of feeble, apolitical abuse against this writer in particular.

Dealing with the least significant of these letters first, it is remarkable that Steven Davies is still raging against an article I wrote several months ago on the age-of-consent laws. He really has developed pretty authoritarian views on some questions. Eccentrically comrade Davies calls on the CPGB to expel me for holding positions that are, unfortunately for him, right in the CPGB mainstream. Over the last several years, even before I joined, the *Weekly Worker* has published quite a few similar articles to mine on these kinds of questions.

Indeed our draft programme, adopted well before my time in the organisation, calls, in its section on 'Youth', for "The abolition of age-of-consent laws. We recognise the right of individuals to enter into the sexual relations they choose, providing this does not conflict with the rights of others. Alternative legislation to protect children from sexual abuse." Davies's absurd call for the 'no-platforming' of people with these views is therefore logically a call for the no-platforming of the CPGB itself - rather hypo-

In Scotland, constitutional change has let workers have a different set of political options reflected in the growing support for the Scottish Socialist Party

and May 3

ite motion in favour of campaigning for a workers’ party, which was supported by James White and SA members in Merseyside, whose motions were incorporated into the composite.

At the SA conference the composite secured about a third of the votes and established itself as the main alternative to the majority perspective carried by the bloc of the SWP, ISG and pro-SWP indies. Since then we have made some progress in putting the May 3 Committee on a more formal basis with the intention of convening a conference later in the year. To understand the significance of the May 3 Committee we need to view it not only as a product of the evolving struggle in the Socialist Alliance, but as a product of a wider struggle in the working class movement.

Let us return to the politics of Tom Rigby’s favourite organisation. Last week Tony Woodley, general secretary of the TGWU, one of the new left-leaning trade union leaders, was pleading with his members to remain loyal to Labour and not to “walk away”. He warned that New Labour’s days were numbered. Noting the bitter disappointment within the working class, he sought to persuade disillusioned Labour activists to stay and fight for “the soul of the party” (*Financial Times* July 3). Was this the same speech that Tom made at the AWL summer school?

The chair of the Labour Party, Ian McCartney, was on hand to point out that unless the trade unions accepted Labour’s anti-union laws, privatisation, flexible labour markets and fat-cat pay then the Tories would be back. For

McCartney, the two-party system meant that workers had only one choice. The trade union movement must back New Labour or face disaster. But the two-party system is already breaking down. In Scotland, constitutional change has let workers have a different set of political options reflected in the growing support for the Scottish Socialist Party. This is why workers in England should not simply wait for political change, but should actively mobilise to break the constitutional mould of two-party Toryism.

Compare this with the more militant approach taken by the RMT delegates at their annual conference in Glasgow. General secretary Bob Crow branded the cabinet “war criminals” who had “betrayed” workers. Delegates launched a series of bitter attacks against the government over its treatment of workers. Disaffiliation from Labour is now on the cards. RMT branches will be able to get permission to support other political organisations. Bob Crow made it clear that this could mean support for the SSP, Ken Livingstone or even Plaid Cymru. But the major problem for the RMT is the lack of a workers’ party they could support in England and Wales.

There is now a major divide within the working class movement. On one side are those who oppose creating and building a new workers’ party. This includes the TGWU, Unison, the Campaign Group of MPs, the Communist Party of Britain and the SWP (and its majority in the Socialist Alliance) and of course Tom Rigby. Either in theory or practice this bloc is opposed to independent work-

ing class political representation. By ‘independent’ we mean with a programme and organisation independent from the capitalist class. The Labour government supports and is supported by the capitalist class. The party that sustains it cannot and does not provide independent representation for the working class movement.

On the opposite side are the RMT, the SSP, the Socialist Party, and those the SA minority represented in the May 3 Committee. It would be easy to blame the SWP for acting as a block on the development of the SA. Their policies have and are continuing to undermine the possibility of uniting the left in an anti-New Labour workers’ party. However, we must examine and criticise our own policies. Sectarianism is still a major factor weakening and undermining those who are fighting for a workers’ party.

The example of Workers Power refusing even to discuss a composite motion with the May 3 groups can only assist anti-partyism and the SWP. The failure of the AWL, CPGB and RDG to unite around a common revolutionary platform has been very divisive. At times relations between these groups have become quite sectarian. The question of whether the Socialist Party’s exit from the SA was a sectarian move will be tested when we see if they are prepared to work with us.

The real point is that the SWP can only damage us in so far as we fail to overcome our own sectarianism and unite. We must concentrate much more on overcoming our own sectarian weakness and not simply make the SWP the scapegoat for our own failures ●

abuse or political polemics

critical for someone who regularly avails himself of our letters page.

At least Davies’s letter contains some politics. Which is more than you can say for Cathy Nugent’s offering. It really is pretty odd to read an apolitical hate letter, complete with crude epithets, signed by the editor of a leftwing publication. One wonders how many more missives of this type are sent out by the AWL in an official capacity. However, taken in conjunction with the letter from Martin Ohr, it really does offer an opportunity to further illustrate to our readers the unfortunate decline in politics - and thereby in political honesty, integrity and indeed coherence - that is affecting this organisation, which appears to be approaching a crisis of some sort.

Look at the string of epithets that have flowed from the Nugent-Matgamna pen over the last few weeks. I have been characterised as a “nutcase”, a “nut”, a “lunatic”, a “fuckwit” - and now a “moron” as well. These allegations of mental ill-health are not used in order to give spice to a political argument, but as a *substitute* for a political argument. Ian Donovan is a “moron”, so there is no need to answer what he has to say and those who publish his writings him should stop doing so. Pathetic.

Frankly, it is laughable to see the comrade editor play the ‘feminist’ card in her defence. Another apolitical excuse for running away from an honest exchange. It is obvious to anyone familiar with the AWL that the real *political* author of her June 12 *Solidarity* piece was her boss, Sean Matgamna. The letter of Martin Ohr well illustrates that gender has nothing to do with it: cultists, people willing to shamelessly lie and hurl abuse in deference to a political *caudillo* like Sean Matgamna, can be of either sex.

Among a series of claims, comrade Ohr says of my offending article, ‘Descent into cultism’ (June 26), that after reading it, “It took me only a few seconds to find ample evidence to refute Donovan’s claim that ‘the AWL has issued not one word of criticism or analysis of this ultra-reactionary phenom-

enon’ in relation to the Israeli state’s persecution of Palestinians” (Letters, July 3). But though it only took him seconds to “refute it” it is clear that he had not spent enough time reading the original article. The “phenomenon” I was discussing was ‘christian-Zionism’ in the United States, not the Palestinian question. For example, I touched upon the christian-Zionist use of the book of Revelations and the advocacy of mass expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied territories by Dick Armeey, the Republican leader in the House of Representatives. In conclusion I criticised the “vicarious-Zionist AWL” because it 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.”

The AWL has indeed not analysed this question. In other words, Ohr’s ‘refutation’ amounts to nothing. The same goes for his claim that I directly equate the AWL with the British National Party, MI5, the Ku Klux Klan, the Workers Revolutionary Party, pro-Blair witch-hunters, etc. Of course, I did no such thing. What I did was to criticise the AWL (and Steve Davies) and show what smelly company they keep on certain key issues. For example, stating the simple truth that the AWL went along with MI5’s witch-hunt of Scargill over ‘Libyan gold’ in 1992, as it does today the witch-hunt of George Galloway, does not mean I think the AWL is an MI5 front.

The real reason for this torrent of lies and abuse is of course the political crisis of the AWL. As the CPGB’s main writer on the Middle East over the last period of Israel/Palestine turmoil and Iraq war, I have of necessity had to polemicise against the AWL, as the political consequences of their ‘little bit Zionist’, islamophobic and Arabophobic deviations from the consistent democracy for all peoples it claims to uphold have become more and more obvious. The AWL has a real problem with this: its normal response to criticism of its views on the Middle East from the economic left is to snap back that the critic is a ‘left anti-semite’, utilising the fact that

many such critics tend to deny Israeli national rights on left-moralistic grounds.

Their problem is that my politics and record make such a retort from the AWL simply untenable; I am publicly known and on record to have been since 1980 a two-nationist on the Israel-Palestine question (the AWL only publicly declared itself such around 1987) and therefore a defender of national rights for both Israelis and Palestinians.

In an earlier period I was in favour of raising demands for a binational workers’ state of Israel/Palestine as part of a regional socialist federation; now as a CPGB member I have a more transitional, democratic approach, using the concrete demand for two equal states as a bridge to such a binational, working class solution. Since the AWL leaders cannot credibly use the ‘left anti-semite’ slur against me, they are reduced to crude insult to fend off these criticisms: “fuckwit”, “moron”, “nutcase”, “lunatic” ... Needless to say, this also casts considerable light on the real nature of the ‘left anti-semite’ smear the AWL regularly hurls at other leftists; for all its somewhat ideological appearance, fundamentally it is just a term of abuse; a pseudo-political version of “moron”, “fuckwit”, etc.

If I was an AWL member with any aspirations beyond being an errand-boy for Matgamna, I would be acutely embarrassed to read this latest rubbish - particularly Cathy Nugent’s.

In any case, judging by the implicitly harsh but at present inchoate and mildly expressed leftwing criticisms of the Matgamna leadership’s pro-imperialist politics - such as its ‘critical support’ for Bush’s Middle East ‘road map’ and on the Iraq war, now being raised publicly by such prominent AWL members as Mark Osborn and Mark Sandell - it seems that a significant layer of the AWL’s cadre are indeed likely to be so embarrassed.

The political crisis of Matgamnaism looks like it is only just beginning ●

Ian Donovan

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.**

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Right to elect under attack

Price of democracy

Democracy may be worth dying for, but apparently it is not worth £20 an hour. That at least is the view of Richard Leese, Labour leader of Manchester City Council.

His comments followed the election of fellow councillor Liaquat Ali by the people of the Longsight district. Ali is a Liberal Democrat, who narrowly took the seat from its Labour incumbent. He is also a Pakistani refugee who speaks little English: the £20 an hour in question is the cost of his interpreter.

Councillor Leese is furious: "What some in Longsight are saying is they have a councillor unable to represent them in council because of his English and the

**Liaquat Ali:
elected**



council will have to pick up the bill for translation. It's about competency and cost."

Would Leese have objected to the election of a deaf candidate, who might have required similar help? Does he object to the cost of producing government papers in braille for blind home secretary David Blunkett? "There is an easy difference. Mr Blunkett can go to as many classes as he wants, but he won't learn to see. Mr Ali could have learnt English before putting himself up as a candidate. It's an issue of cost. The Lib Dems presumably knew about this before they picked him."

Leese clearly regards Ali's failure to become fluent in English as a sign of moral laxity. Blunkett is blind, but he cannot help it. Ali could have studied. He is appalled that the local Liberal Democrats so ignored this lack of effort as to select Ali as a candidate.

He is not alone. *The Sun* was outraged: was there "no trick" the Liberal Democrats would not pull to get votes? The fact remains that the "trick" in question was to stand a candidate whom the majority wished to vote for. If the local people had agreed that Ali's lack of English made him an unsuitable candidate, they could simply have refused to vote him in. They did vote for him, and ultimately it is their decision, and their right to make it, that the Manchester Labour Party and the tabloid press are challenging: and that all communists must defend.

Where, otherwise, do such arguments lead? Longsight is home to many who speak English as a second language, if at all. Will the council not bear the cost of translators to hear these people speak, or communicate its decisions to them? Is good English to become a condition for the granting for that most basic of all human rights: democracy? ●

Manny Neira



Police fight British-Asian youth: communists favour assimilation through struggle, not English tests

The Sun says ...

The Sun is clearly appalled at the financial strain interpreters are placing upon the state. To avoid aggravating the problem, therefore, the *Weekly Worker* offers the following translation of their editorial into English entirely free and without charge to the taxpayer.

Just when you thought the asylum situation couldn't get any crazier ...

The British government sometimes allows residency to those who have suffered political oppression or torture abroad, often at the hands of governments it has supported itself, and despite the fact many of them are not white. Some 'cheats' even abuse this system because all they are escaping is grinding poverty and despair. Or perhaps their 'crime' is that they want a better life. As if that were not bad enough ...

Along comes Liaquat Ali, from Pakistan, a new Liberal Democrat councillor for an area of Manchester where immigrants live.

Along comes Liaquat Ali, who is not white, and has been elected as a councillor in an area of Manchester where lots of people aren't white, and have cynically

escaped the suffering they have a moral duty to endure abroad.

He can't read, write or speak English - He is linguistically equipped to write for The Sun -

- and he's been waiting five years for his asylum-seeking case to be decided. - and the home office have made his life a misery of uncertainty by prevaricating over the application of their insulting and inhuman asylum criteria for five years: a delay which he is clearly responsible for himself.

We salute anyone who's public-spirited enough to serve their fellow citizens.

We salute anyone who's white, likely to be elected into power, and avoids interfering in newspaper and broadcasting monopolies.

But there's something wrong when a councillor needs an interpreter at his side.

But there's something wrong when a man who needs an interpreter is allowed to represent a community merely because the majority of them voted for him.

Especially when the taxpayers have to foot the £20 an hour bill.

Especially when ... well, consider this.

During the 90s, Newscorp Investments (which owns *The Sun*) made a little over £1 billion in UK profits, but despite the 30% corporation tax rate, used clever accountancy and political might to avoid making any net tax payment at all. If the cost of this translator were carefully saved, this £300 million loss could be recouped in less than 60,000 years. *It just shows there's no trick the Lib Dems won't pull to get votes.*

It just shows there's no brazen, illogical, racist, anti-democratic, insulting and inhuman garbage *The Sun* won't print ●

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