



weekly **worker**

**Elisabeth Gaultier:
Genoa ESF meeting and
SWP's domineering antics**

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Towards a new workers' party

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SWP takes Socialist Alliance to brink of disaster

**Marcus Ström reports
from the SA's national
council - see p5**



Secularism is no ‘shibboleth’ either

The National Union of Teachers is taking legal action against government regulations implementing a European Union directive on the basis that they violate EU law and the human rights act. Apparently the EU permits employers with a “religious ethos” to discriminate on grounds of religion or sexual orientation if there is a “genuine and determining occupational requirement, provided that the objective is legitimate and the requirement is proportionate”. An obvious example being the faith schools - Church of England, catholic, jewish and muslim - so admired and encouraged by Tony Blair.

Doug McAvoy, NUT general secretary, is quoted, saying: “We cannot accept that committed teachers should be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. Governing bodies should not be given dispensation to sack good teachers simply on the grounds of their sexual orientation” (*The Guardian* July 22).

Quite right. There can be no truck with sexism and homophobia. But communists go further. Faith schools should have no right to discriminate against anyone because there should be no faith schools. The draft programme of the CPGB insists: “No religious schools, no private schools”.

A short aside. Unlike the SWP the CPGB regards programme as a matter of the greatest importance. That is why our carefully crafted programme has been exhaustively debated, democratically agreed and is militantly defended against any attempt to compromise or water it down. Of course, the SWP has an informal, eclectic, orderless and thoroughly bureaucratic programme - Tony Cliff’s insubstantial and pulverised dogma of the Soviet Union as “bureaucratic state capitalism” plus the latest central committee zig or zag.

The SWP’s programme is the result of convenience, not democratic process. Hence the leadership can perform complete summersaults without fearing that critical minorities will get the membership to assess the latest about-turn in light of the programme. Principles can therefore be picked up and abandoned at will. They are nothing; building the SWP everything. From Cliff to post-Cliff that is the advantage of ‘programmelessness’.

Back to the main subject. Unfortunately one often encounters - including, amazingly, on the left - the ignorant notion that secularism is anti-religious. An elementary mistake.

Be it Britain, Ireland, the USA, Israel, Iran or Saudi Arabia - yes, we communists favour the complete separation of religion from the state. There should neither be the domination of religion by the state nor the domination of the state by religion. Necessarily it follows that the privileged position of one particular cult - in schools, state institutions and the legal system - be ended. So the suggestion that Britain’s arcane blasphemy laws be extended to include islam is for us a complete anathema. There must be no censorship in order to safeguard religion.

Not that we in any way excuse or

seek to emulate the anti-religious nightmare perpetrated in the name of communism by the Stalinite states. At the most extreme Albania under Enver Hoxha declared itself to be officially atheist. In practice that meant a vicious persecution of believers in a manner eerily reminiscent of Thom  s de Torquemada’s notorious inquisition in 15th century Spain.

Naturally parents ought to be able to take their children to religious ceremonies and celebrations. The same goes for Sunday schools and their various equivalents. Such matters are a private concern and the state is obliged not to interfere. What is objectionable is using the state’s education system as a means to promulgate and normalise religious superstitions and customs amongst children. There should be no prayers, no hymns, no sermons, no nativity plays - and no multiculturalist equal-signs between Easter, Diwali, Passover and Ramadan. In other words, keep all religions out of schools.

Religion, like art and music, should be studied in schools as an academic subject. World history has after all been visibly shaped and coloured by religious ideas and billions still believe. A rounded materialist analysis of religion reveals many profound truths about present and past social realities, movements and contradictions. God did not make humanity. On the contrary gods are fashioned in the image of humanity. The earthly ideal is symbolically projected upwards into the heavens by scribes and redactors.

We say people should be allowed to worship whatever god, spirit or demon they wish and practise their religion as they see fit - with the sole proviso that it does not harm others. Equally people should have the right to deviate from orthodox doctrines and established practices without any legal sanctions being incurred. So, from the biggest and most prominent church to the smallest and most obscure sect, there must be freedom of religious observance. By the same measure there must be freedom for the likes of ourselves to deny the existence of all gods and propagate atheism.

Those secular principles of the separation of religion and state and mutual toleration are nowadays considered perfectly acceptable by most religious people. Nevertheless, despite that, secularism and faith schools are surprisingly controversial issues amongst revolutionary socialists and communists in the United Kingdom. Suffice to say, opportunism - and that is what it is - increasingly considers such principles inconvenient “shibboleths”. Just like women’s and gay rights, it seems.

The last Scottish Socialist Party conference voted down an unexpected motion demanding the abolition of all faith schools. Alan McCombes - *Scottish Socialist Voice* editor and the brains behind Tommy Sheridan - argued that such a commitment would unleash a reactionary storm. He might be right. Scotland, including its working class, is blighted by an oft denied and frequently overlooked religious fault line.

The catholic church, in particular,

would almost certainly urge its flock to join a fanatical crusade against secularism, as it does over abortion. In this case, though, confrontation with reactionary priests has to be avoided at all costs. So comrade McCombes urged an alternative strategy. The soft course of multiculturalist compromise. Instead of secularism he proffered religious equality. In effect every religion should be allowed to do their own thing ... no challenge here to the existence of faith schools and in effect condoning the pollution of life in state schools with all manner of religious festivals and overtones. Comrade McCombes’s rotten backsliding won the day with the help of the Socialist Worker platform. Particular concern was expressed by SW platform speakers for the sensibilities of the imagined ‘muslim community’.

Now there is Birmingham. John Rees - the *primus inter pares* of the Socialist Workers Party - has been promoting the idea of ‘Peace and Justice’ candidates, run in cooperation with Birmingham’s central mosque. Salma Yaqoob - a practising muslim and chair of the local Stop the War Coalition - has been floated as a possible ‘star’ candidate. Shamefully Alan Thornett of the International Socialist Group has alibied the SWP’s popular front line and purge of Birmingham SA’s awkward squad, including the removal of victimised firefighter Steve Godward.

The Socialist Alliance has been bluntly informed by representatives of the SWP majority that Peace and Justice candidates could not stand on a programme which includes a women’s right to choose an abortion and homosexual equality. Such “shibboleths” are totally unacceptable to the mosque and therefore must go. Suffice to say, the SA’s 2001 general election manifesto explicitly ruled out any “compromise” in our fight against sexism and homophobia. There has to be “equal rights” for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in all legal matters. Women must have equal pay and the “right to choose” (*People before profit* London 2000, p16).

One must expect that secularism and the demand for an accompanying secular education system will be treated in the same cavalier fashion. Opportunism has a poisonous logic.

People before profit committed the SA to the disestablishment of the Church of England and the “complete separation of church and state, not least to ensure that we all enjoy the freedom to worship, or not, as we choose” (*ibid* p17). Obviously in this context ‘church’ and ‘mosque’ mean exactly the same thing. Our manifesto also contained a demand for ending the “charitable status and tax privileges” for all private schools (*ibid* p9). Note - most muslim schools are private and financed by exploiting the charity laws.

Let the SWP opportunists follow their easy road of compromise and abandoning principle for the sake of short-term advantage - it is a well-trodden road to disaster. Meanwhile communists will intransigently defend our movement’s principles - not least secularism, women’s rights and homosexual equality ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

Walking out

At a meeting of about 15 members of Brighton and Hove Socialist Alliance, myself and Brian Avey, a shop steward on the buses, presented our motion condemning the Socialist Workers Party for their outrageous behaviour in Birmingham SA and demanding that that AGM be rerun and Steve Godward be reinstated as vice-chair of the SA nationally.

The motion was defeated by nine to four, though it wasn’t due to SWP packing so much as the International Socialist Group taking fright at the prospect of winning.

Another motion, which was presented by two ISG members (the SWP took a back seat and had only three members present, one of whom was wringing his hands!), repeated all the old canards of the SWP.

What happened in Birmingham was democratic, because everyone’s membership had been approved by the executive members present (no surprise!). They adopted the SWP line that no one has a life tenancy on positions in the SA (as if this was an issue).

The motion deliberately distorted our opposition to links with *religious organisations and their leaders* and turned this into hostility to muslims instead, stating that “singling out the beliefs of muslims for special criticism can only bolster the reactionary agenda of the warmongers and racists, and should be rejected by all socialists”. Well, yes, but we are not attacking the beliefs of muslims any more than we attack the beliefs of any religion (which I hope we do!).

The only nod in our direction was a lukewarm acceptance that “in this context the premeditated packing of SA meetings with members of affiliated organisations who had not previously been members of the SA damages the spirit in which the SA was set up and fosters an atmosphere of anger and frustration”.

This was about as far as the ISG’s lapdogs were prepared to go in criticising the behaviour of the SWP. They went along with another lie - viz, that Steve Godward and the Birmingham comrades had opposed the ‘unity’ motion at the national conference, when of course what they had opposed was the *interpretation* of that motion.

The meeting was deeply unhappy at what had happened. About three people abstained, including the ISG chair. The ISG wriggled with embarrassment about the fact that gay and women rights have been dumped by the SWP in their electoral pacts with the mosque. Andy Richards, the seconder, loudly proclaimed that he would not accept the removal of support for gays and women from any manifesto, but nonetheless supported the SWP who are doing precisely that.

But then Andy, only a couple of weeks before, had expressed to both myself and Brian his unhappiness at what the SWP had done. Yet at the meeting he seconded a motion which had been virtually written by the SWP (it was almost identical to the one they moved at the national council).

I am reminded of the old Roman saying that those whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad. What has happened in the Socialist Alliance is extremely sad.

Despite their protestations, the SWP has deliberately torn up any vestige of democracy in the SA, removing anyone who disagrees with them in the slightest. Our task is to regroup with those who are not disillusioned, in order that in England - just as in Wales, it would appear, and Scotland - a workers’ party

can be built.

When the vote came, both Brian and myself, and Dave Newland, one of the three SA candidates in the last elections and a former Labour councillor, resigned and walked out.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Staying in

The majority of the members of Stockport Socialist Alliance - certainly all of the active members - agree with those comrades who believe that the current political tactic should be to stay in the SA and fight the bureaucratic centralism of the SWP.

At our recent meeting it was unanimously agreed that it was not acceptable for the editor of the local SA newsletter, *Left Turn*, to present the strategy of SWP leaders, primarily John Rees, for a peace and justice party as a non-political question of simply getting stuck into more activity.

In violation of elementary workers’ democracy, John Rees has refused to provide details of the proposed electoral alliance or the negotiations with the leaders of the mosque in Birmingham. He treats the SA as his own private property rather than the collective property of the membership.

We have the right to participate in the formulation of policy, strategy and tactics. We object to the attempt to impose a new turn or line on us without debate and discussion. The suggestion of a Peace and Justice party should be presented to the membership for acceptance or agreement. *Left Turn* should open its pages to the debate on this issue.

SA activists in Stockport are totally opposed to any watering down of a socialist programme or any refusal to fight for the democratic rights of gays or women in any opportunist attempt to form a popular front with islamic clerics.

The Stockport branch was formed after the Manchester SWP decided to break up the large South Manchester branch because the local SWP chief had lost a few votes.

Political culture was dismissed, in a philistine way, as equivalent to discussing the inside of a cat’s arse, which no worker was interested in. The justification of the break-up of South Manchester was ‘weapons of mass membership’. The SWP had found evidence of a mass of new members who actively needed to join a new branch, if not in 45 minutes, then very soon.

After the polemical war, or personal abuse, from local SWP leaders, no mass of new members was discovered. The new branches simply shadowed the branches of the SWP.

A comrade, now a committee member in the branch, who had stood as an electoral candidate on two occasions for the Socialist Alliance, was not invited or informed of meetings of her new local branch. Her political crime? Voting with the comrades who opposed the line of treating the anti-war movement as simply numbers to be mobilised rather than discussing how socialists could influence the politics and direction of the movement as well.

Unlike the leaders of the SWP, the majority of the Stockport branch of the SA do not treat the self-activity of the class and socialism from below as a mere shibboleth.

Barry Biddulph
Chair, Stockport SA

Prima donnas

At the cost of stating the obvious, it sounds like the CPGB were just plain beat by your inability to actually mobilise any votes in Birmingham SA.

Now I may be wrong, but when I used to stand in elections in my union, in community groups or in political organisations, I always use to canvass like mad,

lobby hard for votes, get as many of my supporters as possible to meetings - that sort of thing: basic political stuff.

It seems you didn't and your laziness or lack of appeal even to other activists brought you down. Shame - learn and win next time. The SWP haven't exactly got mass appeal.

History has shown they can't even keep themselves together, let alone any form of alliance. I am surprised that instead of actually doing the hard work of organising within the Socialist Alliance the response is to walk out the door into an even smaller, 'independent' SA.

Now the SWP have really won, who needs purges when you have prima donnas?

Pete Shield
email

False conception

The SWP represents a continuity: Gerry Healy, who is detested by the SWP, functioned similarly. The issue is not 'bad', power-mad people, but a false conception of the revolutionary party - the SWP and Healy had a mechanical conception: an army led by the generals of the central committee.

I believe we need to struggle to reject all forms of elitist conceptions of the party. Rather I suggest the party that is needed is the community of revolutionaries which is preparing the new man and woman capable of a socialist society before there can be a revolution.

Earl Gilman
email

Lessons of history

Whilst correctly taking the SWP to task, following unpleasant reports concerning their members' attempted physical assault on *Weekly Worker* sellers at this year's Marxism event, it is unfortunate that Jack Conrad went on to display a decidedly faulty grasp of history ('Party notes' *Weekly Worker* July 17).

Indeed, in getting no further than those (curiously unnamed) whom he cites as having offered mostly unsatisfactory explanations for the SWP's lack of democracy and having failed to raise the call for a labour movement inquiry into the unacceptable business of violence against rival leftists, comrade Conrad turns his ire on Leon Trotsky's "so-called Fourth International" and one of its former US leaders, James P Cannon.

The latter is accused of "boot[ing] out Max Shachtman, Hal Draper and co [from the US affiliate to the old FI, the American Socialist Workers Party - no relation], simply because they disagreed with the woefully mistaken view of Stalin's USSR as a 'degenerate [sic] workers' state'".

If comrade Conrad bothered to check out what really happened (perhaps best documented in a volume called *In defence of Marxism* - Pathfinder Press, 1973), he would find that Shachtman and co *voluntarily split* from the then US SWP, as they disagreed with the majority view that the USSR was in fact a *degenerated* (ie, once healthy) workers' state and should be defended against imperialist aggression. And Trotsky and Cannon actually argued for Shachtman, Martin Abern, James Burnham and other oppositionists to stay within the party in 1940 and argue their differences out internally with proper minority rights.

Given his unenlightened remarks, Conrad might also care to explain when he believes the former Soviet Union ceased being a workers' state, degenerated or otherwise.

My understanding is that the early 1990s is the period when the bureaucratic, post-capitalist structures finally collapsed under the inevitable pressures of their own conservatism and inertia and a little help from the greedy imperialists. However, comrade Conrad

talks as though October 1917 were just a bit of reformism!

The above recommended documents contain, amongst other things, articles and letters on how the revolutionary internationalists of the 1940s actively fought for real socialist principles and a genuine proletarian morality and against the debilitating pressures and influences of bourgeois public opinion and adaptation to opportunist positions.

It is highly doubtful that such documents can ever have been read by the Chris Bamberys and John Reeses of this world, judging by the modern British SWP's current trajectory and overall political history!

And what a great pity it is that the same SWP cannot enthuse its members with a similar sort of aggression to that apparently shown to CPGB supporters at Marxism when it comes to serious mobilisations (as opposed to Anti-Nazi League lollipop-waving) to confront the arrogant bands of fascists we are seeing on the streets!

Those who do not learn the lessons of history ...
Geoff Smith
Birmingham

1917 fantasists

Bob Harding was quite correct in pin-pointing democratic centralism as the primary mechanism of control that the leaders of Leninist parties use to police their members and, potentially, the working class (Letters, July 10).

It is noteworthy that in the *Weekly Worker's* recent report of the Socialist Alliance conference you were rightly critical of the Socialist Workers Party's manipulation of the slate system in order to ensure its domination of the new executive.

Yet you do not make a single criticism of the slate system itself. To do so would be to undermine the very system which the CPGB practises as a matter of high principle.

In reality, the slate system and its theoretical justification of democratic centralism is all about wheeler-dealing, back-door manipulation and demonstrations of loyalty to the leading group and its 'correct' political line.

Can it really be an accident that every democratic centralist party in history, from the mass (ie, Soviet, Chinese, etc) to our relatively lowly sects in Britain, has ended up as a bureaucratic nightmare? But of course every sect accuses every other of bureaucratism, whilst claiming that it itself is the exception. I suppose that is what is called Marxist science!

It is also interesting that in CPGB and ex-Socialist Labour Party member John Pearson's proposals for democratising the Socialist Alliance, he omits to mention the one measure which would do most to undermine the power of the would-be Lenins within the alliance: ie, a secret ballot for all elections at every level of the organisation (*Weekly Worker* July 3).

Does the CPGB oppose this because it would mean that the leadership would not then be able to ensure that their own members had voted the 'right' way? I think we should be told.

Socialists will never gain enough support to mount a serious challenge to the capitalist system whilst we behave in a less democratic fashion than the main capitalist parties.

All of our actions, as well as our words, should be about demonstrating that a more open, more humane, more free way of relating to one another is possible.

We should be the new society in embryonic form in the here and now. Utopian? Probably. Necessary? Certainly. Whilst the Socialist Alliance remains merely an arena of factional struggle between the various 1917 fantasists, then it will remain at the margins of society - on the same level as fascists and religious cults and I, along with the vast majority of the working class, will not

be joining.

Tony Green
Liverpool

Sloppy

If you ever pay attention to them, bourgeois journalists can be an entertaining lot.

For instance, the *Weekly Worker* should be gratified that it is often cited as a source of information and well-targeted criticism of the left. It's just such a shame that some hacks can't actually seem to even accurately *crib* what the *Weekly Worker* lays out for them.

Take *Tribune* - a paper staffed with its fair share of aspiring 'bourgeois' journalists, actually. In its coverage of the correspondence between a leading member of the SWP and the SA executive (*Weekly Worker* July 3), this august journal manages to make some laughably elementary errors.

It refers to Stuart Richardson, treasurer of Erdington Socialist Alliance, as "Stuart *Erdington*". Salma Yaqoob is dubbed a "committee member of the Socialist Alliance" - she is in fact the chair of Birmingham Stop the War Coalition, and not even an SA member. The article refers to "correspondence" between this shadowy "Stuart Erdington" and John Rees - the *Weekly Worker* made clear that comrade Rees was answering queries from the Birmingham SA committee and Stuart had penned a *personal* response, handed out at the local SA's AGM.

Of course, comrade Rees gleefully corrected these errors in the following issue of *Tribune*, but did not deny the veracity of the original report in the *Weekly Worker* - that there was a proposal to support Yaqoob in the Euro elections "on a limited programme - limited in its commitment to women's rights and there would be no mention of gay rights".

In contrast to the generally scrupulous *Weekly Worker* writers, the *Tribune* journalist showed a sloppy disregard for facts that obscures the core of the argument. Perhaps they should be offered a job on *Socialist Worker*?

Ian Mahoney
London

SWP in Asia

Good luck, comrade Steve Godward, and all the best. To you and the comrades of the *Weekly Worker*, keep up the good work - we reproduce a few of your articles. We too are appalled by the attacks against your comrades at Marxism 2003.

We are used to the pathetic behaviour of the SWP's International Socialist Tendency. They claim Malay and Indonesian sections, but in truth they have nothing. Callinicos is an object of pure ridicule in Asia. In point of fact, he was told to get lost by a serious bunch in the PSM, one of the Marxist organisations in Malaysia.

In Hong Kong, they have three 'members' after seven years of trying to work here. Their history:

First, they sold out the vitally important ISS cleaners' strike - the organiser left to work full-time in Greenpeace in shame - he mistook a legal contract for the necessity to close down a strike that was escalating. They do not conduct industrial work now.

Secondly, they set up a broad alliance with christians in the anti-war coalition. Thirdly they are members of the 30-body member coalition against Tung - calling for direct elections in three years! Meanwhile they call for entry into the Tung administration!

Fourthly, they have blacklisted all Marxists that raise opposition to their tactics. They have orchestrated smear campaigns ad nauseum.

They ingratiate themselves into NGOs - in fact they are all employed in NGOs!

They have the money to do small things and the positions - unelected and not won through consistency and work, etc - but employed by the tools of impe-

rialism.

They will never even dare raise the question of thuggery with us, as we work with the lumpenproletariat closely; in fact they are somewhat concerned for their own well-being.

We have half a mind to let the dogs of the lumpens on them if they continue their attacks on good comrades in the west. We do, however, ensure that we take up arguments politically instead, but it is so tempting. After all, this is China, where politics is sometimes conducted by the baseball bat.

Anyway, what I am trying to say is they are a bunch of toothless wonders, incapable of creation and development, but proven at destruction - sectarian indeed. Basically they are scum - save for one important area, Thailand, where the Thai lot maintain a healthy distance from London.

All in all, the SWP are a bunch of useless fuckers. For an organisation that claims to lead the world revolution, they have nothing.

John Ho
Hong Kong

China greetings

I am a PhD student at the institute of Marxism at Renmin University of China in Beijing. We stand firmly with you. Do your best to struggle for a better world.
Wenzhong Fu
Beijing

Brilliant

John Hutnyk is, as always, straight up and clear in his brilliant article ('Razor-wire imperialism', July 17).

He analyses detention in order to do his 'reality check-up', reminding us that we should not forget that we have the right and obligation to do ours, calling us to see how behind all this razor-wire 'our' western democracy is gradually being transformed into protectionism, fundamentalism and the abuse of human rights.

Almir Koldzic
email

No spent force

As a member of the Socialist Party in Ireland, I find your publication quite amusing. I suppose it is almost flattering that you devote such a large section of your website to our organisation.

However, much to your consternation, I'm sure rumours of our demise have been greatly exaggerated. In the last year or so, new branches have been established in many parts of the country. In fact we have active branches in areas where we have had nothing since the days of Militant.

Despite the poisonous sectarianism of some elements of the so-called left in Ireland, we are the only leftwing organisation with a credible base in the working class. In next year's local elections we are running more candidates than ever before and can reasonably expect to increase our number of council positions. Our youth section has also experienced a successful growth since its establishment two years ago.

There is a lot of hard work ahead for the Socialist Party, but we are now a vibrant organisation with a healthy balance of youth and experience and are far from being a spent force.

Mark Hoskins
Co Louth

Quotas work

According to your article, 'Going Dutch or double Dutch?', you cannot win equality through quotas (*Weekly Worker* July 17). Surely the recent experience of the Scottish Socialist Party is that quotas for women can work where there is a will to make them work. We now have four out of six women among the SSP MSPs, and 10 out of 22 women on the SSP executive.

Campbell McGregor
Glasgow

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday July 27, 5pm - 'Towards a Communist Party', using August Nimtz *Marx and Engels: their part in the democratic breakthrough* as a study guide. Phone 07950 416922 for details.

People's Assembly for Peace

Second conference, Saturday August 30, 10am to 5.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London WC1 (opposite Euston station). Organised by Stop the War Coalition.

Remember Larkin

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

End the occupation

National demonstration against occupation of Iraq and Palestine, Saturday September 27. Assemble Hyde Park, 12 noon. March to Trafalgar Square. Organised by Stop the War Coalition.

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.

Socialist Alliance

Yorkshire and Humberside

Regional membership meeting for Euro elections, Saturday July 26, 12 noon to 5pm, All Hallows church hall, Regent Terrace, Leeds LS6 1NP.

Gay Pride

Demonstration, Saturday July 26. Join SA team leafleting Pride marchers. Meet 11.30am, Burger King, Victoria station.

Greater London

First planning meeting for Greater London Authority and European election campaign, Wednesday July 30, 7.30pm, Exmouth Arms, Star Cross Street, near Euston station. Chair and secretary (or two locally active comrades) from each SA.

Brent Convention of the Left

Thursday July 31, 7pm, Willesden Library Centre. To discuss a left candidate in forthcoming Brent East parliamentary by-election. Organised by Brent SA: 07940 510906.

Eastern Region

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

ASLEF

Labour Left Briefing -
www.labourleftbriefing.org.uk

Reclaim web space

Our journey though the Labour left this week takes us to the website of *Labour Left Briefing*, which (alongside *Tribune*) is a key forum for socialists remaining in the Labour Party.

I last visited the website a couple of years ago and remembered a relatively well designed and competent home page. Since its revamp and switch to a new server in the meantime, I am sorry to say that the result does not compare favourably with the previous site. As with *Tribune* (see *Weekly Worker* July 17), the aesthetic appears rough around the edges, but at the end of the day it is content that counts.

The screen is divided in two. A navigation bar runs along the top, beneath which the *LLB* legend dominates the page, followed by three drop-down menus that provide the main navigation pathways around the site. In contrast, the bottom half comes across as unnecessary. A photo of militant firefighters commands this section under the slogans, "Stop the war on public services" and "Now take on Blair!" This is offset by a scrolling list of events - or rather event. At the time of writing the July 19 demonstration outside USAF Fairford remains the only action advertised. There is one original feature though. As you scroll up and down the screen, the navigation bar follows you around, demanding that you click on one of its four links. I duly obliged. 'Stop the war', 'May Day', 'News' and 'Firefighters dispute' dropped down more menus, linking articles, reports, diaries and photo collections from a variety of websites. Taken together, a half-hour exploration of these links provides a snap introduction to Labour left politics.

Turning to the 'Current issue' navigation menu, the content is self-explanatory, if something of a mixed bag. An editorial is there in full, but is unsigned and undated. Only one other article makes the transition from print to internet intact - George Gallo-way's special feature on the Blairite "hijacking" of Labour. The rest are extracts, previews, summaries and very short pieces. Most sections end with subscription information, and the date of the update. Sadly where the latter is concerned, *LLB* was last uploaded on March 28! This sclerosis might have been passable during the long slumber of the Labour left, but certainly not now.

'More about *LLB*' seeks to avoid the vacuum that afflicts

Tribune's website, and just barely manages to. First of all, it heads off with another 'Current issue' (this time taking us to a bare contents page of April's edition!) 'Next issue' gives the copy and distribution dates for the May edition, but gives useful submission/contribution requirements. 'Where we stand' is a short introductory preamble and is followed by the *LLB* AGM 2001 statement on September 11, and a more general piece on objectives. The latter is very general but nonetheless marks the journal out as a non-sectarian and democratic labour movement publication. 'Subscribe' seems a pretty redundant page, considering the details appear almost everywhere else. Adverts, submission and technical information follow. Finally, the 'Back issues' link turns out to be broken.

The 'Action' bar at least suggests a few sparks of life remain. 'What's on?' begins with RAF Fairford and lists a handful of recently past and upcoming labour movement/anti-war activities. 'Things you can do' was something of a surprise. The title implies activism in the Labour left and/or the union movement. Instead a mixed bag of Cuba solidarity, anti-missionary, Free Tibet and Fair-trade banana links greeted my eyes. The 'Grassroots Alliance', 'Network of Socialist Campaign Groups' and 'Labour Party conference' pages are so old that they are almost moth-eaten. The GA page lists the candidates *LLB* is supporting for the 2002 NEC elections, and the conference page previews last September's fringe meetings.

The next page 'outtakes' provide a little light relief from "the *LLB* cutting room floor". 'Readers' quotes' carries three short (positive) comments and is largely superfluous - it will remain so unless it takes on a comments function similar to that operating on the *Tribune* site. 'Links' holds a fair selection of campaigning, union and socialist links (inside and outside Labour). To round it off, there is an option to join the high-quality *LLB* discussion list and the magazine's supporters club.

As a tool for promoting *LLB* and the Labour left generally, this website fails on both counts. The design is very basic, the content poor and the lack of updates does *LLB* no favours. Activists aiming to 'reclaim the Labour Party' would do well to consider reclaiming their own web space too ●

Phil Hamilton

around
THEWEB

Setback for TU awkward squad

On Thursday July 17 Aslef, the train drivers' union, announced the result of its election for general secretary. The voting was Mick Rix - 3,299; Shaun Brady - 4,475 out of a total electorate of 16,863 (turnout: 46.1%). This shock vote, removing one of the key members of the 'awkward squad' and replacing him with a rightwing buffoon, goes completely against the trend. It is especially shocking considering Aslef's reputation as one of the most leftwing and militant of unions.

Why has this come to pass? The answer - as is usually the case - is not straightforward. The roots of the right's comeback can be traced to the defeat of Lew Adams by Mick Rix five years ago. A number of Adams supporters did not accept the democratic decision of the membership and immediately began a campaign to frustrate the new general secretary. Three EC members began to wage a guerrilla campaign on the executive. They would disrupt its working in various ways, including walking out to make it inquorate. Mick Rix and his supporters - notably Martin Samways, the EC president - responded by using bureaucratic methods against them. This led to the three taking Aslef to court in an attempt to stop a recall of the annual assembly of delegates (AAD), a recall they had originally proposed themselves, when they realised that the AAD delegates would back Rix.

The recalled AAD did indeed back Rix and called for the expulsion of the three EC members for taking the union to court. The three were subsequently expelled and the court actions continued to drag on. Aslef won most of the cases, although an industrial tribunal did find partially in favour of the three. Using this as their lifeline, they subsequently launched a campaign for their reinstatement.

When the general secretary election was announced, the right set up a website and started to circulate anti-Rix propaganda. They latched onto any little-tattle that came their way, whether it had any truth or not. They campaigned against the policy to eliminate rest-day working, appealing to the greedy and selfish. They criticised Rix for promoting "politics", by which they meant leftwing politics, and the attention given to international issues, including Columbia and Cuba. They also backed the BNP candidate expelled from Aslef in the BNP's court action. Their campaign was well financed, unlike the left, which had no organisation to counter this attack. The right seems to have



Mick Rix: defeat by weak opponent

been financed by Lew Adams and at least implicitly supported by Virgin Trains, the Strategic Rail Authority and of course the Blairites.

The right, however, has won only a partial victory. It is the EC, carrying out the agreed policy of the AAD, that runs Aslef. The general secretary works under EC instructions. Shaun Brady is a weak candidate with little charisma and even less ability. It is doubtful that he will be able to dominate the EC, especially if Martin Samways remains president. The right would need to gain a couple of EC positions in order to secure support for many of Brady's policies.

The left needs to urgently get its act together. Rix's defeat at the hands of such a weak candidate as Brady is a clear warning that reliance on the 'machine' is the road to disaster. The left needs to organise in an open and democratic way, avoiding personalities and fighting on policy. The Socialist Alliance has to shoulder a major portion of the blame for this. Its so-called rail faction has done nothing to organise, with its leading light,

Greg Tucker, content to play for his own advantage within the RMT. The failure of the SA to move towards a party has emasculated its impact within the rail unions.

Aslef has seen a major change in its make-up over the last few years. The expansion of the rail industry, coupled with the elimination of rest-day working and implementation of the 35-hour week, has resulted in a large influx of members. Companies such as Virgin have been forced to offer increasingly attractive salaries to drivers, and this has allowed them to target middle class professionals. Virgin has ex-bank managers, doctors and now a vet driving their trains. These people can be won to ideas of working class solidarity, but this will need concerted campaigning to educate them that their interests will not be served by taking the side of the employer.

On the other hand, if Virgin and the like succeed in subduing Aslef, this new layer of membership will only learn the hard way ●

Aslef member

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SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Pull back from disaster

A question mark hangs over the future of the Socialist Alliance. The best hope for principled socialist unity in some time is being undermined by the misleadership of the Socialist Workers Party. Its obsessive control-freakery might ensure adherence for its turn to a section of the mosque, but in the process the SWP is obliterating the original tolerance and inclusiveness of the SA. The Socialist Alliance is in danger of becoming nothing more than an ineffective, on-off electoral appendage of the SWP.

Yet the idea for an ever closer alliance of revolutionary socialists and communists is not the property of any single group in the workers' movement. The objective situation in Blairite Britain demands principled socialist unity. For the SWP to risk even the limited achievements of the Socialist Alliance for a thoroughly unprincipled, get-rich-quick approach is criminal.

The fall-out from the SWP's coup in Birmingham Socialist Alliance - which removed all critical voices from its committee - continues. At the national council of the Socialist Alliance on July 19 - co-incidentally held in Birmingham - the SWP and a handful of fellow-travellers saw off attempts from the overwhelming majority of non-SWPers to criticise its actions in the city. Unrepentant over its removal of Steve Godward, former Birmingham SA chair, the SWP is now openly abandoning the spirit of the SA constitution. It believes it can use the SA as its political property to leap-frog into the big time: dissent is irrelevant; minorities troublesome.

While Workers Power's walkout (from the national council meeting and from the alliance) was predictable, it is the growing departure of non-aligned comrades that must be of some concern - if not to the SWP, then at least to their hangers-on, most notably the International Socialist Group, Nick Wrack (SA chair) and Will McMahon (publications officer). In the last few days independents and some Alliance for Workers' Liberty comrades have publicly exited various local SAs.

We must stop this haemorrhaging of critical voices. To cohere anything out of the Socialist Alliance, individuals and groups must avoid moralistic gestures and seek ways to unite. To this end the CPGB supports the statement from minority executive committee members, including vice-chair Lesley Mahmood, which looks to a meeting of SA activists and others in September.

There were 63 voting comrades at national council - delegates from branches, as well as executive committee members. Given that there were around 30 executive members present and some branches had two voting delegates thanks to the new 50-50 gender balance rule, this means that less than 30 local alliances were represented. Comrades from Wales were given no vote. The agenda was in three parts: motions on the direction of the SA and Birmingham; building the Socialist Alliance; and reports.

After apologies and opening remarks from Nick Wrack, we moved straight to a discussion of motions. First taken was that from Mark Hoskisson *et al* (Workers Power). This was an attempt to give content to the open-ended formulations of the annual conference resolution on the 'left unity initiative'. Specifically, it aimed to direct this initiative along class lines and away from the cross-class approach being pursued by the SWP. Tellingly in the pre-conference executive meeting, comrade John Rees of the SWP referred to the mosque as one of the "community organisations of an oppressed people". The failure to identify antagonistic class contradictions within the muslim 'community' is self-serving wishful thinking.

An amendment from the AWL, which sought to remove reference to George Galloway as one of those worth talking to, with a view to mounting a left challenge to New Labour at the European elections, was heavily defeated with only four votes in favour. Unfortunately, this included the vote of one CPGB delegate who voted in accordance with the decisions of his SA branch rather than with the Communist Party position. The WP motion received 17 votes, with 43 against and three abstentions.

In arguing against the motion, John Rees pointed to the Bolsheviks' experience in Russia, where a soviet republic of workers and *peasants* was established: a cross-class alliance. Of course this was a *revolutionary* cross-class alliance - of the two *main* exploited classes. Anyway, this is the clearest attempt at ideological justification we have seen from the SWP for its alliance with an undifferentiated muslim 'community'. It is if the Bolsheviks had proposed a governmental bloc with the rabbis in the name of an alliance with the oppressed Jewish 'community'. They did no such thing. The Bolsheviks championed working class political independence - ie, they defended their programme and its principles - and sought to *split* religious workers from their clerical misleaders.

While there is undoubtedly islamophobia in Britain, the imams generally represent conservative and backward-looking politics. They might protest against the US-UK invasion of Iraq one day, but the next they will preach against godless communism and the evils of women's liberation. Even amongst 'progressive' imams their socialism is not proletarian, but clerical - islamic socialism is half a ludicrous protest against existing conditions, half a lamentation for a lost golden age. As for the mosque as an institution, it is not controlled and run by its working class members rather the traditional intellectuals, the petty bourgeois and more especially the bourgeois elements. Defend muslims against dis-

crimination and chauvinist attacks, yes, but no compromise and no concessions to the mosque's politics.

Although it is permissible to form episodic alliances with such forces - in the Stop the War Coalition, for example (while insisting on the right to put forward our working class programme - 'March separately, strike together'), standing with them on a joint platform in elections is not principled. Of necessity this means watering down or dropping key aspects of our programme in the interests of an implicitly pro-capitalist popular front.

There were three motions moved on the 'Birmingham affair': one from Erdington SA and Stuart Richardson (ISG); one from Lesley Mahmood and Steve Godward; and one from John Rees and Lynne Hubbard (new chair, Birmingham).

The contribution of comrade Richardson and others from the ISG showed just how fragile that organisation is. Comrade Richardson ably described the stacking of the Birmingham meeting - a total of 20 SWPers had 'joined' the SA in the weekend preceding the AGM. Comrades from the floor compared this to what had gone on in the Labour Party in the past. The ISG was all over the place. While its leader, Alan Thornett, voted for the Erdington motion (defeated by 29 votes to 33 with five abstentions), he could not vote for the motion moved by Lesley Mahmood and backed by just about every independent and group there. Comrade Mahmood's motion was defeated by 25 votes to 34 with nine abstentions (including at least one SWPer).

Nick Wrack, who is increasingly seen as little more than an SWP fellow-traveller, was under considerable pressure as chair and his approach was far from democratic. He refused to allow observers from Birmingham SA, including the chair at the AGM and a former SWP member who was deposed as press secretary, to speak. Procedural motions in opposition to the chair's ruling were defeated by the narrowest of margins.

Comrade Wrack should be ashamed of himself.

The SWP's only concession to the large, hostile minority (Dave Church of Walsall SA exclaimed: "I don't mind you outvoting me, but don't bullshit me") was to withdraw its own motion. While continuing to defend his organisation's blatant bureaucratic manoeuvring, John Rees seemed a little cagey on the politics that lay behind it.

He denied "offering" the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain a joint Peace and Justice campaign in Birmingham, despite this being publicly acknowledged by the CPB's John Haylett. Further, he distanced himself from claims made by Stuart Richardson that the Peace and Justice platform would have a limited reference to women's rights and no mention of gay rights. He said he had told comrade Richardson that he could "foresee" a situation where some in the muslim community might want that approach.

At the end of the debate, comrade Wrack said there had been a request to divide the Lesley Mahmood motion so that there could be a separate vote on the SA's commitment to candidates who supported women's and gay rights. This was rightly refused by comrade Mahmood, who said that the issues were inextricably linked. Comrade Wrack's attempt to push this to a vote was greeted with howls of derision, which caused him to back down, even though an earlier indicative vote had been in favour of taking the vote separately.

Martin Wicks made perhaps the most telling contribution. He said he had been privileged to have been a delegate at the RMT conference which decided to demoralise the union's political fund. However, if the SWP was intent on pursuing this undemocratic line in the alliance, then the RMT would not touch the SA with a bargepole. Comrade Wicks has since put forward a principled argument in favour of staying together in the SA and avoiding individual splintering off. Quite right.

After lunch, the meeting room seemed depleted. Many had had enough. Workers Power had abandoned ship. Yet Nick Wrack attempted to put a brave face on the future of the SA. Speaking as if to a mass meeting, the comrade tried to remind us all why we were socialists in the first place. There was an air of unreality. According to script, SWPers got up to say what was great about what was happening in their alliance. And there is some positive work taking place. Yet, unless it is knitted together in a democratic and effective fight for a workers' party, it is all going nowhere fast.

Comrade Wrack reported that the *Morning Star's* CPB had formally rebuffed the SA. No surprises there - except for poor Alan Thornett, who really thought the CPB might dump 50 years of the *British road to socialism* in order to lie prostrate, as he is doing, before the SWP. Nick Wrack proclaimed that the SA would not "water down its beliefs in order to accommodate a half-way house". How does this sit with Lindsey German's description of women's and gay rights as "shibboleths"?

The most interesting contributions came from two SWPers - Brian Butterworth of Brent SA and Preston councillor Michael Lavalette. Comrade Butterworth pointed to the coming by-election in Brent East. The SA favours standing a socialist candidate. Excellent. Brian and his friends have approached the Pakistan community association, whose representatives said they were hoping Labour would select a "muslim candidate". But the Blair machine had not obliged and the association is now expected to give the SA a hearing. Brent SA is hosting a 'Convention of the left' on July 31 to consider what sort of MP is needed. The SA will propose their candidate and see if they can win support. All good stuff.

This, and the election of Michael Lavalette, is somehow trumpeted in opposition to the motions being proposed by the SA minority. How so? Comrade Lavalette was elected on the basis of *People before profit*, our 2001 general election manifesto, which declares "no compromise" in the fight against sexism and homophobia. An SA candidate in Brent would stand on that manifesto too. As I argued at national council, if an imam, rabbi or priest wants to support a Socialist Alliance candidate - good luck to them. If they feel moved to recommend a vote for the SA to their congregation (on Friday, Saturday or Sunday) - even better. The contradiction is theirs, not ours.

It is when we propose allowing our electoral platform to be compromised in order to win the support of this or that cleric that we end up crossing class lines. This is what the SWP's opportunism is pointing towards. It is not there yet, but the door is wide open.

Comrade Lavalette referred to this in his own speech. He has been involved in an excellent initiative in Lancashire to launch a paper for the labour and social movements. On the editorial board are a number of non-SA members, including a priest who is in the CPB. Comrade Lavalette said that was his circle to square. Precisely the right approach.

The politics we stand on is vital. We must be infinitely flexible in tactics, yes, but stand firm on our principles. Yet the SWP seems prepared to turn this on its head: firm in the tactic of winning over sections of the mosque; flexible in the 'principles' you adopt to achieve this.

We need to be calm, yet prepared to act quickly. The SA can be pulled back from disaster. By staying together we can lay the basis for a serious campaign for a workers' party - through the Socialist Alliance, if possible; outside it if necessary ●

Marcus Ström

Alliance minority meets

After the national council meeting, supporters of the motion moved by Lesley Mahmood and Steve Godward met to discuss the next steps. I was pleased to see 24 comrades (almost all of the national council minority) attend. Five members of Workers Power also sat in as observers.

We agreed that members of the executive should draft a statement (right) and seek endorsements. We will hold a conference in September with the aim of achieving a common Socialist Alliance platform based on democracy and inclusivity.

The consensus was that people should stay in the alliance and fight for unity around such politics. It was important to prevent the fragmentation of the democratic and pro-party elements. We agreed that links with socialists outside the SA should be made, including with the Socialist Party.

This is the way that comrades should be working: let us unite the supporters of the Mahmood-Godward motion, the May 3 committee (proposers of the Merseyside composite) and the comrades proposing another 'indie' conference into one force. Unity is strength. Support the statement.

Preamble

Following the narrow defeat of resolutions opposing the actions of the SWP in Birmingham at the national council on July 19, we are asking for your support for:

1. the statement below;
2. a conference to be held in September organising for democracy within the SA.

Statement

There remains an objective need for the unity of socialists in Blairite Britain. The Socialist Alliance has been the best attempt at achieving that unity in the immediate period in England and Wales. At the national council of the Socialist Alliance on July 19, the actions of the Socialist Workers Party has put a question mark over the future of the alliance. By voting en bloc, with the support of only a handful of others, to scupper motions in opposition to its political coup against critical voices in the Birmingham Socialist Alliance, the SWP is in danger of overturning the founding principles of the Socialist Alliance: democracy, inclusiveness, transparency, unity and accountability.

The idea of socialist unity is not the property of any one trend in the workers' movement. The overwhelming majority of non-SWP members at the national council - and throughout the alliance - oppose the heavy-handed, anti-democratic approach of the SWP.

We call for the increased unity of all those in the alliance who support its original aims and methods based on *People before profit*. Those of us who aspire to the successes of the Scottish Socialist Party and Rifondazione Comunista in Italy wish to build a Socialist Alliance based on the founding principles of inclusivity, the rights of minorities, openness and democracy rather than through packing meetings and bulldozing votes.

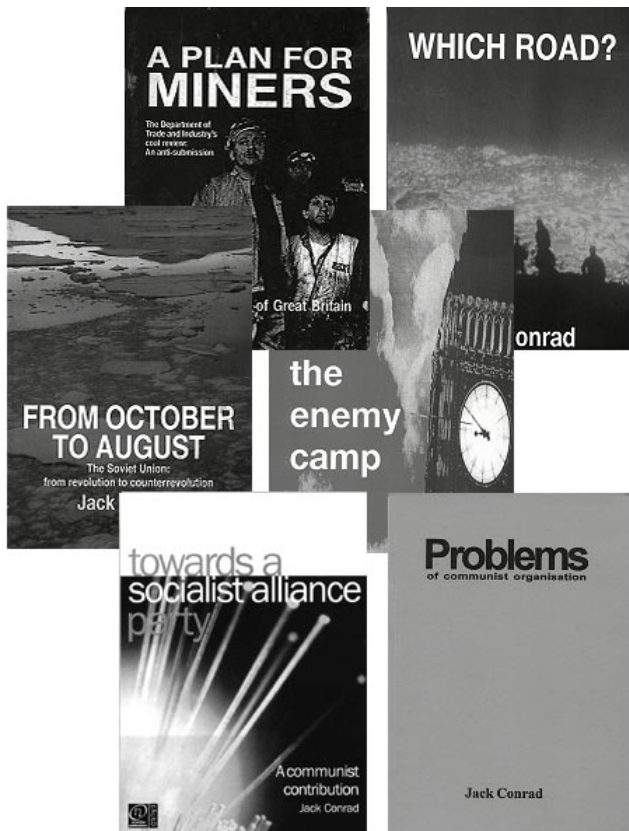
To this end we are calling a conference in September (avoiding the Stop the War demo on September 27) for anyone who wishes to support these aims and who wishes to effectively organise around them (from 11am in Birmingham; date to be confirmed).

Please circulate through your own networks and contact the executive members who have put their names to this for further details ●

Lesley Mahmood, vice-chair
Steve Godward, executive member
Marcus Ström, nominating officer

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Put in its place

The second European Social Forum, to be held in Paris in November, is now only months away. **Tina Becker** and **Anne McShane** report on the latest preparation assembly, which met in Genoa over the weekend of July 19-20, where they witnessed the Socialist Workers Party taking a knock

Over 300 people attended what was in many respects a disappointing event.

Firstly, although the process has begun to involve representatives from eastern Europe and Russia and has become broader in a geographical sense, its politics remain dominated by the stunted and reformist liberal agenda of the World Social Forum. Political parties still cannot be represented in their own right at the ESF. Instead, they will undoubtedly be present in various other guises.

Secondly, all the projected topics for discussion in the main programme remain the same - anti-neoliberalism, anti-racism and anti-war. In other words, what we are *against*. Class-based unity is a question that is way down the agenda, despite the talk of involving trade unions. What we should be *for* - ie, the ideas of socialism and revolution - is not up for discussion either.

Thirdly, it has been confirmed that the event will take place in four venues, which are "very far apart", as even the French comrades had to admit. While St Denis and La Villette are both in the north of Paris, Ivry is in the south east and Bobigny right in the south. Participants could well spend hours every day travelling from one venue to another.

Last but not least, the atmosphere was pretty tense, especially compared to the rather chummy events in the past. This was in no small part down to the fact that the Socialist Workers Party (showing its Globalise Resistance face, and supported by a number of its International Socialist Tendency sections) was very publicly and embarrassingly put in its place by the French mobilising committee.

The first day of the assembly started pretty uncontroversially with a report-back on the women's assembly, which will take place on the eve of the forum. The speaker who introduced this item said that some of the main topics would be the representation of women in the social movements and the issue of women and war. She put forward a very feminist perspective, presenting the issue of women's oppression as something for women only - rather than an issue of vital importance that needs to be taken up by the whole movement, necessarily involving men. Women were pacifist by nature and did not want war, we were told. The aim was for a "non-male-dominated society".

CPGB comrades have previously called for men who are partisans of the struggle for women's emancipation to be invited as speakers. But this position has received no support, indicating a hands-off approach on this question.

However, there were some interesting moments. In particular there was the stance taken by the French organising committee in relation to Globalise Resistance. GR - aka SWP - has consistently portrayed itself as the British section of the ESF. The comrades have continually referred to themselves as the official representatives from England or Britain and have tried to stamp on any attempt to put the record straight by the CPGB. Up until now the main components from the French and Italian mobilising committees went along with it.

But there have been a number of social forums set up across Britain - very much against the will of the SWP. Most of them are still small, riddled with reformist and green-anarchist ideas and ill-advertised. Nevertheless, they certainly should be allowed representation in the ESF. But the SWP was having none of it.

Teresa Hoskyns from the yet to be officially launched London Social Forum put herself forward as one of the two participants from Britain to attend the working group

which will decide on the ESF programme. The SWP said no - it could only be Chris Nineham and Asad Rehman from GR. These were the two comrades that were nominated by a number of meetings of the English mobilisation committee. However, the reason they were given the approval of the other groups and individuals was that there was no other person who really wanted to attend the rather boring and long meetings which take place every four weeks or so. But people did raise problems with both representatives being members of one of the SWP's front organisations.

At the last meeting of the English mobilisation committee in Manchester, which was dominated by GR, a third person was put forward as a representative for this working group. Claire Williams's credentials, as advertised by her comrades: she is a relatively prominent member of Unison, a woman and not from London. It just so happens that she is a member of GR too.

The French organising committee heard about Teresa's complaints and Christophe Aguiton (Attac) encouraged Teresa to speak to the forum about the problem of representation from Britain. GR comrades, led by Alex Callinicos, were visibly upset by her open criticism of the English ESF, which was received with gratified applause from quite a few participants (many for their own sectarian reasons, no doubt).

A raging Callinicos confronted the two leading French comrades, Pierre Khalfa and Sophie Zafari, who are both members of the

Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. Judging by the row that broke out, I would guess that the negotiations between the two organisations to fuse their international sections are not going too well (see *Weekly Worker* July 17). Of all places, the comrades chose the space right in front of our stall for their fight.

While Alex and Chris were insistent on "not having any of it", Sophie and Pierre said that the SWP must accept discussion and involve other forces as equals - something they most definitely have not been prepared to do so far. Britain could not just simply be represented by GR - especially given the formation of a number of social forums in England. The French committee finally decided to allow Teresa to attend the meetings of the programme working group as an additional observer from Britain. However, members from GR quite rightly argued that it is up to the British ESF to nominate their own delegates in a democratic way. The question is therefore still to be resolved at the next meeting of the English mobilisation committee, which takes place on Friday July 25 in London.

It was good that the SWP leaders were told in no uncertain terms that they could not dominate in their accustomed way, even though we might criticise the reasons for it and the way in which it was done. Interestingly, sales of the *Weekly Worker* increased significantly after this very public row, as people came to the stall to ask for a copy of "the paper that criticises GR" ●

Breaking down barriers?

Anybody who thought that the main business of the ESF was to unite the progressive left across Europe and break down national boundaries was in for a shock in Genoa. Nationalism is alive and well, even if it appears in a most bizarre form.

The main plenary sessions during the ESF will be addressed by 275 speakers. But rather than organising the sessions to produce the most lively debate between divergent or opposing views, the French organising committee has opted for a solution based on nationality. At the beginning of the weekend, they produced a list of the precise population of each European country, then calculated how many speakers each country should get - in proportion to the number of residents. They added or took away a couple of speakers here or there, according to the size of the respective anti-capitalist movements.

While some delegations, especially the German group, disagreed with this method, it was adopted as a starting point. Then the national delegations started to bargain for more. In particular Chris Nineham and Alex Callinicos were outraged that there were only 12 British speakers proposed, while Germany was allocated 21. "The British anti-war movement was a lot bigger than anything in Germany," they stated. Of course, it would be unfair to suggest that comrades Nineham and Callinicos

were motivated by nationalism. As SWP 'patriots' first and foremost, they have their eye on as many as the 'British' speaker slots they can get their sectarian hands on.

After several hours of wrangling, the Germans gave up some of 'their' speakers: "I just couldn't be bothered any more - it was getting too silly," Hugo Braun, a leading member of the German Communist Party (DKP) and German Attac, told me. Now we, the British, can bring 15 speakers (13 English and 2 Scottish) to Paris instead of the original 12, while the Jerries get only 18. Good news, isn't it?

There will be a French speaker in every single one of the 55 sessions, as the 'proportionality' rule does not apply to the host country - a regulation made up by ... the host country. To be fair, the Italians made use of this home advantage at last year's ESF in Florence too. This year, there will be 22 Italian speakers, Greece will get 11 and Ireland only three.

It will be a nightmare for the programme working group to decide who will speak in each plenary. Restricted as they are to taking so many from each country, they may be forced to exclude important and interesting individuals on the grounds of nationality! But, hey, it will surely be fun to track down the single speaker from Cyprus, Malta and Iceland ... especially as nobody from these countries has ever attended an ESF meeting ●

Starting from scratch

Elisabeth Gaultier is a member of the executive committee of the Communist Party of France (PCF). In the French ESF organising committee she represents Espaces Marx, an organisation that “explores theoretical and emancipatory questions, inspired by the thoughts of Karl Marx”. When we interviewed her, she made it very clear that she keeps her “membership of the PCF very separate from my participation in the ESF process. I do not want to mix up these two roles”

Who is involved in the French organising committee?
We started to organise for the ESF last year and have been able to build quite a broad alliance in the last 18 months or so. Sometimes this broadness can create difficulties in trying to reach consensus, but it makes the whole process very interesting indeed. The active organisations on our committee include migrant groups, through to trade unions and peace movements, to a few religious organisations and human rights campaigns - a wide range of anti-globalisation groups. Over 200 organisations have signed up to our call to organise the next ESF in France. All these groups meet once a month to discuss the key questions and make the major decisions.

We have set up a number of committees and working groups - all of them open and transparent. The organising committee, which meets once a week, has about 30 members and reflects the broadness of the participation.

Three major trade union organisations are heavily involved: the CGT [the biggest union federation traditionally linked to the PCF]; the relatively new leftwing union, the SUD; and the FSU teachers' union. There are also members of other unions, but they do not officially represent them. Most organisations which played a part in the recent anti-globalisation movement in France are now involved.

I take it Lutte Ouvrière is still not taking part?

This is correct: they do not accept the ESF as a way to transform society and seem to think it is not militant enough. But you really have to talk to them about their refusal to participate.

A number of other political parties are very much involved in the ESF process. The majority of the organising committee are members of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire or the PCF, but officially parties are still banned. Shouldn't we try to overturn this ruling, which was imposed by the international secretariat of the World Social Forum?

We in France take the WSF charter very literally. Political parties cannot be organisers of the ESF process - they are not represented as such and have no presence in our various organising committees. Of course, political parties of the left are not totally separate from the movements that are developing in society. Many people who are very active in the anti-globalisation movement often happen to be members of political parties too.

And left parties generally do support the ESF process. For example, we will only be able to organise the ESF 2003 in Paris because local and city governments have agreed to let us use public areas and meeting halls. The mayor of Paris is a member of the Socialist Party, while the other three localities where there will be ESF meetings have Communist Party mayors. We do need their financial and administrative support.

While members of the LCR and the PCF have been involved in the Social Forum for some time now, in recent months members of the Socialist Party who view themselves as members of the socialist family have also begun to attend our meetings. Their leadership has recently decided to take the ESF seriously. But I don't think that one single organisation is able to directly influence

and direct this movement.

Formally, these parties will not take part in the ESF. Of course, there is also a debate in the French movement about this situation, especially about the role of the youth groups that are linked to political parties. But at the moment we can only reach consensus with all other organisations if we bar parties from officially joining. The debate could of course move on and we might find ourselves in a different situation in the future.

Personally speaking, I think the current arrangement is almost a necessity to guarantee the success of the ESF. This autonomy from political parties helps to create a certain dynamic and guarantees that the direct political interests of the parties cannot block the process. I am not sure we would have the same level of self-organisation, autonomy and creativity if parties were directly involved.

Perhaps this reflects a recognition of the fact that young people have been alienated by the existing parties and do not trust the left either.

Of course history, and especially recent history, shows that there are big problems with parties trying to take over social movements for their own purposes. I particularly recall the last World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, where the French Socialist Party organised a big photocall, but did not participate at all in the forum. As it happened, this was only weeks before the French presidential elections. This was nothing more than a PR stunt.

Then there are those political parties who do take part in the forum, but pretend that they are not a party and do not offer anything new to young people. Everybody can see that this happens - especially with one British organisation, which is really rather small and insignificant and has no impact on wider society. Rather than working for a new joint project with other forces, it is obvious that the group puts its own particular interests at the centre of all its activities.

Of course, there are positive developments to do with the participation of political parties. My own party, for example, has learned a lot from working with the ESF movement. For example, how can we solve problems in a non-hierarchical way? How can we debate and organise confrontations without them leading to explosions? We have also learned a lot about other organisations and discovered that there are often close contact points on a political level of which we were not aware before.

Has the ESF helped to bring the French left closer together?

I would not go quite that far, but certainly some of the fears and prejudices are gone. There are certainly moves to overcome the atomisation of the critical left and anti-capitalist movement, which of course most organisations want. But the reality is not so straightforward and there are real reasons why these different organisations exist. But the joint experience and dialogue helps the communication between our groups.

It all seems rather complex from the outside: LO does not participate in the ESF, but is in talks with the LCR to form a joint challenge in the European elections. Leading members of the LCR and PCF seem very close within the ESF. Then there is of course the link between the PCF and the Socialist Party, government partners who still work

together in local and regional councils.

Members of the LCR, the Communist Party and the Green Party work very closely together in the ESF. But, while the Green Party, for example, is split over the role of the anti-globalisation movement, the PCF decided at its last congress that a new relationship with the social movements should be sought. We agreed that alliances and other work should be organised in a far more open, public and democratic way than has happened in the past, when many things were decided in back-room committees. Political ideas should be discussed and alliances should be formed in full view of the people. Our own political methods have become a lot more open and flexible.

Since the LCR and LO are to decide within the next few days if they will again stand together in the European elections, chances are very slim that a new electoral alliance could emerge from the ESF movement.

But in the last few months it has become very clear that the Socialist Party offers no real alternative for most people. It is not enough to portray itself as the opposition. In the recent strikes over pensions, the SP was not distinguishable from the right government. There are no substantial differences.

Does that mean the PCF will no longer support a Socialist Party government?

At the moment, there is no real basis for us to do so. But, at the same time, we should always work towards forming a new broad left if we are serious about beating the right. That would, however, depend on the turn of the movements to such a left. At the moment, the idea of a new, broad left standing together in elections is not very likely.

However, the French electoral system has recently been dramatically 'reformed' and is moving towards a two-party-system like that of the United States. This is a very dangerous situation that could lead to a dramatic decline in the left presence in the institutional system. In some areas, there is the danger of letting in Le Pen's Front National. Obviously, in such cases the left has to overcome its serious divisions. But in general, the danger of the right is not enough to form a permanent left force with the SP.

We are in a very difficult situation: we have seen recent movements in France that are possibly more radical than those in 1995. Despite this, the organised left has not made a breakthrough in these movements. This leads to two questions: how can we strengthen the movement; and how can we influence the political system in a way that leads to real transformations in society? As long as the Socialist Party only offers 'alternation but no real alternative', as we call it, we will not support them.

How do you view the emergence of Attac [the anti-capitalist network that emerged from the fight for the Tobin tax on share dealings]?

There is still a debate going inside the PCF about the nature of Attac. Personally I think it is a new, serious organisation that has taken up a lot of questions to do with anti-globalisation. However, a lot of other groups have taken this up as well - which means that Attac is not so special any more.

Therefore Attac has also tried to engage with the political process, without actually fielding candidates in elections. During the presidential elections they

attempted to influence the outcome by presenting candidates with a set of demands, rather than opting for one of them. They had hoped to build up a certain dynamic behind their demands, but even in their own judgement this tactic failed. They were not able to influence the process.

There is a big difference really between political parties and Attac. Parties cannot affiliate to it and Attac refuses to call on its members to vote for their candidates. Of course, there are again individual activists in Attac, including communists, who happen to be members of other political parties.

The French comrades have not been very keen on the creation of ESF networks. Doesn't the success of massive, European-wide demonstrations on February 15 show that we can be far more effective when we are united?

In my opinion, February 15 was not organised by a simple network. Certainly not an ESF network. You will recall that during the various ESF assembly meetings a number of anti-war statements were circulated. They were not signed by the ESF as a whole, but by a number of participating organisations. This was necessary for the widest possible participation. In France, for example, there are organisations who would not have taken part in our protests had we not criticised Saddam Hussein. That was very different from other countries - the British, for example, did not want this in at all. Sure, most organisations who organised the protests are part of the ESF. But a European-wide joint statement, a joint call for demonstrations, would not have been possible.

This debate has been going on for some months now: do we offer a space for discussion and organisation or do we attempt to build an active network? In France all the organisations agree that the forum should simply provide a space and would self-destruct if we moved beyond that.

We necessarily exclude some organisations if we start organising networks from above. If groups come together during the ESF process to form a network, fine. But we cannot prescribe that they have to be part of a network when they join the ESF.

The European Union is becoming

ever more centralised, ever more like a state. At the same time, the left is pitifully divided along national lines and sometimes even smaller than that.

This is a problem of the left and the trade unions. No question, the trade unions must seek new methods of militant co-operation across Europe. The political parties of the left also have to develop European-wide structures. The Communist Party, for example, takes responsibility for working towards a new, European-wide organisation that must take the form of a party.

But we cannot mix these things up. Every organisation has to do its own work. The social forum can help the unions and the parties to strengthen their cooperation, but the forum itself will not and cannot become a new political vanguard. There are of course parties in the ESF who still believe in the old ways of organisation. But I would ask for patience. Especially if we look back at the earliest examples of working class and leftwing organisations, it becomes obvious that they were not formed overnight, but developed slowly out of discussion groups and other formations.

We have a huge problem to explain to people our vision of a non-capitalist society in this tremendously changed world. The Soviet Union has gone, the social democratic system in the west has collapsed and has led to an immense atomisation of the working class. For those below, the last few decades have been marked by a tremendous deterioration in social conditions.

We have to radically rethink past strategies and redefine the relationship between those above and those below. The millennium has marked a certain sea change, where for the first time we were able to envisage that we can organise again on a global level. The disappearance of the Soviet bloc means that there are fewer hurdles for us and that events like the World Social Forum have only now become possible. But everything has to be invented again: we have start again from scratch ●



FIREFIGHTERS

A drawn out defeat

What lessons can be drawn from the failure of the Fire Brigades Union's 30k pay struggle? **Ian Foulkes**, brigade chair of Merseyside FBU and an active member of the Socialist Alliance, looks back at the dispute

Not even the general secretary was able to sell the deal as a victory. After months on its sick bed the firefighters' dispute finally faded away with little more than a whimper. After three weeks of spin worthy of New Labour, the Fire Brigades Union executive finally managed to get a 'yes' vote to accept a deal that sells jobs for a small wage rise and gives away conditions of service that have been successfully defended throughout the Thatcher era.

How did it come to this?

In 1977 the first national strike in the fire service achieved a pay formula which tied firefighters' wages to those of the upper quartile of manual workers. This formula delivered decent wage rises for a time but as the privatisation programme of Thatcher and her successors and the trend towards globalisation drove down wages and closed factories, the formula began to deliver less and less and at times had trouble keeping up with inflation.

Eventually it became clear that firefighters and emergency control staff were falling behind other sectors in terms of comparative wages. At the same time the increasing technical complexity of the job and the housing problems faced in the south east led to a rising tide of pressure.

The calls to address the problems of the 1978 pay formula were resisted for a number of years by the old guard of Ken Cameron and Ronnie Scott, who were protective of what they had fought to win for many years, and perhaps too they were wary of uncorking the bottle - releasing the genie of the employers' so-called 'modernisation' agenda.

Not so Andy Gilchrist, who was not in the fire service at the time of the last national strike and therefore, one could argue, less attached to the old formula. The executive council in a statement to conference set in motion the train of events that would lead to the pay dispute. In that statement it was made clear that any change to the formula would have to be hard fought for and that it was to be expected that the employers would want some sort of *quid pro quo* in the form of lifting the longstanding overtime ban and changes to other conditions of service.

The campaign

At conference in May 2002 the executive council proposed an emergency resolution. The resolution called for pay parity for retained firefighters and emergency fire control staff, a new pay formula and a basic wage of £30,000. This motion was carried unanimously after a euphoric almost New Labour rally-style debate.

The £30,000 wage was backed up by a great deal of research, including a costing document which demonstrated that it could be paid for with changes to the fire service that would reduce the cost of losses due to fire.

The publicity campaign began at that conference with the unveiling of the 'Y ... Because we're worth it' slogan. Once again the publicity campaign went into overdrive with a plethora of stickers, caps, flags and whistles, produced and distributed throughout the country. As the leadership went in to negotiate the demands of the pay claim, fire stations throughout the country were adorned with campaign material.

With the predictable rejection of the pay claim by the employers, the ballot process was started and a series of mass meetings and rallies were held throughout the country in a campaign for a 'yes'

vote. These meetings were addressed by a leadership who were received with show of support bordering on adulation that must have convinced them that the members were up for it. At this stage the impression was given that it was a done deal and all that was required to win was to get a massive 'yes' vote.

Were the members prepared for the hardship of strike?

It has to be asked, did some members vote 'yes' without being prepared back this up with the action needed to win the dispute? The result of an 87% 'yes' vote suggests that the campaign was an overwhelming success. Many believed that the whole £30,000 was achievable without having to put up much of a fight.

It may be argued that the campaign was *too* successful. The leadership were convinced that they had the full backing of a membership that had given them very few reasons to believe otherwise (who is going to argue, when promised a 40% pay rise?). They perhaps believed their own excellent publicity. They certainly had the confidence that a strike could be won.

The members definitely believed the hype and their enthusiasm for the campaign and the promise of a massive pay hike caused a positive feedback loop of mutual admiration which precluded any thought about what would happen in the event that the wage claim was met with opposition. There were very few voices calling for caution.

The strike

In retrospect a strike was inevitable. Nobody in their right mind would expect the government to cave in to such a big pay claim without a bit of a fight. The campaign was so successful that it blinded the union to the need to prepare an action plan in the event of strike action. The drive to deliver the 'yes' vote almost excluded planning for what would need to be done to win the dispute. There was so much emphasis on getting the vote and then the members out that it was almost forgotten that eventually there would have to be a settlement.

The signs that all was not going to be well were on the wall from the very beginning. Three planned strike dates were pulled by the executive council without reference to the members. We were persuaded that a deal was there for the taking and that we had to appear to be reasonable and join in constructive negotiation. This proved futile, since, although progress was made on principles of pay equality and a new pay formula, the pay offer remained derisory and a new spectre had raised its head. This was in the form of an 'independent review of the fire service', to be conducted by professor Sir George Bain (see below).

In rejecting this offer the only resort was now to take strike action. A series of strikes had been announced in October ranging from 48 hours to eight days. The strategy of longer duration strikes had been informed by the experience in Merseyside, Essex and Derbyshire, where the longer periods of strikes had reduced the length of the dispute. Merseyside's first dispute dragged on for nine months, whereas the second dispute lasted just 12 days.

The first two strike periods went well with a solid response from the membership. There were no FBU members working and indeed in some areas a number of members were recruited to the union.

There was apparently an undercurrent of unease in some brigades at the length of the strikes. A large number of complaints were received from individuals in the less experienced areas along the lines of 'no one told us that we were going to lose so much money'.

It has to be noted that this is when the campaign began to fall apart and it must be put down to a lack of preparation of the membership in those brigades that had not experienced strike action before. Either the EC had failed to represent their members' views or failed to properly explain the strategy.

Going on strike had given control of the dispute directly into the hands of the members. The picket line provided a good opportunity to put the message over to the public, provide a focus for the action and reinforce members' solidarity. Going back to work was a let down which took all momentum away.

The executive council faltered at this point and snatched at the first opportunity to resume talks and abandon the fundamental pillar of the dispute - namely the pay rise. It was around this time that '£30k now!' became 16% spread over three years. It was also about this time that the government spin machine went into overdrive.

Talks dragged on over Christmas and despite a brief return to the picket lines in January it became increasingly obvious that there was no stomach for the fight at the highest levels of the union. At a time when leadership was most needed it was lacking. There was opposition to continuing strike action, but this came from a vocal minority. If the members had been called to return to the picket lines in a determined effort to force a favourable settlement, then there is no doubt that the vast majority would have responded with the same solidarity that was shown when they first walked out on November 13.

Sadly this was not to be and the function of the executive council changed from persuading the members that they were worth it to selling a series of inferior deals. Whilst the first recommended offer was resoundingly rejected by a vast majority at a recall conference, the damage had been done. The membership became increasingly demoralised and took the next opportunity that was presented to pick up the employers' fourth 'final offer'.

Who was active?

The dispute saw a wide variation in militancy which resulted from different levels of past activism and to an extent the north-south divide.

London, which is by a long distance the largest metropolitan brigade in the country, had a history of poor support for action over many years. However, in the last five years a change in the officials had seen a gradual increase in activity. A number of skirmishes over station closures and cuts to services had been met with increasing militancy. In addition the rampant inflation in house prices meant that despite London weighting allowances the vast majority of FBU members were unable to afford to live in the communities that they were protecting.

London came from nowhere to become one of the driving forces in the fight for fair pay. The same economic necessities also affected a number of south east brigades. Region 10, representing East Anglia and Bedford and Essex, were also prominent in the campaign. The latter, Andy Gilchrist's region, has a long his-

tory of militancy. Essex has had to resort to strike action to win disputes twice in the last decade.

In the end some unexpected brigades and regions were the ones pushing for acceptance of the final disastrous deal. Strathclyde, a massive Scottish brigade, has a long history of political militancy. In the end the leadership, which includes two current national officers, had to go all out to persuade their members to pick up the final offer. This work included one national officer spending the entire week before the recall conference canvassing branches in order to ensure acceptance. This 'yes' vote was only achieved by a tiny majority of 30 votes out of 3,000. Only one Scottish brigade voted for rejection and this was in the face of strong lobbying of brigade officials by regional officers.

In recent years in a process of promoting fairness two new executive council members have been elected representing the black and ethnic and women's sections in the union. These two new members joined three others representing retained firefighters, officers and control staff, and account for a voting bloc of nearly a third on the EC. Whilst welcoming the representation of special interests and underrepresented members on the EC, the ability of these sections to influence a vote has to be a concern for the membership.

Outside support

Because of the nature of the dispute - a challenge to the government's policy of low wages in the public sector - the dispute attracted a lot of attention from many sections of society. Experiences on the picket line would indicate that on the whole there was a great deal of public support from members of the public, from the 'Honk if you support us' gesture to practical donations of both money and provisions. This support was another reason why the withdrawal of strikes was a blow to the morale of the members.

The TUC gave verbal support from the beginning of the dispute. A unanimous supporting resolution of the general council was in direct contrast to the situation in 1977, where their position was the opposite. Despite this support the general secretaries, Monks and Barber, along with the so-called wise heads of the TGWU and GMB, were instrumental in pushing the policy of 'talk, not walk', which was so damaging to the eventual outcome of the strike.

Some individual unions were extremely supportive of the dispute. The health and safety campaign, which called for risk assessments of the workplace, was a practical way in which solidarity action could be undertaken without breaking employment law. Notable among these unions was the RMT, whose leader, Bob Crow, was one of the most vociferous in campaigning for the FBU. This was to the extent of preparing to ballot its London Underground members for a strike against the victimisation of those staff refusing to do work they considered unsafe.

All this union activity was a sign of the importance many attached to the FBU claim. Our fight was their fight against a government who were unabashed in their determination to hold down public sector wages. A highly organised single trade union was strongly placed to take on the government. The failure to carry the fight to a satisfactory conclusion is a bitter let-down for those less able to defend themselves.

There was the expected support from

leftwing political parties and approaching Labour MPs was also an interesting exercise. Whilst they expressed their private sympathy for our pay claim, only a few notable exceptions were willing to publicly support the dispute. Only when the government started to push through legislation to impose a settlement did a sizeable number find it in themselves to rebel.

Rank and file activity was minimal throughout the dispute. In April 2002 a group of 15 from around the country met to discuss the implications of the pay claim. The announcement of the 30k claim wrong-footed the left in that it exceeded their wildest speculation. Throughout the dispute the numbers varied very little from the original meeting.

There was a general failure to form a wide-ranging representative movement. This was partly due to the initial size of the claim, but also partly due to the infiltration of the group by those who were willing to follow the EC line without criticism. The FBU is widely regarded to be a leftwing union. The left group of the EC was easier to identify by the two or three that were excluded. Was this a reason for the failure of the rank and file to organise?

The largest and reportedly best meeting of the rank and file came only two weeks before the end of the dispute. This was the first meeting that was advertised on the '30K' website. One of the biggest complaints from members was the lack of information. This on the surface was somewhat surprising.

Regular branch and brigade committee meetings were held to inform members of developments. Head office had published more than 70 strike bulletins in the six months of the dispute. The fact is, however, that people felt excluded from the decision-making process and for that reason many turned to an unofficial website for news on developments.

The official website failed to fit the bill. The FBU site did update on a regular basis and all official publications were available on line. It failed, however, to provide an adequate bulletin board or forum for members to voice their concerns. Nature abhors a vacuum and an unofficial site stepped in to provide that platform. This site was initially supported by the leadership, but towards the end they came to mistrust and despise it with a paranoiac zeal. What had initially become a rallying point for members became a place to go to criticise the direction and leadership of the dispute.

The government

The fire service had been the responsibility of the home office for as long as anyone can remember until it was transferred to the DTLR under Stephen Byers about two years ago. With the reshuffle following the departure of Byers, the fire service was once again transferred, this time to the office of the deputy prime minister. In the time that Labour has been in power there have been numerous ministers who have had the service as part of their remit, but few have had any impact.

It is open to speculation why the fire service has been passed from one ministry to another. One theory would be that with the pay dispute looming it was a poisoned chalice, with very little to be gained for any minister who found themselves in the middle of a big dispute. Another theory would suggest that John Prescott was the acceptable face of Labour for the trade unions and would be more able to handle any up-



Firefighters tell Blair to pay up

take a long time to recover. Whilst it is understandable that such an outcome should lead to such calls, a pause for thought must be taken as to what should or would take its place.

Splitters

The final deal may lead to the inclusion in consultative bodies of scab unions. Some uniformed members of the fire service were unwilling to take part in strike action to obtain a pay rise (they are all too willing to take the money though). The numbers in FOA and the RFU have risen slightly, but they still represent a tiny minority. The inclusion of these associations on any negotiating body will only serve to weaken their effectiveness.

Could we have won?

It is difficult to say whether or not, if a determined campaign of strike action had been pursued, a much better settlement could have been achieved, but the doubt will always linger. Many activists were acutely aware of what happened to the miners in their dispute and this might have caused some of the hesitation which led to the cancellation of strike dates.

At the time the strikes were first cancelled the government and the employers were in total disarray, other unions were very active in support, the public were on our side and the vast majority of the membership had just had their first taste of strike action. We were holding the winning hand. If the planned strikes had gone ahead, then the dispute would probably have been over before the New Year, whatever the outcome.

With concerted and determined action a satisfactory outcome could have been achieved. The 30k aspiration may not have been met, but the union would be in a much better position than it is now, with a demoralised and sceptical membership.

Where do we go now?

The UK fire service faces a very uncertain future. A lot of the detail of the final offer has yet to be filled in. What is certain is that there will be job cuts, not all of which are guaranteed to be by natural wastage. There will also be cuts in the cover that the service provides to the community. The push for community fire safety will not make the need for an emergency response go away.

It is imperative that activists within the union organise now in order to put forward a coherent and united response to proposed cuts in conditions of services. Despite the disappointment at the outcome of the dispute a lot of experience has been gained and a lot of new activists will have been created. It is important to turn the disappointment into determination that an effective fire service is preserved and those working in it retain their conditions and levels of pay.

The future of affiliation

The disaffection of many members at the treatment that they have experienced from the Labour government runs very deep. Countless numbers have already withdrawn from the affiliation part of the political fund. Many of those have vowed never to vote Labour again.

This year's annual conference has been postponed and it is in the balance whether it will go ahead or not. More than 30 brigades have submitted motions regarding affiliation to the Labour Party. A campaign for conference to go ahead is already underway, but it is important that any move to disaffiliation is well thought out.

Trade unions must remain active in the labour movement working towards its stated goal of a socialist society. Simple disaffiliation leaves the union without direction and the danger is always there that members may be attracted to the silky promises of the right. Disaffiliation must go hand in hand with a campaign for a workers' party led by the trade union movement ●

coming dispute.

Whatever the reason and despite the long run-up, the government was not ready when the fire dispute began.

For many months from the start of the campaign the government appeared in disarray. Ministers, including the prime minister, would put forward differing views within minutes of each other, spreading confusion throughout the media. The one consistent theme, however, was that there would be no rise without 'modernisation'.

As a delaying tactic in early September the government set up an inquiry into the fire service, headed by Sir George Bain. This was clearly not independent and was outcome-led, in the sense that the terms of reference included the zero cost/cuts agenda. The FBU refused to recognise the review and this may have been an early mistake, in that it allowed ministers to portray the union as obstructive and resistant to change.

The government may have been slow off the mark, but when the spin machine got into full swing the results were devastating. At the time that a resolution was in sight in mid-November all government press officers throughout Whitehall were put on the case. Despite the hostility to the government in many parts of the press, when agendas coincide the effect can be very impressive, and this was the case in November.

The Sunday papers were full of personal attacks on the leadership, and general attacks on the wider membership. Despite the secondment of three press officers from other unions the FBU were unable to cope with the intensity of the attacks. From personal experience public opinion went through very little change, but the membership appeared to be demoralised by these attacks and most importantly the leadership began looking for a way out.

One of the myths that the government promoted was that the army was more than coping on strike days. This was patently untrue but the perception was not challenged in the press. The army was overstretched - a fact which was admitted by senior armed forces personnel. The commitments that they were undertaking were about to be challenged by the impending attack on Iraq.

The need to provide and train troops meant that the army was being stretched to an unacceptable degree. The morale of those on fire cover was low because of lack of leave and poor pay. This provided a tactical advantage for the union

but not one that was pursued. If strikes had continued before Christmas, the collective mind of the government would have had to concentrate on resolving the dispute. Instead their postponement meant that the government was able to plan for war and simultaneously undermine the FBU membership by appealing against strikes whilst 'our lads' were fighting.

This pressure and the threat of imposing a settlement along with a strike ban were instrumental in demoralising the membership and paving the way for the disastrous deal that was finally agreed.

The employers

The employers' side of the national joint council provided the principal negotiators in the pay dispute. This group is Labour-led and mirrored the government's agenda. For the most part these councillors are ineffectual puppets of fire service management at best and incompetent at worst. At one stage they were willing to make a deal but were stopped by government and never really recovered - with all subsequent negotiations dominated by the need to consult with government on the tiniest detail. In the end they were no more than go-betweens.

The regions

Scotland, Northern Ireland and to a lesser extent Wales all played an influential part in the dispute. There was strong support from all these regions at the outset, but towards the end they were instrumental in the final acceptance of the deal.

Northern Ireland managed to get the vote out in spectacular style. An 82% turnout returned an unprecedented 97% in favour of strike action. This mandate was a massive endorsement of the pay campaign and it makes their support of the settlement more puzzling than most. The Northern Ireland region managed to gain the support of many local politicians, which speaks volumes for the efforts made to progress the brigade into a non-sectarian organisation. It is disappointing to note therefore that the region's officials chose to second the EC resolution to accept the deal.

Scotland's behaviour during the dispute is even more puzzling. As in Northern Ireland, local officials were able to gain the support of many more local politicians than those in England. Once again local officials supported the dispute at the outset, but in the end this traditionally militant region voted overwhelmingly for

an inferior deal. Rumours that a deal had been made that would soften the impact of the modernisation package north of the border may explain this puzzling stance. There is also the threat of forming a breakaway Scottish FBU, which has loomed since devolution.

The deal

The deal that was finally agreed is nothing more than selling jobs for a mediocre pay rise. The future of the fire service is one of a reduced number of firefighters working more hours on fewer stations with fewer fire appliances. The only successful part of the deal was the achievement of pay parity for retained firefighters. The abandonment of equality for emergency fire control staff pay is one of the greatest betrayals of the entire dispute.

The pay deal of 16% is entirely dependent on the delivery of cuts. One authority has already declared that it is rejecting the pay increase on these grounds. It is a great turn-around for what is supposed to be a strong militant union to be recommending to members that they allow jobs to go in order to achieve a poor pay rise.

The abandonment of a longstanding ban on overtime is also a great shame. Many thousands of jobs have been created by the willingness of members to forgo extra pay in order that someone else could have a job.

The final settlement is so full of holes and unexplained detail that it is a recipe for industrial unrest for many years in the future. Fire cover will be decided on cost alone, with the UK being the only developed country without a centrally determined minimum standard.

The press

The press and electronic media have never been as all-pervasive as they are now. At one stage of the dispute there appeared to be a camera crew based at every fire station in the country. It is to the credit of the membership that there were very few times that the ordinary firefighter failed to be on message. This level of understanding astounded the hard-bitten hacks, who usually expect to uncover one duff interviewee.

The constant presence of the press meant that they recorded many incidents where firefighters left the picket line to attend emergencies. This made good television and put members in a good light, but served to cover up the inadequacies of the army fire cover.

The press, whilst occasionally provid-

ing a platform for individual members, was instrumental in demoralising a large number. This was particularly evident at the highest levels of the union. When the government spin machine finally got its act together, the onslaught was incredible. The blanket coverage brought the union's press office to a standstill. They were unable to cope with the deluge of requests for information and interviews.

In addition the personal attacks on the general secretary appeared to take an enormous toll.

The press coverage following the tragic events in New York on September 11 2001 elevated firefighters to the status of heroes. This adulation spilled over to the UK and many firefighters must have believed the stories. It would have come as a great shock to many then when the Tory press turned on them. Whilst most of the vitriol was directed at the leadership, it must have shocked many to fall from grace in such a spectacular fashion.

Achieving the vote

For the first time since the members went on strike the executive council got its act together in promoting the final offer. The humiliating defeat on the recommended offer to the first recall conference this year must have stung them into action. The spin machine got rolling again and the only difference from the initial pay campaign was that this one was not accompanied by caps and whistles.

A number of strike bulletins and circulars sold the deal with a great deal of blatant poetic licence. The deal and its recommendation by the EC were presented to a weary membership who were scared into acceptance by threats of an imposed deal and the removal of the right to strike. The final outcome of the vote at the third recall conference this year was testament to the effort that was put into selling this deal. It is a pity that a similar effort was not put in to winning the dispute.

Is everybody happy?

There is a great deal of dissatisfaction on fire stations and control rooms. At recall conference the only person trying to make out that this was a good deal was the general secretary and even he was lacklustre. Even those voting to accept were under no illusion that the deal was an escape and not a victory.

There are many calls for votes of no confidence and wholesale resignations of the union leadership. The anger and demoralisation of the membership will

ANTI-SEMITISM

SUMMER
OFFENSIVENine
days, six
grand

This week saw a much needed boost to the Summer Offensive, our annual two-month period of fundraising.

Some of the near 1,000 readers, supporters and sympathisers who have received 'donate now' letters have started to respond. From previous years, we know the size of these donations can vary enormously - from numerous fivers to the rarer £1,000-plus. Whatever the size of the gift, these contributions to the campaign are much appreciated.

This week we received a fillip when two comrades completed £1,000 and £1,200 pledges respectively. Other comrades have also stepped up the pace of their contributions. With this week's magnificent haul of £5,788, our total stands at £18,376.

In truth, we should be in a position to go far beyond our target - a *minimum* amount, remember. Jack Conrad commented at last year's social to mark the end of the campaign that "with a little more militancy" as a communist collective, we should be raising "twice as much" as £25k - a static target for a number of years now.

Party members will dissect this year's SO in some detail at their next aggregate. However, our campaign looks set to mark a solid success this year - yes, there are areas of weakness we will address, but comrades can be very proud of their achievements in the 2003 Summer Offensive.

Cash we raise this year will be channelled towards the *Weekly Worker*. The computers, scanners and other gizmos that are currently used to produce our paper are getting decidedly creaky and obsolete. They desperately need replacing.

Plus, we are going to advertise our paper more widely, fight to expand its team of writers, make its production more streamlined and professional. In short, get a better paper into hands of thousands of new readers every week.

But readers and sympathisers are not being asked to get their hard-earned cash out for this year's SO so our editorial team can fiddle around with some new hi-tech toys. We call on comrades to support us because of the politics of the paper and the method it engenders - consistent democracy and openness.

Come on, comrades! We need a small blizzard of cheques and postal orders. We still have the time and the momentum to make this one of the best Offensives for years! ●

Tina Becker

AWL and roots of



Orthodox Jews in Tottenham: face "marginal" anti-semitism

Manny Neira suggested in a recent article that the pro-Zionist politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty "seemed to rest on a confusion about the meaning of 'Zionism'." (*Weekly Worker* June 26). I beg to disagree.

It was in the early 1980s that the then *Socialist Organiser* began a debate which led to its current politics. Andrew Hornung, a prominent member of the SO leadership, who had co-founded the Labour Committee

on Palestine with me, along with myself contributed a number of articles to *SO* explaining the historically reactionary roots of Zionism. Whatever else it is that Sean Matgamna and co can be accused of, it certainly is not "confusion". They are all too well aware of the antecedents of Zionism.

The first Zionists, people like Lord Shaftesbury, saw quite clearly that the powerful ideological roots of Jewish colonisation of the ancient Hebrew land of Israel could

be harnessed by British colonialism. This type of romantic colonialism was epitomised by George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda*, with its toe-curling Isaac and its wooden characters - a book in two parts, with the Zionist part being embarrassingly awful.

Zionism arose among a section of the Jewish masses in eastern Europe - the petty bourgeoisie. They despaired of ever fighting anti-semitism and nor did they wish to ally with the socialist and communist forces that Jewish workers turned to. It was out of this milieu that the early Zionist leaders arose. Zionism, as its founding father, Theodore Herzl, explained to the tsarist pogromist and interior minister, Von Plehve, was an "antidote to socialism". It took the Jews away from the revolutionary parties and instilled a sense of national pride. This is why the Russian Zionist Organisation was, remarkably, a legal organisation under the tsar and equally why the Bolsheviks outlawed it as counterrevolutionary.

It is ironic - in view of the standard accusation of Zionists and now the AWL that anti-Zionism equals anti-semitism - that the Zionist movement saw its most fruitful allies as being among the anti-semites. Zionism began from the notion that anti-semitism, in the words of another founder, Leo Pinsker, was an incurable disease, and as such it was hereditary among the non-Jews. And if a disease is incurable, there is no point in fighting it. Which is why Zionism sought to ally with the anti-semites. As Isaac Deutscher, in his *Non-jewish Jews and other essays*, noted regarding the situation in Poland, the main slogan of the anti-semites was 'Jews, go to Palestine'.

The Zionists were thoroughly in agreement with this and therefore seen by the Jewish workers as being the legitimisation of anti-semitism. Not surprisingly, as the Hitler threat advanced, the Zionist parties decreased in influence in Poland's Jewish com-

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Zionism



munal elections. In 1938, of 20 Jewish seats, the Zionists won just one and the anti-Zionist Bund won 17.

No less than Adolph Eichmann himself described himself as an ardent supporter of Zionism (*Life Magazine* November 28 and December 5 1960). Indeed the Zionist HQ in England is Balfour House, named after the Tory politician who sponsored what became known as the Balfour Declaration in 1917, promising support to the Zionist project. Balfour, as home secretary, in 1906 had introduced the Aliens Act, aimed at preventing Jews escaping the pogroms of tsarist Russia. Balfour's anti-semitism neatly complemented his Zionism.

The record of collaboration by the Zionist movement during the war is notorious and was itself the subject of a major libel trial in Israel in 1955, when the leader of Hungarian Zionism, Rudolph Kastner, was accused of sacrificing Hungary's million-strong Jewish community in order to save the Zionist elite. All of this is documented, not least by Zionist sources. Indeed Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir was one of the leaders of the pro-fascist Stern Gang, which actually offered a military pact to Nazi Germany in order to oust the British! All of this Matgamna and co are well aware of, because it was debated at length in the pages of their paper.

Zionists were always fiercely anti-communist and after the May Day riots in Jerusalem in 1921 they actively cooperated with the British in deporting Jewish communists of the MOPSI to Russia (where Stalin murdered them). Like their white counterparts in other British colonies, the Labour Zionists could be militant in defence of their own work conditions whilst being utterly hostile to even the notion of organising the Arab working class. Indeed, whereas the revisionist (Likud) Zionists were quite happy to exploit the Arab workers, Labour Zionism campaigned to exclude Arabs from the land and the economy

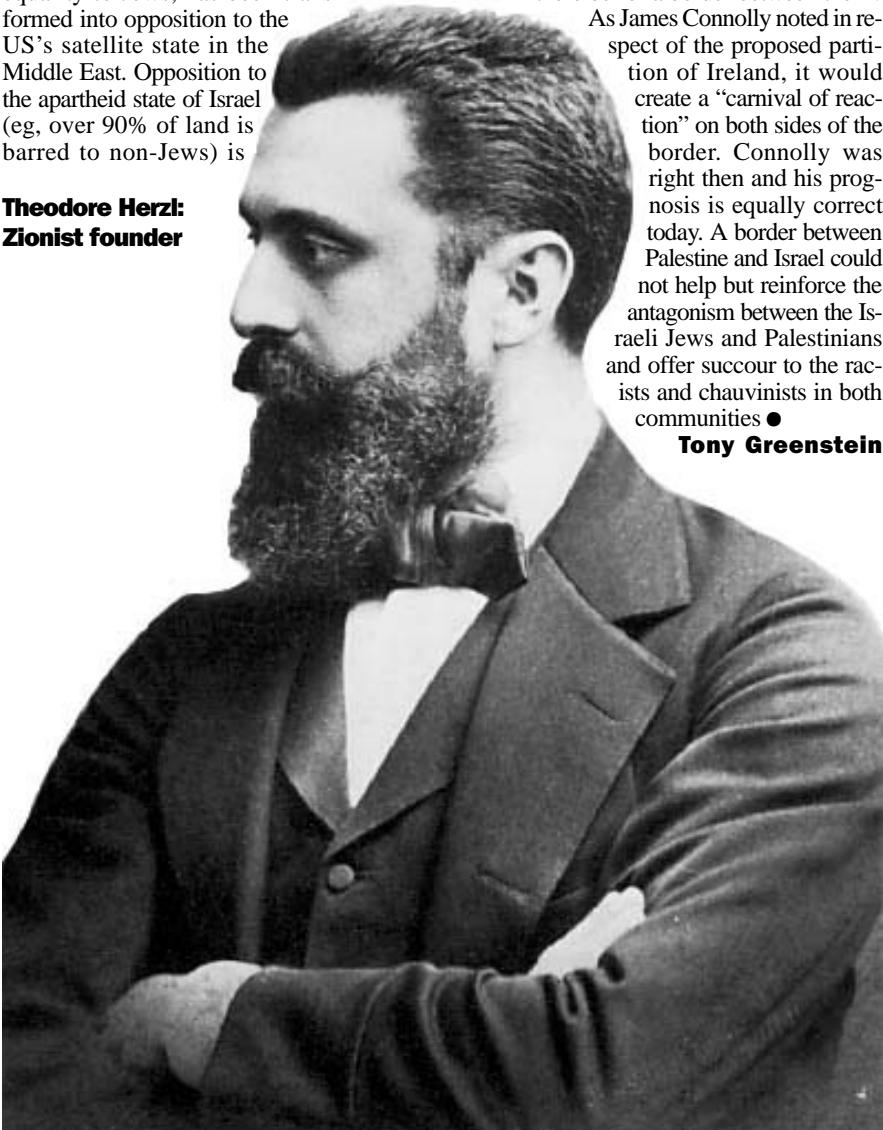
(‘Jewish land, Jewish labour, Jewish produce’ was their slogan). Unlike their cousins in South Africa, they sought to expel the indigenous population rather than exploit them (though they ended up doing that too!).

Where Manny Neira goes wrong is in his suggestion that Israeli Jews today are the ‘children of rape’, bearing no guilt. But Marxists do not analyse or categorise people in terms of individual moral guilt. The fact is that the present Israeli state is just as much a colonisatory project as it ever was. Not only is the colonisation of the West Bank/Gaza a continuation of the colonisation of Palestinian lands inside Israel's Green Line (pre-1967 borders), but even to this day groups like the Bedouin of the Negev live in unrecognised villages that are subject to demolition, have no right to basic utilities or education and are herded into townships when the need to colonise their lands becomes pressing.

The Israeli Jewish nation is as much an oppressor nation today as it ever was. Self-determination - ie, the right to be free from national oppression - cannot and does not arise in the case of an oppressor people who define their national identity in terms of their role as oppressors. Of course socialists should oppose the rights of an independent Jewish or Israeli Jewish nation to its own state, because such a state does not exist in a vacuum, but as a settler colonial state. The idea of a non-oppressive Jewish state makes as much sense as a white Afrikaner state which was not antagonistic towards black South Africans. Likewise the Ulster loyalists, who have 300-plus years of settlement behind them, but who still see themselves as the last outpost of the British empire (I kid you not, when I visited the Ulster Defence Association as part of a labour movement delegation, their fond reminiscences were as embarrassing as they were outdated).

What Matgamna and co are doing when they label anti-Zionists as anti-semites is to consciously mimic their co-thinkers among US neo-conservatives, for whom ‘anti-semitism’ is the respectable anti-racism of the right. Anti-semitism, which was the ideology and practice which treated Jews as sub-human and part of an international conspiracy, denying individual democratic rights and equality to Jews, has been transformed into opposition to the US's satellite state in the Middle East. Opposition to the apartheid state of Israel (eg, over 90% of land is barred to non-Jews) is

Theodore Herzl:
Zionist founder



presented in the Orwellian double-think of the AWL and its rightwing co-thinkers as ‘anti-semitism’.

The politics of the AWL should neither be tolerated nor excused by suggesting they are ‘confused’ or mistaken, etc. For someone on the left to describe themselves as “a little bit Zionist” is no different from saying you are a ‘little bit racist’. Racism and socialism are diametrically opposed and that is why the AWL has such a fixation on George Gallo-way. Supporters of Arab nationalism are its main opponents. It will work with all manner of Jewish reactionaries, as it has done, but an islamic reactionary is something different.

Ian Donovan quotes Matgamna as saying that the vast majority of Jews in the world are at least a “little bit Zionist”. This is highly debatable. It is precisely because of the *absence* of anti-semitism in the west that Jewish communities are declining and assimilating so fast. The majority of Jews in the US and Britain are marrying out (ie, to non-Jews, the most cardinal sin for the Jewish orthodoxy). As my own father, a rabbi, once told me, anti-semitism has something of the divine will to good in it because it helps preserve the Jewish people. Most Jews today outside Israel are non-Zionists. They want to be reminded as little as possible of the atrocities committed in their name. And let us be honest - anti-semitism in the west is a marginal force, a prejudice at worst, a totem that even the fascists have to hide away. Racism in the west is predominantly based on refugees and asylum-seekers. Jews are white, for the most part professionals and middle class and as much part of the establishment as any other group.

And when Matgamna and his groupies call anti-Zionists anti-semitic, they are echoing the old Nazi abuse of anti-Nazi Germans. Zionists call anti-Zionist Jews ‘self-haters’: ie, they hate their race and nation. This was precisely the ‘crime’ of anti-national Germans. That the AWL echoes this charge says much about its political degeneration.

It is a step forward that the CPGB call for a “democratic, secular state” in Palestine. But to believe that there can be two such states, side by side, is an illusion. If there were two such states, what possible reason would there be for a border between them?

As James Connolly noted in respect of the proposed partition of Ireland, it would create a “carnival of reaction” on both sides of the border. Connolly was right then and his prognosis is equally correct today. A border between Palestine and Israel could not help but reinforce the antagonism between the Israeli Jews and Palestinians and offer succour to the racists and chauvinists in both communities ●

Tony Greenstein

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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Weapon scientist's death highlights Blair crisis

After the human tragedy of war in Iraq, New Labour Productions have been treating us to a farce: *The search for weapons of mass destruction*. As ever, the whole audience (the British people) is in on the joke: there are none. As ever, the hapless hero (Tony Blair) must pretend that there are, or face calamity. As ever, the hero's co-conspirator (Alistair Campbell) is even daffier than the hero. And, above all, there is an auntie (appropriately enough, the BBC) involved.

Regular readers of the *Weekly Worker* will have followed every twist and turn of the plot: and, as Blair has played his role deadpan, when this critic wrote his reviews, what could he do but lead the laughter?

But there is precious little to laugh at in this instalment, as the analogy has finally broken down. Blair is not an amiable fool, but a cynical agent of forces even more cynical than himself. Our call remains the same. Do not be distracted by the nonsensical disinformation of a government in crisis: the reality is plain. The events of the last week have shown as clearly as the war itself the reality of what passes for 'democracy' when democracy is chained to the service of power and privilege.

Death of a civil servant

At 11 o'clock last Friday, police found the body of Dr David Kelly lying on Harrowdown Hill in Oxfordshire, a short distance from his home. He died after losing blood from a cut in his left wrist. Thames Valley police reported finding a blade, and an empty packet of painkillers, at the scene.

This news quickly reached Tony Blair's private cabin, as a Boeing 777 flew him from Washington to Tokyo for a six-day diplomatic tour of the far east. His mood on boarding was elated: his address to the US legislature was the bone thrown to the prime minister for betraying the democratic wish of the British people, and supporting the invasion of Iraq. According to journalists flying with him, he was shaken and ashen-faced on hearing of Dr Kelly's death. A promised three-hour briefing on Blair's discussions with Bush was abandoned. Instead there was a belated, short and sudden announcement of a judicial inquiry made when the plane was only eight miles from landing and little time remained for questions.

Whatever nonsense the conspiracy theorists may peddle, Kelly committed suicide. His death was the grisly and bizarre climax of the British government's increasingly shrill attempts to evade the charge that their war on Iraq was, even in their own terms, simply mass murder. Blair repeatedly justified it on the grounds that it was necessary to enforce UN resolutions which forbade Iraq from holding WMDs. Not only have none been found, but week by week evidence has accumulated of the lies he and his colleagues told to substantiate their claimed existence.

On the back foot, the government has been fighting a bitter and underhand campaign of disinformation and political bullying to obscure the issues and defend itself. The story of how Dr Kelly became a victim of the government's political desperation is so well known now that I will not bore you with a full repetition of the events. A sketch will suffice. After the breathtakingly casual statement made by US deputy defence secretary Wolfowitz that WMDs were "the one issue that everyone could agree on" (or, put another way, a pretext for war), Blair has been in trouble.

Promises that WMDs would be found

Paying the blood price

were scaled down to promises of *evidence* of WMDs, then to promises of evidence of WMD *programmes*, and finally to promises of evidence of an *intention* to establish WMD programmes. 'Mistakes' were admitted in the production of the dossiers. In short, the substance of the case against Blair has never been seriously contended, and yet for some reason the government drew the line at one last accusation: that Downing Street 'director of communications' Alistair Campbell had a hand in the assertion attributed to the security services that Saddam could have activated his WMDs in three quarters of an hour.

This accusation was reported by BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan, and attributed to a government source. Campbell responded apoplectically, writing furious letters to the BBC and turning up at Channel 4 news demanding to be interviewed. Behind the scenes, MI6 boss Richard Dearlove was wheeled out to persuade a foreign affairs select committee to clear the spinmaster in its report. And finally, on July 3, civil servant David Kelly approached his bosses with the admission that he was probably Gilligan's source. As a result, within a fortnight he would have taken his own life.

Man from the ministry

His motives for coming forward are unclear. Whatever they were, Dr Kelly underwent five days of 'debriefing' by the ministry after breaking cover. Many politicians and journalists have spoken of the fearsome efficiency of the New Labour political machine, and yet here it was not being directed at a journalist or a politician, but a scientist and career civil servant. We need not speculate about physical intimidation: simple consistent pressure combined with implicit threats to career and reputation, sustained over such a period, have daunted more experienced players than Kelly.

Finally, its star witness carefully groomed, the ministry felt ready to make public the fact that that someone had confessed to meeting Gilligan. Their statement did not name Kelly, but a letter sent to the BBC demanding that they confirm his identity did and, as the BBC naturally refused to do so, the government leaked his name to the press themselves. Blair denies authorising this, but defended the government's willingness to provide confirmation "once the name was out there". Dr Kelly was thrown to the wolves.

The foreign affairs select committee which had previously cleared Campbell reopened its enquiry to question him. Rereading the transcript of this interview is extremely disturbing: here was a man clearly under the most intense opposing pressures. His fear manifested itself as confusion and stubbornness.

MPs wanted to know if he considered himself likely to be Gilligan's main source. He said he thought not - though he rec-



David Kelly: thrown to the wolves

ognised some of his own words in Gilligan's reports, he disowned the most important ones. Above all, he denied that he had told Gilligan that Campbell had been responsible for doctoring intelligence reports. Why, then, had he not objected to the ministry's statement that he was likely to be Gilligan's main source? He gave no clear answer, bluntly accept-

... consistent pressure sustained over such a period, would have daunted more experienced players than Kelly

ing this inconsistency in his evidence when it was pointed out to him.

He stonewalled many questions, repeatedly insisting that some be referred to the ministry of defence. He made sometimes bitter throwaway remarks, the full weight of which could not have been felt until after his death.

Almost throughout, he spoke so quietly that MPs frequently had to ask him to raise his voice. On one significant point, though, it seems sheer professional pride conquered any caution he might feel. When asked if he thought it likely that Saddam could have deployed WMDs in 45 minutes, he first hedged, querying the context of the question and the meaning of 'deploy', but finally said: "Basically it would be very difficult to see how Iraq could deploy in 45 minutes." So even the government's secret weapon, wheeled out against the BBC, did not believe this propaganda was true: Campbell himself may or may not have written it, but it was still a lie sold to the British people.

It was clear to all that Dr Kelly was being politically exploited, and much against his wishes. MPs repeatedly asked Dr Kelly whether he felt that he was being mistreated by the ministry in being pushed into public exposure in this way, and used as a pawn in a propaganda game. His reply on this point was consistent and cryptic: "I accept the process that I have encountered."

In the end, though, he could not accept it: finding the pressure he was under unendurable. In an email he wrote to American author Judy Miller hours before he left his home for the last time, he spoke of "many dark actors playing games".

Buying time

Blair's reaction to his death was not based on human sympathy. His policy towards Iraq has already cost countless lives, amongst the coalition forces and especially the Iraqi population. In Sep-

tember 2002, Blair accepted that Britain would have to "pay the blood price" for its 'special relationship' with the US. With so much blood on his hands already, therefore, why was he shaken by this single casualty?

The truth is that Blair's last, desperate gambit against exposure and censure had gone disastrously wrong, and its cynicism could not be more clear. Blair's immediate concession of a judicial inquiry was bowing to the inevitable. It might just buy him the time he needs to ride out the crisis. The demands for his resignation, even from his own MPs, began the day Dr Kelly died.

The man appointed to head the inquiry, Lord Hutton, was perhaps previously best known for ruling that general Pinochet could be extradited to Spain to face criminal charges there relating to his murderous dictatorship in Chile. However, Blair is unlikely to allow the same freedom of expression in his own case. While initially promising the widest remit to Hutton's team, it has not taken long for the first hints to be dropped that investigating Dr Kelly's death is not the same as investigating the whole story of how Britain joined a war to rid a country of WMDs when it had none.

We must demand, of course, the fullest possible extent of democracy attainable even under the government's own rules, and this includes arguing for unquestioned freedom for the inquiry to see any document regardless of security designations, interview members of the intelligence services, and pursue any subject it deems relevant. However, we should have no illusions. Blair is undoubtedly dispensable. If he becomes too great a political liability for the interests he serves, he may well be forced into resignation: but what then? A Brown premiership would not represent progress.

No forgiveness

Blair himself seems to have abandoned the claim that any legal justification for the war will necessarily *ever* be found. In Washington he made the most astonishing and despicable statement so far: "If we are wrong, we will have destroyed a threat that, at its least, is responsible for inhuman carnage and suffering. That is something I am confident history will forgive."

He is wrong. History will not forgive him. If the interests which he serves deem him a liability and are prepared to see him replaced, even Lord Hutton may not forgive him. But the ultimate power of redress lies in the hands of the British working class: and we shall never forgive him ●

Manny Neira

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