

weekly **Worker**



Graham Bash: why socialists and communists must work within the Labour Party

- ▣ **Brent East**
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Towards a new workers' party

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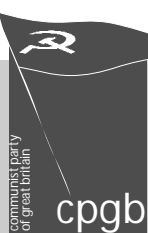
Iraq: US-UK get out



UN stay out

Manny Neira calls for left unity in the anti-war movement - see back page

Mike MacNair debunks bourgeois legality - see pp10-11



PARTYnotes

Republicanism: militant or liberal

By adopting a fake leftist pose on diverse issues such as the Iraq war, student fees and the council tax, the Liberal Democrats have won considerable popularity - and a stunning by-election victory in Brent East.

Yet, despite all their radical posturing and claims to be different, they fearfully shied away from adopting republicanism at their conference.

Not that the Lib Dem youth and students organisation was proposing anything militant. Instead they attempted to smuggle through their tepid republicanism with a motion calling for a referendum on whether or not to replace the monarch as head of state.

However, Charles Kennedy imperiously announced that he would neither support their motion nor include it in any general election manifesto. Overwhelmingly delegates meekly followed their leader.

Kennedy did not present himself as an enthusiast for the present monarchy, though. On the contrary, he stressed that his objection to the proposed referendum was solely on the grounds that there are other, more important, priorities: "I don't think in the great scheme of things, amid all the other issues facing this country at the moment, that a referendum on the future of the monarchy is the most pertinent or pressing one" (*The Guardian* September 22).

Funnily enough, we have heard the selfsame argument many times before; and not just from Lib Dems. Alike the Labour left, the orthodox Trotskyists, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Alliance majority effectively repeat Kennedy's lame excuse for inaction.

So, for example, when we proposed to the SA that it conduct a "militant campaign" demanding the abolition of the monarchy during the celebrations of the queen's golden jubilee, the International Socialist Group's Dave Packer successfully sabotaged our motion. With the backing of SWP bloc votes the word "militant" was surgically removed. The same comrade then insisted that our "moderate" campaign should not be prioritised. While he personally was a republican, there were, of course, more pressing matters.

Unfortunately it is not only the SA's majority which adheres to this liberal, non-prioritised type of republicanism. There are those in the SA's minority too. Having debated the issue with him on countless occasions, I know that Sean Matgamna - patriarch of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - is one of them. Mired in what Marxists call economism - ie, the downplaying of democratic demands in favour of the narrow politics of trade union consciousness - he contemptuously dismisses any notion of prioritising republicanism.

Comrade Matgamna's operative conclusion is this: Lenin was right to prioritise the overthrow of Russian tsarism - it was nasty, brutish, backward and undemocratic. We on the other hand should not bother ourselves over-much with constitutional monarchism. By implication it is comparatively benign, a feudal relic of third-rate significance which a modernised, bang up-to-date capitalist

constitution could not conceivably miss. Comrade Matgamna is actually of the opinion that "the British monarchy could be sloughed off tomorrow with little else of importance changing in British society". So he would happily let Charles Kennedy take the lead - if only he would.

What we target, of course, is not simply Elizabeth Windsor as an unelected figurehead; rather it is the constitutional monarchy *system*. In other words, the way in which the rulers rule the ruled.

In its origins the constitutional monarchy represented a break from Tudor and Stuart quasi-absolutism. Initially this system functioned to reconcile and manage relations between the crown on the one side and on the other the aristocracy and rich merchants; then between the landed aristocracy and the rising industrial bourgeoisie. Needless to say, with the second half of the 19th century, the social weight and centralised organisation of the modern working class makes its mark. From 1869 the franchise was fitfully extended - sometimes as a pre-emptive measure, sometimes in the face of irresistible popular demand. By 1930 there was for the first time what could be described as universal suffrage.

Under these unfolding conditions the ruled had of necessity to be ruled in new ways. The enfranchised masses must be pacified and persuaded to vote for harmless, moderate and thoroughly responsible candidates. Material concessions, credible lies and compulsory childhood miseducation provide far greater social leverage than sabres, muskets and cannons. And, as an extra safeguard, all manner of constitutional 'checks and balances' are erected, reinforced or modified. Democracy therefore comes into existence in the form of an updated constitutional monarchy; a system which leaves capitalist exploitation intact and the masses as far as possible away from the levers of political power.

From the point of view of Marxism - ie, consistent and extreme democracy - there can be no doubt that the United Kingdom is characterised by systemic shortcomings when it comes to democracy (by which we mean rule of the people by the people and real control from below). Let us compare and contrast what is with what could be *technically* achieved even under the socio-economic conditions of capitalism.

The people are unarmed, while the state possesses monstrously destructive weaponry. We say - abolish the standing army and introduce a network of popular militias. Despite pay and sex discrimination acts, women and men are still grossly socially unequal - put in place measures of substantive equality. Capitalist firms operate secretively, sack workers at will and despoil the environment - open the books, access the computers and demand workers' supervision and control. Migrants and asylum-seekers are demonised and turned into worst paid labour - unionise all workers and fight for open borders.

What of the constitution? Northern Ireland perpetuates the national oppression of the 40%-plus catholic-Irish minority and the division of Ireland. We say - withdraw British troops and

unite Ireland. There should be a federal solution, whereby the British-Irish minority have a two-county, two-half-county province which exercises the right to self-determination. There are palpable national questions in Scotland and Wales, but no right to self-determination - which to be meaningful must include the guaranteed right to separate. Westminster elections are scandalously unfair and leave millions effectively unrepresented. There is no system of proportional representation or the right to recall MPs. The European Union is increasingly influential over every sphere of life in Britain. Yet the European parliament is a mere token appendage. Judges are appointed from above, not elected from below.

Political power is nowadays concentrated in the House of Commons and, through that electoral college of misrepresentatives, the cabinet - chosen and personified by the almost *presidential* prime minister. The House of Lords functions as a sort of delaying mechanism, a safety valve, a means of thwarting popular demands. Yes, Tony Blair is pruning the second chamber of its last hereditary peers. But no more.

The monarchy constitutes what Walter Bagehot, in his 1867 treatise, famously called the "dignified" part of this constitution - it is designed to befuddle and beguile those whom he derisively calls the "vacant many" (W Bagehot *The English constitution* London 1974, p34). Yet, besides appearing to stand above party squabbles and the undoubted propaganda value provided by royal continuity, pageantry, local visits and nationwide broadcasts, the monarch retains certain powers that could serve the interests of capital well in an emergency situation. Eg, the monarch symbolically chooses the prime minister and can dissolve parliament, while no bill can pass into law without royal assent.

We could go on ... and on. But there is no need. The point has been made - the constitutional monarchy system is a weapon pointed against democracy and the working class.

What of comrade Matgamna's conviction that the "monarchy could be sloughed off tomorrow with little else of importance changing in British society"? Frankly, this is the sort of Whiggish nonsense you would expect to read in a *Guardian* editorial.

A transition from monarchy to republic in Britain - with its royalist official history, royalist constitution, royalist oaths, royalist societies and institutions, royalist armed bodies, royalist knighthoods, orders, gongs, etc - is hardly akin to a former colony, a Commonwealth country like India, Pakistan or Jamaica, swapping the geographically distant British monarch for a native and resident head of state.

Think about China, Russia, Germany, Austria, Turkey, Spain, Italy, Egypt, Iraq, Greece, Iran and other countries in the 20th century when they became republics. End of monarchy usually coincides with a revolutionary crisis. By prioritising the fight for a democratic republic such an outcome is exactly what we communists seek to speedily bring about □

Jack Conrad

LETTERS

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

SA opposition

I do not understand why John Pearson and Mark Fisher saw my contribution to the Socialist Alliance 'Open forum' conference as "negative" (*Weekly Worker* September 18). After all, I voted for all of the resolutions which they applaud in their article and even for Dave Church's resolution, which advocated a campaign towards a party and was defeated.

John and Mark claim that I am opposed to loyalty to the SA and that I stated that the Socialist Workers Party will not change. I have been on the organising committee of the Coventry SA since it started in 1992 and have stood as an SA candidate in local elections. Surely that is commitment enough to the SA!

However, I have always seen the SA as a stepping stone towards a workers' party with a democratic constitution, as in Scotland, not as an end in itself. In 1996, when the Socialist Party showed an interest in the SA, we had a number of discussions with Allan Green and the Scottish Socialist Party. It gradually became clear that the SP in England and Wales did not want to follow the lead of their Scottish comrades and form a party. We only found this out through the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. The SP's departure from the SA in December 2001 was the culmination of their failure to make the Scottish turn.

Now we have the SWP who appear to want to dominate the SA and not to transform it into a broad, open, democratic party. To me their behaviour in Birmingham was bureaucratic, sectarian and totally out of order. And it came from the top, not from some over-enthusiastic regional organiser. It is a form of gangsterism, going around giving the boys a kicking to show who's who and what's what.

Some comrades have said that the SWP made a mistake or went too far in Birmingham, or with Bob Whitehead that it was a "pyrrhic victory". These arguments miss the point. The behaviour expressed the SWP's organisational beliefs and methods, which are organically linked to their politics. I do not say that the SWP will never change, but they have been using these methods for over 30 years. There are hundreds of thousands of activists and workers who have experienced the SWP and the other "ghastly sects", as Jack Conrad calls them. And, as Lesley Mahmood pointed out in her introduction, there is a limit to how many times you go back into an abusive relationship.

In my opinion workers do not disagree with the political programme of the groups so much as the bureaucratic centralist manner of organising. As Steve Godward stated at the meeting, this manner is very similar to the bullying and manoeuvring we find every day in our workplaces and trade unions. Jack Conrad calls it Stalinist, but to me it mirrors normal personal relations within capitalism - as straightforward as that.

I agree with John and Mark that we should stay in the SA and fight. But that is not the key question for me. The key question is, what are we fighting for? That has to be for a workers' party with an open, democratic constitution, respecting the rights of minorities. That means that we must reserve the right to look outside the SA for allies, as Lesley Mahmood's resolution makes clear. It also means we reject bureaucratic centralist methods of organisation and attempt within our own ranks to create a culture of comradely respect and trust: not an easy task.

Dave Spencer
Coventry

Bold and strong

To describe Margaret Manning's chairing of the SA open forum as uninspiring is some understatement.

When John Pearson stood as secretary of the South Manchester SA on the basis of democracy and minority rights, with meetings to be conducted democratically, with agendas to be circulated beforehand and put openly to meetings, the SWP found a candidate who did not run meetings or function democratically. That person was Margaret Manning.

But, to be fair, we were halfway through the morning before the meeting began to realise that it had been decided that the comrades could let off steam and there would be a short period at the end when we could decide to meet again! The problem with just letting off emotional steam is that without concrete political alternatives it would just be a safety valve.

As Steve Freeman said, we had to discuss what we were for and not just what we were against. There was an enormous amount of preaching to the well informed, experienced and converted about the awful machinations of the SWP. Dave Church galvanised the majority of the meeting by good humoured remarks about what a hopeless lot we were, seemingly incapable of taking things forward with specific proposals. The majority showed their resilience by insisting on proposals being taken and voted on, despite the opposition of the chair, who attempted to postpone the proposals to the next meeting.

Barry Biddulph
Stockport SA

Think bigger

When people complain in your columns about the SWP 'packing' meetings (eg, in Birmingham Socialist Alliance) and voting in supporters of their own political trend, as if this were some kind of bureaucratic manoeuvre, I begin to wonder about their own democratic pretensions.

Since when has it been a crime to mobilise one's own members and supporters to gain leadership positions in a democratically held conference or AGM? Aren't these complaints against the SWP just sour grapes because they are better organised and command more numerical support than their political opponents?

Instead of whinging about the SWP's success, and disingenuously portraying their every move as some kind of sinister plot, wouldn't it be more honest, politically, to accept that the SWP simply won the day? That is, that they "got there the fastest with the mostest", which a famous American general once described was the secret of his success in battle?

And is it really such a crime to want to reach out to British ethnic minorities in the context of a war and establish a broader base from which to challenge the warmongers? The Brent East result shows just how weak the Socialist Alliance is despite the very best efforts of its supporters. The SA remains a far-left rump which got a joke vote. The Preston result was excellent, but so far it is our only success.

Isn't it time to try to think a little bigger? To try and seize opportunities created by the Iraq war to make a quantum leap, to create much a broader base for the left alternative to Blairism? If we don't make the attempt now, comrades, when the Blair government is up to its neck in problems relating to the Kelly affair, then we are fools to ourselves.

Let's be honest: we are not going to win muslim workers to our politics on gender and sexuality issues overnight. But many of them do agree with us *now* on a whole range of politically advanced issues related to imperialism and war. To insist that muslim workers agree with us

on issues of special oppression before uniting with them is wooden formalism gone mad.

It is not possible to say simply, ‘Political clarity first, organisational unity second’. However tidy and attractive that formula may sound, it fails to understand the real problem and oversimplifies the solution. Political clarity must be won in the course of a struggle for organisational unity, as organisational unity must be won in the course of a struggle for political clarity. In his May 5 1875 letter to W Bracke, Marx wrote: “Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes.”

This observation is used by opportunists to justify their abandonment of the revolutionary programme, but its real meaning is that there is an indissoluble connection between achieving theoretical clarity and building the revolutionary movement - a dialectical unity of opposites. Theoretical clarification not linked to building a political organisational alternative is an unimportant exercise.

Dave Williams
email

Broken slabs

Stan Keable says the SWP’s Brian Butterworth stated of the mainstream parties at a Brent East Socialist Alliance election meeting: “All they can talk about is broken paving slabs.”

Well, all I can say is, no wonder the Socialist Alliance performed so badly at the Brent East parliamentary by-election and at various council elections since May 2003. The SA has been getting about two to three percent of the vote, which is pathetic. But then they cannot relate to the electors. Believe it or not, the war in Iraq is not the only thing on people’s minds. People do care about what is happening where they live: they do care about broken paving stones, do care about crime in their area, do care about rubbish on the streets.

The British National Party certainly have realised this and are reaping the electoral benefits, as they are campaigning on these issues as well as race. But the SA do not have a clue and consequently are in terminal decline.

Barry Buitekant
email

SW platform

I wish the SWP in Scotland would make up their mind. If they are in the Scottish Socialist Party, they should help to build the party. If they are in it to build their own platform, they will not succeed. I have talked to many non-platform people in the SSP and they are fed up with the actions of the SWP platform.

Grow up or get out.
Brian McFadyen
email

AWL and Zionism

We should welcome the report by Jack Conrad that Sean Matgamna/O’Mahoney has issued a ruling that members are now to describe themselves as fully-fledged, rather than “a little bit” Zionist. It is far better that they are honest, open and transparent.

No one should be under any illusion that Zionism is any different a creature to that which was founded by Herzl in 1897 and Pinsker in the 1880s. Racial purification, using religion as the criterion, is as much a part of the Zionist project as it has always been.

Or did Matgamna not notice the new mixed marriages law that says that Israeli Arabs must leave Israel if they want to marry Palestinians? Or is he not aware that Judaisation of the Negev and Galilee is as much a part of official ideology as it was in the 1950s?

Israeli Arabs are not merely second-class citizens, as, for example, Amerindians or Aborigines are. Their status is circumscribed in every aspect of the

state, its organisations and policies. Even child benefits are greater for a Jewish woman (to increase the Jewish birth rate) than they are for non-Jews. Zionism took as its starting point a rejection of the French Revolution and its ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality. Theirs is a politics that looks fondly back to the ghetto.

Where the CPGB and Ian Donovan go wrong is in their belief that the solution is two states. As an article in *The Observer* noted, Palestinians are increasingly realising that two states is a chimera, a cover for continued apartheid occupation (September 14). The fact is that two states cannot now happen. The extent of settlement, the pillaging of water and other natural resources is too far gone. What is needed is a demand for equal national and individual rights *within* one state. The demand for two states acts as a camouflage for continued apartheid discrimination, the confiscation of land, the military closure of villages, the lack of basic legal rights, etc in the West Bank/Gaza.

It is also incorrect to assume that, because Israeli Jews have a common language and culture (debatable), they are a nation. Their defining characteristic is antagonism to the Palestinians. Any attempt to form a state based on being Jewish - and even the most secular Zionists always rested their claims on the ancestral biblical claims to the land - will end up being expressed against the Palestinians.

It is time for the CPGB to rethink the two states slogan, otherwise they will be accepting the logic of the AWL position without the politics that lead to it.

Tony Greenstein
email

Centralism kills

I read Joe Wills letter in reply to Richard Griffin with interest. Wills dismisses Richard’s comments on liberal electoral democracy as a “nihilist world outlook” that suggests “the working class have not improved their lives one iota since the dark days of feudalism” (*Weekly Worker* September 18).

I was under the impression that working class direct action had improved our lives, not paternalistic actions by liberal parliaments. Obviously I was wrong to think that reforms were a product of working class self-activity (and the fear it provoked in ruling circles). Thanks for clarifying that - I now know where the real power to change society lies.

Looking at ‘democratic centralism’, Wills argues: “If there is one thing revolutionaries learnt in the 20th century it is this: decentralisation or survival.” Strange. That century suggests the opposite: centralisation leads to minority rule, not socialism. Wills claims that ‘democratic centralism’ is “not necessarily in conflict” with popular democracy, yet his own example (the Russian Revolution) shows this is false. He states that the Bolshevik slogan was ‘All power to the soviets’.

Indeed, it *was* a slogan, and nothing more. Lenin in 1917 made it clear that the Bolsheviks aimed for party power, not soviet power. And that is what we got. Wills claims that what “disrupted” the power of local soviets was “the civil war conditions created by the white terror of the internal and external armies of counterrevolution”. Sadly, this often repeated claim is false. The Bolsheviks had been disbanding soviets elected with non-Bolshevik majorities from the spring of 1918: ie, before the civil war started (see Samuel Farber’s *Before Stalinism*). Faced with the choice of soviet power or party power, the Bolsheviks picked the latter. Unsurprisingly, given Lenin’s politics.

Wills argues that, “if there had been no central authority, the revolution would have been instantly strangled”. Yet it was this “central authority” that strangled the revolution. It had started to do this *before* the start of the civil war

with attacks on soviet democracy, workers’ control and opposition groups. Anarchists are not surprised by this, of course, as the state is designed for minority rule.

Then there is the stark contradiction in Wills’s argument. According to Lenin, revolution inevitably involves civil war. Now, if civil war makes soviet democracy impossible, then Leninists should come clean and rip up Lenin’s *State and revolution* (as Lenin did once in power). You cannot have it both ways.

Iain McKay
email

Spain 1936

Bob Pitt’s piece on cross-class alliances makes some interesting points, but its comments of the popular front in Spain misses crucial dimensions (*Weekly Worker* September 18).

Firstly, the nature of the labour movement, the CNT and the anarchist dimension: along the south-eastern coast of Spain, the libertarians were the hegemonic force in the labour movement. Secondly, perhaps most telling, the dynamics of change: one the one hand, Caballero was moving left, but he had a background of working with conservative governments in collaboration with employers, so he had to earn the trust of large parts of the labour movement - he was opposed by a rightist tendency within the UGT and PSOE; on the other hand, a part of the libertarian movement was moving rightwards.

In the libertarian camp adventurists who had tried what they called revolutionary gymnastics - launching insurrections - had got a bloody nose and had been unable to upset the rightwing government - tacitly they accepted that it was useful to vote for the left to get their comrades out of jail. Such a practical objective - getting comrades out of jail - led them to downplay criticism of the popular front policy.

Another perspective had been aired within the libertarian camp - V Orobón Fernandez had argued for a front based on activity by workers to defend their interests. Fernandez died before 1936, and his views were not developed. Thus, although it did discuss self-management and did carry through many of these changes in 1936-37, the libertarian camp had little practical political policy to propose - especially on how it was to work with, through or beyond the UGT/PSOE - and was taken by surprise by the events of the summer of 1936.

Under such conditions the leadership of the libertarian movement ended up in government working with Caballero, partly because it did not know what it wanted or where it was going (beyond reflecting that it would continue the revolution after the war), and partly because it feared defeat if it attempted to rule on its own. Such a view might suggest that this popular front was not so much a Stalinist conspiracy to establish governments with the liberal bourgeoisie to defeat fascism, but rather a product of past defeats of the working class and its political formations.

Terry Sheen
email

CWU ballot

The Communication Workers Union campaign for strike action was utter bollocks from the start. There was no way we could have matched the amount of crap Royal Mail was sending to individuals and the posters they sent to offices, but Billy Hayes and Dave Ward want pissing off for the amateur way they dealt with things. Thousands of members didn’t receive a ballot paper (14% in my office alone).

Hayes and Ward poked their noses out of their window in Wimbledon, sniffed the London weighting issue and imagined they had the same support everywhere else. At no time did divisional

officers visit delivery offices. You could do worse than write an article on how those fucking desk jockeys who have forgotten their roots lost us this campaign.

Northern postman
email

Scamming

Thank you for exposing the Ukrainian scam. However, British parties, organisations and groups have worked some pretty clever scams themselves.

A British Communist Party would go all out to obtain recognition by a socialist country. In order to get the franchise it had to maintain three things: one, there was a good revolutionary solution in Britain; two, it was leading the British revolution; three, all other parties were no good - if not actually counterrevolutionary or CIA fronts.

Once a party had secured recognition, money, literature, free holidays and delegations to international conferences flowed freely. This was all at the expense of the socialist countries who were, on the whole, poor with small reserves of foreign currency.

A classic example was the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), whose paper *The Worker* at one stage carried the banner - ‘Russia 1917! China 1949! Britain next!’ The parties and governments of the socialist countries formulated their political strategies on the basis of the tales that they were told. This kind of scam was operated throughout the western countries. Parties which were excluded from the feast in the socialist countries often recognised each other.

International conferences were ideal places to meet third world revolutionary leaders. Either that or else party members from the western countries went snooping around in the third world using their party’s international prestige. As anyone could join a western party, intelligence was easily collected in this way and passed on. Small wonder the British left is known internationally as the left wing of the British foreign office.

Friendship organisations also have a role to play. They tell the leaders out there that the British people would like them to moderate their line. Said leaders crack down on the left and moderate their line. The friendship organisation then tells people here that they must respect the decision of the people out there and back the moderate line.

With the Ukrainian scam, tragedy is repeating itself as farce.

Ivor Kenna
London

Building a socialist alternative



New Socialist Alliance pamphlet, £2 each; discounts for bulk orders. From Socialist Alliance, Creative House, 82-90 Queensland Road, London N7 7AS; 020 7609 2999;

ANIMAL

A new play by Kay Adshead from The Red Room. Finishes Saturday September 27, 7.30pm; Saturday matinee, 3pm Soho Theatre, 21 Dean Street, London W1

Bookings: 020 7478 0100; www.sohotheatre.com

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sunday September 28, 5pm - ‘Einstein and the militarisation of science’: István Mészáros’s *The power of ideology* as a study guide. Phone 07950 416922 for details.

Kent: Sunday September 28, 6pm - ‘James Connolly and the first Red Army, 1916’. Kings Head pub, Wincheap, Canterbury. Phone 01227 731045 for details.

Close Yarl’s Wood

March and demonstration, Sunday September 28 (reopening day). Assemble 12 noon, John Howard memorial statue, St Paul’s Square, Bedford. March to Yarl’s Wood immigration detention centre, Twinwoods Road, Clapham, Bedfordshire for demonstration, 2pm.

Campaign For Justice in the Yarl’s Wood Trial: sady_campaign@yahoo.co.uk

Defend Maria

Public meeting, Tuesday October 7, 8pm, Malcolm X Centre, 141 City Road, St Paul’s, Bristol BS2. Meet Somali refugee Maria Ikow, who is facing deportation. Defend Maria and defend all asylum-seekers.

Organised by Bristol Defend the Asylum-Seekers Campaign hughesbob@compuserve.com; www.asylumBristol.org.uk

London Labour Left

Meeting for Labour Party members - ‘Where now for Labour after party conference?’, Wednesday October 8, 7pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Diane Abbott MP; NEC members Ann Black and Christine Shawcroft; national policy forum member Pete Willsman.

International Brigade

Memorial Trust AGM, Saturday October 11, 2pm, City Chambers, George Square, Glasgow.

NCDAC

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns national meeting, Saturday October 11, 12 noon to 5pm, ARC, 60 Dovecot Street, Stockton on Tees. Transport costs for anti-deportation campaigns reimbursed by NCADC; crèche available. ncadc@ncadc.org.uk; http://www.ncadc.org.uk

Renewing dialogues

Marxism and education day seminar, Wednesday October 22, 9.30am to 5pm, Clarke Hall, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1. Sessions on identity, Marxism and action; activity theory; Gramsci, religion and the curriculum. To reserve a place (free, but limited), contact Glenn Rikowski: rikowski@tiscali.co.uk

Mumia Must Live

New video showing in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal, US militant framed for murder of policeman, at Anarchist Bookfair, Saturday October 25, 3pm, room 3B, University of London Union, Malet Street (nearest tube: Goodge Street). Organised by Mumia Must Live, BCM Box 4771, London WC1N 3XX; mumiauk@yahoo.co.uk

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

CWU

CND - <http://www.cnduk.org>

Updated image

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament must be thanking its lucky stars. Having haunted anti-war demos and actions as a ghostly relic of the cold war era, it has recently re-emerged from the political graveyard. The necromancy was performed by the Socialist Workers Party, fulfilling its perceived need to gloss the Stop the War Coalition with a liberal-pacifist veneer.

Considering CND's previous shadow-like existence, I was quite surprised to come across a website looking superior to that of the organisation which gave CND the kiss of life. 'Neat and tidy' is the most accurate way of describing it. The header features a mushroom cloud with some placards, and a number of rotating links.

During my visit, these included legal opinion on the Iraq war, international nuclear news and coverage of CND in the press. This latter page brings together weekly mentions by news agencies and papers. For instance, an article by that professional Tory buffoon, Boris Johnson, on the exchange rate mechanism is included because CND gets a brief mention in passing. If that is all it takes, can we expect the *Weekly Worker* to feature next week?

The navigation menu is the first port of call. 'About CND' is very brief, setting out the aims and objectives. The organisation sets out to "campaign non-violently to rid the world of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and to create security for future generations". To achieve this end, it calls for unilateral disarmament, public debates on non-violent conflict-resolution, empowerment to work for a nuclear-free peace and cooperation with similar groups across the planet. As expected, it has nothing to say about capitalism's inherent contradictions and how they give rise to conflict and war.

'Join CND' is interesting because applicants receive a number of goodies for their money. A number of other schemes can be joined, such as CND letter-writing teams, active branches, and more specialist newsletters. 'Campaigns' is especially pretty, with each separate issue (trident, star wars, Nato, plutonium trade and Iraq) represented by a photo.

Each page states the CND case, lists upcoming actions specific to that campaign and gives relevant information and organisation links. To illustrate, 'Star wars' gives notice of the October 11 Menwith Hill action, carries a petition and links to Yorkshire CND and missile defence briefings.

'Events diary' is a useful calendar of future actions. 'CND shop' is still under construction, branded T-shirts being the only available merchandise at present. 'Press' carries the year's media releases and includes an archive for 2002 also. 'Briefings and information' is valuable for anti-war activists, providing a degree of depth and research seldom seen elsewhere.

Unfortunately, given the chronological ordering of the briefings, you would be forgiven for thinking that the likes of Iran and North Korea pose a threat equal to the US. 'Education' remains under construction - so still time to include something on the roots of war then. 'Jobs' focus on CND internships, where aspiring graduates can apply for voluntary posts as a springboard into the NGO sector. 'CND contacts' is a directory of branches, offices and specialist sections. 'Useful links' is a good list of peacenik groups, but nothing explicitly political.

The main part of the site highlights items catalogued by the navigation bar. The most prominent headline is for this Saturday's demo against the occupation of Iraq. Activists can download flyers and posters, as well as volunteering to help CND out on the day. This section is divided from the rest of the screen by a bar highlighting the US war drive and Britain's relationship to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

If anyone still has illusions in Blair's "ethical foreign policy", a quick read of this should disabuse them of such notions. Another prominent feature is Iran. Here CND echoes the calls of US and British imperialism to make its weapons programme visible to the International Atomic Energy Agency (while distancing itself from Bush's undisguised threats).

'Iraq war crimes' updates the situation on the indictments being compiled against Blair, Geoff Hoon and Jack Straw, which will then be presented to the International Criminal Court at some future time. This is backed up by more links, UN resolutions and the George Galloway legal fund (!).

This website certainly does CND credit. The professional design and the heavy emphasis on briefings and research suggest an image far removed from Orwellian stereotypes of bearded fruit juice drinkers. Unfortunately the politics leave a lot to be desired. CND's preaching against certain types of weapons does throw up interesting information, but this can only be used effectively if working class interests are firmly in the anti-war driving seat

Phil Hamilton

around
THEWEB

Anger explodes

What happens in the next couple of weeks will be crucial for Royal Mail postal workers. While both management and New Labour were still crowing over the defeat of the Communication Workers Union national strike ballot, the militant section of the CWU membership has hit back over London weighting. They recorded a massive 'yes' vote in favour of strike action (for: 11,417; against: 4,316).

Meanwhile, hundreds walked out at the Oxford mail centre in Cowley and Headington. Workers decided to take unofficial action over worries about the national pay deal and job cuts. They were eventually persuaded to return to work by CWU officials at an emergency meeting on the morning of Sunday September 21. However, a second walkout followed the next day after a van driver was suspended.

Despite the loss of the national ballot, feelings are running very high in militant areas and the London weighting result could easily shift the balance of forces. Unison's welcome call for joint action must help: its council members in the capital voted by an 80% majority in a 'consultative ballot' to continue their long-running dispute, also over London weighting.

Of course, postal workers face an intransigent management, working hand in glove with a government that is intent on defeating the 'awkward squad', so that it can carry through its programme of 'modernisation' unimpeded.

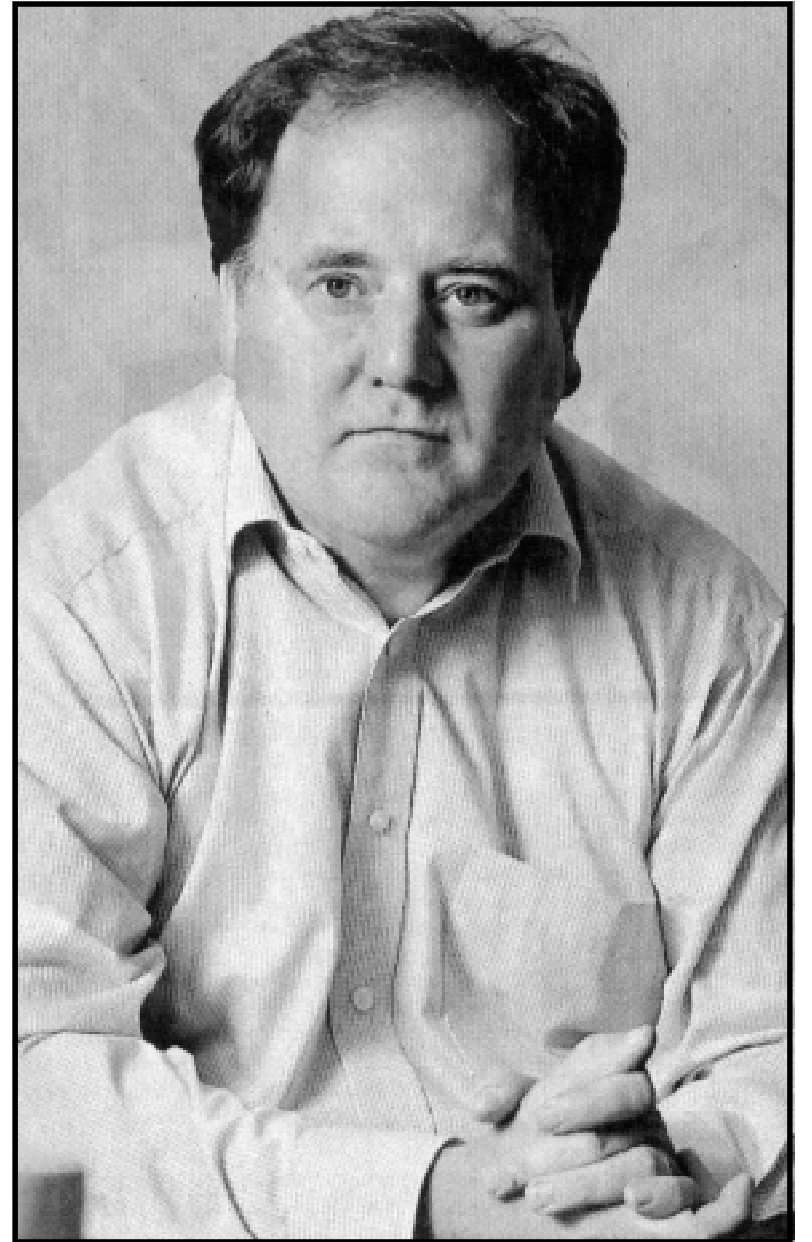
Last week's national vote was obviously a blow not only to the CWU leadership, but to those hoping to see a revival of working class combativity. Those voting in favour of the recommendation for a 'yes' to strike action were defeated by 46,391 to 48,038 - a majority of 1,647.

This dispute relates to the CWU's 8% basic pensionable pay claim. Management offered instead a derisory 4.5% over 18 months with a carrot of 10% - provided a batch of cost-cutting targets are met, including 30,000 redundancies.

It is deeply disturbing that around 65,000, or 40%, of our membership did not vote at all, and there have been complaints that thousands never received their ballot papers. This of course leaves a question mark over the handling of the dispute by the union bureaucracy.

Before and during the balloting period we received a constant flow of letters from Royal Mail chairman Alan Leighton, addressed to each of us personally - initially using the 10% inducement carrot, followed by dire warnings of the consequences of strike action. Local managers called us into meetings to lecture us about the foolishness of walking out and damaging 'our' competitiveness.

Yet many union branches have noted that there was no sign of national or divisional union officials attempting to counter management's propaganda. Clearly Royal Mail's campaign far outclassed that of the CWU. The use of union meetings to disseminate information and boost morale is an essential ingredient for a successful outcome. Whether this lacklustre effort was due to a lack of resources or complacency on the union's part is not entirely clear. Either way, it was not a good start for Billy



Billy Hayes: unhappy

Hayes and his deputy Dave Ward, both members of the so-called 'awkward squad'.

The failure to win the ballot - and win convincingly - will have its cost. A worker at my depot reflected both the mood of despondency and a commonly held view: "From now on management will be able to do what they like with us."

So why did the vote go so badly against all expectations? There are several reasons:

- apathy, reflecting a lack of confidence
- failure of the Fire Brigades Union strike
- Royal Mail's propaganda
- half-hearted CWU campaigning
- lack of rank and file organisation

It appears that the Royal Mail executive now intends to embark on a campaign of de-unionisation. This could mean ending full-time release for union reps in depots and stopping the paying of dues through payroll deduction. First the FBU, now us. It is obvious that Leighton, together with executive director Adam Crozier and his deputy, Elmar Toime, engineered this dispute in order to see off the union. Before Royal Mail can be broken up and sold to the private sector, it will be necessary to atomise the workforce through disabling our collective defence - allowing further attacks on our conditions in the newly privatised units.

The proposed changes in Royal Mail

are all part of a wider scenario involving the rest of Europe. The goal of 30,000 job cuts here are an echo of the 45,000 losses which have already taken place in Deutsche Post - part of a coordinated liberalisation programme to make the European Union more competitive compared with its US rival. Royal Mail's 'restructuring' is being stepped up in line with EU plans to end the monopoly held by national postal carriers and open up markets to competition.

The problem that faces the trade union bureaucracy is that the culture of institutionalised compromise established in past times is now largely ineffective. Since the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 things are much more confrontational. That is why the FBU lost. Foolishly the CWU leadership went into this dispute expecting to find a quick compromise. What they got was war. The CWU told the membership that a 'yes' vote would force management to retreat and it would probably not be necessary to strike. It was a simple matter for Leighton to call the CWU's bluff - he told us if we walked out we would still be out at Christmas.

To say you do not really expect to fight is to guarantee defeat. When you go to war you must be prepared to fight all the way to victory. That is the message coming from London and those who are now taking unofficial action

John Keys

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CANCUN SUMMIT

Imperialists shaken

So-called ‘third world’ countries are being forced to rebel against neoliberal economics and the inhuman suffering it imposes. **Ian Donovan** believes that this is only the beginning

The collapse on September 15 of the world trade summit talks at Cancun, Mexico, has caused a degree of consternation in imperialist circles. A powerful bloc of recalcitrant ‘third world’ powers, centred around China, India and the Brazilian ‘left’ government of Lula, mobilised the bulk of so-called ‘developing countries’ to force a stalemate, refusing to go along with the arrogant demands of the United States and European Union over issues to do with protectionism.

What is actually at stake goes to the heart of the project of globalised neoliberalism that has become the dominant form of capitalism over the past three decades or so, and has achieved something approximating to complete hegemony - particularly during the period of ideological reaction that ensued since the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The neoliberal project, in dealing with the ex-colonial world, is expressed in the decades-long cascade of so-called ‘structural adjustment programmes’: ie, enforced marketisation, privatisation, deregulation and the opening up to exploitation by imperialist monopolies of any scrap of state provision or incipient welfare/non-marketised economic entities that can be found in those countries that are in the position of having to seek ‘aid’ from capitalist world institutions. The results of this social phenomenon were summed up powerfully by a Zambian newspaper after the trade talks collapsed:

“It really breaks one’s heart to hear and see what is going on in our slums; what is happening to the children, the women and the unemployed; what’s happening with education; the growing number of children who are homeless and have to try to survive on the streets; and what is happening with the health situation in most of our countries that now have HIV/Aids.

“Faced with this situation, people in the poor nations and their leaders are becoming truly desperate. It is only a matter of time, because this policy is creating a time bomb in the world. Are we going to wait for it to explode before we start thinking about these problems? Never before has humanity had such formidable scientific and technologic potential, such extraordinary capacity to produce riches and well-being, but never before have disparity and inequity been so profound in the world” (*Lusaka Post* September 16).

This protest against the inhuman consequences of the neoliberal world order is not in any way socialistic or communistic. It reflects the hard-headed outlook of states throughout the underdeveloped capitalist world. Bureaucratic elites fear for the future of their own ‘home grown’ capitalism, given the social consequences of decades of imperialist-dictated globalisation, which is, of course, counterposed to any kind of nationalist economic development - once pursued in an attempt to promote industrial development. Subsidies, social welfare and tariff walls are being torn down with no thought for the human cost, all for the sake of increasing the profits of the giant transnationals. Hence the rebellion against neoliberalism and its consequences.

The actual sticking point that led to the collapse of the Cancun talks was the batch of so-called Singapore issues - basically a list of demands from the US and EU - which were summarised very crudely by the BBC as:

- how countries treat foreign investors;
- standards for anti-monopoly and cartel laws;
- greater transparency in government purchasing, which might help foreign companies win public sector business;
- trade facilitation - making things like customs procedures simpler

(BBC news online, September 15).

These demands were presented by the US and the EU as a take-it-or-leave-it package to the ‘developing countries’. However, this latest tranche of marketisation proved too much - they refused to submit. Interestingly, though, this defiance is led by forces that are largely, though not entirely, advocates of various alternative capitalist models of development.

First there is China, whose ‘communist’ regime now presides over a most unstable situation - a hybrid economy, in fact. The state whose whole ethos was once the so-called ‘iron rice bowl’ of state employment and the supposed rule of the working class, is now the main guarantor of foreign capitalist investment and overseer of what has been in the last couple of decades an unprecedented boom in ‘controlled’ capitalism, with annual growth rates in excess of 10%.

It is rather obvious, however, that the Chinese regime regards its Stalinist economic prerogatives, exercised in modified form, as key instruments in building its own national capitalism. Many world commentators, and some hostile elements in the US bourgeoisie, regard China as a potent economic and strategic competitor for the US in the coming decades. Whatever the realism of such projections, these events certainly portend significant tensions and antagonisms.

Then there is India, currently governed by a coalition of religious and secular bourgeois parties led by the BJP, a notorious hindu chauvinist formation, which rode into power on the basis of communal tensions between India’s hindu majority and huge muslim minority (140 million or so of India’s population of around a billion). In recent years the Indian bourgeoisie has followed its own version of neoliberalism, as part of the same ‘modernised’ nationalist paradigm that has led to its development of nuclear weapons and subcontinental nuclear rivalry with Pakistan. However, as with China, such policy has its limits. The use of imperialist economic muscle to impose the lifting of restrictions on western economic penetration without any quid pro quo contradicts the national programmes of the ruling class, which aims to use neoliberalism for its own enrichment, not to surrender such development to the interest of the world’s most powerful corporations.

Then you have Brazil, where many similar considerations apply. The main difference here, of course, is the election earlier this year of a ‘left’ popular front coalition. Its central locus is the social democratic Workers Party (PT), led by Luis Ignacio da Silva (Lula), the former metalworkers’ leader, but it does include a Trotskyist minister (a supporter of the so-called Fourth International and a fellow thinker of Allan Thornett and the International Socialist Group in Britain).

Although the PT-led government has engaged in a lot of rhetoric about opposing neoliberalism, it is pushing ahead with privatisation and has not attempted to repudiate the crippling debts owed to imperialist financial institutions - the main cause of the super-exploitation of the Brazilian workers and the landless poor. This despite the fact that it was

precisely the struggles of such oppressed and exploited people that brought to power the PT in the first place.

In this respect - albeit in a rather different context, given the proletarian pressure that undoubtedly exists at the base of the PT - the considerations of the Brazilian government in allying with China and India to bring about the thwarting of the imperialists’ plans at Cancun were broadly similar to those of their bloc partners.

Of course, apart from the goings-on inside the conference, what also attracted international attention to Cancun was the demonstrations outside. The barbaric character of neoliberalism was symbolised by the suicide of a poor South Korean farmer outside the conference - a tragic waste, but a powerful symbol of the despair of imperialism’s victims.

Many made comparisons with the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle in 1999, where militant demonstrations of trade unionists and anti-capitalist protestors outside went hand in hand with deadlock inside to produce a spectacular, if symbolic, debacle for the imperialist financiers. Now, in the context of such events as the so-called ‘war against terrorism’, culminating in the US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq and the subsequent bogging down of the coalition forces in what looks more and more like a Lebanon-style quagmire, once again the imperialist attempts to crack the whip are running into serious problems. For us communists, that is a good thing, despite the unsavoury nature of many of the governments that are currently in dispute with the would-be masters of the world.

Communists are not partisans of national capitalist development in the underdeveloped world. Nor are we opponents of capitalist globalisation in itself - a process that leads to the growth of the proletariat as an international class (and that has often been an undeniable consequence of some aspects of globalisation, as evidenced in places as far apart as Mexico, South Korea and India). While at the same time fighting against the savage exploitation that inevitably accompanies such development, nevertheless we regard the growth of our class and the spread of the potential for class struggle that results from this as objectively progressive.

That does not, however, mean that such a positive outcome will emerge smoothly without the most dire consequences in individual countries. Particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in parts of Latin America (Argentina being a recent, dramatic example - though

“We regard the growth of our class and the spread of the potential for class struggle that results from this as objectively progressive”

there are much worse cases), globalisation has brought whole societies to the brink of collapse. The genocidal neglect of Africa’s massive Aids crisis in the interests of the profits of imperialist drug monopolies is the ultimate example of capital’s destructiveness. In the former Soviet bloc also, in many cases economic ‘liberalisation’ has led to the wiping out of enormous productive potential in a manner that is completely damaging socially. And of course, the many evils of capitalist development in the other parts of the ‘third world’ have been well documented - from the sweatshops of the far east and Indonesia to the murderous pollution of the people of Bhopal, India, who are still being poisoned by the legacy of Union Carbide.

We do not support the developmental programmes of the Indian BJP, the Chinese Stalinists or Lula’s Brazil. We do, however, seek to use every opportunity, including those brought about by clashes between the imperialists and what are essentially national capitalist interests of less powerful countries, in order to bring to the fore the independent interests of the masses.

There is perhaps a very fleeting coincidence of interests in this respect - whereas sections of the masses are protesting against the socially irrational and exploitative manifestations of globalised imperialism, the national capitalist regimes are protesting that excessive neoliberal ruthlessness from the imperialists is undermining the stability of their own economies and destroying their human and infrastructural productive forces.

But, in the end, despite the all-inclusive appearance of the movement around Cancun (and indeed Seattle before it), these divergent interests are irreconcilable. Faced with real class struggles against the consequences of neoliberalism, which will inevitably develop a logic directed against the capitalist system itself, the bourgeois opponents of the currently dominant gang of imperialist robbers will inevitably unite with the same imperialists in an unholy alliance against the workers and peasants of the underdeveloped world.

Only a rather different alliance - one that unites the ‘third world’ masses with a revived, indeed thoroughly revolutionised, workers’ movement in the advanced capitalist/imperialist countries - can really shake imperialist world domination. Such a future development requires the rebirth of a genuine communist movement internationally - this alone can give rise to the conscious element necessary to take such struggles forward to a democratic and socialist conclusion □

Fighting fund

Urgent appeal

My pleas last week seem largely to have fallen on deaf ears. Although we received a welcome spurt of new subscriptions, when it comes to donations, they are few and far between.

As I never tire of reminding you, we must raise the full £500 over and above receipts from sales and subscriptions each and every month.

In fact right now we are particularly in need of hard cash to upgrade our IT equipment, so I was hoping that by today we would already have gone past our £500 target, leaving the best part of a week to pick up at least an extra ton.

No such luck. The last seven days have

only brought us £90 (thanks to JK, LP, GF, RD and JB), taking our total to just £305. So, instead of looking forward to a big surplus, I am now left worrying about making our basic target. Not a happy situation.

Comrades, it is time to act. In order for the *Weekly Worker* to continue playing its indispensable role we need a good response to this urgent appeal: help us go past our £500 target by posting your contribution *today*.

Robbie Rix

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SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

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The poverty of complacency

Often we hear glowing reports of the Socialist Alliance's executive committee and how proceedings are comradely, upbeat and business-like. My impressions were rather different, I am sorry to say.

I attended the September 20 meeting at the University of London Union, substituting for Marcus Ström who is in Australia. Not only did things start late, but debates exhibited a dreadful complacency and lack of vision. As to relations, they are decidedly uncomradely. The source of this growing malady can be summed up using an old English proverb - fish begin to stink at the head.

Rob Hoveman - SA national secretary and leading Socialist Workers Party member - reported on the three recent council and parliamentary by-elections. Our candidate in Cardiff, Clive Protheroe, got 3.0% of the poll, Lee Rock 3.5% in Waltham Forest and Brian Butterworth 1.7% in Brent East. The comrade rightly praised the candidates. All were excellent.

Focusing in on Brent East, he reckoned that the SA's message on the Iraq war, student fees and public services was either kidnapped or eclipsed by the Liberal Democrat machine. Nevertheless the government was given a hammering and the Labour Party suffered its first by-election defeat for 15 years. Our campaign had been good and a few contacts were picked up. Brent SA plans not to dip back out of existence now the election campaign is over.

Readers might be interested to note that Brent SA accumulated debts estimated at between £1,100 and £1,400 during the campaign. The executive agreed to take on half that sum (the CPGB sent off £150 towards this last week). To me, however, that whole small-minded approach smacks of amateurism. The by-election appears to have been run as a local campaign - only with outside help. But by-elections are national events and of national significance. The executive and its officers should have taken full charge and ploughed in as much national money and resources as possible. Surely that is what the Liberal Democrats did. After all, it is unlikely that their Brent East constituency organisation paid for the one million leaflets that were delivered to households urging a vote for Sarah Teather.

The only comrade to critically question the SA's performance was Margaret Manning (Manchester SA). She pointed to the SA's lack of profile and the failure to secure a speaker at any of the Stop the War demonstrations. Others satisfied themselves with excusing or explaining away the low vote.

Simon Joyce (SWP) correctly pointed to the dishonesty of the Liberal Democrats. Will McMahon (SA office worker and *Resistance* supporter) complained of the unwillingness of the capitalist print and electronic media to carry the SA's "story". Matthew Caygill (Leeds SA and *Resistance*) emphasised the importance of left unity - not only did Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party stand in Brent East: so did a string of other fringe candidates who were to the left of Labour. Mandy Baker (Socialist Solidarity Network and *Resistance*) concluded that we "couldn't have done differently". John Rees (SWP) argued that Labour's social base was "decomposing". The Liberal Democrats are filling the vacuum because we lack the social forces necessary to mount a credible challenge. However, with correct tactical handling, the RMT and PCS unions, George Galloway, the muslim community, etc could come to our rescue.

Nick Wrack (SA chair) delivered the next report. This was from the executive's 'task force' - a kind of politically united leadership within the leadership: ie, the SWP and its closest allies. Comrade Wrack referred to talks with various trade union officials. He also mentioned the example held out by the Scottish Socialist Party. Of course, they have a well known leader in the form of Tommy Sheridan and proportional representation.

Comrade Wrack outlined a three-pronged strategy. Firstly, the trade unions. The SA is sponsoring a convention of the trade union

left on February 7 2004. A number of prominent speakers have already been agreed and support gained from the London region of the Fire Brigades Union. Secondly, the SA is preparing to take part in a series of nationwide forums - George Galloway will play a crucial role here. Thirdly, building the SA. The SA should not disappear between elections. Branches should follow the example of Hackney SA and SA councillor Michael Lavalette in launching a bimonthly or quarterly local publication.

Then I came in. Basically I called for a sober assessment and a clear line of march. What is remarkable about Blair's government is not that it lost a by-election mid-term and after a deeply unpopular war. Rather that it had not experienced similar trouble till now. Labour's social base was not decomposing. Brent East was a massive protest vote. Under these circumstances the SA should have done better. Much better. We should take the example of the SSP seriously, not flippantly put its success down to one man and proportional representation. Comrade Sheridan was elected as a councillor in Glasgow under first-past-the-post rules. London's assembly has PR and so does the European parliament.

Objective circumstances in Scotland and the rest of Britain are not qualitatively different. The key factor is subjective. Scottish Militant Labour - the leading force in the Scottish SA - wholeheartedly fought for a party. It threw all of its financial resources, full-timers and energies into the project. Other factions of the left were won over too. The SSP launched a fortnightly paper which, with the eventual entry of the SWP as a platform, went weekly.

The results speak for themselves. And not only in PR elections. A week before Brian Butterworth secured 1.7% of the poll for us in Brent East, *Scottish Socialist Voice* reported that in Glasgow's Drumry ward the SSP's Andy Lynch ran second to Labour. He got 18% - ahead of the SNP and the Greens ... and the SLP, which managed just seven votes.

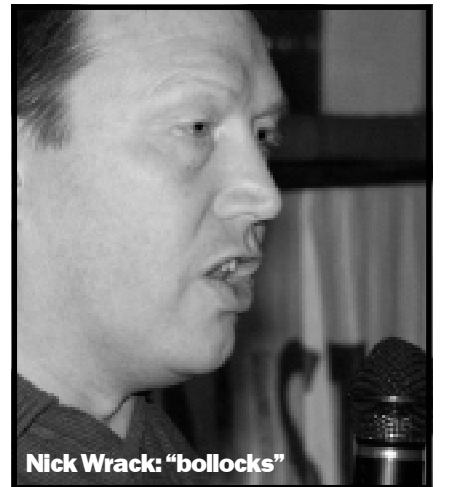
There is no chicken and egg situation. We should not wait upon "bigger social forces". The SA is the answer - if properly led. And talking about progressing left unity is all very well ... but how does it square with the total purge of dissenting voices in Birmingham SA by the SWP.

Comrade Rees would have none of it. He simply repeated the half-baked nonsense about Scottish PR and his faith in trade union leaders and George Galloway. John Fisher (independent) put his stress on local initiatives, while Alan Thornett (International Socialist Group) highlighted this year's TUC and the SA's fringe meeting. Forty-five attended, including some 35 delegates. The main speaker, Mark Serwotka, was "right down the line". Comrade Hoveman referred to the Green Party's decision to allow local discussions with organisations such as the SA. He also mentioned the "fraternal atmosphere" at the Wrexham summer gathering put on by Welsh assembly member John Marek. A somewhat amazing statement considering the brazen attempt to exclude the CPGB. But I let that pass. Other executive members either asked technical questions, touched upon European developments or concentrated on their own particular local circumstances.

Perhaps the complacency and poor level of debate is down to the absentees. Not only our comrade Ström, but Martin Thomas (Alliance for Workers' Liberty) and oppositionists such as Steve Godward and Lesley Mahmood were away too.

Shelly Margetson (Cambridge) gave a financial report. Her McCawber-like approach is to religiously avoid debt and keep safely in the black. Incidentally she appears oblivious to Worker Power's departure from the SA and therefore the end of its financial contribution.

She also banked on the CPGB continuing to pay twice as much as the AWL, International Socialist Group, etc for the rest of the year. We are putting a stop to this. Hence sud-



Nick Wrack: "bollocks"

denly controversy broke out. Comrade McMahon asked me when he could expect the cheque covering the CPGB's monthly contributions to SA funds. I said that he should not rely on it and that the CPGB will be writing to the executive to the effect that we wish to renegotiate the arrangement. Comrade Wrack said this threw the SA's plans into crisis, including the SA's intervention at the September 27 demonstration against the occupation of Iraq.

The meeting adjourned for a break and myself and comrades Wrack, McMahon and Margetson got together to talk. Comrade McMahon was particularly angry: "Why did you not inform the SA earlier?" I did not know it at the time, but apparently we did. Mark Fischer, our national organiser, left an answerphone message saying that our cheque had been cancelled.

Anyway I explained that the CPGB was deeply worried by recent negative developments in the SA. The CPGB had originally proposed that all of the principal supporting organisation pay equal contributions to cover the rent of an SA national office. Everyone agreed. Last year we paid in full. No other organisation did. The SWP merely discounted debt owed to its printshop, East End Offset - good business practice.

More than that, at the last AGM in March the SWP carried out a coup d'état. The SWP increased its representation from three to 13 seats on the executive, while its docile allies around *Socialist Resistance* were rewarded with some half a dozen places. The political balance within the SA's leadership was thereby radically shifted. The SWP also sought to kick out the AWL's Martin Thomas. He was kept on the executive, but only after we threatened to withdraw from the SWP's slate.

Shortly after that the SWP replaced comrade Godward as vice-chair and attempted to likewise remove comrade Ström from the purely technical post of nominations officer. This violation of the SA's founding principle of inclusivity was a prelude to the infamous purge in Birmingham and the physical attack on our members at Marxism 2003 - apparently set up by SWP national organiser Chris Bambery. Naturally we wrote to the SWP central committee in protest over this particular incident. No reply has been forthcoming. Not even an informal apology.

An example of the state of affairs in the SA can be gleaned from when comrade Rees put his oar in. In the Brent East campaign, he said, the CPGB did nothing (untrue). In Hackney CPGB members only sell the *Weekly Worker*. Not Paul Foot's local propaganda sheet. I did not directly respond. But I did mention Waltham Forest. The candidate, Lee Rock, got 3.5% of the vote - nothing to boast about, but neither a disgrace, considering Brent East. He is a CPGB member and CPGB members did most of the canvassing and most of the leafleting. Comrade Rees shut up.

However, comrade Wrack launched a sneering attack on the *Weekly Worker*'s post-mortem on the Waltham Forest by-election and the candidate's complaint about the SWP putting in only 15 hours of work during the whole of the campaign - in spite of claiming some 100 members in the immediate vicinity. This was "bollocks", spat comrade Wrack. "If that is the case," I said, "then what comrade Rees has just said should likewise be described." Did he talk "bollocks"? But, of course, our national chair would not dare say any such thing about the leader of the SWP, would he?

Again - and I know this is trivial, but it does serve to illustrate the soured relations that

exist in the SA - I later asked comrade Wrack if he would care to buy a copy of the *Weekly Worker*. He reads the paper avidly and with a lawyer's nose for fine detail. He certainly complains any time he thinks we have misrepresented him. "No," he said. "Giving you 50p would be an act of solidarity." So there you are. The national chair of the SA expects the CPGB's members to carry on paying twice as much as other principal supporting groups, while the SWP bars them from the STWC, attempts to remove them from SA positions and physically assaults them. Quite frankly something stinks.

The CPGB's Provisional Central Committee will, of course, be writing to the SA executive soon and naturally *Weekly Worker* readers will get to see our letter and the reply - if we get one. In the meantime let me stress that we communists have no intention whatsoever of ending our financial contributions to the SA. Our members will keep up their dues payments and the PCC will hand over *in full* our renegotiated contribution. But a changed political balance and a changed internal climate means a change in financial commitment. Perhaps the principal groups should pay according to the number of executive seats or their claimed total membership. Either way, the present arrangement is no longer tenable.

The next session began with comrade Wrack announcing a scaling back of the SA's intervention on the September 27 demonstration - because of the absence of the CPGB's cheque! Comrade Rees bore bad news too. The Stop the War Coalition had decided to turn down the SA's request for a speaker. If the SA was allowed, who else? I should have asked comrade Rees how he and the other SWP comrades on the STWC voted on this question (we do not know - the SWP ganged up against us, to prevent the CPGB from even sending an observer to meetings). In all honesty the question did not occur to me at the time. It is still worth asking though. Did the SWP argue and vote for the SA to have a speaker?

Weyman Bennett followed with a totally uninspiring report on anti-racist activity. The British National Party is talking of standing 1,000 candidates. In response the SA will join with mainstream parties and MPs in condemning them. Oh, and SA branches should invite black speakers along during black history month. The discussion around Europe and the European Social Forum proved no more uplifting. Eg, John Fisher, our representative on the ESF, did not know quite why we should go to Paris in November or what we should do when we got there.

There was some discussion over the dating of the SA's next conference. Should it be March or October? One day or two? Contributions were also requested on the method of electing the new executive. The slate system suits the SWP and its ISG/*Resistance* allies. But no one else. So thankfully there might be a rethink. The CPGB favours a straightforward first-past-the-post system of individual election with a committee appointed by conference to recommend a list which takes into account factional affiliation, geography, industry, gender, age, etc.

Finally Beds SA came up in correspondence. Eric Karas wrote, complaining that the branch has been closed since January. After the SWP ousted from office and then tried to expel Danny Thompson and Jane Clarke - both supporters of the Revolutionary Democratic Group - he and other SA members had been left in limbo.

We were provided with an accompanying letter from Keith Woods, Beds SA secretary, which was written for purposes of 'clarification'. He admitted that the branch had not been meeting. Apparently to hold an AGM and allow the two dissident comrades, Thompson and Clarke, to stand for election would undermine "our credibility". As if SWP purges and not meeting for the best part of a year promotes credibility.

Nevertheless the 'secretary' of 'Beds SA' rightly complained that the appeals committee has so far taken 18 months to consider the issue! In my view a disgrace and an insult to natural justice. For comrades Thompson and Clarke to still have disciplinary charges hanging over their heads after all this time is oppressive. A form of persecution and a denial of their elementary rights as SA members. The executive agreed to seek an update from the 'new' appeals committee - elected at the March AGM □

John Bridge

“The CPGB’s Provisional Central Committee will, of course, be writing to the SA executive soon and naturally *Weekly Worker* readers will get to see our letter and the reply - if we get one”

Brent East by-election Learn the lessons

The dismal inability of the Socialist Alliance to take advantage of New Labour's difficulties was well and truly exposed by the September 18 Brent East parliamentary by-election.

True, Tony Blair's Labour Party was given, in the words of home secretary David Blunkett, a "bloody nose" in what was supposed to be one of its safest seats. As a result Liberal Democrat candidate Sarah Teather romped home. Labour's share of the vote fell from over 63% in the 2001 general election to just 33.76% last week, while the Lib Dems - who did not get a single councillor elected in Brent East and have hardly any activists in the constituency - almost quadrupled their percentage of the poll.

Despite an energetic campaign and a good candidate in Brian Butterworth of the Socialist Workers Party, the SA could only pick up 361 votes (1.73%). This compares to the 383 managed by the Socialist Labour Party's Iris Cremer in 2001 (admittedly on a bigger turnout) and the 466 notched up by Stan Keable (a CPGB member standing for the SLP) in the 1997 general election. Comrade Keable, it should be noted, stood against 'red' Ken Livingstone and on an openly revolutionary platform. He was also publicly disowned by SLP president Arthur Scargill. This time, of course, he supported and worked for Brian Butterworth.

According to SA national secretary Rob Hoveman, "With two major parties pouring resources into the election and with the election being conducted under first past the post, the Socialist Alliance was bound to have an uphill struggle to register a vote, and so it turned out" (SA e-bulletin, September 23).

But, asks Stan Keable, "Why such fatalism? Although we could not match the resources of the mainstream parties in terms of finance, we certainly made up for this when it came to enthusiasm." The SA had fewer canvassers than the Liberal Democrats and Labour (even London mayor Ken Livingstone joined the 200 or so MPs who flooded into the constituency to back defeated candidate Robert Evans). But with 150 campaign workers we were not that far behind the Tories and certainly ahead of the Greens.

The SA's inability to make an impact results from its lack of any national profile or sense of purpose. "Every time I spoke to someone," explains comrade Keable, "I had to start from scratch". They "usually don't know who we are or what we stand for". As for the SWP leadership, it "doesn't appear to have a clue about where to take us". The SA is an officially registered party, but at the last AGM the SWP voted down the aim of campaigning for a new workers' party - "that leaves the SA as neither fish nor fowl." And, concludes comrade Keable, "People vote for parties, not on-off SWP united fronts of a special type".

In the past the SA had done much better in similar circumstances. In the very first by-election contested by the SA in June 2000, the SWP's Weyman Bennett gained 885 votes, saving his deposit with 5.4%. This was in Tottenham, a seat which, like Brent East, has a high proportion of ethnic minority voters, and where of course the mainstream parties were also able to concentrate their resources.

Comrade Hoveman argues: "What was a very difficult position was made far worse by a number of left candidates standing with very similar policies." Obviously, not untrue. Apart from the Greens, who cannot necessarily be described as a left party, the SA was in competition with at least three other anti-war candidates. And then there was Kelly McBride, standing for justice for her brother, murdered by British troops, and a candidate standing against a post office closure. Despite the efforts of the SA through Brent's convention of the left, we failed to produce a single left candidate. That undoubtedly cost. The array of candidates lessened the impact of the SA.

However, we must seriously ask ourselves why the SA did not have the credibility to attract to itself at least some of these "leftish fringe candidates" (we can exclude Scargill's

ultra-sectarian SLP). For example, Fawzi Ibrahim (Public Services Not War) is not only a leftwing Iraqi exile, but a trade union activist, who spoke as a delegate of the lecturers' union, Naffhe, at the recent TUC congress. Neil Walsh, who stood against post office closures, is a Communication Workers Union member employed by Royal Mail, while Harold Immanuel, a dissident member of Brent East Labour Party, preferred to stand as Independent Labour.

The truth is, the circumstances of the by-election ought to have been very favourable for the Socialist Alliance. In a constituency with an 11% muslim population and over 50% from ethnic minorities, it is generally agreed that opposition to the war on Iraq played a significant part in the outcome. The left - mostly in the shape of the SWP - was at the helm in the Stop the War Coalition, which had a major role in organising and mobilising for the anti-war actions, not least the magnificent, two-million-strong February 15 demonstration.

But the Socialist Alliance was deliberately sidelined by the SWP in the anti-war upsurge. There were no SA speakers on any major STWC platforms, while SA banners, placards and leaflets hardly featured. SWP comrades, including leading members of the alliance, *did* speak on numerous occasions, but never wearing their SA hats. SWP members were instructed *not* to do SA work.

What is more, the STWC leaders made a huge tactical blunder by permitting Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy to appear on the February 15 Hyde Park platform. He was allowed to pose as the leader of the only mainstream party claiming to be against the war - although, of course, within a few weeks he was marching his troops behind Blair, insisting, as everyone knew he would, that it was essential to 'support our boys and girls' once the conflict actually started.

Stopping Kennedy speaking on February 15 would have run against the grain of the SWP's numbers strategy. Yet a public clash with Kennedy would have hardly effected the turnout. More to the point, it would have been *politically* astute. A sharp line of demarcation would have been drawn between the anti-war party and the Liberal Democrats. We should have seized that opportunity and faced down the criticisms and brickbats. Instead the SWP shrank back, craving respectability and fearing a split. Timing was left for Kennedy to calculate. As a consequence, in Brent East the Liberal Democrats claim the anti-war mantle - thanks in no small measure to February 15 and the short-sighted generosity of the SWP and their allies in the STWC.

Another organisation given an undeserved helping hand by the SWP is the Muslim Association of Britain. Although it was probably tactically correct for the STWC to agree to merge its September 28 2002 demonstration with an MAB march which had been called on the same day, there was no reason whatsoever to continually promote this re-

actionary and largely unrepresentative body as a joint sponsor of STWC demonstrations ever since. MAB is the British branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and tends to organise Arab muslims, certainly not the entire so-called 'muslim community'.

The MAB repaid the SWP's generosity in Brent East by declaring that the treacherous Liberal Democrats were the "best choice for muslims" and afterwards even tried to claim credit for the result: "... the muslim community has once again proved its profound influence on the outcome of elections, as well as its agreement with the sentiments of the British people" (statement, September 19).

The Muslim Public Affairs Committee was another group spreading illusions in Kennedy's gang that had an over-inflated sense of its own importance: "MPAC made history in the UK, as the first ever candidate was defeated by a muslim bloc vote. The *ummah* [believers] had taken up a political *jih*ad and delivered a bloody nose to the government that attacked Iraq" (MPAC UK website).

But just how damaged is Blair by this shock defeat? Obviously, the Labour leadership would have rather held onto their seat but, if they had to lose out, then how much more preferable was going down to the Liberal Democrats than to the Conservatives? In fact, while there was a 29% swing from Labour to Lib Dem, there was a 15% swing from the Tories, whose vote was also slashed.

Blair knows full well that only the Conservatives can defeat him at the next general election, but, on this showing, the Lib Dems are more likely to inflict losses on them than on the Labour Party - after all, 75 out of Kennedy's top 100 target seats are held by the Tories. Kennedy himself made it clear that he has no hope of defeating Blair nationwide: "The Tories are the big losers from this contest. It blows a hole in the idea that the Conservatives' recovery is underway. We're now on course to overtake the Tories as the principal party of opposition."

Thus, while Blair is still in deep trouble - his front men are weaving their pathetic lies before the Hutton enquiry, the 'big four' unions are joining forces to oppose him at the Labour conference, his MPs are rebelling over foundation hospitals and his spin doctors thought he was so much of a liability in Brent East that they advised him to stay away - his party nevertheless looks a safe bet for the next general election.

Many Labour activists refused to campaign in Brent, and a good number of traditional Labour voters, seeing no viable alternative, stayed at home on polling day. Blair will not be bothered by the low turnout - he showed in 2001 that he can win despite a large number of abstentions (disillusioned or otherwise).

The Socialist Alliance must learn the lessons. Discontent and anger with New Labour does not automatically translate into SA votes □

Peter Manson

Brent East result

Sarah Teather (Liberal Democrat)	8,158	39.12%
Robert Evans (Labour)	7,040	33.76%
Uma Fernandes (Conservative)	3,368	16.15%
Noel Lynch (Green)	638	3.06%
Brian Butterworth (Socialist Alliance)	361	1.73%
Fawzi Ibrahim (Public Services Not War)	219	1.05%
Winston McKenzie (independent)	197	0.94%
Kelly McBride (independent, anti-army)	189	0.91%
Harold Immanuel (Independent Labour)	188	0.90%
Brian Hall (UK Independence Party)	140	0.67%
Iris Cremer (Socialist Labour Party)	111	0.53%
Neil Walsh (independent, stop PO closures)	101	0.48%
Alan Hope (Monster Raving Loony Party)	59	0.28%
Aaron Barschack (independent)	37	0.18%
Jiten Bardwaj (independent)	35	0.17%
George Weiss (independent)	11	0.05%

DEBATE

Unavoidable battleground

The attempt to create an electoral alternative to the Labour Party in the shape of the Socialist Alliance was doomed from the outset, argues **Graham Bash** of *Labour Left Briefing*. The task of communists is to work within to defeat the Blairites

Thirty-five years ago I took two of the most important decisions of my life. After a process of inner struggle, I became a revolutionary socialist. And, at the same time, I joined the Labour Party. I never saw these decisions as being in conflict with one another. And, no matter how different the political landscape has become during this 35-year period, I do not see those decisions as being in conflict today.

The changes have of course been enormous. I joined the Labour Party in 1968, towards the end of a Labour government under Harold Wilson - a government which was supporting the napalming of the Vietnamese people and which attacked the trade unions in its attempts to introduce *In place of strife*. In the early 1970s, the rise in industrial militancy brought a Tory government down in 1974. That militancy, finding expression in the Labour Party, helped to create the strongest Labour left for a generation or more, and it laid the basis for the Bennite movement and for the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone.

The defeat of that movement, of the Bennite left in the constituency parties and the trade unions, of the GLC, of the rate-capping struggle, above all the defeat of the miners, was a defeat that lasted a generation.

In the Kinnock years that followed, we on the Labour left were isolated, witch-hunted and we were defeated. Thatcher's rightwing Tory government took on and defeated not only the trade unions, and not only the local government left. One of Thatcher's greatest achievements for her class, one of her greatest legacies, according to Geoffrey Howe, was that in effect she took over the Labour Party. That is the basis of, and the historical significance of, New Labour.

Let us have no illusions about the historic role of the Labour Party. The starting point is to understand what the Labour Party actually is. It was born a distorted and bureaucratised expression of the working class. Key here was Britain's early bourgeois revolution and then Britain's imperialist domination of large parts of the globe. The Labour Party was based on the growth of trade unionism, which was largely cut off from revolutionary influences and under bourgeois hegemony. The opposite, for instance, of the working class in Russia and China, where the bourgeoisie developed too late and was too weak to carry out its own revolution, and the working class was powerful and revolutionary almost from the moment of its creation.

This growth of the trade unions was relatively late in relation to the rise of the bourgeoisie, with its initial revolution and centuries-old development, but early in relation of the late arrival of the Labour Party. The political existence of the British working class was conditioned by the prior existence of trade unionism. Unlike Germany, where the workers' party largely preceded the trade unions, in Britain the trade unions created the Labour Party. And this determined from the outset the party's organisational stability, on the one hand, and its theoretical backwardness, on the other. Significantly membership of the Labour Party was entirely through affiliation until 1918, when constituency Labour Parties were finally created.

This produced a relationship between the Labour Party and the working class which was always indirect and passive. There was no golden age of Labourism. The Labour Party was a contradiction in class terms - created by the trade unions, but embodying the bourgeois domination and character of the trade union movement. The Labour Party had no socialist programme. Indeed it had no political programme at all until 1918, when the power of the Russian Revolution found its watered down expression in clause four.

"There was no golden age of Labourism. The Labour Party was a contradiction in class terms"

The point is that New Labour is different. New Labour set out to destroy that contradiction. However rightwing previous Labour leaderships, New Labour had a qualitatively different relationship to the labour movement. It was not and is not the distorted and bureaucratised expression of the working class. It was and is, in its essentials, the direct and immediate expression of the interests of big business, and is intertwined with it in a way that the right wing of Wilson, Callaghan - even Kinnock - could only aspire to. And the logic and explicit intention of New Labour is to destroy the Labour Party.

But - and this is the central point - it has not yet happened. It has not yet succeeded. The Labour Party is a party based on the trade unions and the link between the Labour Party and the trade unions, however bureaucratised, is still there. Since the rise of New Labour, and to a large degree, I suppose, even before that, the crisis of the working class has been characterised by a crisis of representation - the domination of the party by Thatcher's heirs, meaning that except at the margins there has been no political expression open to the working class. At the last general election, for example, we had the lowest turnout for generations.

But change and movement did not stop in 1994, when Blair took over the Labour Party. There are now the beginnings of new realities, though we have to see these in some perspective.

Firstly, New Labour is itself in profound crisis: the war, foundation hospitals, privatisation of public services, the biggest parliamentary revolt for 100 years, growing defections. Secondly, there has been the biggest mass movement, the biggest demonstrations ever seen in this country against the war and against the government. Thirdly, there is a new generation of trade union leaders, less touched by the defeats of the 1980s, in conflict with New Labour. The trade unions, although they are still weak, still at a low ebb, are prepared to assert themselves - and the trade union character of the party - and to move in the direction of reclaiming the party, however partially and however much this comes from above.

The trade union base of the Labour Party has a contradictory role. It is bourgeois and conservative, but organisationally cohesive. It is the trade union base, along with the unified structure of the British trade union movement, that is responsible for the fact that, alone of all the major social democratic parties in Europe, there was no major split from the Labour Party in the wake of World War I, the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Third International. And that is the reason why no serious electoral alternative to the Labour Party based on the working class has ever been created.

I have read the *Weekly Worker*'s criticisms of how the Socialist Workers Party has distorted the Socialist Alliance through sectarianism and opportunism. I agree with most of those criticisms, but actually I think they are totally beside the point.

From where I stand, the Socialist Alliance is barely alive. However, even if the SA had been everything you wanted it to be, even if the SWP had responded positively to every criticism you have made, I do not share your illusion that the outcome could have been anything other than marginally different. My criticism is not that the CPGB has overestimated the Socialist Alliance - to be honest, that is not really the point. My criticism is that you have underestimated the centrality of the Labour Party, whose continued existence, and whose historical embodiment of the British working class, is the reason, not what the SWP gets up to, why the attempt to create an electoral alternative to the Labour Party was

doomed from the outset.

A couple of years ago, when Liz Davies left the Labour Party and joined the Socialist Alliance, I wrote: "Yet, even if we accept, with whatever reservations, Liz's two arguments for leaving the Labour Party - that New Labour is qualitatively different and that its takeover has rendered the Labour Party incapable of being reclaimed - her decision to leave the Labour Party and support the Socialist Alliance is by no means a necessary conclusion. It was always axiomatic amongst most members of the *Briefing* editorial board that if the Labour Party was ever destroyed our task would be to rebuild a mass party of labour based on the trade unions. And, while working class politics remains predominantly expressed in relation to the Labour Party, and while the party remains the organisational framework for the labour movement, due to its organic link to the trade unions, not yet broken, our place remains within it."

"Even in this situation, in which the Labour Party is all but destroyed by New Labour, the role of socialists would be to help to assemble a coalition of forces to rebuild a party of labour, not to use the occasion as an excuse to retreat into the marginal political practice of building a socialist sect. The Labour Party, whatever its fundamental weaknesses, is a product of the historical experience of the British working class. If we lose it, it would be the end of 100 years of working class history. A new party of labour could not easily be created without a desperately difficult struggle, especially in the period of defeat which the triumph of New Labour over the structures of our movement would represent. Our role, as always, would be to base ourselves on class struggle and the strength of the working class - the only force which can at best save our party but, if it comes to it, rebuild our party, against New Labour and the forces of bourgeois reaction which it represents."

"I am sympathetic to those who have joined the Socialist Alliance. Many comrades have found its energy and its internal life to be in marked contrast to the sectarian, bureaucratic and semi-Stalinist Socialist Labour Party. But it is not, and does not claim to be, an alternative to the Labour Party. And because of that I cannot see that it could ever be more than a marginal electoral alternative. Nor for that reason can it seriously ever address the crisis of representation that is the central political problem for the working class in [the 2001 general] election. I believe that any grouping that is serious about building a mass electoral alternative must begin to speak on behalf of and in the language of the broad party of labour that Blair has all but destroyed."

It is important, as we look at today's situation, to have no illusions about the state of the Labour Party as it is, or of the Labour left. New Labour is in profound crisis; the trade unions are beginning to reassert their position within the party. But it is all at an early stage. Some of the articles I have read in *Weekly Worker* have overestimated what is only in the process of becoming a reality. The constituency parties are still in decline - many of them non-existent. There are fewer constituency delegates than ever to annual conference. The constituency left is small and

poorly organised.

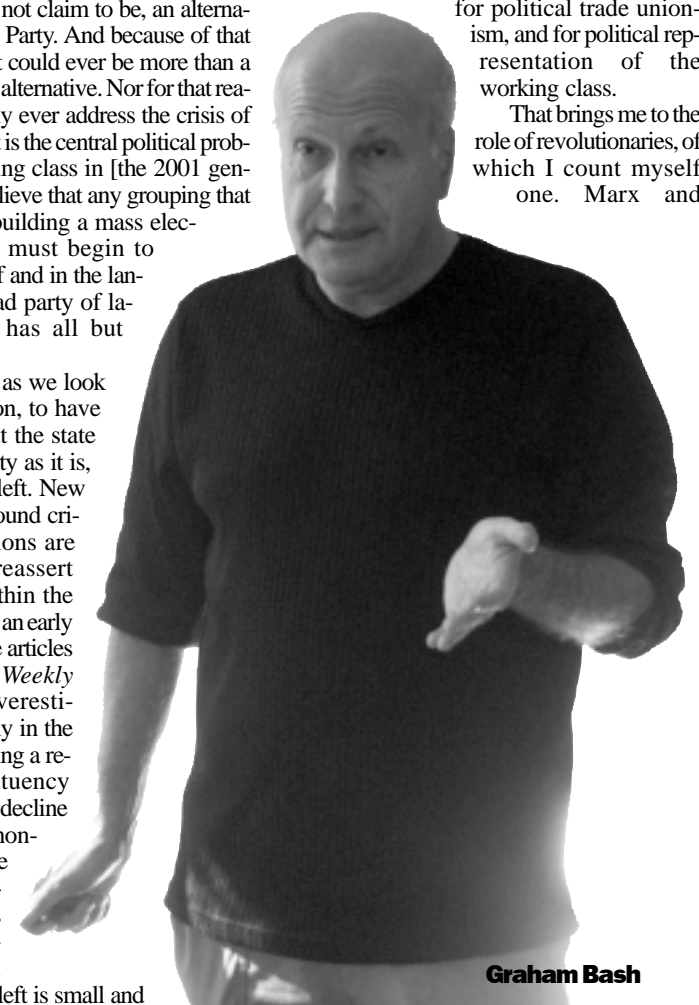
However, the argument for orientating towards and being part of the Labour Party is not based on any episodic assessment of the balance of forces, but on an understanding of the historical relationship to the working class - why it cannot be bypassed, what is possible and what is necessary. The Labour Party is a battleground you cannot avoid. It is a contradiction in class terms. New Labour was set up to resolve that contradiction, by destroying the party's class nature and its trade union base.

Trying to avoid the danger of being overschematic, I see our task, as revolutionary socialists, as communists, as resolving that class contradiction at the heart of New Labour too. Not by destroying the working class base of the Labour Party, but by realising it. Not by the disaffiliation of trade unions from the Labour Party, as some ultra-lefts have advocated. We must fight to build, democratise, use the trade union link with the party, not destroy it. Disaffiliation of the trade unions, in the absence of a mass alternative party of labour, can only lead to a split trade union movement and exacerbate the crisis of representation.

Our task as communists is to fight within the united front bodies of the working class that history has bequeathed us. And that means the trade unions and the Labour Party. Not as rivals, which we seek to destroy, but as united front bodies within which we struggle for our programme and for leadership.

I no more want to destroy the Labour Party than I want to destroy the trade unions. I am sorry if that is shocking, but it is actually the correct position. I draw a distinction between the political formations - New Labour, Labour right, centre, soft left, whatever - which we seek to destroy as conditions permit, and the Labour Party itself. And from within the Labour Party and trade unions we seek to overcome the division between politics and trade unionism, a division which is at the very heart of Labourism and has given our movement such a distorted expression. Our task is to fight at the very elementary level for political trade unionism, and for political representation of the working class.

That brings me to the role of revolutionaries, of which I count myself one. Marx and



Graham Bash

Engels wrote in the *Communist manifesto*, that “Communists have no interests separate and apart from those of the working class.” Those words were written over a 150 years ago. But I believe they should be the starting point for any discussion of what a revolutionary organisation is, and how it should relate to the working class and the rest of the left. The precondition for challenging New Labour is not the unity of revolutionary groups, or of Marxist groups. No revolutionary organisation can be built - or revolutionary unity which is of any use whatsoever achieved - unless those involved are at the same time engaged in the struggle for the broadest possible unity and strength of the labour movement.

Any organisation that puts its interests above and separate from those of the movement can only build a sect. A sect is defined not by its numbers - there can be a sect of five or of 50,000. It is defined by its orientation to the working class. A revolutionary group on the one hand and the united front on the other are not opposites or alternatives, but part of the same process. You cannot build a revolutionary group organically linked to and part of the working class movement, outside the struggle for a united front.

We have been bequeathed the concept of the Leninist revolutionary party that is distorted, almost Stalinised, by those such as Zinoviev, who provide a picture of a revolutionary group appearing almost ready-made with a perfect programme, setting up its banner, fighting off the reformists and centrists and, when the moment came in 1917, the masses flocked behind its banner. It is a wonderful story, but that is not how it happened.

I believe the Bolshevik Party is a model. Not the Bolsheviks of pre-1917, who were sometimes divorced from the labour movement and were sometimes sectarian, nor the Bolsheviks of post-1917, when bureaucratic degeneration was beginning. My model is the Bolshevik Party of 1917 itself, which operated in conditions infinitely more favourable than those that we can dream of in this country, facing as they did a weak, impotent bourgeoisie, and therefore a weak reformist current within the workers’ movement. Yet, even in these conditions, those revolutionaries succeeded in taking power because they understood the centrality of the united front. Their slogan was not ‘Power to the Bolsheviks’. It was ‘Power to the soviets’ - which were the united front bodies of the working class, the highest form of united front, as Trotsky called them (as opposed to the Labour Party, which arose in opposite historical conditions and which I would perhaps describe as the lowest form of the united front).

Marcel Liebmann, in his wonderful book *Leninism under Lenin* describes the Bolshevik Party in 1917: “In the course of 1917 in Russia, the masses and the party came together. The proletariat largely identified itself with an organisation that had become for the first time its own organisation. The terms of the relation between class and party, between guided class and guiding party, the class that is led and the party that leads, were reversed, the Bolshevik Party having at last agreed to submit itself to the revolutionary proletariat.”

What Liebmann calls “libertarian Leninism” was made possible because the party ceased to be in relation to the masses an external body, an organ imposing itself as leader. The point of this is not just an academic dis-

cussion about Lenin, interesting though it is, but to show that the united front, the building of the organisations of the working class - left unity against right, class against class - is not an optional extra for revolutionary organisations. To the extent that we are part of revolutionary organisations, and not a sect, it is what we always do - not at the cost of programmatic clarity, or as an alternative to it, but side by side with it.

I helped to set up *Labour Left Briefing* 23 years ago. I can pick out, for example, the headlines “Kinnock scabs on miners, but we will fight on” and “It’s war!” during the miners’ strike; “All out for Bermondsey”, as we supported poor old Peter Tatchell, who got the chop for writing an article on extra-parliamentary action; “The people’s choice” on Ken Livingstone; “Not in our name”, as we moved towards war; “Liberate the Labour Party”, with a statue of Blair being toppled, and “War criminal”, which is probably my all-time favourite.

We have stood the test. Our voice has not been silenced. We have not been forced to compromise our essential politics because we have dared to be in the Labour Party.

I have never said that the Labour Party can be transformed into a revolutionary organisation or party. What I say is that we must distinguish between revolutionary groups - embryos at best of a revolutionary party, communist organisations fighting for programme and leadership within the united front bodies of the working class - and the struggles of the class itself, which are, have been and probably will continue to be focused on the trade unions and their distorted, rotten political expression, the Labour Party.

I do not preclude the possibility of us all belonging to the same revolutionary organisation at some stage in the development of the struggle. However, to belong to an organisation that is standing candidates against the Labour Party would for me be impossible. There is not the space, for historical reasons, for an electoral alternative to the Labour Party, an expression of the trade unions - certainly not at this stage.

I will never be in the same organisation as anyone who proposes setting up an alternative outside the structure of the Labour Party and the trade unions. If you think you can do that, then fine: go ahead. If you can prove me wrong, I will join you. But if you are *against* disaffiliation, then the logic of that position is quite clear. You are for the power of the trade union movement being put back into the Labour Party and used to make the various bodies of the party accountable to the trade union movement.

I have to admit that I am a fan of the *Weekly Worker* - I actually read every word of every issue. It is not all good, comrades. When reading through a 3,000-word article about the Socialist Alliance in Aberystwyth, I have been known to lose the will to live. But overall I admire the intelligence, the integrity and the revolutionary will that is expressed. These are all preconditions for a healthy revolutionary organisation.

There is, however, a further precondition - and that is for your intelligence, your integrity and your political will to be applied *where it matters* and not on the margins. As Karl Marx wrote in 1847 in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world. The point, however, is to change it” □

“I will never be in the same organisation as anyone who proposes setting up an alternative outside the structure of the Labour Party and the trade unions”

Hackney Don’t think, act

The Hackney Socialist Alliance ‘Left strikes back’ meeting on September 22 attracted around 70 comrades on a cold and windswept Monday evening to discuss “the left alternative to Blair’s New Labour”.

The publicity for the gathering emphasised that it would be “an essential, lively and inclusive discussion”. By and large, this was true - an encouraging departure from the belligerent and uncomradely behaviour of the Socialist Workers Party that has marred relations between Socialist Alliance allies over the past fraught period. However, the discussion following the presentations of the two main speakers - Tommy Sheridan of the Scottish Socialist Party and Michael Lavalette, the SA’s Preston councillor - emphasised that sharp political tensions remain unresolved. More than that, SWP contributions underlined that the SA’s largest component element has learned few lessons from the recent crisis. *Misleadership* is our key weakness, not the sanguine diagnosis from some SWP tops that ‘objective conditions’ simply will not allow us to ‘break out’ yet.

Comrade Lavalette’s opening was businesslike, if a little low-key. He set out to “emphasise the positive” in his speech, he told us, underlining the importance of the September 27 demo against the occupation of Iraq as an active agent in the unfolding crisis of Blair. Unfortunately, for many SWPers in the debate, the need to build the march was too often counterposed to an honest appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of our work thus far.

Thus, we saw an SWPer bemoan the contributions from two CPGB comrades who had raised some fairly mild-mannered criticisms of the prominence given to Lib Dems by the Stop the War Coalition, the way the SA was effectively ‘disappeared’ for the duration of the war and the nasty spasm of SWP intolerance of minority views during its ill-fated ‘peace and justice’ adventure.

“There’s a demo on Saturday,” our SWP critic reminded us. “We need to be talking about building *that*.” Action - or at least *talk* about action - was what we needed in this meeting, as “there’s things going on out there”, she observed vaguely. The CPGB was just dealing in “recriminations”, apparently.

This comrade’s contribution was a blunter version of most of her fellow SWPers’ - we were told that if the SA was “just about sell-

ing papers to each other, then forget it”; that there was a “new audience out there” we needed to engage with; that we had to “move on” from the “bickering” that characterised the last SA conference, and so on.

The vacuous remarks were not directed at the CPGB alone. Rather at anyone who dares to think, anyone who dares to criticise. From a different political angle, Liam Conway of Tower Hamlets SA made some similar points to ours. The SA “missed a trick with the anti-war movement” and the prominence given to the Lib Dems was a mistake. The comrade suggested that “prominent people” in both the SA and STWC (he meant the SWP in both cases) might reflect on how to “bring these two strands of their work together”.

Characteristically, comrade Sheridan’s interesting contribution mixed pointed observations about the state of the left in England with some nationalist nonsense - to the obvious discomfort of many SWPers in the audience. He peppered his speech with comments such as “no group has the monopoly on the truth”, the “despair” he felt when he saw the long list of ‘alternative’ candidates in the Brent East by-election, or that - given the continued success of the fascists - it was long overdue that the left “bring our energies together”. All things we can agree with, of course.

However, Tina Becker (CPGB) reminded him of his comment that the left in England should ‘reclaim’ the flag of St George. As if the left or the workers’ movement had ever had the royal flag of England ... or for that matter the royal flag of Scotland. The working class movement is internationalist - and to symbolise that we have one flag. Not the flag of nations, nor the flag of kingdoms, but the red flag.

Comrade Sheridan dug himself further into his nationalist hole. The fascists have “no right” to the flag of St George, he said. The left had “given it up too easily”. The example from “other parts of the world”, where “patriotism and left politics go hand in hand”, should teach us all a lesson for our political practice here, he argued.

“That’s all crap,” commented one SWPer *sotto voce* at the back of the hall. A pity *Socialist Worker* does not make some more profound - and audible - criticisms of this brand of nationalist baloney which is spreading fast, particularly in Scotland and Wales □

Mark Fischer

Smug repetition

Hackney Stop the War Coalition held a public meeting last week. About 150 people turned up to the Halkevi Centre to listen and participate in the discussion. Unfortunately, however, there was not much of the latter. This was not the fault of the chair, Vivek Lehal of the SWP, who presided over the meeting fairly. Rather the problem was the unwillingness of platform speakers in particular and the SWP in general to actually engage in debate.

All the platform speakers - with the exception of Diane Abbott, who turned up as usual just before the meeting ended - were leading SWP members. However, true to form, they were never introduced as such. Paul Embery was, for example, merely an FBU militant speaking in his personal capacity. Anyway, he kicked off with a description of how badly the government is doing in the light of the Hutton inquiry and called for Blair to be put in the dock of the International War Crimes Tribunal.

Lindsey German then followed with another account of how badly the government is doing at the moment and how strong the anti-war movement is. She called for the biggest possible mobilisation on September 27 and said that if the demonstration was small, that would be a defeat. We need to fill Trafalgar Square. Then Mark Steele spoke (humorously) of how badly Blair is doing and how

important it is to build the demonstration. The pre-selected list of SWP speakers from the floor then repeated the same points over and over again.

The smug self-satisfaction from the top table was breathtaking. No analysis of the last six months. No discussion of how we build a political alternative to New Labour. No hint of criticism of the STWC’s failure to include opposition to the Ba’athist dictatorship amongst its demands. No rethinking of the decision to give Charles Kennedy a platform on February 15 - in spite of Brent East. No reconsideration of the SWP’s ‘numbers are everything’ strategy and the fear this engendered of a schism with Kennedy. No questioning of the long-term alliance with the Muslim Association of Britain - which opted for the Liberal Democrats in Brent East and calls for the death of apostates.

Finally Diane Abbott swept in to give us her opinions. The Hutton inquiry will “spark a rebellion” from MPs who “voted with the government” on the war. She also believed that the difficulties of actually holding down Iraq will hamper both Blair and Bush on any more adventures against other ‘rogue states’.

Whatever happens, it is clear that we cannot just rely on demonstrations. We need real debate, not smug self-congratulation and hot air □

Anne Mc Shane

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Lancashire

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IRAQ

The war and the law

Could the invasion of Iraq have been prevented by forcing the US and UK to adhere to ‘international law’ or observe the United Nations charter? Such an approach conceals a trap, argues **Mike Macnair**

“B is charged with murder. He organised a drive-by shooting in which members of B’s gang fired machine-guns aimed at S, the leader of a rival gang, into a crowd including S and members of his gang, as well as numerous innocent bystanders. Several members of S’s gang were killed, as were many bystanders, but S escaped and has gone into hiding. In his defence B proposes to argue that (1) B and his accomplices acted in self-defence, as S was waving a papier-mâché model axe and they knew that S had previously committed axe murders against members of his gang and others; and/or (2) B and his accomplices acted lawfully in execution of a public duty, as there was a warrant extant to search S’s house for offensive weapons; and/or (3) B and his accomplices acted to prevent crimes which S would otherwise have committed against his associates and the bystanders. Discuss.”

This puts the government’s and its supporters’ arguments for the legality of the invasion of Iraq into the form of an examination question in English criminal law. It is not a very good exam question, because it is not difficult enough: it would not take a court or jury (or a law student) long to convict our fictitious B.

International law is, of course, not the same as English criminal law: states in general stand in the role of individuals, and since there are no ‘international police’, the rights of self-defence, and so on, are more extensive. However, waging aggressive war against other states has something of the same status as murder in English law. The Nazi leaders were prosecuted at Nuremberg, among other charges, for “launching an aggressive war”; and under the United Nations charter, “All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations” (chapter 1, article 6).

In response to arguments that their action was illegal in international law, Bush and Blair have argued (1) that they acted in self-defence - either (a) because the Iraqi Ba’athist regime was linked to al Qa’eda, or (b) because the regime’s “weapons of mass destruction” were an immediate threat to the US or UK or US-UK allies; (2) that they were merely enforcing existing UN security council resolutions in relation to Iraqi disarmament, though the security council had not at this stage backed the use of military force; and (3) that in any case the intervention was necessary to protect the ‘human rights’ of Iraqis, which the regime violated.

Even in international law, the arguments of the US-UK coalition in defence of their aggressive war on Iraq were widely regarded as very weak, and they have been further weakened by the failure to discover ‘weapons of mass destruction’ and by the continuing violations of ‘human rights’ under the US-UK occupation of Iraq. It is therefore understandable that anti-war activists and leaders have been inclined to place a strong emphasis in their arguments on the illegality of the invasion and that various schemes for ‘bringing Blair to justice’ have been proposed.

This is understandable, but it is also a political trap, which will ultimately undermine the struggle against the ‘war on terror’, and has to some extent already done so. This article aims to explain why.

Fighting the war

Anti-war activists can fairly say that at least we have made the moral gesture of standing up to be counted against the USA’s programme of aggression and the UK’s participation in it. But this is hardly enough. We

need to address the question of *how to stop the war drive*. It should be transparent that raising arguments of international law will not in itself do so. For Blair to be prosecuted as a war criminal is a pipe dream: the war crimes legislation requires the consent of the attorney general, a member of the government, before any prosecution can take place. Moreover, the US-UK coalition has *already* gone ahead with the invasion of Iraq against the majority opinion of the UN security council. The law in itself has not deterred them.

For some activists arguments of international law are employed to support the use of individual or small-group non-violent direct action (NVDA) to interfere with military supplies and organisation and thereby stop the war. Supporters of this strategy point to the role of NVDA in the movement in the USA against the Vietnam war. They ignore the special features of the Vietnam war (see *Weekly Worker* April 17) and pass over in silence the complete ineffectiveness of NVDA in the nuclear disarmament movement and various other campaigns directed at ‘hard targets’. What is actually needed is a mass movement on a scale which in itself threatens the political stability of the government, and which reaches into the armed forces and persuades soldiers, sailors and aircrew that it is necessary to resist the war drive. We are a long way from this goal.

The illegality of the war is said to be a tool of persuasion in building a mass movement. As such it is, however, the sort of knife which can all too easily turn in your hand and cut you. Just to give a couple of immediate examples. The USA’s attack on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was part of the global war drive, and its results have been - predictably - to add further destruction to the preservation of warlordism in that country. The USA has in the course of the war committed war crimes, in the form of breaches of the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war. But the war itself was not *illegal*, since the Taliban sponsored al Qa’eda (or perhaps the other way round), so that the US had a defensible claim of self-defence.

Even if the *invasion* of Iraq was illegal, its *occupation* has now been authorised by the security council and is therefore legal in international law. And if, in a few months’ time, the USA turns its military attentions to Iran or North Korea, it will probably do so with the backing of International Atomic Energy Agency inspection reports and with a security council majority, and thus legally. Yet the results - death and destruction - will be the same as the (illegal) invasion of Iraq ... By arguing against *this* invasion on the grounds of its illegality, we hand a weapon to the warmongers which has been and will be used in *other* invasions.

Why the war drive?

Placing Iraq in the context of the general US-led war drive of course raises the question: why is this war drive taking place? Few people, even supporters of the invasion of Iraq, are now so naive as to suppose that the US’s aims were to ‘enforce international law’ against the Ba’athist regime or to ‘introduce democracy’ in Iraq.

A fairly widespread view is that the current US administration has been captured by a neo-conservative ‘lunatic fringe’ group of the far right which has the utopian aim of making over the world in the American image, or a group with specific corrupt links to the US oil and construction industries which expect to benefit from the seizure of Iraq’s oil resources. There are two difficulties with this view. The first is that for Bush to win the presidential election - even by ballot-rigging - his team needed much stronger financial backing from US capitalists than the lunatic fringe or the oil and construction sectors alone

could provide. The second is that the plans for the attack on Afghanistan were made by the *Clinton* administration and merely dusted off by the Bush administration after 9/11, and this administration also operated the sanctions against Iraq which prepared the way for the invasion, and engaged in a variety of other ‘bomb the bastards’ operations, the largest being in the former Yugoslavia. In fact, destructive military interventions which leave behind chaos have been the common coin of US policy since Lebanon in the 1970s.

A view widespread among muslims is that the attack on Iraq was motivated by the defence of the Zionist regime in Israel. Since, first, Israel is a (substantial) nuclear power, second, the USA already provides sufficient military and economic support to secure Israel against almost any conceivable conventional attack and, third, the Ba’athist regime was crippled by sanctions and nowhere near getting the bomb, this view is even more implausible than the first. It displays an anti-semitic assumption that the Israeli tail somehow wags the Yankee dog. The Zionist regime is certainly keen to link the Palestinian resistance to ‘terrorism’ and thus help keep the USA onside, but it is *US* interests which sent US (and British) troops into Iraq.

More plausible arguments have linked the war drive to the strategic economic interests of the USA and the economic interests of US capital generally. A widely held view is that the invasion of Iraq is a ‘grab for oil’ to keep oil prices down. This seems unlikely, since the best way to achieve this result would have been to do a deal with the Ba’athist regime and lift sanctions. A more sophisticated version sees the USA attempting to gain *strategic control* of oil supplies, in order at some future date to be able to strangle actual or potential economic competitors in the far east and Europe. The war in Afghanistan can then be seen as ‘pre-positioning’ for a US takeover of central Asian oil resources: a view confirmed by the movement of US forces into several bases in central Asia in connection with these wars.

Beyond these theories, Andre Gunder Frank has suggested that it is not a coincidence that the ‘axis of evil’ countries named by Bush as targets are all ones which had started to use the euro rather than the dollar to denominate international contracts (‘Paper tiger, fiery dragon’, http://rojasdatabank.info/agfrank/paper_tiger.html), and Peter Gowan’s *The global gamble* (1999) explained the 1991 Gulf War, and much else, in terms of the USA’s manipulation of the dollar-led global money regime as a defence against its competitors.

A significantly different approach has been offered by Hillel Ticktin (see *Weekly Worker* August 28) and Wadi’h Halabi (in the US Communist Party’s *People’s Weekly World* August 2). These authors have linked the war drive to the deep structural economic difficulties of world and US capitalism and their immediate manifestations in the run-up to the war. Thus Gunder Frank and Gowan see the dynamics in terms of the *relative decline* of US capital as a world hegemon since the 1970s; Ticktin and Halabi see a crisis of *capitalism as such* and the systems of rule it has operated since 1945.

A ‘law-governed’ system of international relations?

If - in whatever way - the US-led ‘war against terrorism’ is driven by the economic interests of US capital, the *strategic* problem of stopping the war drive becomes united with the problems addressed by the anti-capitalist/anti-globalisation movement: the problem of world order in the 21st century. And it is here that international law comes back into the picture, as the symbol of a certain sort of strategy for dealing with these problems. Gowan

“Few people are now so naive as to suppose that the US’s aims were to enforce international law or introduce democracy”

lays out the basic point very clearly in his April 2002 interview in the Fourth International’s magazine *International Viewpoint*:

“The US concept since the Gulf War of 1991 has been of a globe with an American ‘sovereign’, ... it alone can tell us who the enemies of the world are - Saddam Hussein, Milosevic, the Taliban government, Iran and so on. It alone can tell us what is a global emergency and what is not ... and it can lay down the rules which others must follow without being bound by those rules itself.

“Against this US conception, there are two other main ideas about how world capitalism should be managed. The Europeans put forward the world order concept of ‘multilateralism’, the rule of the ‘international community’ ... The US should be in some way subordinate to the G7, thematised as ‘the international community’. That’s why Condoleezza Rice, presidential security advisor, says, ‘There’s no such thing as an international community.’

“There is a third conception, that of the UN security council and UN charter as the determiners of world order ... That conception of world order should not be discounted, because it not only enjoys support from states, but is also anchored in the consciousness of billions of people. I would say that in a certain way you can see the power and persistence of this concept in the capacity of the Palestinian Intifada.”

Gowan evidently supports this “third conception” (“Only the UN idea of the nations of the world actually uniting ... could give us a really authoritative body for ‘laying down the law’ internationally. In such a body the left should accept the official representatives of states.”) So, too, does the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain. The ‘peace and justice’ project, now seemingly aborted, was conceived within the same general framework. But is this framework any use?

The underlying problem with the strategy of a ‘law-governed world order’ based on the UN charter is that it fundamentally misunderstands the nature of *law* as a social institution and, as a result, of international law. In the result it is merely yet another social democratic utopia, this time on an international scale, which attempts to win reforms without confronting the power of capital.

Is ‘international law’ law?

There is a traditional view - among conservative as well as liberal and left legal theorists - that ‘international law’ is not really law at all. This view goes back to John Austin’s *The province of jurisprudence determined* (1832), where it is argued that there is no ‘sovereign’ - ie, world state - enforcing power. An alternative approach is that it is not law because it lacks underlying political support among the subject population (‘legitimacy’). This view is taken (of current international law) by Gowan: “... international law ... is nothing other than the past codified policy of the dominant capitalist states. It has no popular democratic source of legitimacy whatever.” If international law is ‘not really law’, that would provide us with a very short answer to the project of a ‘law-governed world order’.

In reality, law needs neither a state nor ‘legitimacy’ among the subject population to exist and be effective. International law is not the only example of a non-state legal system: various forms of religious law - jewish law, islamic sharia, hindu law, and so on - exist today and have done for centuries without state backing; medieval Welsh and Irish (Brehon) law were non-state systems; in medieval and early modern Europe traders had their own body of law, the *lex mercatoria* or law merchant. As to ‘legitimacy’, the historical frequency of the imposition of legal systems by conquest (as variants of Eng-

lish and French law were imposed on much of the world) should give the lie to the claim that law as such needs ‘legitimacy’ among the subject population.

Basics of law

To understand what law *does* need in order to exist and be effective, the necessary starting point is to distinguish law from other related phenomena.

In the first place, law is not simply ‘binding rules’. A railway timetable is a system of ‘binding rules’, but it would be silly to regard it as law. Law, in contrast, is a system of ideas (including rules, but also more abstract concepts like ‘justice’) *used in decision-making in adjudication*: ie, settling disputes in some court or court-like body. Adjudication involves a claimant or prosecutor bringing a demand or complaint against a defendant before a neutral third party, the judge, who is expected to *decide who is in the right* - as opposed to, for example, helping negotiate a solution (mediation). The judge may be a state official, but may also be an ‘arbitrator’ agreed by the claimant and defendant to resolve their dispute. Arbitration was the normal context of international law before the 1922 creation of the League of Nations’ Permanent Court of International Justice, now the International Court of Justice. But an arbitrator is still a kind of adjudicator.

Secondly, not all adjudication is on the basis of law. As common in history, and still found in the present day, is adjudication on the basis of currently applicable custom and practice. But custom and practice is *not* law: it lacks the stability and determinacy of legal rules. Where a legal system exists, the distinction is practically important. Buying your round in England or offering dowry on the marriage of a daughter in much of India are *socially* binding customs, but not legal requirements. Passing the joint in England, and *suttee* (the ritual sacrifice of widows at their deceased husband’s funeral) are also seen as socially binding customs by sections of English and Indian society; both are positively illegal.

For a legal system to exist as distinct from custom there have to be *lawyers*, a group of professional specialists (judges, advocates or teachers) who monopolise the interpretation of the law; and there have to be authoritative written sources, like the Roman ‘12 tables’, the Jewish Torah, the Islamic Quran, or the medieval English Register of Writs, on the basis of which these professionals do their interpretation. In international law there is a body of specialist ‘international lawyers’ who overlap with diplomats and legal academics. The written sources are primarily treaties, but also ‘customary law’, which is, as Gowan says, “the past codified policy of the dominant ... states”, but as *mediated through the interpretations of the international lawyers*, primarily through treatises on international law.

Behind the basics

Adjudication is a peculiar way of making decisions. Unlike negotiation and mediation, it makes ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Unlike community political decision-making, the only people represented are the immediate parties: the workers thrown out of work if a company is bankrupted in litigation have no voice. It looks *backwards*, to the *rights* of the parties, not forwards to find the best answer to the problem. Why do societies do it? When we add lawyers and law sources, the problem becomes more acute. Lawyers are notoriously expensive, obscure and troublesome: this has been a common theme of satire since Roman times. Moreover, not all historical societies do use law and few - most notably the later Roman empire - have been as ‘law-saturated’ and obsessed with law as the late 20th and early 21st century world.

To start with adjudication: it seems that adjudication as a mode of decision-making presupposes and is adapted to disputes *about private property*. The ‘justice’ which a judge or arbitrator is to deliver is at its core the restoration of prior ownership, or compensation for the loss of ownership. From this core, which appears at the heart of early legal systems, law is extended by analogy: a crime is a ‘taking from the state’ or a ‘taking from the society’; jurisdiction, or decision-making power, is treated as a kind of property right. But the sanctity of property remains the core basis of legal reasoning.



Jacques Chirac at the UN: multilateralism

It is this basis which enables adjudication to look backwards to rights, and thereby reach a *decision* rather than a compromise, and to reduce the people entitled to a hearing to the claimant (from whom something has been taken) and the defendant (who allegedly has taken it or possesses it). As a result, the judges themselves recognise that some issues are ‘non-justiciable’ because of the involvement of forward-looking policy and multiple parties: thus, for example, the English rule in *Foss v Harbottle* (1844), still in force, says in effect that the court will not generally investigate the merits of decisions of company policy reached by a majority of the shareholders.

The passage from custom and lay adjudication to law and lawyers is more complex. In substance, the people who promote it are seeking more *predictability* of the judicial decision than lay adjudication on the basis of custom can offer. The fundamental demand for law in this sense - and the demand which continues to this day to be the real economic basis of legal professions - is from *ruling classes*, in the narrow sense of elite groups who have individual or family private property in segments of the means of production (as opposed to state bureaucratic elites): slave-owners, feudal lords, capitalists.

Their demand for law and lawyers comes from their disputes *among themselves* about ownership. It comes from their need for complex ‘estate planning’ arrangements to secure income from the exploitation of property rights (tenancies, mortgages), to transmit wealth between generations (wills, trusts and settlements), and to minimise their tax liabilities. *These* needs demand more certainty than custom can provide. As a result, these areas of law remain far more developed in all historical legal systems even today than, for example, the law relating to personal injuries.

The price of law

The price of law should now be visible. The sanctity of property at the base of the value of justice and the idea of adjudication carries with it practical inequality: in Anatole France’s phrase, “The law in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to beg, to steal, and to sleep under bridges.” The sanctity of private property is embedded in every ‘human rights’ document, from the English Petition of Right (1627) through to the *Charter of rights* in the draft constitution of the European Union. It is reflected in constitutional prohibitions on expropriation and in ‘restrictive construction’ in favour of the property owner of tax laws, laws controlling property use, and so on. The role of lawyers in the construction of certainty inexorably carries with both ‘tax avoidance’ and ‘regu-

latory failure’: ie, the use of the requirement of predictability to undermine for the benefit of the rich the effect of rules made by parliaments. It carries with it ‘inequality of arms’: ie, that the rich can afford more and better legal services than the poor. These phenomena are commonly attributed to judicial bias: the truth is that the biases are *inherent in the idea and practice of law itself*.

The ‘rule of law’, ‘human rights’ and a ‘law-governed world order’

It should be apparent on the basis of this analysis that ‘the rule of law’ is under present conditions a euphemism for the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. The doctrine converts all questions of political order into variants on the sanctity of property, and renders all forms of regulation subject to the activities of the corporations’ lawyers. By placing the sanctity of property, increasingly widely interpreted, out of political bounds, the ‘rule of law’ and ‘human rights’ doctrine sets up the law *in opposition* to political democracy. ‘Democracy’ is reduced to the occasional choice of which bunch of political managers - Tory-Tory or Labour-Tory, Republican-Republican or Democrat-Republican - the capitalists are to employ.

If this is true on a national scale, it is all the more so on a world scale. At Cancun some ‘third world’ states have finally rebelled against the endless demands that the semi-colonial countries *give* legally enforceable rights to the imperialists’ corporations, while *getting* nothing in relation to the imperialist countries’ protection systems. But this imperialist World Trade Organisation ratchet was merely the natural result of the project of a law-governed world order, with its inherent commitment to the sanctity of property - that is, the sanctity of *existing vested rights* - which overwhelmingly means the rights of the imperialists’ corporations to ‘their’ debt claims, ‘their’ ‘intellectual property rights’ and ‘their’ ‘freedom to invest’: ie, right to buy up, asset-strip and close down factories, etc. A ‘law-governed world order’ is not an *alternative* to US world domination; it is *another ideological form* of US world domination.

... and the war drive

It is precisely *out of* this world order that the US-led war drive has emerged. It is the sanctity of property, expressed in the aggressive promotion of the ‘rule of law’, which has *enabled* the present utter corruption of the US political system, its subordination to corporations and the super-rich. It is the inability of the capitalist world order led by the USA to deflect its internal contradictions *without* war which has produced the war drive: this is still true whether we see the US as playing for strategic gain, in oil or in the monetary system, against potential competitors, or as responding to a deeper crisis of the military-industrial-financial complex.

Hence, in order to begin to construct a strategy to *end* the war drive, as opposed to merely protesting against it, we need to break out of the mental iron cage of law-talk and rights-talk. Our starting point has to be the struggle - not for a world order governed by *law*, but for a world order governed by *the class solidarity and common action of the global working class* □

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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Anti-war movement needs left unity

Beyond the politics of stopping the next war

Never have so many been failed so badly by so few.

On February 15, not thousands, not even tens of thousands, but something approaching two million mainly working people protested their opposition to war on Iraq. The range of opinion represented in London that day was broad, but the objective fact of a truly mass extra-parliamentary protest raised the fundamental question of democracy. If Blair went to war against the will of the people, in whose interest was Britain really governed?

Labour's defeat in last week's by-election demonstrated that seven months on, Blair has been forgiven neither the war nor the lies he told to justify it. He is not the only politician, though, who should draw lessons from Brent East. The left too stands indicted.

The anti-government vote on September 18 went not to a socialist, or even to an anti-war campaigner, but to a Liberal Democrat. The Socialist Alliance candidate, a member of the Socialist Workers Party, polled only 361 votes: less than two percent. After the undoubted skill and backbreaking effort the SWP put into organising the Stop the War Coalition, their members could be forgiven for feeling that this was a bitterly poor harvest. The percentage of the *entire British population* which *actively demonstrated* in February was higher than this derisory slice of an already derisory turnout.

Organisational skill and hard work are simply not enough. We, the tiny, splintered left, collectively failed the protestors and the class. Our failure was a political failure.

It was our responsibility to present the socialist case, and link the fight against the war to the fight for human liberation. To those who arrived in London bewildered, their genuine faith in bourgeois democracy shaken, we should have offered explanation. To those who had hopes that the United Nations might yet 'step in', we should have offered consciousness of their *own* power. To those who already better understood the nature of our society, we should have offered leadership.

We failed. The left's only united organisation, the Socialist Alliance, had no speaker on any Hyde Park platform. We heard Charles Kennedy cynically attempting to obscure his plan to support "our boys" once war started. We heard Bianca Jagger calling on the squabbling rival powers of the UN to act. The SA, though, was silent.

That is not to say individual members of the SA did not speak. Lindsey German, a leading member of the SWP and editor of *Socialist Review*, addressed protestors, but with a message which barely rose above pacifism. The STWC is run by those who fully understand the nature of our society but do not dare base their political action on that understanding. In an attempt to preserve the unity of a politically diverse coalition, they have silenced the only political voice which offered it any hope of success: that of socialism.

Of course, moving amongst the demonstrators were paper-sellers from every left group, each seeking to peddle its own particular line, and to recruit new members. The endless, meaningless, competitive game of the left was played with energy. Understandably, most sim-

ply ignored this cacophony of sectarianism. The *Weekly Worker* was alone in highlighting the call for a single, united working class party. The simple fact is that despite the largest demonstration in our country's history, and a historic resurgence of radicalism, no left group has significantly increased either its size or the distribution of its press.

The fault is not just the SWP's. The Socialist Party abandoned the SA entirely, placing the perceived needs of its own organisation above those of the class. The smaller SA groups have responded to the SWP's opportunism with chaos and paralysis. Without political leadership, many of those newly drawn into struggle by the STWC have dropped out rather than moving on to a more complete political understanding. All the while, of course, Iraq remains under increasingly brutal US and UK occupation.

Our demand is not for a socialist STWC: it is entirely correct that those who wish to protest the occupation of Iraq should be able to organise alongside socialists without having to accept our programme.

Socialists have always formed alliances with others when our cause could be advanced by doing so. However, to suppress our politics in order to maintain such an alliance is a bizarre, confused futility, advancing nothing.

The message must be taken to the STWC: the peoples of the world have no interest in killing each other. No two genuinely democratic states, in which the people governed, would go to war. Neither the US nor the UK is governed by its people: while democratic reforms have been extracted from our ruling classes, we still live in societies divided by class and ultimately serving the interests of capitalism. At home, those interests are manifested in decaying public services, iniquitous taxation, the suppression of trade union freedoms and the continued wealth and privilege of those who serve our system of profit. Abroad, they are expressed through economic dominance over weaker powers, war, occupation and commercial exploitation of millions already grindingly poor: imperialism.

These are the causes of war. The struggle against war and the struggle for genuine democratic rule by the people, or *socialism*, are one.

This is a socialist ABC of a kind which rarely appears in our paper, as most of our readers are 'of the left' and already alive to such basic arguments. It is a flavour, though, of the fundamental agreement which is objectively manifested in the Socialist Alliance, whatever its internal disputes. The strength of the socialist case is betrayed only by the failure of the left to organise around it. We must build a party - a revolutionary party - which can truly intervene in movements like the STWC, unafraid of presenting its argument and unafraid of internal democracy. A clear socialist alternative offered not only to those supporting the STWC, but also to the effectively disenfranchised voters currently supporting the BNP, or the trade unionists currently forced to support the party which is trying to crush them, might not only stop the next war, but stop war □

Manny Neira



Competition time: but left groups did not recruit

Next steps ...

The Communist Party of Great Britain is active in the anti-war movement not to pursue a sectarian agenda, but to advance the cause of socialism, and therefore of peace. If you have taken the trouble to read this article, we would urge you to go further:

□ You may not be a socialist. You may have attended a Stop the War demonstration because you were motivated by a sense of the injustice being done to the people of occupied Iraq. If so, we urge you to examine the wider questions. How was Blair able to go to war against the will of the people in a 'democracy'? What were the real reasons for the war, given that no 'weapons of mass destruction' have ever been found, and for years the western states supported the regime of Saddam Hussein?

□ You may be a socialist, but unaffiliated. If so, join the Socialist Alliance, and help us turn it into a democratic socialist party: an answer and an antidote to the poison of left sectarianism.

□ You may be a member of a socialist group outside the SA. Our argument to comrades in other groups is consistent: do not leave, but stay and fight. Argue for unity with your comrades in the SA, and for the building of a force rooted not in some ideological totem, but in the needs of the working class and of humanity.

□ You may be an SA independent, or a member of one of its smaller constituent groups. If so, support the Socialist Alliance 'opposition platform', for democracy and unity in action.

□ You may be a member of the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP is the largest group on the left, and includes many sincere and hard-working class fighters, drowned by the organisation's lack of internal democracy. The fight to democratise the SWP is central: both to allow their members to speak, and to allow political unity with those outside the group who wish to work with them. Help us build a real, socialist, workers' party.

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