



**weekly**  
**worker**



**Muslim women, the left  
and the 'enlightened  
despotism' of the state**

- Kilroy-Silk and Arabs
- Respect and SA
- Respect the republic
- Democratic centralism

No 511

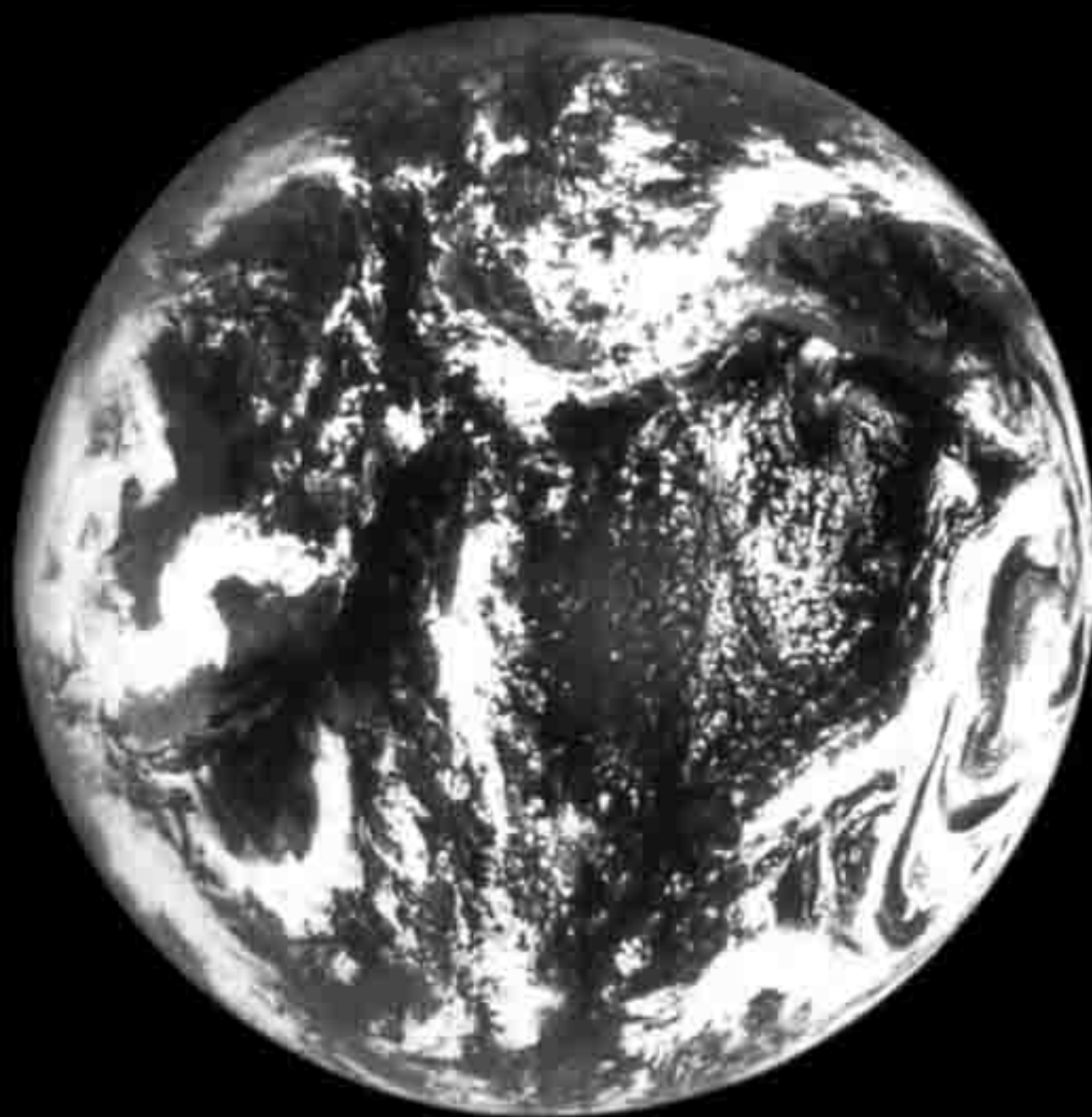
Thursday January 15 2004

Towards a new workers' party

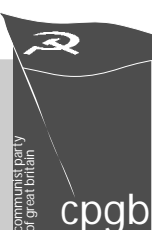
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**Bush's 'Mission Mars' electioneering:**



**We demand**  
**Mission Earth!**



## PARTYnotes

# Mission Earth

George W Bush is reportedly going to use his 'state of the nation' address on January 28 to announce plans to establish a permanently manned base on the moon some time over the next eight to 15 years; this is with a view to eventually landing humans on Mars. Survival and endurance techniques and equipment will be tried out and perfected on the moon before the supposedly more testing conditions of Mars.

Obviously Bush has an eye on the forthcoming presidential elections and giving himself what the *New York Times* calls a "legacy-inspiring flavour" (January 10). His Mars mission plays to abiding American myths of an endless frontier and echoes John F Kennedy's May 25 1961 speech. "I believe," Kennedy famously said, "that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth" (quoted in K Gatland *Manned spacecraft* London 1967, p141).

Going to Mars will doubtless be hugely expensive. Estimates vary from \$50 billion to \$250 billion over the course of the whole project (though the free-marketeer, Robert Zubrin, president of the Mars society, reckons he could do it for \$30 billion). Even if, as expected, Bush is re-elected, this could sink his 'vision thing'. When, in 1989, his father, George Bush senior, announced his Space Exploration Initiative, which envisaged an American return to the moon, he found himself rebuffed by congress. Nasa's \$450 billion projected bill proved far too much.

To ensure that history does not repeat itself Bush junior is determined to keep details vague. It is not hard to fathom why. The present US boom has been funded through a Keynesian-type federal deficit amounting to just under four percent of GDP. The IMF also publicly worries about a ballooning US trade deficit and external debt. In short the US economy is in danger of undergoing a devastating reversal of fortunes.

Despite the inevitable criticisms from various Democratic Party presidential hopefuls, Bush is banking on the undiminished popularity of all thing space. Generations of science fiction writers - from HG Wells to Arthur C Clarke and from Ray Bradbury to Ken McLeod - and long-running comic, radio and TV series - from Dan Dare to Dr Who and from Superman to Star Trek - have created a ready audience for Bush's version of bread and circuses.

Space is nowadays commonly thought of as ripe for human colonisation. Certainly the arrival on January 3 of Nasa's Spirit rover and the subsequent snapshots of the rugged, boulder-strewn Martian landscape proved extremely popular. Hits on Nasa's website took it soaring to a record daily high.

Yet the fact of the matter is that space is not the modern equivalent of crossing the Atlantic Ocean and reaching the New World in 1492. Christopher Columbus and the conquistadors who followed him over the next 30 years allowed the Spanish monarchy to amass unprecedented riches. They stole gold and land and enslaved the native people *en masse*. America, confirms distinguished

French historian Fernand Braudel, represented the "treasure of treasures" (F Braudel *Civilisation and capitalism* Vol 3, Berkeley 1992, p420). After two centuries of superhuman efforts - driven half by base greed, half by sublime yearnings for freedom - the Americas were reinvented and transformed into Europe's outer skin.

The promised spin-offs from a moon base are in comparison quite frankly risible - mining rare metals, manufacturing pure crystals, beaming solar energy back to Earth, etc smack of technological quackery rather than rational investment. Mars is no different. It is virtually airless, barren, inhospitable, hellishly cold and prone to gigantic sandstorms. Nothing exists there that cannot be made or obtained far more cheaply on Earth. Possibly there might be sources of frozen water under its rocky surface. But why travel for six months in a tiny capsule and across vast expanses of space for that? Yes, eminent scientists speculate about the possibility of terraforming. The Martian atmosphere could be artificially oxygenated, greatly thickened and thereby warmed. Once again water could then freely flow. However, this would take quite a few years - roughly a million.

Of course, Nasa and the whole US space business is a branch, or extension, of the military-industrial complex. Satellites, computer-enhanced imaging, Saturn rockets, the space shuttle, etc owe far more to military requirements for nuclear missiles, communications, spying, guidance and pinpoint targeting than so-called pure science. Behind Bush's Mars mission lurks a sinister bipartisan agenda for ensuring US domination of near space: Nasa has space-plane 'taxi's and geostationary weapons platforms ready on the drawing board and is eagerly awaiting the go-ahead.

There is another, more important, factor at work besides electioneering. Production of the means of destruction, the third department of production (the other two being the production of the means of production and the production of the means of consumption), allows capitalism to guarantee "maximum" self-expansion from the firm basis of the "minimum" consumption of the *relatively* impoverished masses (I Mészáros *The power of ideology* Hemel Hempstead 1989, p226). Their limited ability to purchase the means of consumption no longer constitutes a barrier.

Turning the production of the means of destruction into a system of profit and self-expansion through state purchase effectively obliterates the distinction between consumption and destruction. This is feasible precisely because for capital the purpose of production, the end aim, is not human consumption of use-values according to need: rather it is self-expansion for its own sake. Problems of real use, and therefore *real* consumption, are overcome (though not eliminated) through the unlimited ability of the state to generate *artificial demand* and purchase waste - ie, the means of destruction - through credit and taxation. This innovative response to capitalist overproduction - initially tried before World War I and then after the 1929-33 world economic crisis - was made into a model of normality after 1945. The annual *peacetime* US arms budget is today

fast heading towards \$500 billion.

The state legitimises this perverse and obscene squandering of human and material resources through patriotism. A real or imagined enemy is singled out and thoroughly demonised: eg, kaiser Germany, European fascism, communism, Saddam Hussein, bin Laden and Islamic terrorism. Voting in favour of the endless production of waste therefore becomes a national duty and imposes a welcome internal discipline over the working class. Spending on Nasa and the space programme is essentially no different. Except that, besides patriotism, it is able to harness another misplaced idealism - the Quixotic belief that space represents humanity's natural destiny and promises solutions to every pseudo-problem from overpopulation to global warming.

Meanwhile, back here on planet Earth, the United Nations estimates that over a billion people have no access to clean drinking water, some 840 million have to survive on significantly less than the daily recommended daily intake of calories and around 30 million are infected with HIV/Aids. There is nothing inevitable or natural about any of this.

Neoliberal, IMF and World Bank programmes of market 'reform' and subordination to capitalist globalisation over the last 20 years have greatly exacerbated the unevenness of the system. Leave aside the growing gap between the mega-rich and the masses in the advanced countries: the so-called 'developing' world has in fact progressively been de-developed. Human misery - poverty, disease and hunger - thereby increases, not decreases.

Yet with organisation and political will humanity has within its reach the ability to easily meet all basic needs. The wealth exists in abundance. Simply diverting the US arms budget to such *real* uses would do that - almost at a stroke. But such a turnaround can never happen through the platitudes and essentially diversionary calls of the NGOs, religious notables and various leftwing reformers for rich governments to do their moral duty. The modern state palpably exists to defend, serve and promote the self-expansion of capital - the two are inextricably and increasingly interwoven and interdependent.

Social problems demand social solutions. Humanity - which can viably only be led by the *revolutionary* working class - faces an epochal challenge of putting humanity's wealth under social control. Capitalism long ago outlived any usefulness it once possessed. Now this most alienated of social relationships threatens our very existence - through economic crash, world war and ecological destruction.

Once humanity has superseded capitalism and become properly human, who knows what we might choose to do. Mars, along with other planets and moons in the solar system, could be explored by self-replicating robots or terraformed in an attempt to make them habitable. Perhaps one day in the far future our descendants might reach nearby stars. Now, however, the main subject of humanity *must be* humanity - as we find it, here on this planet. Our mission is transforming Earth ●

Jack Conrad

## LETTERS



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

### French ban

In reply to your request to respond to Peter Manson's article, let us say first that the general tone of this piece is gratuitously insulting, while its title is intentionally so ('Jacques Chirac's Lutte Ouvrière policemen' *Weekly Worker* January 8).

No amount of polemics between revolutionaries can justify insults in our book. In view of our past relations, which were reasonably fraternal, we want to believe this to be a slip. But we expect a formal confirmation from you on this particular point.

The many factual mistakes in Peter Manson's article and the flimsy knowledge of basic social realities on which he bases his abstract reasoning would make a reply far too long to write at a time when we have more important tasks to attend, such as the preparation of three election campaigns on top of our usual organisational work.

So the best thing we can suggest to meet your request is that you translate some of the articles that we have written on this issue (all are available on our internet site: <http://www.lutte-ouvriere.org>). Then, at least, your readers will be able to judge for themselves rather than being presented with Peter's own pre-conceived ideas.

The articles published on the following dates are indicative, but cover more or less the various aspects of the problem and the reasons behind the militant stand we made on this issue (as communists, not as 'teachers', as Peter puts it so naively): September 26 2003; October 10 2003; October 24 2003; December 19 2003.

François Rouleau  
Lutte Ouvrière

### Scandalous

I agree 100% with your analysis of the scandalous position of Lutte Ouvrière on Islamic headscarves. I would add that leading teaching members of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire voted for the exclusion of the Lévy sisters from their school.

Having defended girls wearing the headscarf at the time of the first attack on them (the 'Bayrou circular' of 1994), may I draw your attention to a number of articles in French on this question, now reproduced on our website (<http://www.le-militant.org>). You will also find there an 'Open letter to the brothers and sisters of Lutte Ouvrière'.

Raymond Debord  
Militant, Paris

### No thanks

We thank you for your invitation to speak at your January 18 forum. However, we regret to have to turn it down for political reasons concerning both the subject and format of this event.

Your forum is entitled: 'Headscarves, secularism and the battle of democracy'. One would have assumed, therefore, that it would be devoted to the attitude that revolutionaries should have towards religion in general and the revival of muslim fundamentalism in Britain in particular - which would be fair enough. However, the blurb contained in the invitation focuses on a totally different issue - namely Chirac's legislation to ban ostensible religious symbols (not "political" so far, contrary to what you write, although this may well change one of these days) in French state schools and what the left's attitude to this should be.

This, in our view, makes no sense whatsoever. Since nobody on the French revolutionary left supports Chirac's legislation; whose attitude to this legislation are you planning to discuss in this forum? More importantly, we find it rather

strange that British revolutionaries should be arguing wisely over the attitude that communists should have towards religion in France, when so many left groups in Britain avoid making a clear stand on such issues for fear of upsetting the liberal prejudices of the petty bourgeoisie!

On the format, one has to make a clear choice, which you have failed to do. You want to discuss the attitude of revolutionaries towards a particular issue. But this attitude can only stem from the aim we pursue: ie, the revolutionary transformation of society. Despite this, some of the speakers you invite do not share this aim. As a result, the panel you selected may be adequate for a student debating society, but not for a serious discussion between revolutionaries.

These are the reasons for our decision not to speak at your forum. We must add that we were all the more surprised by your invitation, as it seems to us that a much more pressing issue is being posed to the British left closer to home: namely the Socialist Workers Party's drive to build a rainbow alliance which aims to involve elements of political Islam. Judging from your paper, you seem to be broadly satisfied with the SWP's initiative whereas, as you probably know from the November issue of our journal, *Class Struggle*, we have made a clear stand against it.

We would certainly welcome a serious debate on this issue between our organisations, possibly involving other revolutionaries groups and activists.

Anna Hunt  
Workers Fight

### Straightening bent facts

Steve Cooke and Andy Hannah both indulge in considerable fact bending in their attempts to justify their support for my expulsion from the CPGB (*Weekly Worker* December 18).

Comrade Cooke tries to invent 'previous form' with his statements: "[Pearson's] repeated refusal to accept the legitimacy of decisions made through our democratic structures left us in an impossible position"; and "By repeatedly letting down his comrades and diminishing the effectiveness of their interventions, comrade Pearson lost the trust of the membership" (my emphases). His account is fictional. As Mary Godwin's report of the expulsion proceedings at the CPGB aggregate on December 7 (*Weekly Worker* December 11) and the terms of the indictment against me - set out in Jack Conrad's 'Party notes' in the preceding week's paper - both make plain, the charges related solely to the way I voted in three calls at the same meeting: the inaugural conference of the Democracy Platform of the Socialist Alliance on November 8.

Andy Hannah is even more inventive: "Having lost the argument within the CPGB, comrade Pearson arranged to be 'mandated' by Stockport Socialist Alliance to present his own position - in opposition to the Party majority - at various SA bodies", he says. Comrade Hannah should be ashamed of this base fabrication. All three of the motions upon which I voted against the lead given by comrade Marcus Ström concerned the matter of how the SA should relate to the phenomenon which, at that point, carried the appellation, 'the Monbiot-Yaqoob initiative'. It has since metamorphosed into the 'Respect/Unity coalition'. The Monbiot-Yaqoob proposal for an electoral coalition, and announcement of their intention to approach *inter alia* the SA for support therefor, had only been made public, in the *Guardian* newspaper, on October 13. I had then won an emergency resolution of Stockport SA, two days later, seeking rejection by the SA national council of the Monbiot-Yaqoob approach. The national council meeting took place just

three days later, on October 18.

Far from my engineering the Stockport SA mandate, "having lost the argument within the CPGB", I was representing the well known CPGB position of opposition to Monbiot-Yaqoob's previous incarnation, the 'Peace and Justice' proposal. There was no "opposition to the Party". I was in fact playing a self-starting leading role in advancing what I considered to be the principled political position of the CPGB.

I arrived at national council armed with a ringing endorsement of the position I was going to fight for, in the text of the *Weekly Worker* editor, Peter Manson's article. Sub-headed, "Reject latest 'Peace and Justice' coalition", it advised: "Delegates must reject any notion of some green-liberal-pacifist coalition that will take the working class movement precisely nowhere. The irony of the Yaqoob-Monbiot-SWP 'peace and justice' hogwash is that it is likely to be ignored by voters even more than the Socialist Alliance itself was in last month's Brent East by-election" (October 16). At the meeting moreover, I gained the support of the CPGB national organiser, Mark Fischer, for accepting into the Stockport motion an amendment by Martin Thomas of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty which "made clearer" (Mark's words) that the Monbiot-Yaqoob manifesto described a non-socialist electoral coalition.

What I did subsequently oppose - *four weeks after* I obtained the Stockport SA mandate - was the presentation, on the very day of the DPSA conference on November 8, of an unprincipled *volte-face* in the form of the 'papal bulls' that were carried by comrade Ström.

No, there had been no prior argument, no democratic discussion by the CPGB membership on its attitude to the Monbiot-Yaqoob/Galloway/SWP phenomenon. Again, Mary Godwin's report of the December 7 CPGB aggregate presents us with the truth. That democratic discussion did not take place until the same meeting at which my expulsion was executed.

To move on, an interesting development has now occurred. Commenting on the declaration of the self-appointed committee of 'Respect', Jack Conrad observed: "Even where we strongly disagree tactically - eg, over the European Union and voting 'no' in any referendum over the euro (this plays into the hands of the 'anti-European xenophobic right wing' and we therefore urge an active boycott) - there is room for optimism. It must be stressed that what we have in front of us is a draft" (*Weekly Worker* December 11).

But lo, what do we see on SA-associated email lists on December 30? A communication from CPGB Provisional Central Committee member Marcus Ström of a motion he has submitted to the SA executive committee, which contains the following proposal for submission by the SA to the inaugural convention of Respect: "We will strongly oppose the anti-European xenophobic right wing in any euro referendum. But we oppose the 'stability pact' that the European Union seeks to impose on all those who join the euro. This pact would outlaw government deficit spending and reinforce the drive to privatise and deregulate the economy and we will therefore vote 'no' in any referendum on this issue."

Comrade Ström lays claim to a mandate from the committee of the DPSA for the terms of this motion in whose name he submitted it. (I would cast doubt on the veracity of this claimed mandate, but that is another matter.)

Well, well, well - what a blow to comrade Conrad's hopes of seeing the Respect draft declaration amended. Can we now expect to see comrade Ström expelled from the CPGB? You can bet your bottom pound or euro that we won't! There is a world of difference between the CPGB leadership's treatment of a consistent and outspoken left

critic from its rank and file and one of their own who embarks upon a rightward deviation from a democratically decided Party position. I have no doubt that there will be a world of difference too in the attitudes of comrades Cooke and Hannah.

**John Pearson**  
Stockport

## Selective discipline

The expulsion of John Pearson raises some serious questions about the CPGB's internal regime.

What about CPGB comrades who failed to attend the February 2003 anti-war march in London. Despite the next aggregate agreeing that a letter of censure should be sent to all who failed to attend without prior permission, setting out the seriousness of non-attendance at the biggest class action for over 20 years, no action was forthcoming.

The internal disciplinary regime of the CPGB seems to be rather selective when it comes to handing out punishment. Comrades who fail to carry out agreed actions (SA, anti-war demo, etc) are spared the retribution of the PCC. More importantly the failure of the central committee to carry out the instructions of the aggregate - eg, reprimanding non-attendance at the February demo - is by far the most serious breach of democratic centralism and one for which the culprits get away scot free.

The expulsion of John Pearson was a mistake. A return to candidate membership or supporter status, with the responsibilities and not the rights of membership, would have been more in line with comrade Pearson's mistakes. And I say "mistakes", because Jack Conrad himself highlighted the low level of consciousness of the accused.

That's not a defence you can use for the PCC.

**Roger Harper**  
Manchester

## Not leaders

I have watched the CPGB with real interest during the last three years. I was a member of the CPGB (the real one) from 1970 until its death. I hoped the people who had taken up the name might have taken up the best elements of its mantle.

Alas, the *Weekly Worker*, which I always read, is never concerned with how to mobilise the most class-conscious elements of the working class. It is absorbed in the NE London world of interecine 'left' (?) politics. And its lack of internationalism means policies adopted by the CPGB are bizarre - especially the policy on Ireland.

Now who in Ireland wants a repartition? Such a policy could only arise from those so deeply buried in the polity of the imperial nation that they don't even notice its imperial nature: ie, telling the lesser people what to do. It could never have been formed in the context of a true workers' (worldwide) party. If the CPGB had discussed this policy with Irish communists, I cannot imagine it would ever have been adopted. The CPGB never had such imperial lines (whatever one thinks of their policy on World War II).

Now I read these items from the letters page: "The Respect coalition expresses the lack of confidence of the SWP in socialism from below. It is moving in an opposite direction to what the class needs - a mass workers' party" (January 8). Yes, the working class needs a mass workers' party - so what does the CPGB do? Support Respect. Have you read the *Critique of the Gotha programme*? F\*\*\* knows what Marx would have said about Respect.

"We need a working class organisation that can encourage self-awareness, confidence and solidarity within the class. After much deliberation, I've decided to join the Independent Working Class Association, which seems much

more realistically placed to further the interests of my class."

Does not such mail tell the CPGB that it is now losing even its close supporters? I'm not going to join the IWCA as it seems to me to be directionless: ie, not within Marx's vision of socialism; just a rebellion against where we are now. But it is miles better that you, the CPGB. Its focus is on how to build socialist sentiment amongst workers.

The *Weekly Worker* is concerned with slugging off the SWP and others. They are rubbish, alas - deeply locked in the struggles of a now irrelevant past. But there is not even the beginning of an appreciation in the CPGB that we need to start building an independent, fighting, working class movement. You have become part of the 'left', not the leaders of the working class.

I joined the CPGB as it was the central organisation of the militant working class. You're not even trying to get there. I truly regret that. Quo vadimus?

**Richard Harris**  
Canterbury

## Democratic

I agree with Matt Richards on the need for long-term, or even permanent, factions within democratic centralist parties (Letters, December 18).

Permanent factions are not a "disease", as Duncan Hallas erroneously asserted. This notion is actually an insult to the memory of Trotsky and the struggle he conducted against Stalin. Trotsky's very own oppositional faction, the International Left Opposition, in the Comintern itself lasted, in one form or another, for the best part of a decade from the early 20s to 1933, when Hitler came to power.

Was this evidence of a "diseased" political mentality? I think not. It was a necessary and indeed heroic struggle. Should present-day Trotskyists have less rights than Trotsky had? The real "disease" is, in reality, the arrogant intolerance of dissent in the British Trotskyist movement - including the SWP/International Socialist Tendency and Militant/Committee for a Workers' International. Present-day splinters from these organisations often suffer from the same disease to one degree or another.

Why are tendencies and factions necessary? In a nutshell, because the revolutionary organisation does not live in a vacuum. It exists in class society and, for this reason, it is not immune from the enormous ideological and political pressures that the ruling class exerts upon it at crunch points in history. The British ruling class is expert in this art, having been the longest surviving, and most experienced, capitalist class in history. Revolutionary organisations in the imperialist centres like Britain are especially vulnerable to such pressures because of the enormous financial resources at the disposal of establishment and the

historic weakness of the far left.

Every so often events happen (wars, civil wars, terrorist bombings) which subject the far left to severe political tests. At such times, the ruling class launches a vigorous propaganda offensive which reaches into the ranks, or even the leaderships, of left organisations and grabs hold of the minds of some of our comrades, sowing confusion and creating disarray. Tendencies and factions are necessary in order to resolve, in a civilised way, the conflicts and turmoil which such rightwing political interventions create, often via the liberal bourgeois and petty bourgeois intelligentsia and its academic institutions and press.

It is necessary to formally recognise, and give proportional representation on leading bodies to, all tendencies and factions within a given revolutionary organisation. This tradition has been lost in the British left with the exception, to my knowledge, of the former International Marxist Group and its offspring, the International Socialist Group. This has not prevented this political trend from making all manner of political errors over the years, but it has provided a framework for struggling to reverse such problems in a reasonably fraternal and comradely way. Leaderships have been replaced without splits on a number of occasions, which is rare in the British Trotskyist movement. We should be striving to make it less rare.

It is time for the SWP (and the CPGB) to consider and adopt the excellent democratic provisions within the constitution of the ISG, while rejecting the bankrupt moves to ditch democratic centralism which presently emanates from it 'allies' in the Socialist Solidarity Network and also from its international 'allies' in the leadership of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. It is time to break with the bad old ways of Duncan Hallas and Tony Cliff and accept that the ruling class is able to wreak havoc within our ranks from time to time and that we need a tolerant, civilised constitutional framework for resolving these problems.

In short, it is time for the left to treat its supporters with respect (to use a currently fashionable term). I think the ISG should publish its constitution.

**John Ellis**  
email

## Al Richardson

I have just been sent your obituary of Mr Richardson by a fellow former pupil (*Weekly Worker* November 27). I wish his family the best.

I must add that Al, as you like to call him, was someone who always stuck in the mind for many reasons. Having not been raised within the leftist fraternity or any other political front, I could see he was always someone that had a thirst for knowledge and a hunger to teach. He was a natural academic and great, great historian who taught me much.

I will always treasure my experience as a 12-year-old, when a pupil ripped a page from a book and he threatened the entire class with suspension, and meant it, unless the perpetrator came forward. Of course the pupil was castigated, suspended and made to pay for a new book.

He defended the written word with an iron fist and I will always remember him saying, "History is most important because it is a great indicator of the future". He was referring then to the former state of Yugoslavia and prophesied its intense ethnic struggle. It all seems too obvious, when said in such plain and simple terms. He spoke of the Middle East in the same way - without a solution perhaps history means nothing.

Good man. Thank you. Though a true socialist, you were not my equal. Mr Richardson, sir, I look up to you.

**Darren Porritt**  
email

## Death penalty

Why is so much of the left opposed to the death penalty? I am a communist and believe in the sanctity of human life. Therefore those who, beyond doubt, commit premeditated murder should have the privilege of their own lives taken away. It is wrong that scum like Ian Huntley are given a luxurious lifestyle at the taxpayer's expense.

The leftwing intelligentsia can't keep dismissing such issues as 'rightwing'. Is this hysteria or working class common sense? Let's start thinking outside the constraints of political correctness!

**John Mann**  
email

## R for Republican

I am coming to believe that there is something in what the Revolutionary Democratic Group say. Consider the situation:

- The productive forces in the United Kingdom have by no means outgrown the relations of production.
- Everybody in the UK benefits materially from imperialism.
- The subjective forces for revolution, particularly in England, are, in total, small in size and are split up into numerous mutually intolerant parties and groups.

This is not a revolutionary situation. It has always been ridiculous that the monarch should play a key role in the governance of the UK simply because she has inherited a few genes from the medieval Scottish kings. The queen is no longer buttressed by a large aristocracy and the royal family is losing its popularity and even becoming an object of ridicule.

A republican movement should be able to make some progress. I can't understand, though, why the RDG does not call itself the *Republican* Democratic Group.

**Ivor Kenna**  
London

# Join the Respect Unity Coalition Support the 'Convention of the Left'

The **Respect Unity Coalition** will be hosting a **Convention of the Left** at **Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London** on **Sunday January 25, 10am.**

I shall be attending the convention on January 25.

I wish to join the Respect Unity Coalition.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town/city \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

To attend the convention, or join the coalition, fill in this slip and send it to:

**National Convention**  
**10 Woburn Walk**  
**London WC1H 0JL**

Include £10 registration fee if attending the convention, £10 if joining the coalition, or £20 if doing both, made out to **Unity Political Fund.**

## CAMPAIGNING

National Union of Students -  
www.nusonline.co.uk

# Back to the future

**P**oor Tony Blair is on the ropes yet again. The Kelly affair has seen him looking even shiftier than Michael Howard at prime minister's questions, and now he faces his biggest backbench rebellion over tuition fees. 'Desperate times require desperate measures,' goes the old saying, and there is definitely an element of desperation in his increasingly hysterical attacks on the rebels. By likening a vote against variable fees to 'treachery', Blair is looking increasingly unstable and is on the right track to alienate all but his most ardent acolytes.

This would be a mistake when it comes to the National Union of Students. For decades the upper echelons of its bureaucracy have churned out loyally unthinking voting fodder for the Labour Party. Illustrating the depth of the rot, the original introduction of fees did not even register as far as this relationship was concerned. But times have changed. The faceless Blairite hacks of the late 90s have given way to 2004's tough-talking Mandy Telford. This reflects the growing anger on the campuses.

NUS online has the smart, corporate look common to most union websites, and is a marked improvement over the 'yoof' look it attempted to pass off last time it visited. The main field is split into three topic listings. The first, 'Advice', highlights its 'Safe as houses' site and, as you might guess, this is dedicated to the perennial problem of student accommodation. Students are requested to submit anecdotes of hideous housing and loathsome landlords, and there is more generalised information, including what students can expect from the forthcoming Housing Bill. (But all this does not explain why the home page uses a picture of Roland Rat to publicise the site. My old digs were never infested by unwieldy glove puppets.) Moving along, further items listed include safe sex messages, a thinly-veiled plug for the NUS-owned Endsleigh Insurance, a chance to win 300 quid, and an article on job agencies.

The 'Campaigns' column begins with a scathing attack on variable fees by Mandy Telford. She fears the £3,000 charge is merely the thin end of a £10,000 wedge that universities would really like to demand. Once the government introduces the market into higher education, the pressure to raise the ceiling will prove irresistible, she argues. It is obvious to all but the prime minister that this would create a two-tier system

where some institutions will be devalued, and whole swathes of working class students put off by the vast debts they would accrue. But of course, Tony always knows best.

Moving on, the column acknowledges Holocaust Memorial Day on January 25, and provides more material on housing and health. January 20 marks 'Democracy Day', and the NUS shows its commitment to democratic transparency by denying access to these pages to all but registered members. Other items include the 'Save Wednesday afternoon' campaign, a report from the December 5 lobby of MPs, a campaign against violence toward women, footage of demonstrations and conference documents.

The third column speaks to the increasingly accurate stereotype of students as hard up, and offers a number of discounts on a variety of goods and services. Unfortunately my union card expired years ago, so I was forced to do my bargain hunting elsewhere.

The navigation bar at the top of the screen offers a series of drop-down menus, giving even more advice, campaigning links and discounts. The news link offers press releases, a Westminster watch, upcoming stunts, and a small round-up of recent happenings. 'NUS card' extols the consumerist benefits of such a desirable possession, but is it really necessary to separate it from the 'About NUS' pages? By giving the card a stand-alone page, it implies that the main selling points of the union are the discounts membership offers. Nevertheless 'About NUS' offers a fair overview of the size, structure, function and history of the organisation. The Wales and Scotland pages provide some bilingual links and short introductions concerning their activities - though in my opinion these could do with more work. This, however, is complemented nicely by 'The guide', a map index of affiliated college and university unions throughout the UK. Lastly, the bar is completed by a resource page that promises "briefings, events guides, publications ..." to union officers, but once again you have to be a member to see it.

The NUS is to be congratulated for packing in as much information as possible, while avoiding the boring design and plodding content not uncommon among trade union websites. Their monochromatic IT departments could do with taking a look ●

Phil Hamilton

# Shaun Brady shows his true colours

**T**he new rightwing general secretary of the train drivers' union, Aslef, has threatened staff at head office with the sack if they take industrial action. He is also making noises about withdrawing recognition from the GMB union and setting up a 'staff association' for the new scab workforce.

The problems started when Shaun Brady beat Labour left Mick Rix (a former member of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party) for the post after an acrimonious election campaign involving dirty tricks on both sides. There is no doubt most staff at Arkwright Road sided with Rix - notably Andrew Murray, Aslef's press officer and a member of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain. Many of them have since left to further their careers elsewhere.

Brady has constantly complained that the staff were undermining his leadership. At times he has developed an aura of paranoia worthy of *The X-files*. His actions, however, are serious. He has been accused of bullying, and



Aslef's own union-basher

changing working conditions and practices without negotiating with GMB reps.

Brady has now sent a letter to the

staff as a result of the GMB balloting for industrial action, saying that they face the sack if they go ahead. The letter outlines a new regime that includes reducing sick pay to the legal minimum, abolishing flexible working arrangements, withdrawing childcare vouchers and tightening disciplinary procedures. He is threatening to use the Tory anti-union laws that the union is pledged to campaign to repeal.

Needless to say, all this is a total disgrace. For a trade union to treat its staff in the manner of a Victorian workhouse proprietor shows the level that this New Labour Blairite has sunk to. Aslef members need to side urgently with the GMB head office staff and get resolutions condemning the general secretary's shameful behaviour up to the EC. If this is not stopped - and soon - how can Aslef negotiators stop the employers doing to train drivers tomorrow what their general secretary is doing today? ●

Matt Lawson

# Civil Contingencies Bill Power to suppress

**1**920 was a significant year. It witnessed the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain and it also saw the insidious Emergency Powers Act become law.

Drawn up in the aftermath of the World War I, the act was ostensibly intended to allow parliament to respond quickly and efficiently in response to a threat to Britain's 'security'. Its real purpose was soon revealed. It was first used the very next year, in response to the miners' strike, and then again in 1926. It was used nine times subsequently - five times by the Heath government alone - and on every single occasion it was the organised working class that was the target.

Eighty-four years on there is good news and bad news. Good news: the law will soon "cease to have effect". Bad news: it will be replaced by the government's new Civil Contingencies Bill.

The bill, which will get its second reading in the House of Commons on January 19, is purportedly intended to allow the state to respond to a wide range of emergency situations - not least the bourgeoisie's current favourite spectre: terrorist attack. However, the bill defines an emergency using the broadest possible definition. An emergency is anything that "presents a serious threat to human welfare, the environment, political, administrative or economic stability, and the security of the UK or part of it". In response, "senior ministers of the crown" would have the sanctioned authority to bypass parliament and institute emergency measures.

The powers they wish to accrue to themselves are vast and far-reaching. The legislation will enable the state to restrict access to "sensitive areas", restrict travel, break up demonstrations and public gatherings, deploy the armed forces and seize property. The bill also allows for local or regional state of emergencies to be declared.

In the face of strong criticism from civil rights groups and opposition politicians, the bill as it currently stands now features a 'triple lock'. A supposed safeguard against misuse of this act, this requires the government to demonstrate that there is an emergency or the threat

of such, and that swift action is both necessary and proportionate. This is the sole concession that has been made as a result of the consultation period, and one that can plainly be overcome - witness, for example, the 'compelling evidence' presented in order to justify the invasion of Iraq.

The Civil Contingencies Bill formally derives its authority from the monarchy, which grants the queen's power to her ministers. It will enable the state to act without even the cursory and largely illusory 'democratic' approval of parlia-

ment. In reality, of course, the democratic rights enjoyed by British subjects are under constant threat. They result from hard fought concessions won by the ongoing struggles of the working class, but for as long as it is the bourgeoisie that controls the state, such rights are in danger of being hollowed out.

This bill enshrines that threat in law. Should we step out of line, the state can, and will, abolish at a stroke any pretence of democracy and any feigned commitment to human rights ●

Jem Jones

## Fighting fund

# Much better

Good news: our £500 monthly fighting fund is back on target. After a bad new year's start we have leapt from a rather miserable £45 to a much better £118.50. This is thanks to donations from two longstanding supporters. Comrade TR, a pensioner from the North East, sent £60 - which sets a benchmark I wish other readers would follow. And on top of that we received £13.50 from comrade FJ, who lives in the Manchester area. Thank you both.

Yet it has to be admitted that our fund is well short - considering we are already halfway through January. And I must emphasise that meeting the fighting fund each and every month is vital for us. Our finances are stretched almost to breaking point. There is no slack. So once again let me appeal to readers - yes, including those on the web - to help out. Send a donation: whether it is big or small, it all comes in useful, and it is all very much appreciated.

By the way, some readers might have seen the front page of last

week's paper on BBC1's *The politics show* (midday, Sunday January 11). The programme began with a short film showing *Weekly Worker* sellers setting their stall up outside London's Angel tube station. Our comrades were quizzed about Michael Howard's fake 'big people/small state' credo. I had agreed to be there at 2pm sharp. And I was on time. However, the film crew started their shoot early. So I missed my three minutes of fame and you missed the opportunity to see me on TV.

Whether or not this tincture of BBC publicity added anything to our circulation I do not know. However, last week we recorded 8,479 e-readers on the CPGB website and with our estimate of just under 1,000 print readers this keeps our total circulation healthily near our 10,000 average ●

Robbie Rix

Ask for a bankers order form,  
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Weekly Worker

around  
**THEWEB**

**MEDIA**

# What have Arabs ever done for us?

One reader of the *Weekly Worker* tells me that her favourite part of the paper is the sometimes laconic picture captioning. We have run the politically analytical "Sean Matgamna: isolated?", the somewhat cryptic "Pierre Khalfa: different", and the more direct "Alistair Campbell: ranting". She is waiting for the day when we run simply "[insert name here]: wanker".

It is curious that the term to describe someone who indulges in the harmless and condemnably 'safe sex' practice of masturbation should be used in everyday speech for a particular kind of corrupt, oily, self-seeking, insincere, bull-headed moron, but if anyone deserves the caption this reader craves to see it is ex-Labour MP and television presenter Robert Kilroy-Silk.

On January 4, the *Express on Sunday* carried an article entitled 'We owe Arabs nothing'. Here Kilroy argues that the Arabs should be grateful for liberation by the west, and if that is at the cost of "destroying the Arab world", then: "Should we be worried about that? ... After all, the Arab countries are not exactly shining examples of civilisation, are they? Few of them make much contribution to the welfare of the rest of the world. Indeed, apart from oil - which was discovered, is produced and is paid for by the west - what do they contribute? Can you think of anything? Anything really useful? Anything really valuable? Something we really need, could not do without? No, nor can I."

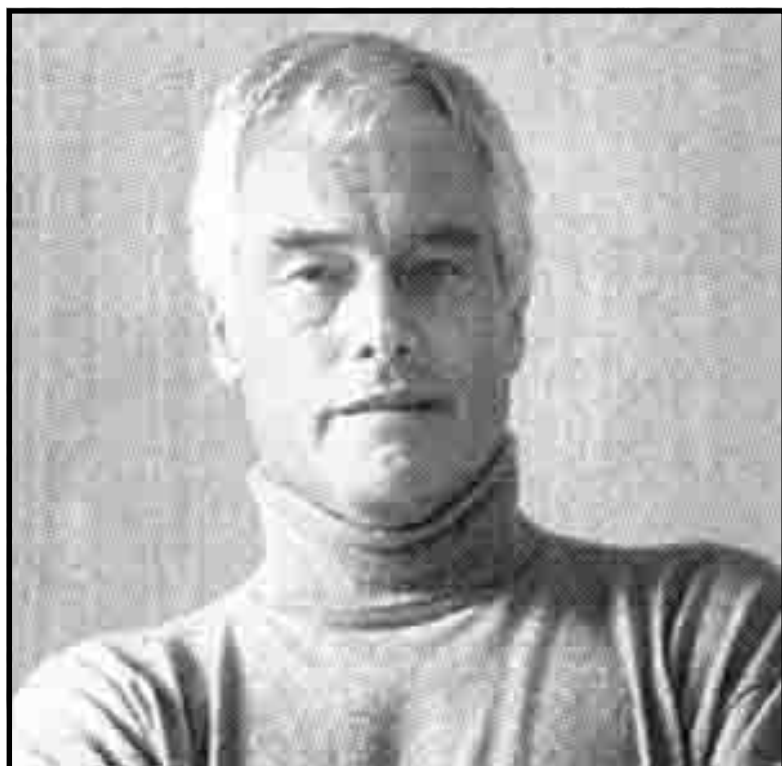
The worthlessness of the Arab race is a theme close to Kilroy's heart. He asks why Arabs should loathe "us": "For providing them with science, medicine, technology and all the other benefits of the west? They should go down on their knees and thank god for the munificence of the United States."

Ironically, the Arabs may well have given us nothing: or, more precisely, the concept of 'nothing'. In the ninth century, Arab mathematician Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Musa Al-Khwarizmi built on the number theory of the Indians and is credited by some historians with the first use of the digit 'zero' as a 'place holder': for instance (using European notation) distinguishing the meaning of the digit '5' in the numbers '50' and '500'. He also played an important role in the development of algebra: indeed, the term 'algebra' derives from his use of the Arabic term *al-jabr*, or 'completion', in describing his methods. Both these developments are, of course, fundamental to our science and technology.

The Arabs achieved another important development in number theory. While the Indian system relied on the use of 'dust boards' to perform calculations, they adapted it to suit pen and paper. This was important as, though the Chinese invented paper, it was brought to Europe by (you've guessed it), the Arabs.

There is not room in this article to describe all the contributions the Arabs brought to humanity. Suffice to say that - through both their own development of mathematics, astronomy, philosophy and science, and their far-flung settlement and trading - the Arabs not only achieved advances, but spread them widely: not least to western Europe, where Kilroy, like some cretinous Alf Garnett made real, seems fondly to imagine they all originated.

Kilroy is a fantasist of such pure water that, had his career as an MP not thankfully been cut short, he might have been New Labour's answer to Jeffrey Archer. On arriving at Salfrey Grammar



**Robert Kilroy-Silk: Blair is worse**

School near Birmingham as a boy, such was his confidence that he wrote a poem in praise of ... himself. It began: "There! He's arrived, made, and successfully done it/For what he's got, he's striven, won it." Elected as Labour MP for Ormskirk, and later for Knowsley North, he would apparently tell anyone who would listen that he had the looks, the brain and the charm to become the next prime minister. He was opposed, and finally ousted, largely through the work of the comrades of Militant (now the Socialist Party). I was a member of the group and remember watching him on television claiming that we had sent him a letter warning that "Militant supporters use baseball bats". Strangely, he never produced it.

Instead, in the same way that the vacuous, alienated, brittle self-obsession of Archer found reality unsatisfactory and chose to live in a world of *Boys Own* novels, Kilroy found an equally unreal world in which to posture: BBC daytime television. With characteristic modesty, he called his show *Kilroy!*

In a glitteringly antiseptic white studio, the perfectly coiffured presenter would preside over an audience made up of a mix of emphatically 'ordinary' people (and a few others playing the role of 'experts' or side-show freaks). Nominally, they would be brought together by their common connection to an 'issue': which might be anything from sexual relationships between the old and young to obesity and dieting. Kilroy would wander through this human menagerie uttering combinations of earthy bonhomie and platitudinous wisdom, seeking to convey a message of importance to humanity: the message usually being that Robert Kilroy-Silk was a rare and wonderful thing.

In the face of the protest Kilroy's article has generated, the BBC has taken his show off the air. One cannot help but wonder what really lies behind this decision. After all, Kilroy did not use the show to promote his views, and the BBC cannot but be aware that the views themselves are not a million miles from those which underlie the opinions of politicians and pundits they broadcast every day. It seems rather that Kilroy has shattered an illusion, and thereby broken an unwritten deal with the corporation. Kilroy was presented not as a person but as a

personality: a sanitised, colourless, unreal, and inoffensive manikin. People may have political opinions, get into debt problems, have dandruff and go to the toilet. Personalities may not. They hired a man with the bland, hygienic neutrality of a hotel room - not to any particular taste but acceptable to all - who could smoothly manage proceedings without lowering himself into them. He has suddenly plonked himself alongside the opinionated freaks on his own show, and has broken its structure. That's just not *Kilroy!*

The wider debate is interesting too. Crude, overt racism, of the kind Kilroy has foolishly betrayed, is one of the few things which is culturally simply unacceptable even in *reactionary* mainstream politics, but it is despised more for its *gaucheness* than for any real concern for the peoples of various ethnicities. Many bourgeois and petty bourgeois who roundly criticise Kilroy for his statement will still approve the actions of the US and western Europeans in manipulating Middle Eastern politics both through behind-the-scenes diplomacy and armstrading with dictators, and through direct military action of the kind we are seeing in Iraq. They may do so on more charitable, paternalistic grounds of bringing the 'western values' of freedom and democracy to the deserving but powerless Arab peoples. They may, more quietly, even sadly acknowledge the 'necessity' of such action on *Realpolitik* grounds: the theory of maintaining stability in 'troubled' regions, supporting lesser evils, securing oil supplies, and preventing worldwide instability.

It is all, however, cant. The pious New Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat politicians who will doubtless condemn Kilroy's appalling lapse of taste will continue to support the imperialist policies which are actually bringing misery and death to the Arabs in the Middle East and others all around the world.

I cannot quite bring myself to say that 'at least Kilroy is honest about it', because he would not know honesty if it sat on his face and wriggled. However, if I were an Arab, I would sooner contend with his ignorance and folly than with the guns ordered onto the streets of Iraq's cities by Blair ●

**Manny Neira**

## ACTION

### London Communist Forum

Sunday, January 18, 6pm: 'Headscarves, secularism and the battle of democracy'. Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaurgh Street, London NW1 (nearest tubes: Regents Park, Great Portland Street).

Speakers: Peter Manson (editor, *Weekly Worker*); Houzan Mahmoud (Worker-communist Party of Iraq and editor in chief of *Equal Rights Now!*, official paper of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq); Terry Liddle (Socialist Secular Society - personal capacity).

### Remember John Sullivan

Memorial meeting, Saturday January 17, 2.30pm, Brockway room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

John Sullivan, 1932-2003: socialist and scholar.

### British politics at the crossroads

Public meeting, Tuesday January 20, 7.30pm, Shandon lecture theatre, main building, Cardiff University, Park Place (opposite student union). Speakers include George Galloway, John Rees (Socialist Alliance), John Marek (Forward Wales).

### Israel's wall must fall

Lobby of parliament, Wednesday January 21, 2pm.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

### Support Iraq workers

Public meeting, Wednesday January 21, 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Manchester. 0161-882 0188.

Called by Iraq Solidarity Campaign.

### Europe-wide action for migrants

Against detention and for migrant rights, called by European Social Forum.

**Public meeting:** Tuesday January 27, 6.30pm - 'Oppose Asylum and Immigration Bill'. Grand Committee Room, House of Commons. Speakers include Neil Gerrard MP.

**Protest outside parliament:** Friday January 30, 11am, St Stephens Gate. Release all detainees. For an unconditional 'Blunkett amnesty' for all asylum-seekers and migrants without status.

Organised by Save Our Souls Immigration Discrimination (Sosid) in support of Sosid: 07949 282445; dikeka@onetel.com

**Noise demonstration:** Close down Lindholme - Saturday January 31, Lindholme removal/detention centre. Meet 12 noon, Tyrham Hall Hotel, South Yorkshire (on the A614, south of Hatfield Woodhouse). Sumac Centre: 0845 458 9595; lindholme@veggies.org.uk

### Labour democracy

Campaign for Labour Party Democracy annual general meeting, Saturday February 21, 11am-4pm, Conway Hall. Speakers include Billy Hayes, general secretary CWU, and Alice Mahon MP.

### Stop The War Coalition

Annual conference, Saturday February 28, 10am (registration from 9am), Camden Centre, London (opposite Kings Cross station).

Up to four delegates from each local group, two from affiliates. National individual members may attend as observers. Register with STWC office no later than Saturday February 14. £10 per delegate/observer.

### No more WMD

London to Aldermaston march, Easter 2004. Starts with rally, Trafalgar Square, Friday April 9; march via Southall, Slough and Reading; ends bank holiday Monday, April 12 with demonstration at Aldermaston atomic weapons establishment, Berkshire.

Aldermaston 2004, c/o AWPC, 18 Greenway Road, Bristol BS6 6SG; www.aldermaston2004.net; info@aldermaston2004.net

Called by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp and other local groups.

### RDG

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

### Socialist Alliance

Creative House, 82-90 Queensland Road, London N7 7AS; 020-7609 2999; office@socialistalliance.net

### National council

Saturday January 17, 12 noon to 5pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston, London. Deadline for motions: 12 noon, Wednesday January 14. Each SA can send two delegates: one woman, one man. Pooled fare: £2 per delegate.

### Convention of the Trade Union Left

Saturday February 7 2004, 11am to 5pm (registration from 10am), Friends Meeting House, Euston, London (nearest tubes: Euston, Euston Road). Union sponsors include: London region Unison; London region FBU; London Transport region RMT; London region GMB; Essex committee FBU; Cambridge and District Trade Union Council; Natfhe Western Region; Yorkshire and District Natfhe. Speakers include Bob Crow, general secretary RMT; Mark Serwotka, general secretary PCSU; Paul Mackney, general secretary Natfhe.

Organised by Socialist Alliance, tu-convention@yahoo.co.uk

### National conference

Saturday March 13, London. Details to be announced.

### Building a socialist alternative

SA pamphlet by Alan Thornett, £2 each; discounts for bulk orders.

**REPUBLICANISM**

# Turn unity coalition into republican movement

In a previous *Weekly Worker* article I had occasion to quote James Thorne, a former commander in the Royal Tank Regiment and now a member of the Stop the War Coalition, who had been interviewed in *Socialist Worker*. At the end of the interview he concluded that "the two main political parties in parliament are identical. Who represents the 80% of people who are opposed to war? The February 15 demonstration is more like a pro-democracy march than an anti-war one. These are dark times, but there is hope" (February 1 2003).

I thought this was an important insight. James Thorne went on to make the point that "the anti-war demonstration is a pro-democracy march, giving voice to millions of citizens, whose views are ignored. The dark days of war must indeed be matched by the hope of democracy. This war has no democratic legitimacy or democratic mandate. There has been no referendum, nor any general election, in which these life and death issues are put before the people. There has been no vote in parliament. Yet her majesty's government has dispatched 30,000 troops, a quarter of the British army, to the Middle East. The slogan 'Not in our name' sums up the mass rejection of Blair's war plans."

In fact there was, subsequently, an indirect vote in parliament. Pressure from a massive popular movement forced Blair to abandon historical precedent, the royal prerogative powers, and use his control of parliament to try to wrest back some democratic authority. But it only served to highlight the fact that parliament did not represent the majority of the country opposed to war. This was not really different to the relationship between parliament and the anti-poll tax movement over a decade earlier.

In the same article I characterised the mass movement as "an emerging pro-democracy movement" (*Weekly Worker* February 6 2003). Perhaps it could have been called a 'very near democracy' movement or an 'almost democracy' movement. The dialectic of struggle was turning something 'anti' into something 'pro', as if war was the negation of democracy and democracy negated war. What was missing was the extra twist of democratic consciousness which would enable the movement to publicly declare its democratic aims and intentions.

The role of Marxism is not to 'invent' or 'impose' democratic aims, but rather to make clear the political path along which the movement must travel. Its job was to bring a clearer democratic consciousness to a spontaneous anti-war movement. Either the movement would 'naturally' follow the democratic path outlined by the Liberal Democrats or it would take the road of militant republicanism. We therefore seek to divert or nudge the mass movement onto the democratic republican path.

Unfortunately British Marxism, rotten to the core with economism and ultra-leftism, failed the democratic test. Instead of taking up republican cudgels against the Liberal Democrats, the so-called revolutionaries conceded hegemony to the pseudo-democratic credentials of a parliamentary monarchist, Charles Kennedy. It is the same concession to liberal democracy that forces the SWP to exclude republican demands from the Respect platform. Charles Kennedy may not want to join Respect, but the door is kept open.

Today we face the same democratic issues. We need to transform the rem-



Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams

nants of the anti-war upsurge into a mass, democratic, republican movement. The importance of movements mobilised on the streets in the struggle for democracy should not be underestimated. History provides us with many examples, from the Chartists, the suffragettes, the peace movement (Greenham Common), the anti-internment and hunger strike movements in Ireland, and the anti-poll tax campaign.

## Contradictions

Mass movements arise from contradictions within society, which brings about the confrontation of social forces. I am reminded of the recent discussion with Mike Macnair, who is undoubtedly a republican. But he says: "Republicanism in this sense is ... an important component of Marxist politics. It is not an existing contradiction in mass politics" (Letters *Weekly Worker* November 12 2003). This goes to the heart of the dispute over republicanism, which divides the left and differentiates the Revolutionary Democratic Group-CPGB view from that of the liberal republicans.

The implication of Mike's point is that republicanism is an issue between Marxists, but not in wider society. The Socialist Workers Party sees republicanism in this way: as a sectarian issue invented by the RDG and promoted by our partners in crime in the CPGB. Sean Matgamna, who is a better republican than the SWP, sees the question in the same way. He thinks the RDG invented republicanism and the CPGB have followed us, because of their Stalinist two-stage theory of bourgeois revolution! In other words republicanism is pie in the sky, which does not relate to anything real in wider society.

This is the essence of the soft liberal republican case. They may pay brief homage to the god of republicanism, before going back to the fields to plough the barren furrows of economism. Republicanism can and should be ignored. There is no purpose in it, unless the SWP wants to have 'sectarian' debates with the RDG - which of course it does not.

The opposite is true. Republicanism is on the rise because of contradictions within British capitalist society. The post-war 'social monarchy' (constitutional monarchist state plus extended state capitalism and welfare state) has moved into a period of crisis. From the late 1970s, Thatcherism, the defeat of the miners and the trade union movement, we have evolved into a crisis-prone 'degenerate social monarchy'. Blair's constitutional reforms are an attempt to bale out the

sinking ship.

The national question is a political reaction to this, as people seek their own democratic answers. Irish, Scottish and Welsh nationalists appeal for an opt-out from the rotting UK state. The situation in Northern Ireland shows the issues most clearly in a part of the kingdom in which the form of democracy was already corrupt and degenerate in the 1960s.

At the start of the Irish crisis, republicanism was marginal, if not irrelevant. The civil rights movement wanted to reform the Orange (protestant monarchist) statelet. Republicanism emerged from the armed nationalist resistance to the British army. But it only evolved into a mass republican party in the early 1980s in response to Thatcher's attempt to crush the hunger-strikers. There is a tendency on the left to ignore Ireland as if it is now 'problem solved'. Northern Ireland is still 'our' country. And in part of 'our country' there is in Sinn Féin, a mass republican socialist party. Comrades may want to argue about the precise meaning of Sinn Féin's 'socialism' or whether SF should be called socialist at all. Either way, the main point holds firm.

If we want to see a crisis-ridden and degenerate social monarchy, we need look no further than Northern Ireland. Here could be found militarism, war on 'terrorism', armed fascist gangs, suspension of civil liberties, internment without trial as well as popular republican resistance. The US-inspired 'war on terrorism' is pushing the rest of British social monarchy in the same direction, stoking up a reactionary climate of fear and bringing further restrictions on civil liberties.

George Galloway MP is right to say that there is a "crisis of bourgeois democracy" in Britain. It is not restricted to Northern Ireland. Blair's constitutional reforms have not settled matters. The national question in Scotland and Wales is not solved, nor is the problem of the House of Lords sorted. What about proportional representation and the range of voting systems? The failure of parliament to call the executive to account now awaits with the Hutton inquiry. Low voter turnouts, restrictions on civil liberties and the renewed growth of fascism indicate how dangerous this situation is.

We therefore face a whole series of unresolved democratic political questions. But to call it a "crisis of bourgeois democracy" is an abstraction. In Britain bourgeois democracy takes the concrete form of a constitutional monarchy. Blair's reforms can only exacerbate the crisis and ultimately draw more people

into active politics. Republicanism is emerging as a democratic reaction to this situation. The "crisis of bourgeois democracy" means that the left cannot continue to avoid the republican question for ever. Our task is to bring it to the fore.

## Support

We therefore need a dual perspective of building a mass republican movement alongside the organisation of a republican socialist workers' party. We need to think clearly about the relationship between them. Mao Zedong made the point that a guerrilla army depends on the support and sympathy of the surrounding peasantry. A workers' party needs the support of sympathetic movements. The party builds the movement. The movement builds the party. There must be interplay between these two legs, if we are to succeed in walking.

The Scottish Socialist Party did not emerge out of thin air. It came from the massive anti-poll tax movement, which both produced the Scottish Socialist Alliance and pushed the Scottish parliament higher up Labour's political agenda. This helped to create the political conditions for the launch of the SSP. Similarly it was the hunger strikes and the mass protests in Ireland which produced Sinn Féin's first MP and set the scene for SF's transformation into a mass republican socialist party.

The revamped Socialist Alliance was not part of any mass movement. At best it was a movement towards left unity. With the departure of the Socialist Party and Workers Power, even that modest aim has come undone. But in terms of a mass movement, the SA is more like a beached whale. With no sea to swim in and no fish to eat, it is now starving to death. Had there been a significant strike movement, the prospects for the SA would have been much better. Instead the world of imperialism produced a mass political movement against the Iraq war. Even here the alliance was unable to intervene effectively - neither campaigning for democracy, nor for a workers' party. There was a failure of politics and perspective. But we have to learn the lessons and fight to put it right. Running away from the SA is not the answer.

Let us turn to the question of the Respect Unity Coalition, which currently exercises the minds of most SA members. Respect is a product of the mass anti-war movement organised by the Stop the War Coalition. The Galloway-SWP bloc is trying to resurrect it and build it into something positive. This can only succeed if it completes the dialectical process, which James Thorne pointed to in *Socialist Worker*. It must be fully transformed into a democratic and social movement. That means not avoiding or ducking the republican question. The stronger and bigger that movement, the greater will be the real possibility of launching a new workers' party.

Respect is not a republican socialist party. It is not a workers' or indeed any type of party. It is a movement or it is nothing. I do not have a crystal ball to predict whether it will be something or nothing. Can it attract mass support to its rallies and, far more importantly, on the streets? If we ask whether Respect is a republican movement, the honest answer is equally negative.

For Marxists it is not simply a question of describing what it is, but understanding what it can become. The answer is not anything you fancy, but is to be found within the movement and

the society from which it springs with all its contradictions. Respect is not a republican movement, but it could become one. That should be the basis of our intervention.

We have to be aware of the danger of a sectarian attitude towards the movement. We should not focus on the need for party, but the politics necessary to build the movement. This is the only way to engage with the audience, addressing their concerns about how we can go forward. If we just turn up to lecture them on the party question, it will be seen as sectarian point-scoring.

There is no problem with making propaganda for a republican socialist party. We need such a party to represent the working class. But if we are walking on two legs, it is the movement leg that we have to put forward at this time. The main thrust of our agitation should be about building a mass democratic and social movement, which addresses some of the important questions facing the people on democracy, equality, Europe and a wide range of social issues.

At present there seem to be three trends around the Respect movement. First, there is the liberal democratic platform, supported by George Galloway, George Monbiot, Salma Yaqoob and the SWP. Second, there are republican socialists coalescing around the SA Democracy Platform and defence of the SA programme *People before profit*. Third are those who are developing a left sectarian line. I want to comment on the latter grouping, which is presently a minority in the Democracy Platform.

This bloc is presenting itself as hard-line. Its adherents ask themselves whether Respect is a workers' party aiming for workers' MPs on a workers' wages fighting for socialism. The answer is of course a resounding 'no'. Add to that a 'maverick' rebel Gorgeous George and his alleged misdemeanours, and Christmas dinners with Tariq Aziz, and that is enough to oppose the whole show. But we could interrogate the Labour Party or the Transport and General Workers Union about socialism and a workers' wage and come up with the same answers. We have a strong moral tradition in Britain, which leads to boycotts. Lenin took up his pen against this in *Leftwing communism*.

This is the wrong method. We have to ask not only what is, but what such a movement can become. The left usually answers this pessimistically. It cannot become anything because of SWP control. What is what is - and ever more shall be so. Such an answer does not come from any understanding of the dialectic. Is Respect a republican movement? No. Could it become a republican movement? Possibly. It all depends on the class struggle.

What we do know is that there is a contradiction, which the Respect declaration shares with liberal democrats. This tells us "there is a crisis of representation, a democratic deficit at the heart of politics in Britain. We aim to offer a solution to this crisis". Thus the draft poses the question of democracy, but no serious answer is given. The best the Respect declaration can provide is that rather vague and woolly call for "a world in which the democratic demands of the people are carried out".

That is why we say R is for republicanism. Let the working class find out if it is ●

**Dave Craig**  
Revolutionary Democratic Group

**RESPECT**

# What about the workers?

**R**espect's convention on January 25, no matter what its outcome, will merit a minor historical footnote, if for no other reason than the achievement of an unexpected unity of the left - even for one day.

Not only will it bring together a scattering of committed anti-war activists, anti-imperialists and non-aligned socialists. Also present will be the Socialist Alliance and its main constituents (CPGB, Socialist Workers Party, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, International Socialist Group) alongside two ex-SA organisations - the Socialist Party and Workers Power. It seems likely that the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and, we are told, sections of the Indian Workers Association will be there too. We may even see the Muslim Association of Britain as observers. MAB president Anas Altikriti is speaking at a Respect rally in Wakefield on January 21.

The Unity Convention has set itself the task of standing as an alternative to New Labour in the European Union and Greater London Assembly elections on June 10. How long these various organisations and factions will manage to stay together is so far unclear, though.

The current signatories of the Unity declaration are George Galloway, Salma Yaqoob, John Rees, George Monbiot, Ken Loach, Linda Smith, Lindsey German and Nick Wrack. That is, five supporters of the Socialist Alliance plus an expelled Labour MP, a radical muslim and a *Guardian* columnist. While it is encouraging that Linda Smith has also signed up, one regional official of the FBU is all we have from the trade unions.

In general the unions are notable for their absence. Yet without the active support of organised labour, including at a rank and file level, electoral success will be fleeting, if achieved at all. Nor is it likely that any Labour Party branch will be sending delegates. This reveals a failure to take the Labour left seriously. Despite Blair and Blairism, it remains a working class party and one with a reviving left. Populist platitudes are no substitute for class politics and cannot provide the cement to secure lasting or meaningful unity.

Hopes were high that the support of Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT transport union, and Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS civil servants union, would be forthcoming. Indeed, Nick Wrack, chair of the SA, said in his recent statement to members: "Please find below the text of the declaration which has now been agreed by all those who attended Sunday's meeting. The text has subsequently been agreed by George Monbiot and we anticipate that it will be endorsed by Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka" (*Weekly Worker* December 11 2003). That expectation remains unfulfilled. Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka did not return my calls seeking clarification on their reluctance or inability to sign up.

The RMT has changed its rules so as to permit branches to back non-Labour candidates who support the policies of the union. That has allowed RMT Scotland to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party. A bold move which has triggered heated disputes in the union, although there appears to be no clear left-right division over this question. Of course, the right wing is committed to remaining loyal to the Labour government and picking up any crumbs that might be thrown its way as a reward. However, many left-wingers in the RMT hold to a strategy of 'reclaiming' the Labour Party. Others simply wish to leave.

This has created problems for Bob Crow on the executive. Comrade Crow, a former member of the CPB, and then Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party,

is attempting to fight ... but only on one front at a time. The SSP link-up is too much for some and Labour loyalists and the RMT right are hitting back. Now Labour is threatening the union with disaffiliation.

The RMT will hold a special general meeting in Glasgow on February 6 to discuss the future of its political fund. This follows receipt of correspondence from the Labour Party stating that the union's decision to allow branches to join up with the SSP, in line with last year's AGM decisions, is inconsistent with the union's national affiliation to Labour.

The letter from Chris Lennie, deputy general secretary of the Labour Party, to Bob Crow states bluntly: "The RMT has placed itself outside of the constitution of this party. Unless the decisions regarding affiliation to the Scottish Socialist Party are immediately revoked, the matter will be reported to the national executive committee at the earliest opportunity with a recommendation that the RMT be treated as disaffiliated from this party forthwith" (December 17 2003).

In this situation, to come out all guns blazing for an as yet untested populist coalition led by a maverick MP in alliance with the Socialist Workers Party would not be the easiest thing for comrade Crow.

To make things even more complicated, the 'reclaim the Labour Party' left is organising too. Lucy Anderson, can-

didate for Camden and Barnet in the Greater London Assembly elections, has committed herself to the RMT's pledge questions regarding renationalisation of the railways and other issues. She has been duly endorsed by the RMT executive as a candidate. This preemptive move, encouraged by deep entryists such as Bob Pitt (editor of *What Next?*) and Socialist Action (one of many fragments originating from the International Marxist Group), is aimed at making it difficult or impossible for local RMT branches to back non-Labour candidates.

So, although Bob Crow has spoken at meetings alongside Galloway, he feels unable to publicly back Respect. He is fighting in Scotland. That seems enough for now, especially as Respect is untested.

Mark Serwotka has different problems. While tensions on the PCS executive have played a part, comrade Serwotka seems to entertain misgivings about George Galloway and his record. On top of that the PCSU general secretary positively favours adoption of the euro - a position he underlined at TUC congress. Yet Respect's draft declaration is anti-euro. Moreover, since the PCSU executive now has a workable leftwing majority, there is a more integrated relationship between him as general secretary and the executive. Comrade Serwotka initially operated relatively independently of the former (rightwing) ex-

ecutive; now he is more susceptible to pressure. This has caused further questions over his support - public or otherwise - for Respect.

While comrade Serwotka has not signed up, he has agreed to speak. I understand he is booked for an Oxford meeting on January 19.

It is unfortunate that these two prominent comrades have not been able to commit themselves to the January 25 unity convention - so far. It weakens ties with the trade union movement as a whole and leaves a question mark over the chances of this formation contributing towards the struggle for a revolutionary working class party in Britain.

Where does this leave the Socialist Alliance and its pro-party minority? The SA executive pledged to fight for Respect to adopt a working class and socialist platform, but it has pathetically reneged on that commitment. So it falls to the SA's Democracy Platform to argue for this perspective on January 25.

Meanwhile at the forthcoming national council on January 17, the Democracy Platform will move a tranche of motions which, if carried, would commit the SA to back working class and "of course", socialist politics at the convention. These include: for a workers' representative on a workers' wage; for open borders and against immigration controls; for the 'R' in Respect to stand for 'republicanism'; for the democratic selection of candidates; and for an out-

line of 'What we mean by socialism', taken from *People before profit*.

Of course, as it stands, each organisation can only move one amendment at the convention, but these politics will be put forward by different organisations anyway. If our motions are passed at national council, it will then oblige the SA to call for a vote for them on January 25.

The Democracy Platform decided at its committee meeting in Birmingham on Saturday January 10 that its motion would be to commit respect's elected representatives to living on a workers' wage. Comrades from the SWP and others, including Nick Wrack, are suggesting this is a deliberate attempt to tell George Galloway to "fuck off". It is no such thing. Let the AWL plough that barren furrow. I still can see no real reason why George Galloway would not enthusiastically support our motion. Indeed I am told he has available ample funds from journalism, etc, which, taken together with the equivalent of a skilled workers' wage, would give him more than enough to meet his needs. I could even imagine him committing himself to donating his *entire* MEP wage to the new coalition.

While the Unity Coalition is being born out of a movement against the war in Iraq, it is also the result of the failures of the Socialist Alliance to grow and dig roots due to the SWP's stubborn refusal to put our unity on the only firm foundations - moving towards a fully fledged political party. The SA was effectively hidden away during the Iraq war so that the SWP could try and grab recruits. Now we are seeing a recurrence of this situation - the SA is once again being put on ice. The SWP wants to be the only socialist pole in Respect and it has blocked moves to affiliate the SA. Rivals, even one dominated by the SWP, cannot be tolerated. Should Respect fail, the SWP might fall back on the SA. But will anyone be left?

There is an ever increasing opportunist appetite driving the SWP to the right. The lower the electoral results, the more it wants to junk principles. Instead of patiently building the SA - with a weekly or daily paper, with education meetings and events, with civilised debate and day-to-day work in communities and workplaces - the SWP seems to believe that all that is required is stringing together meaningless platitudes and signing up 'big name' personalities.

This is the very danger of electoralism that the SWP once warned against: "The search for votes pushes a party towards a softening of its message, towards a search for accommodation with the union leaders in order to secure backing and finance" (*Socialist Worker* November 25 1995). This is what the SWP perceived to be the dangers of standing in elections. As the Bolsheviks brilliantly proved in Russia, they were wrong, of course. But they seem to have believed it so passionately that they it has caused them to fulfil their own prophesy. Standing in elections means only one thing for the SWP - electoralism.

Paradoxically the formation of Respect underlines once more the urgent need for a mass workers' party in Britain (and across the European Union for that matter). A party that stands in elections but promotes, in both propaganda and practice, the ideas and programme of revolution and democracy. Until that happens no serious advance can be made ●

**Marcus Ström**

■ **RMT special general meeting: Friday February 6, 9am, room M201, George Moore building, Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow**

## Cecilia Prosper Loss of a comrade

February 13 1960 -  
January 8 2004



**T**he untimely death of Cecilia Prosper will cause sadness throughout the left. Perhaps best known to the public for her excellent result as a Socialist Alliance candidate in the Greater London Assembly elections of 2000, Cecilia played an important role in making the SA a credible force in London politics at that time.

I first met her when we both worked for Islington council in the 1990s. She was a housing worker and an active member of the Socialist Workers Party. She was also very involved in Unison and played a prominent role as a leading SWP member within the union. She was open and personable and able to work with others in a way that many of her comrades could learn from.

When she and 11 others were sacked by Islington Council in 1998 following an unofficial walkout, Cecilia took the lead in taking the council to an industrial tribunal. She won and the council were found to be guilty of racism, sexism and wrongful dismissal.

It was apposite that her Labour Party opponent in the GLA election was Meg Hillier, a councillor in Islington at the time of her sacking. The Socialist Alliance campaign was militant and serious, and it showed in the results: 8,269 votes (7.2%). In some wards in Hackney Cecilia won up to 20%. This demonstrated that the Socialist Alliance had a base from which a start could have been made in building a credible working class alternative. Even more, it showed how a serious organisation and a serious candidate, with politics far to the left of what is now being proposed for Respect, could make an impact.

Cecilia stood in three more elections after 2000. She opposed Brian Sedgemore in Hackney South in the 2001 general election and won 1,401 votes (4.6%). She also stood in two local elections in Waltham Forest, gaining 147 in 2000, but only 47 in May 2003 - the poor result perhaps reflecting

the decline in the Socialist Alliance under the stewardship of her own organisation after the enthusiasm of those early campaigns. She must have been frustrated by the experience of that final electoral intervention.

I worked with Cecilia when I was also a candidate in the GLA elections and again when she stood in Hackney. I found her completely unsectarian in her approach to politics. I was struck by her candour, when challenged during exchanges at political meetings and on the doorstep. Even when she was asked something she was not prepared for, she tried to give an honest and straightforward reply.

As a person she was warm and gentle. She will be missed for her vitality, commitment and humanity. Our deepest sympathies go to her family - particularly her young son - who will find it hard without her.

The best thing we can do in her memory is to redouble our efforts to build the mass working class party that Cecilia Prosper herself showed was possible ●

**Anne Mc Shane**

■ **A memorial will be held in the near future. Details to follow**

OBITUARY

**CPGB**

# A modest proposal

**Manny Neira** calls for a review of the democratic centralism practised by our organisation

In a couple of weeks I shall be proposing a motion to the aggregate (or all-members' meeting) of the Communist Party of Great Britain which, if passed, will bring the organisation to its knees. This, at least, is the view of at least one of our leading comrades. It will "prevent the leadership from acting", and reveals me to be an anti-communist, an "anarchist".

You may be wondering what extreme, undisciplined and individualistic innovation has attracted such severe judgement. The gist of my proposal is that our Provisional Central Committee (or PCC) provides minutes of its meetings to members, including arguments supporting the decisions taken, and a regular item is added to our aggregate agenda for their formal approval.

Yes, that is all. If you are surprised at the reaction this proposal received, I must admit I was a bit too. In this article, I seek to explain why I am asking my comrades to adopt this procedure, allowing them a chance to decide for themselves.

## Democracy

Communists must organise democratically: this much I can surely say without descending into anarchy. Our most fundamental organisational principle must be the right of the majority to decide the programme and policy of the group.

Below I consider a number of issues arising from this, but none nullify this simple requirement. We are consistent democrats. We wish to see a genuinely democratic society. We believe that such a society - devoid of the distorted accumulation of power in the hands of the few which arises from our current division into classes based on capitalist economic relationships - will both respect the rights and freedom of each individual, and maximise the potential of humanity as a whole. We must begin by organising ourselves according to the same principles, and for the same reasons: because it is *right*, and because it *works*.

## Minority rights

The rights of the majority should be constrained only by a proper respect for the remaining minority or minorities. It is essential that individuals or factions dissenting from the majority view should be able to challenge the majority, in order to test and so improve its methods, and highlight and correct mistakes. In short, dissent keeps us *honest*.

Such principled opposition is not merely a right, but a duty, and so we must create space for opposition to function. Minorities must not be silenced within or outside the group. Should they feel it necessary, dissenters should carry their discussion into the pages of the group's publications or even put out their own - all with the majority's consent and co-operation.

In fact, I think that the CPGB has a healthy, democratic culture in this respect. The publication of this article, advancing an argument so clearly (if, I still feel, bizarrely) opposed by the leadership, is a small example of the open debate for which I think the *Weekly Worker* has deservedly won a reputation. Genuine disagreements, both amongst our comrades, and between them and those of other organisations, appear in almost every issue. As a result, an awful lot of people read us.

Much of the left press is so dull as to be almost unreadable. The rigid imposition of a 'party line' makes them predictable and lifeless, with all the life and joy of a Stalinist five-year plan. They quickly become little more than *internal* publications: few outside the group publish-



**Demand for accountability - or just anarchist bomb throwing?**

ing them read them, and some inside would rather not either. That our tiny group publishes a weekly paper read by thousands is both evidence and vindication of a policy of openness.

## Unity in action

The rights of the minority, though, do not extend to simply ignoring the wishes of the majority. In order to act *correctly*, we must maximise the opportunity for debate and dissent. However, in order to act *effectively*, we must do it together. Once the group has made its decision, therefore, all comrades must implement it.

It is because of this that I reluctantly supported the recent decision to expel comrade John Pearson. He argued that he was bound by the decisions of Stockport Socialist Alliance over and above those of the CPGB: which raised the very natural question, why be a member of the CPGB if you are not free to implement its decisions?

The arguments surrounding the expulsion of comrade Pearson have been extensively reported in the *Worker* and it is not my intention to replay them here. However, such events should make us reflect. Was there any substance in his complaints? Are we sufficiently self-critical? Can we improve on our current practice? I think we would do well to learn everything we can from every problem we endure. Perhaps these proposals would have short-circuited some of John's arguments before they were even raised.

But ultimately, the expulsion was justified: we must have *unity in action*.

## Leadership

You do not have to be a Marxist dialectician to recognise the constant movement in all reality, and particularly in politics. Conservative prime minister Harold Macmillan was once asked to name the greatest political problem he faced, and famously answered: "Events, dear boy, events". In order to be effective, a communist organisation must be able to respond to these events, and it is simply not practical to assemble the entire membership to decide every question.

It is for this reason that we elect a leadership: in the case of the CPGB, our PCC. The leadership is a smaller group, and is therefore able to meet more frequently. It can also assign individual responsibilities to individual members, if even meetings of the PCC are too cumbersome to arrange in managing an area of work. These individually delegated comrades may be taken from its own number or the group as a whole.

In order to fulfil its role, the PCC is given the authority by the aggregate to speak for the group. This *source* of the PCC's authority is an important point. The comrades on the PCC are there

solely because they have been elected by the aggregate, and any legitimacy they enjoy therefore derives from it. This principle is already recognised by the CPGB in the power it gives the aggregate to 'recall' some or all of the comrades on the PCC. However, I believe it could be reflected better and more realistically through an improved exercise of accountability - recognising that recall, like expulsion, is a power seldom used.

## Accountability

As the authority with which the PCC acts is derived from the aggregate, it is not free to simply do as it chooses. Its proper role is defined by its objective relationship with the group. A leadership which acts independently, effectively writing to its own political programme, is a factional leadership. Comrades currently on our own PCC have previously raised the criticism of the factional leadership of the 'official' Communist Party, and therefore well understand the breakdown in democracy that it represents.

It is the role of the PCC to implement the programme and policy of the group as a whole. This is established by the party's printed programme, and by the votes of the aggregate.

In a sense this is just a special case of something I have already mentioned: unity in action. The minority may dissent from a decision, but once it is taken they must act in accordance with it. The PCC, in this respect, is no different. Were it to act against or regardless of the majority, it would simply be an undisciplined minority like any other.

## Reporting

To prevent this, the aggregate must hold the PCC accountable for its actions, and this in turn means that it must know what it is doing and why. Again, this principle seems to have had at least some recognition: the PCC used to circulate regular 'reports' of its meetings. However, it has not done so for some months.

To be fair, even my critics on the PCC have conceded that this was wrong and

have committed themselves to restarting these reports, and so it may be that my arguments spur some improvement, even if my proposals are not passed. In any event, it is essential that the information provided by the PCC to the membership is sufficient for their performance to be judged on its contents. This means that I shall be asking the PCC to distribute minutes which are both *comprehensive* and *explanatory*.

By *comprehensive*, I mean that they should not be restricted simply to those matters which the PCC requires wider party action, as I suspect the original 'reports' were. They must tackle even those issues which are left entirely to the PCC to manage. This comprehensiveness reflects the purpose of distributing the minutes: it is to ensure accountability, rather than simply communicate decisions.

By *explanatory*, I mean complete with explanations of the reasoning lying behind the PCC's decisions and actions. Members must know the reasons in order to judge if they believe them sound; and in any case, conclusions reported without supporting arguments may attract criticism which could be avoided if the reasons to back them up are documented.

Above all, the minutes should be distributed as soon as possible after the PCC meetings take place, and certainly before the next aggregate.

## Collective responsibility

Finally, I am asking that an item is placed on the agenda of every aggregate seeking the formal approval of the minutes. This is a concretisation: it is both a symbol and a real-world action, establishing the responsibility of the *membership* to hold the PCC accountable for what it does in their name.

## Democratic centralism

Taken in its entirety, this is my understanding of *democratic centralism*: democracy which combines open debate with united action, and leadership with accountability.

Democratic centralism is nominally the method of organisation of almost every group on the revolutionary left. Why, then, do we consistently fail to unite? Why is the left prone to constant fission into ideologically defined groups, when we have the mechanism to allow comrades to differ politically but act together? Democratic centralism remains a principle, as Shakespeare had it, "more honoured in the breach than the observance".

This breach is the failure of the whole left, and is of historic importance. The British working class now lacks any independent political representation. New Labour has dragged the Labour Party into being an overtly pro-bourgeois party. The Socialist Alliance failed to retain the affiliation of the Socialist Party;

and even the pro-party minority within the SA failed to cooperate in resisting the SWP leadership's opportunist appetite for unprincipled alliance. I criticise the SWP *leadership* because I believe that many comrades within the SWP, and indeed inside many organisations or no organisation at all, retain a commitment to socialism and unity which is being strangled through the lack of democracy in our organisations.

The deformed, confused, undemocratic and deeply unpromising Respect coalition is ballooning into the vacuum left by the lack of working class representation, which New Labour no longer fills and no individual, ideological sect can fill. The CPGB is right to engage with Respect, because it represents the only space in which class-conscious politicians are congregating, but it represents a failure. Left groups who criticise it might reflect on the extent to which their own sectarianism helped to create the conditions in which some such coalition was inevitable.

The tragedy is, I have yet to meet a socialist who has not conceded *in principle* that, whatever the differences are between our groups, we could not work together within a genuinely democratic centralist formation: free still to argue their case, and even publish their papers, but acting together. If we are to forge Respect into a real workers' party, rather than merely watch disapprovingly as it degenerates into a petty bourgeois or even bourgeois-dominated front, we must move the defence of democratic centralism to the top of our agenda, metaphorically and (in the case of my proposal) literally.

## Anarchist?

Looking back over my words, I am still at a loss to identify the anarchistic deviationism I stand accused of. Did you spot it? Perhaps I should run a competition. Of course, this is a popular sport. The most frequent accusation traded between socialists is that the other guy is not a real socialist at all. The list of real socialists is generally defined as Marx, Engels, Lenin, sometimes Trotsky (according to the background of the speaker) and *me*. It is a wonder the movement has achieved anything, with so few genuine adherents.

Anarchists differ fundamentally from us in their belief in the *spontaneously* revolutionary nature of the working class, and this manifests itself in opposition to the formation of a revolutionary party. Anarchists also claim that parties are, by their internal logic, doomed to become undemocratic. I feel pretty comfortable that this is not the case I am making. We must build a revolutionary party, but, yes, that party must be democratic.

My experience of the CPGB leads me to believe that it has perhaps the healthiest democratic culture of any left group. I am troubled, though, when such a basic mechanism of accountability as I propose here is labelled 'anarchist'. I am troubled further when the PCC fails to produce minutes for months, not by the failure itself, but by the fact that it *excited no comment from the membership*. These are signs of a danger to the survival of that culture.

The danger arises not through a willfully undemocratic or factional leadership, or even through bureaucratic centralist tendencies in our method, but simply through neglect. My aim is not to criticise the PCC, but to encourage an active sense of ownership of the CPGB by the *membership*, without which no leadership, however good, can maintain democracy ●

**"A leadership which acts independently, effectively writing to its own political programme, is a factional leadership. Comrades currently on our own PCC have previously raised the criticism of the factional leadership of the 'official' Communist Party, and therefore well understand the breakdown in democracy that it represents"**



## REVIEWS

# Fantasy and extermination

Peter Jackson (director), JR Tolkien *The lord of the rings - Return of the king* general release

**D**espite the enduring popularity of the genre, successful fantasy films are few and far between. An undoubtedly major obstacle is that of portraying believable fantasy creatures - a recurrent motif. Having a load of extras running around in obvious rubber masks tends to lessen the chances of suspension of disbelief. If the film is to be successful - and the budget large enough to sustain the special effects - it has to be accessible to as wide an audience as possible; and conventional logic would have it that the cinema-going public does not go for outlandish fantasy. This is borne out by the debacle of Ralph Bakshi's animated *Lord of the rings* film (1978), which finished half way through the trilogy. The cartoon was seen as proof that Tolkien's epic, while being an enduring classic in literary form, could not be translated to the big screen.

The New Zealand director Peter Jackson has confounded all the nay-sayers. His adaptation of *The lord of the rings* has been a success both with the critics and with the viewing public. The films have won a slew of awards and taken a veritable fortune at the box office. Not only that, but they have reawakened interest in Tolkien and his work and introduced a whole new audience to the world of Middle Earth, as evidenced by LOTR having recently won the BBC's competition to find the nation's favourite book.

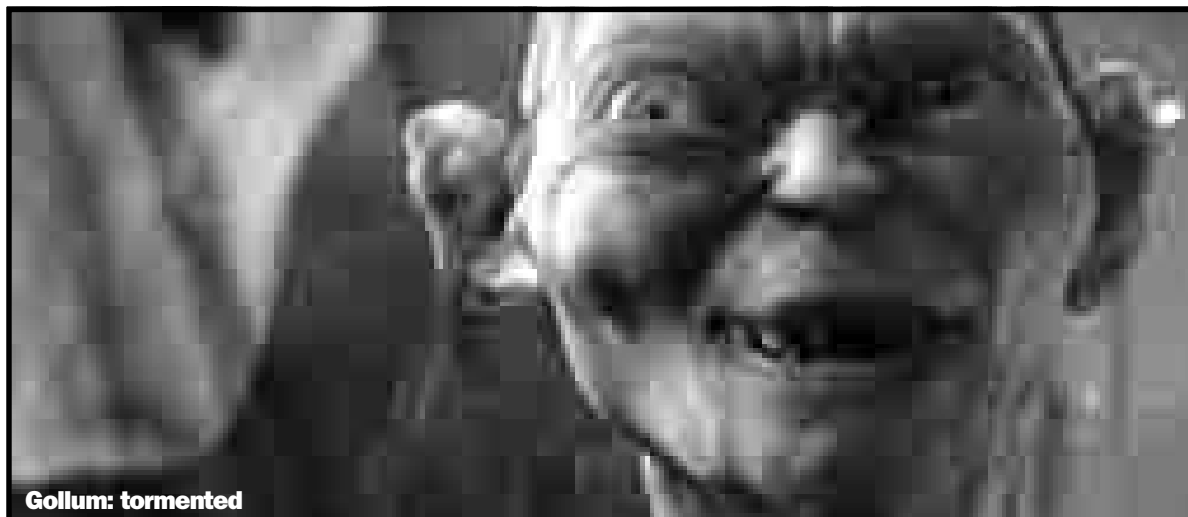
It tells the story of the quest undertaken by brave heroes to destroy the one ring - a seductive and destructive magical artefact - and defeat the dark lord, Sauron, before he conquers all of Middle Earth. The third and final film, *The return of the king* opened at cinemas last month, and by the end of its three hours and 20 minutes the epic tale is brought to its conclusion.

Personally, I find myself deeply ambivalent about both the books and the films. There is much to be critical of. *The return of the king* sees Aragorn taking his 'rightful' place as king of Gondor, due to his pure blood line. The orcs, the servants of Sauron, are portrayed as irredeemably evil, as faceless, unruly and rebellious hordes (with distinctly Slavic features in the books) that must be exterminated by the 'good' races. Women are conspicuously absent, with the exception of Eowyn and Arwen, both of whom feature far more in the films than they do in the books. And as for the work-shy, parochial, petty bourgeois hobbits ...

Despite myself, though, I find it hard not to be moved by LOTR. My heart ached for Gollum as he is tormented and ultimately consumed by the power of the ring. I cried when Faramir led the disastrous charge against Osgiliath, while back in Minas Tirith, Pippin sings a lament to Faramir's uncaring father. LOTR is, at heart, a story about friendship, courage and loss.

The trilogy should properly be regarded as a whole, rather than three separate films. *The return of the king* is unfortunately the weakest of the three parts. The battle scenes take up a great deal of screen time and, although awe-inspiring, after a while the computer-generated images become a little repetitive. When the witch-king, who cannot be killed by a man, is killed by a woman, Eowyn, I could not help but think of Macbeth (whose central character has an Achilles heel), and how the battle scenes are no less effective for occurring off stage. In contrast to the time and effort lavished on the battle scenes, the end of the film is oddly disjointed and unsatisfying.

Part of the reason for this is that the whole sequence from the book - where



Gollum: tormented

the hobbits return to the shire, to find that it too has been changed - is missing from the film. Some Tolkien purists have expressed outrage at the ways in which Jackson's films differ from the original text. However, in his study of mythology, Claude Lévi-Strauss noted how stories evolve in the telling, but concluded that such retellings added to the myth, and should be regarded as a part of it.

When he wrote LOTR, Tolkien drew heavily on his knowledge of Scand-inavian and Celtic mythology. Indeed he stated that he intended to write a mythology for England. *The lord of the rings* can be seen not only as an enjoyable story, but also as mythology, and this is plainly part of its appeal.

Jackson's film adaptation is a worthy retelling of Tolkien's masterpiece, and demonstrates why the story is so enduringly popular ●

Jem Jones

## Memorabilia, not analysis

Reds! exhibition, People's History Museum, Manchester

**T**he People's History Museum in Manchester is home of a new exhibition. According to the publicity, *Reds!*, which spans two floors of the north's largest labour history museum, "charts the story of the Communist Party of Great Britain".

The majority of the exhibition focuses on memorabilia from the party's history, from the 1920s through to its liquidation in 1992, when the majority voted to form the short-lived Democratic Left, as well as charting 'official' communism's rise and fall throughout the globe under the shadow of the Soviet Union. A number of the party's achievements - including the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the various cultural initiatives which formed an important part of the CPGB's activity and the campaign against apartheid - are all featured, with examples of propaganda and members' accounts displayed alongside some interesting audio and video features.

Although the exhibition is undoubtedly a welcome look at a vital and fundamental part of labour history often neglected, it is disappointing that it does not attempt any real analysis of the party's politics, or its ideological shifts throughout the 20th century - which often mirrored the increasingly degenerate 'Marxism' of the Soviet Union. Instead, various snapshots throughout the party's history - eg, the campaign against the means test or a march in opposition to the Spanish civil war - are examined in isolation, with a few artefacts, such as video reels of Harry Pollitt and old copies of the *Daily Worker*, scattered about, devoid of any serious political or historical context. There is also only scant examination of why the party was formed in the first place, and which groups and individuals struggled to forge it, although more information on this can be found elsewhere in the museum.

Primarily this is an exhibition of the party's various political actions throughout its history, and does not explain its essence at all. What analysis there is does not go into any great detail, and the layout is not even designed in a sensible chronological manner which at least might have helped place the party's activity in political context.

Instead, *Reds!* is at times a little like

looking through the spare room cupboard of a retired member of the 'official' party, with various old publications and badges on display, the audio 'I remember when'-style dialogue from ex-members (including snide remarks from the likes of David Aaronovitch) accompanying you to complete the experience. Mostly, however, the exhibition feels as though it was designed and set up by a group of nostalgics reliving their memories of branch meetings and rallies.

Despite this, the exhibition does draw on a wide range of original material, and contains some interesting and inspiring footage of various battles the working class has fought throughout the 20th century. A number of interactive displays are also included, with exhibits designed for children and so on, making it very accessible to all. One rather novel feature was a board entitled 'What does communism mean to you?', where youngsters had placed postcards describing their feelings after seeing the exhibition. There was interestingly a wide range of responses to this question, from "It belongs in a museum" (!) to "Humanness for everyone".

The exhibition is sponsoring a day conference on February 21, when the museum will be hosting a day dedicated to the party's history, with various events and speakers planned.

It is probably not worth making a special trip to see *Reds!* from any great distance (although the People's History Museum as a whole is definitely worth a visit), but if you find yourself in the area it certainly has some points of interest ●

James Bull

### Seeing Reds

The story of the Communist Party of Great Britain is running until April 25 at the People's History Museum, Bridge Street, Manchester. Admission is £1 waged (no charge for unwaged), and is free to all on Fridays. Guided tours of the exhibition will be given on February 6, March 5 and April 2.

The Day conference will be held Saturday February 21. <http://www.peopleshistory-museum.org.uk/>

## Are you sitting uncomfortably?

Peter Hall (director) *Happy days* by Samuel Beckett, The Arts Theatre

**F**elicity Kendall (Winnie) and Col Farrell (Willie) star in this intriguing new production of Beckett's bleak play about old age and faded glories.

Beckett's genius was to realise that the most powerful emotions need no introduction: they are as a world-entire in themselves. His highly conceptual approach to the play text - based on his own insights concerning the human condition - spawned a uniquely distilled and deeply tragic brand of theatre of which *Happy days* is a paradigm.

Hence the beginning of the play is not so much a beginning as an unmasking - the black drape falls, rather than rises, to reveal an old woman literally marooned in her surrounding landscape. This is more usually - and textually more faithfully - a heap of sand in which Winnie is buried up to her waist, and subsequently her neck. However, set designer Kate Hall has replaced it with a vortex-like structure, in which Winnie emerges from the centre - a striking and successful innovation. It heightens the play's physical resonances, allowing the au-

dience to become more emotionally involved in Winnie's physical disintegration.

As a woman I found this immediately resonant. Women navigating the unfashionable territories of late middle age and beyond regularly remark they have become 'invisible' to most. Competent actresses cease to be cast, once they become less than nubile, literally fading from view. I, for one, am all too aware that in our increasingly shallow society, my young body is perceived to be as much of a commodity as my labour.

How interesting that such a play should emerge from the inkwell of a man, how depressing that it is only a comparatively new play - it was first performed in 1961 - and how surprising, considering the youth-obsessed culture we live in. Statistics show that women, like men, are living much longer, and that the number of pensioners of both sexes has ballooned in recent years. This is a fact little reflected in the arts from West End smash hits like *This is our youth* to multiplex goldmines like *American pie*.

As Self eloquently remarks in *How the dead live*, "Where, oh where are the old women of the 20th century? So few films, photographs and television pictures include us."

Despite the characteristic minimalism of the piece, Kendall is endlessly diverting and deeply tragic as she ekes out the last of her pink lipstick - a beautiful metaphor for her remaining bodily charms. There is always the hint of a sob beneath her husky, guttural delivery, a brave choice on Hall's part, when previous directors have mined Winnie's more obvious comic potential.

Go and see *Happy days* - yes, it makes uncomfortable viewing, but there is something uplifting about seeing the human condition so intimately and so simply portrayed. If you cannot afford a ticket (the cheapest are £19) Beckett's plays were recently adapted for film and are available on video. They make dangerously compelling viewing ●

Zoë Simon

**HIJAB**

# French headscarf ban - for and against

Jacques Chirac and his government are attacking the right to wear 'ostensible' religious and political completely confused response from the left. While many groups and individuals oppose it, others are actually in favour - and some just do not know

## Secular support for ban

It must be understood that the proposed ban on religious symbols in French state schools is not just a ban on the muslim hijab, although this has excited the most controversy. It is also a ban on the jewish skullcap and "ostentatious" christian crosses.

It must be understood in the context of French history: in particular the long and bitter struggle for a secular, democratic republic which dates back to the revolution of 1789 and takes in the revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871. What the ban does is clarify and strengthen the law of 1905 on the separation of church and state. This was the work of the government of Emile Combes, a doctor, radical and freemason, and the Bloc des Gauches. The Radical Party, later the Radical and Socialist Party, was the most democratic and secular wing of republicanism.

French socialism inherited this tradition. The French Socialist Party of Jean Jaurès stood for social transformation, republican defence and the social republic. It was said that there were two Frances. One was democratic, republican and secularist. The other was religious, reactionary and monarchist.

Freemasonry, long at war with the church hierarchy, was a great influence. Masonic banners flew on the walls of Paris in 1871 and French masonry abandoned the Great Architect of the Universe in favour of atheism.

President Chirac has stated in a new year address: "It is not a matter of re-founding or changing the boundaries of secularism. It is simply a matter of France staying true to a balance that has been established over decades and reaffirming a principle with respect but also resolutely." Perhaps Chirac is taking his clue from Robespierre, who said in 1794 that only the fatherland has a right to educate its children. Chirac, of course, is no Robespierre, let alone a Marat or a *sans culottes* wearing the red cap of liberty and spiking aristocrats with a pike. But to retain a measure of political credibility he has had to place himself in the French republican tradition.

The ban not only has the support of secularists. Many christians and the Union of Jewish Students (France has the largest Jewish population in Europe) support it. Nor is the muslim world entirely united in its opposition to the ban. Sheik Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi, the grand mufti of the Al Azhar mosque in Cairo and a leading expert on sunni islam, has stated that, while muslim women have a religious obligation to wear the hijab, this applies only in muslim countries; and women who obey French law need not fear divine retribution.

A number of French women of muslim origin have signed a statement supporting the ban and defending the right of 1.7 million muslim French women not



**Chirac: possessed by the spirit of Robespierre?**

to wear the hijab. These include Loubna Meliane, a spokesperson for SOS Racisme; Fadela Amra, a leader of Ni Putes Ni Soumises; the actress Isabelle Adjani; and Chahdott Djavann, author of *A bas le voile* (Down with the veil).

They argue that the hijab condemns women to intolerable discrimination which denies them freedom and dignity. They demand that Chirac unreservedly supports secularism and equality be-

tween the sexes.

The hijab is clearly a symbol of oppression based on the absurd idea that the sight of female hair would lead men into the type of temptation allegedly suffered by the biblical Adam. This supposed temptation has served as the excuse for the oppression of women in all the religions of the book. The skullcap and the cross are also symbols of oppression. The skullcap symbolises the oppression of the Hebrews by the Levite priesthood of Judea. The tribe of Levi got to be priests for slaughtering the worshippers of the golden calf after Moses got back from receiving the law from Yahweh on Mount Horeb. The cross was a Roman instrument of execution on which Yeshua bar Yosif, if he ever existed, was done to death. The only educational value they have is as means to teach people the oppressive nature of religion.

If religion is a private matter, then its proper place is in private - in the home or the place of worship, not in the schools of a secular state. However, religion is not entirely a private matter. It is a question of what role it plays in class society. By promising the masses a reward in a mythical afterlife, religion serves the ruling class by keeping them passive in this life. If they get out of line they are threatened with eternal hellfire and dam-

nation. When the church held power, hellfire was made all too real by the pyres of the inquisition. Women regarded as witches and heretics, atheists included, were condemned. St Paul's injunction to be of one mind found its realisation in the executions by fire of Mary Tudor.

Socialism is nothing if it is not materialist science. As such it demands an intransigent and unyielding struggle against superstition, obscurantism and idealism of all sorts. This was the struggle waged by British socialists such as Guy Alfred, John Gott and FA Ridley and in the USSR by the Society of the Militant Godless who sought to free the minds of the Soviet masses from the feudal ideological grip of orthodox christianity. Anything which weakens the influence of religion in society and the power of the clergy over their flocks is to be welcomed, not opposed on the basis of a spurious libertarianism. Socialism does not mean anyone can do what they like. It means the rule of laws made by the victorious working class in its own interests and those of society as a whole. Those who choose to defy these laws must suffer the consequences.

In 1905, the year the French laws on separation of church and state were being enacted, Rosa Luxemburg wrote in *Socialism and the churches*: "... from the moment the priests use the pulpit as

a means of struggle against the working class, the workers must fight against the enemies of their rights and liberation. For he who defends the exploiters and helps to prolong this present regime of misery is the mortal enemy of the proletariat, whether he be in a cassock or the uniform of the police." This is a lesson today's socialists need to take to heart and act upon.

It is the clergy who are the *flics* and *mouches* of capitalism, not the comrades of Lutte Ouvrière. To call comrades who fought bravely on the barricades of 1968 "Jacques Chirac's policemen" is not polemic: it is an insult unworthy of comrade Manson (*Weekly Worker* January 8).

Society may have progressed beyond the point where it was necessary to strangle priests with the guts of kings. But socialists still have the task of driving gods from the skies and capitalists from the earth. When the hijab, the skullcap and the cross and all symbols of religious oppression are consigned to the flames, and the Sepher Torah - on which judaism, christianity and islam are based - is consigned to the attentions of worms and mice, only then will humanity be happy; only then will it be free ●

**Terry Liddle**  
**Socialist Secular Association**

## Two sides of same repression

In response to Peter Manson's article I would like to add a few comments ('Jacques Chirac's Lutte Ouvrière policemen' *Weekly Worker* January 8).

I believe that no one calling themselves left can support the ban on islamic or other religious manifestations for the following reasons:

1. We on the left must support political freedoms without any ifs and buts. Freedom is indivisible, even where the act may be contrary to one's own beliefs. Freedom can only be curtailed where it interferes with the rights and freedoms of others. clearly the hijab - or cross or skullcap - does not come under this category.
2. While undoubtedly the hijab is often enforced on the girls, banning it in state schools will only help drive the coercers into segregating the girls

### Freedom is indivisible, even where the act may be contrary to one's own beliefs

into private religious schools, which will strengthen the hand of the fundamentalists: that is, these young women will be removed from an environment in which they could become empowered to resist religious coercion.

3. The relinquishing of outdated and inherently oppressive customs is only possible through a conscious process of rejection, which can only come out of

an open confrontation. It can not be achieved through some 'enlightened despotism', which is precisely what has been enacted in France.

4. The law passed in France is fundamentally analogous to laws passed by repressive 'islamist' regimes in Saudi Arabia and Iran which ban the *absence* of the hijab. Both belong to a totalitarian mentality, where the state knows what is best for the individual - and enforces it with a whip. No wonder the reactionary clerics in Al Azhar university have welcomed the move. It vindicates their own policy of *enforcing* the hijab. The enforced wearing of the hijab and the enforced 'de-hijabing' are two sides of the same reactionary and undemocratic coin.

5. The left fighting for a secular society must fight for the total right of individuals to dress as and how they

like. This is a fundamental human right where the boundary of the individual and the state is sharply demarcated.

6. The left must also fight for the right of the individuals to hold, or not to hold, whatever religious beliefs they have, while at the same time relentlessly fighting against all forms of superstition - of which religion is in the forefront.

This is a battle of ideas which is muddled by muddled thinking in response to 'state knows best' coercive legislation, one example of which we are seeing in France. We need to resist the totalitarian right by confronting the totalitarian left - even those with good intentions●

**Mehdi Kia**  
**co-editor Iran Bulletin-**  
**Middle East Forum**

# Unsure what to think

Alliance for Workers' Liberty sits on the fence

**"T**ous ensemble" (all together). French president Jacques Chirac appropriated the slogan of the trade union movement to end his speech about the Stasi commission on the separation of church and state. He has taken to using that slogan.

The commission of 20 'wise men' headed by former minister Bernard Stasi was appointed in July 2003 and reported just before Christmas. Chirac pronounced himself in favour of the commission's main proposal: to ban the wearing in schools and colleges of conspicuous symbols of religious or political allegiance.

Ostensibly this measure aims at ending confusion about the existing legal situation: currently schools can choose whether they interpret a law of 1905 separating state education from the church to support exclusions of pupils from school who persist in wearing religious symbols. In recent years, this has affected only a handful of young women wearing the muslim headscarf.

The original law might have been intended to apply only to the providers of education, not its consumers. Of course, the 1905 law and other legislation was passed to separate the state from a catholic church, then very powerful. Chirac claims that the new law is about no privileges for - or, he says, discrimination against - any one religion in a society where there are many faiths and many people of no faith.

Different also from 1905, women and men are equal in the republic. Chirac's speech hinted - and only hinted, not said explicitly - that the aim of a proposed ban is to help liberate muslim women from restrictions on their dress and movements.

Will the legislation help to forge the harmony that Chirac claimed it is for? That looks unlikely. The proposed law is seen by many - and by most French muslims - as a piece of discriminatory legislation adversely affecting their faith before all the others, and moreover is intended as such.

Why this now? Chirac's speech was heavy with praise for French republican traditions, and warned darkly but vaguely of tensions created by globalisation and the rise of fundamentalisms throughout the world that are forcing different cultural groups in on themselves. "Communalism is not an option for France," he said.

He promised at the same time to combat the racism and discrimination, the social deprivation that might (he was vague here too) cause young people of immigrant communities to pooh-pooh the idea of their great common French heritage and the 'republican pact'.

Does he mean it? Of course he does not! And in his speech there was no acknowledgement of the republic's less than glorious heritage of oppressing colonies.

Leftwingers in France are divided about the issue of a ban on religious symbols. You will hardly find anyone to defend the idea that the headscarf is somehow liberating for young women. One of the main far-left groups, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, has supported the few exclusions of muslim girls from schools for wearing a headscarf where negotiation and compromise have failed. But it opposes the law.

The other main far-left group, Lutte Ouvrière, is more cautious - not supporting the proposed law but saying it could be "a point of support for all those girls who want to resist the sexist pressures they suffer".

Many groups central to the fight against the headscarf and for the rights of women, especially in muslim communities - groups such as Ni Putes Ni Soumises - support a headscarf ban.

The main federation of teachers' unions is against. Gerard Aschieri, general secretary of the Fédération Syndicale Unitaire, which organises teachers at all levels, said that such legislation would not get to the bottom of the problem: "It is manifestly a political manoeuvre to show the government doing something. It's easier to produce a text than carry

out a real policy against exclusion and an education policy that carries on the struggle for secularism."

It is indeed hard to take seriously the government's claim to be the champions of secularism. This is a government that subsidises the pupils of private, including faith, schools; they receive more public money per head than

state school pupils. Will that anomaly be tackled in legislation?

Whatever we think of the possible law, it will be once more one law for the rich and another for the rest. Those are the limits of Chirac's "tous ensemble" ●

**Vicki Morris**  
(from *Solidarity* January 9)

## London communist forum

# Headscarves, secularism & the battle of democracy

**What should be the attitude of the left to the ban on "ostensible" religious and political symbols in French schools? Should we stand for the right of muslim women to wear a symbol of their religious convictions, or welcome the ban as a defence of secularism and the separation of church and state? Come along and debate the issues.**



**Sunday, January 18, 6pm**  
**Diorama Arts Centre,**  
**34 Osnaburgh Street,**  
**London NW1**

(nearest tubes: Regents Park, Great Portland Street).

### Speakers:

**Peter Manson** (editor, *Weekly Worker*);  
**Houzan Mahmoud** (Worker-communist Party of Iraq and editor in chief of *Equal Rights Now!*, official paper of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq);  
**Terry Liddle** (Socialist Secular Society - personal capacity).

## Counterdemonstration

**O**n January 17, islamists have called for demonstration in London to protest the French government's decision to introduce a law banning conspicuous religious symbols in state schools and state institutions. They claim this ban is discriminatory, against women's equal rights, violates women's and girl's rights to education and work, restricts religious freedom and is even anti-pluralism and secularism.

All these claims are false and in fact a mockery of the very principles they feign to defend. Ironically, the very islamic movement that is renowned for intimidating, terrorising and violating women and girls and their rights, is using norms that are antithetical to its belief system and practice in order to maintain its repressive laws and clothing on women and girls.

Clearly, religion, religious symbols and religious freedoms are private affairs not the affairs of a state. In fact states are duty-bound to ensure that all religious symbols be abolished from state-run institutions and schools. This is an important aspect of secularism and not vice versa. Also, contrary to claims that it is discriminatory, the ban in fact reverses the discriminatory effects of religion on women and girls. Moreover, maintaining secularism has nothing to do with racism. It is in fact racist to create different laws for religious and islamic communities in the west and obstruct the access of women and girls in particular to the advances of civilised societies. Finally, protecting girls from the veil goes beyond issues relating to secularism and

addresses the rights of the child from having religious views and clothing imposed on her by her parents through no choice of her own.

The Organisation of Women's Liberation-Iran and the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq are confident that the proposed law by the French government is a step towards establishing a secular society. Secularism is one precondition for a free society and women's equality. The enforcement of this ban will be a first step towards this though it must be extended to include the banning of religious schools and the prohibition of child veiling. We must not allow religious extremism and political islam to spread the rule of religion in society by means of intimidation, blackmail and threats. Religion must be relegated to a private matter. Religion must be separated from the state and educational system.

We invite all freedom-loving individuals and organisations to join us in counter-demonstrations on the same day in several countries, including England, Germany, Sweden and Norway ●

**Organisation of Women's Liberation-Iran**  
**Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq**

### Day of protest

No to hijab ban. Picket called jointly by Muslim Association of Britain and Muslim Women Association.  
Saturday January 17, 11am to 2pm.  
**London:** French embassy, 58 Knightsbridge Road, London SW1.  
**Edinburgh:** French consulate, 11 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 7TT.

# 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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## Respect and CPB's special congress

# Deep factional roots

**O**n Saturday January 17, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain meets for what is perhaps the most important gathering in its previously undistinguished life. The special congress will decide whether the organisation will opt for an electoral coalition with other trends on the left, or doggedly remain tied to the auto-Labourism of its *British road to socialism* programme.

That electoral coalition is, of course, Respect, which is to be launched at its 'Convention of the left' on January 25. Though headed by George Galloway, it is staffed by the Socialist Workers Party and this makes it no-go territory for the CPB's traditionalist wing, headed by John Foster, top man in Scotland, industrial organiser Kevin Halpin and chairwoman Anita Halpin.

Comrade Foster - in a head-to-head polemic with part-time general secretary Robert Griffiths - warned of "principled differences" and alluded to forces in Respect who did not share his views on the "socialist countries" or the "national liberation movements" (*Morning Star* January 8). Better wait for Labour to be 'reclaimed' so that the long journey down the left reformist British road can resume. His wing of the CPB concludes that the Respect coalition is either "just a one-off", which makes it a "diversion", or, if it is "anything else", it is "dangerous" (A Halpin *Morning Star* January 12).

Against them stands the other wing of the CPB leadership, the so-called innovators - crucially the duumvirate of Rob Griffiths and John Haylett, *Morning Star* editor. Not unfairly they have been branded as revisionists by their increasingly embittered opponents. Nevertheless, delegates will debate and vote on a three-paragraph motion presented by Griffiths-Haylett, which is, in fact, skillfully extracted from the CPB's 2002 congress resolutions.

It reads: "Our own electoral strategy is the servant of our general perspective for transforming the labour movement into the main instrument and rallying point of all those seeking progressive social change.

"The Communist Party will continue to stand its own electoral candidates where this can help to contribute to a strong left challenge within the labour movement to the policies of the Blair clique and raise the case for working class struggle and socialism. Where the party's executive committee believes that local or special circumstances require it, we are open to working alongside others on the left in the electoral field, provided there is agreement on strategic perspectives for the labour movement. We are prepared to offer support to candidates who command the support of the labour and democratic movements in their area but who have been denied the right to be official Labour Party candidates by the dominant rightwing faction.

"We remain committed, however, to the return of a Labour government and to support for Labour candidates in elections where these conditions do not apply, to unity to defeat the Tories in all fields and to winning the Labour Party for socialism."

Ostensibly one might think that there

should be no controversy. But the 2002 congress took place in the context of rampant Blairism on the one hand and the challenge presented by the Socialist Alliance on the other. A minority was tempted to join. The leadership therefore came up with a well drafted formulation which kept things as they were - while appearing to give a concession to the minority who were questioning, or rejecting, auto-Labourism.

Not surprisingly, after the CPB congress nothing fundamental changed - as is the norm for this dull sect. For instance, the leadership of the CPB rebuffed the approach of the SWP to form a "broad electoral alliance" in June of last year. But life moves on. Despite the advances made by the 'reclaim the Labour Party' left, the Griffiths-Haylett wing is frustrated by its own lack of progress. *Morning Star* circulation continues to stagnate and CPB membership is generally inactive and increasingly elderly.

It is impossible to tell how things will go on January 17. Nevertheless it is quite clear that, for all their caveats and notes of caution, the Griffiths-Haylett duumvirate appears to have been seduced by Respect. What accounts for the change?

Firstly, Andrew Murray - a leading CPB member and chair of the Stop the War Coalition - is widely regarded as having 'gone native'. His enemies in the CPB whisper about him being soft on the SWP - he and the SWP's Lindsey German are like peas in a pod. Secondly, Respect has George Galloway at its head. He is not only an MP recently expelled from the Labour Party, but is known to be ideologically opposed to the SWP. In effect Galloway is an 'official communist' in exile. Essentially he shares the same world view as the CPB.

Entering a Socialist Alliance dominated by 'the Trots' does not appeal to the Griffiths-Haylett duumvirate and would anyway be hard to sell to the deeply conservative and USSR-nostalgic ranks of the CPB. Joining George Galloway's coalition is both more attractive for them and far easier to sell.

Galloway has also been keen to involve the CPB and seems to have deployed his considerable powers of charm and flattery to get it onboard. Of course, he needs an organisational counterweight of some sort against the SWP (which will numerically dominate). Replying to comrade Foster, he said it would be "strange" if the CPB chose to "cling to a broken down caboose known as New Labour". The place for "Britain's communists" - who "played such a key role in building support for the anti-war movement from which we will draw our support" - is with Respect (*Morning Star* January 12).

As an aside it is worth noting that the *Star* has been giving a fair amount of space to the Respect debate. To be ungenerous I suspect that this owes more to the fact that the CPB executive found itself paralysed - divided four ways on the issue - rather than to a sudden conversion to basic democratic norms.

Nevertheless there can be no doubt that for Galloway the *Morning Star* would be a real prize. A daily newspaper with a not insignificant readership amongst the Labour left and trade union apparatus is not something to be sneezed at. Thus, from the standpoint of



CPB: a prize?

Galloway, it may seem that the involvement of the CPB could reinforce his relationship with sections of the more mainstream workers' movement - unlike Peter Taaffe and his Socialist Party, he does not stupidly dismiss Labour now that he is out of it.

In an interview with this paper, he told us that developments in Labour remain key for the left in the coming period: "The Labour Party has millions of voters. It is known in every household in the land. It has hundreds of MPs, thousands of councillors. Even now - though we note the hemorrhaging in its ranks - it still has a couple of hundred thousand members. This is a behemoth compared to other left groups, even the most successful of them" (*Weekly Worker* December 4 2003).

Quite apart from any sympathies Gal-

loway may have with the political positions of the CPB, he must surely also regard it - and the newspaper associated with it - as a point of leverage with the Labour left and trade union movement.

Galloway's motivations are one thing. The possible consequences for the CPB are another. Here is a group that was formed in 1988 (when the Communist Campaign Group "re-established" the Communist Party), which was an uneasy and inherently unstable coalition of forces. There was the wing we called right opportunist - headed by established figures such as the then editor of the *Morning Star*, Tony Chater, an aged Andrew Rothstein, who was celebrated as the CPGB's number one member, *Star* business manager Mary Rosser, and Mike Hicks, a print union official and the CPB's first general secretary.

The other wing, the centrists, came from the left of the 'official' CPGB - Photis Lysandrou, Rob Griffiths, John Haylett. They were later joined by another similar group called Communist Liaison, led by Andrew Murray and Nick Wright. In order to get their hands on the levers of power - the only politics they understand - these centrists agreed not to question the *British road to socialism*. In next to no time their strategy bore fruit. Chater retired and Hicks and Rosser were driven out after attempting a palace coup against Haylett, who led the *Star* workers out on strike and won after a bitter internal battle. Comrade Griffiths succeeded the disgraced Hicks and became the CPB's second general secretary.

Are we seeing today the final playing out of that struggle? ●

Alan Rees

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