

BUT NEXT  
TO A SCAB  
IM TEN FEET  
TALL

# weekly **worker**



**March 1984 - March 1985:  
20th anniversary of miners'  
strike. Media lies and class war**

- Respect
- Hutton whitewash
- SP and PCSU strike
- European Social Forum

No 514

Thursday February 5 2004

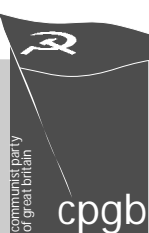
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# PARTYnotes

## Respecting programme

**W**hat sort of political formation is Respect? Before its January 25 launch Rob Hoveman, Socialist Alliance secretary and trusted Socialist Workers Party functionary, insisted that, despite the skeletal and altogether vague platform, Respect is “absolutely socialist”. Ditto SA chair, Nick Wrack: Respect is “implicitly socialist”. Alan Thornett, leader of the International Socialist Group, enthusiastically agreed: Respect is “essentially socialist”.

And yet, faced with a detailed alternative platform which would have truly committed Respect to consistent democracy and working class power, all of the comrades mentioned above unhesitatingly voted against what they earnestly profess to believe. The same was true when it came to our amendments: ie, republicanism, free movement of people and elected representative taking a worker’s wage.

In the pinched debate SWP members took the lead against us - unfortunately the time allotted for each motion was three minutes on either side. Their basic argument amounted to this: Respect is *not* a socialist organisation and therefore it would be mistaken to include socialist principles in its declaration. Lindsey German even said that if people “wanted more socialism” they would by now already have joined the Socialist Alliance.

Undoubtedly the SWP’s red professors still intend to piously preach socialism to the select circles gathered together at their Marxist forums and in *Socialist Worker*’s turgid columns; but in *practice* socialism is increasingly seen as a problem. Socialism and the basic principles of Marxism repels allies, such as George Galloway, George Monbiot, Salma Yaqoob and Mohammed Naseen of Birmingham’s central mosque, and stands condemned for supposedly failing to attract enough voters. The SWP also used its majority to ensure that the “mistakes” of the SA were not repeated - the critical voices of Declan O’Neill and Marcus Ström were kept off the steering committee. So no socialism and no inclusivity.

*Déjà vu.* In the 1980s Neil Kinnock and the *Marxism Today* wing of the ‘official’ CPGB advocated exactly the same slippery slope. Stop banging on about socialism, purge the extremists and start saying what you think ordinary people want to hear. That way alone can you get a prime minister elected and thereby make a difference. Blairism stands like the grown man to this ‘new realist’ child.

Quite clearly under John Rees the SWP is galloping to the right. Heading as he does, though, a small sect without any significant social roots, comrade Rees is hardly likely to awake one fine day as the occupant of No10 Downing Street. In all probability the SWP faces crisis after crisis. It would be cowardly and irresponsible to shirk such a challenge. Indeed we communists are pledged to engage with the SWP as closely as possible in Respect so as to help ensure a positive outcome. The last thing our movement needs is another scattering of demoralised cadre to the four winds.

Equally, there are those, especially the young, who are moving to the left. We shall energetically engage with them too. In 2003 thousands upon thousands came into politics for the first time, propelled by the unprecedented anti-war upsurge. As yet they have not found political representation, let alone a political home. Attendance at regional meetings, which have averaged between 300 and 400, shows that many are seriously thinking about Respect.

Then there is the muslim population. The Muslim Association of Britain is a sign of the times. For such a well established body - with origins in late 1920s Egypt - to align itself, albeit loosely, with Respect, which includes not only the SWP but other godless communists such as Mark Serwotka and Ken Loach, shows that nowadays it is inhabited by two souls: a reactionary lament for the certainties of Muhammad and the *Koran*; a radical anger at the harsh realities of 21st century capitalism and the demonisation of islam.

George Galloway too is moving left. He envisages Britain undergoing some kind of democratic revolution involving socialists, liberals and even conservatives. As the leading figure in the anti-war movement he tirelessly exposed the cynical lies of both Tony Blair and George Bush and bravely urged British troops to disobey illegal orders. Because of this unpatriotic ‘crime’ he was callously witch-hunted and then expelled from the Labour Party by a kangaroo court. Nonetheless, with his mind still mired in Stalinism, left reformism and third worldism, it is hardly surprising that Galloway suffers from confusion and advocates lowest-common-denominator get-togethers.

Eg, writing in the *Morning Star*, Galloway blithely declares that by uniting “as the Bolsheviks once did behind the simple slogan, ‘Peace, bread and land’”, Respect can turn the June 10 European and London assembly elections into a “referendum” on “Bush and Blair, privatisation and war” (January 24). Revealingly we often hear the

same argument from SWP activists - they at least should know better.

In fact the Bolsheviks took the greatest care in formulating and developing their programme: unlike the SWP, of course, whose membership have nothing authoritative to guide them, or test their leaders’ latest get-rich-quick hunches against, apart from the insubstantial ‘What we stand for’ box which appears in each edition of *Socialist Worker*.

Far from relying on populist slogans, banal declarations hatched from above and three-minute democracy, the Bolsheviks went into battle armed with concrete positions on all vital issues: the nature of capitalism; replacing tsarism with a democratic republic; uninterrupted revolution; land nationalisation and gaining working class hegemony over the peasant masses; opposition to separatism and support for national self-determination; a people’s militia; combating bureaucracy with measures such as the recallability of all elected representatives and limiting their pay to that of an average skilled worker; women’s equality; etc, etc. Naturally there were majorities and minorities at congresses and conferences, but no party member was asked to leave anything behind at the door: all viewpoints were rigorously discussed.

“Every step of the real movement,” Marx famously said in his May 1875 letter to Wilhelm Bracke, “is more important than a dozen programmes” (K Marx and F Engels CW Vol 24, London 1989, p78). Time and time again this remark is cited by SWP comrades. It is profoundly wrong, however, to infer, as they do, that Marx or Engels, or any Marxist for that matter, should treat their programme with anything other than the utmost seriousness.

Marx was writing in the context of the “altogether deplorable” unity-mongering being pursued by his German comrades. August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht and co wanted to fuse with their Lassalleans rivals. In his subsequent *Critique of the Gotha programme* Marx took off the diplomatic gloves. Their policy of compromise was savaged. Given the choice between maintaining the existing Eisenach programme of 1869 and disunity, Marx definitely preferred the former. He steadfastly defended the ideas of the *Communist manifesto* and the theoretical knowledge the real workers’ movement had accumulated, especially since the Paris Commune of 1871.

Not that communists oppose change. On the contrary an overhaul can sometimes be essential. Our programme is a road map outlining aims and main strategic routes; it is not holy script.

Following the February 1917 revolution Lenin tenaciously fought at one hotly contested meeting after another to programmatically reorientate the Bolsheviks. The overthrow of tsarism had happened as predicted, but had produced an entirely unexpected and unique situation. Not a workers’ and peasants’ government: rather dual power and a Menshevik-Socialist Revolutionary majority in the soviets, which was intent on handing power to the capitalist class. In other words their minimum programme had half been fulfilled, but had also been left half unfulfilled. The suggestion that the Bolsheviks united behind “simple” slogans is a complete muddle. They united behind the sophisticated transitional programme first sketched out by Lenin in the notes now known as the ‘April thesis’.

Bolshevik slogans altered constantly with the ebb and flow of events. Slogans are the crystallisation of the programme, a way of propagating key demands, or calls to action serving to advance programmatic aims. Slogans without the programme have no more significance than cheap advertising jingles. Slogans certainly cannot substitute for the programme.

Take ‘Land, bread and peace’. Each word for the Bolsheviks, and their audience in Russia, had an expressly unambiguous, fully theorised and weighty content. They were not empty catch-phrases. ‘Land’ signalled the immediate seizure of the big estates by the peasants; ‘bread’ signalled workers’ control over production and distribution; ‘peace’ signalled opposing the so-called revolutionary defensism of the Right SRs and Plekhanov’s Mensheviks and transforming the imperialist war into a workers’, peasants’ and soldiers’ revolution.

In the absence of the organised working class and in the absence of a programme of working class socialism Respect can only be an unstable populist coalition. To achieve this ‘step forward’ the SA has been liquidated programmatically and to all intents and purposes organisationally. An “altogether deplorable” price to pay for such unity. Respect’s declaration rightly lambastes New Labour’s “authoritarian social policies and profit-centred neoliberal economic strategy”. Yet apart from platitudes it aspires to little more than punishing Tony Blair and replacing one set of career politicians with another set of career politicians ●

**Jack Conrad**

## LETTERS



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

### Critical

Comrade Manny Neira’s reporting of the January 25 Respect convention makes interesting reading in terms of a chronicle of the events that took place. I do have reservations about some aspects of its implicit thrust, however.

He writes with regard to the organisation of the convention that Respect “promises to exceed” the grotesquely anti-democratic internal life of the Socialist Labour Party under Arthur Scargill. While of course it cannot be ruled out that Respect will indeed result in that, I have to say that I saw precious little evidence of this at the convention itself. Opportunism from the Socialist Workers Party was of course there in plentiful supply, but actually there was very little in terms of procedure that was formally undemocratic.

It may be frustrating to be outvoted by the SWP’s whipped vote, and even more galling in that the issues on which the smaller left tendencies were outvoted were qualitatively worse politically than the things we were similarly outvoted on in the Socialist Alliance, but there was no need for the organisers to engage in vote-rigging - for the simple reason that they had an overwhelming majority anyway. Nor were there any of the exclusions of oppositionists from the conference itself that marked the SLP’s 1996 founding gathering from day one. On the contrary, people overtly hostile to the entire project, most notably Sean Matgamna, were allowed to register and got their chance to have their say, even though his intervention met with great hostility and heckling from SWPers on the floor.

The non-inclusion of our comrades on the recommended slate certainly signifies an anti-inclusive *spirit*, but again I think it is a misconception to expect those who seek to lead this project in exactly the opposite direction to the one we would wish for to bend over backwards to include those they politically oppose. Their original proposal, demanding that all slates gain the explicit consent of everyone appearing on them, was certainly anti-democratic, but appears to have thankfully proven a dead letter in practice. This exclusive sectarianism can only be overcome politically, by changing the views of those on the left who practise it, in particular in terms of the SWP membership. But not by seeming to complain that being outvoted is undemocratic. It ain’t.

Some of the swipes at George Galloway also fail to hit the mark: “If the media ever get a hint that this ‘far left’ coalition may be successful ... clips of his speech to Saddam Hussein will rival snooker for television time.” Maybe so, but sometimes being demonised in this way can also lead to such an individual being seen as perversely principled, which, I guess, is why Galloway shares with Scargill the absence of much in the way of a middle ground - people tend to either love him or hate him, with little in between.

**Ian Donovan**  
London

### Disgusted

As a former member of the SWP, I was absolutely disgusted when listening to their agenda at the Respect conference over the internet.

As someone who became politically active at the last general election when the Socialist Alliance seemed to offer the creation of a broad socialist alternative to New Labour, to hear SWP members now arguing against motions calling for republicanism, open borders and a worker’s wage for elected representatives was appalling, as was the complete intolerance towards any dissent, such as the

storm of booing when someone dared to criticise the ‘beloved leader’, Galloway - not to mention of course SWP members voting down, parrot fashion, any amendment that wasn’t endorsed by the ruling elite.

This didn’t surprise me, however, as I recall being told by a prominent member of my local SWP, when I was a member, that I had to go to the first conference of the SA following the 2001 election to boost the numbers of SWP comrades there, in order to outvote the sectarians! Obviously I didn’t do this, as I believe in socialism and democracy.

Your coverage over recent weeks about the Respect coalition and the twists and turns of the SWP has been excellent, and I hope you can continue to help open the eyes of more and more ordinary SWP members to the actual realities of the SWP’s sectarianism and opportunism.

**James York**  
email

### Folorn

Marcus Ström, in his article on Respect, says that the Socialist Alliance is now a corpse. The following and final paragraph suggests that CPGB members will now put more time into Respect and trying to win arguments there (‘John Rees airbrushes out history’, January 29).

Isn’t this a rather forlorn perspective? If the more left elements could not win a majority in the SWP-dominated Socialist Alliance, they have even less chance of winning anything in Respect, where the balance of forces is far more unfavourable and include people who are not even potentially winnable - indeed, people who are actively hostile to socialism.

The SWP’s Respect project has no future, certainly none as any kind of socialist party - not even potentially. As the CPGB has pointed out, the SLP had more potential. And look what happened there!

**Philip Ferguson,**  
New Zealand

### Pissing

Reports of the new Respect Unity Coalition have not made comfortable reading. The cringing hypocrisy of the SWP is astounding, but not surprising. The constant desire to appeal to the middle classes, and the watering down of socialist policies is exactly what the same left forces criticised New Labour for.

I remember the Independent Working Class Association always came in for heavy criticism for deliberately disregarding orthodox socialism, despite the fact it still manages to concentrate on, and win credible support from, the working class. If they can do it, why can’t the left set out to explicitly win over the working class, rather than the liberal middle class? I suspect it’s because the politically-correct vanguard of the left, with Gorgeous George at the helm, is overtly middle class in its outlook, values and interests.

I fear, once again, the left is pissing into a hurricane.  
**Ricky Smith**  
London

### Middle class

Jon Owen asks: “I am a member of the middle class ... does my social status prevent me from joining the Communist Party?” (Letters, January 29).

Of course not! Who do you imagine runs the British ‘left’? As for the working class, have you ever wondered why so many of us see the ‘left’ as a complete irrelevance and avoid it like the plague?

**Ronnie Monroe**  
email

### Leaking

Mick O’Conaill clarifies that he has had no association with the CPGB apart from

his “frequent” reading of our press (Letters, January 29). Therefore his professed adherence to the IWCA is not symptomatic of the Communist Party leaking support - the original foolish claim of Richard Harris (Letters, January 15).

However, Mick does more than clear this mistake up. He writes that he is not involved with us, because “your organisation has little to offer militant, working class activists”, given that members of said category are apparently defined by not being interested in “paper sales and lengthy ideological debates, but effective activity amongst the class”.

The comrade and his co-thinkers have a lot of explaining to do if this is their real position. Is it seriously being suggested that the problem with the 20th century - a period of horror and defeat for the proletariat internationally - was that the revolutionary left did not organised enough “activity” amongst the class? Would we have had more of a result here in Britain if we had stood on just a few more picket lines, knocked on a couple of thousand extra doors, perhaps launched more rent strikes, sit-ins against closures or petitions for speed humps?

**Mark Fischer**  
London

## Penny dropping

At the last Exeter Socialist Alliance meeting the main discussion was on local elections. We had already narrowly agreed to back Respect - although essentially 50% of the active membership are *hostile* and have stated they will not be involved in it.

The SWP opposed standing SA candidates in the local elections, but they didn’t rule out the possibility of standing Respect candidates. The impression I got was that their view was along the lines of ‘If you insist on standing candidates [and the SWP seem to be against it], then they should be Respect candidates.’

As far as I can tell, we are to organise a meeting to launch Respect and thereafter the SA has no point in existing on a local level. SA members are then to apply on an individual basis to become members of Respect in order to do the donkey work for it. Whether or not the SA continues to function, the class-struggle socialists in Exeter will continue to meet and organise despite these mad antics from the SWP.

At the Exeter meeting the penny dropped for one of the few independents who had voted in favour of Respect at the previous meeting - to paraphrase him, he hadn’t realised he had voted to close down the SA.

**Dave Parks**  
Exeter

## Split shock

Marcus Ström describes me as a supporter of *Resistance* (‘John Rees air-brushes out history’, January 29). I was a supporter at the time of our conversation reported in that article outside Friends’ House on January 25. I had ceased to be one by the time the paper went to press, and had very deliberately informed Peter Manson of this fact in a telephone call on the morning of Tuesday January 27, very shortly after I had spoken to Alan Thornett, indicating the incompatibility of my refusal to join, let alone build, Respect, with the central project of *Resistance* supporters in the current period: namely, to build Respect.

Either Comrades Manson and Ström are not in regular communication with each other (is this the beginning of a split?) or, far more probably, the *Weekly Worker* team did not want the facts to get in the way of a good story.

**Toby Abse**  
email

## Mischievous

In a mischievous little letter, Will Cross attempts to give the impression that the Manchester Democracy Platform in general and myself in particular are unrenit-

tingly hostile to the CPGB and see the CPGB as the enemy (Letters, January 29).

Now if Will was a *Weekly Worker* reader he would have known that most of the criticisms of the CPGB made by myself and John Pearson have already been published by the *Weekly Worker* and were submitted and received in a spirit of ongoing, comradely debate on the future of the SA and the democracy platform.

As the chair of the meeting I invited the only CPGB member or supporter present to put the CPGB point of view on Respect. This comrade declined the invitation. He preferred to put his own personal position. Therefore I am not responsible for the lack of balance in the debate as far as the CPGB is concerned. As for praise for organisations, let me put some praise the CPGB’s way. The recent criticisms of Respect in the *Weekly Worker* and ‘Party notes’ in particular have been excellent.

For those comrades who are active in the Socialist Alliance it is important that differences are not exaggerated.

**Barry Biddulph**  
Chair, Stockport SA

## Mistrust

A few comments on Marcus Ström’s letter (January 29) in reply to my article ‘A modest proposal’ (*Weekly Worker* January 15):

1. His objections that my proposals were “anarchist” and would “prevent the leadership from acting” were indeed said in a pub, but also repeated in group-wide emails.
2. I’ve never called him a Stalinist. He refers to an SMS message he received from a mutual friend reading: “Manny says you’re too young to be a Stalinist”. I was loyally *defending* him against the charge. The grounds of my defence, I’ll admit, were perhaps unsophisticated, but it was my birthday, and we’d all been at the vodka.
3. “What a bastard I must be.” Marcus, you mustn’t be so hard on yourself.
4. I am not asking the aggregate to approve the PCC minutes “as a true record” - how indeed could we? I am asking them to approve the actions documented.
5. My proposal specifically excludes the minuting of information harmful to the party or identifiable individuals, so objections on security grounds are unnecessary.
6. As Marcus says, comrades may already raise any issue they wish at aggregate. My proposed addition to the aggregate agenda is merely a *reminder* that they have the right to do so. If they can be trusted not to waste the time of the aggregate with trivialities now, why should we fear that they will in the future? The idea that we should not rattle the members’ cage with a reminder of the right (indeed, responsibility) to raise criticisms in case we wake them into doing so is, at best, very dodgy.
7. Marcus complains that I am provoking “organised mistrust”. Interestingly, in *One step forward, two steps back* Lenin specifically *defends* the notion of “organised mistrust”, provided it is applied by the whole of the organisation to any part of it, as in my proposal.

**Manny Neira**  
email

## Racism?

Don Preston writes, in reference to Kilroy-Silk, that “We should always think at least twice before crying ‘racism’ and we need to put clear red water between our anti-racism and theirs” (Letters, January 29).

This is quite true, because in the article Kilroy was only exercising his freedom of speech, which should always be allowed in a democracy. His article was not racist at all: he was talking quite rightly about the Arab regimes and not the Arab people. Following the *Secret policeman* documentary on BBC1 about a number of racist police officers Kilroy did a programme on racism in a Britain. He showed no signs of racism or preju-

dice in his show.

So calling Kilroy a racist is a mistake from start to finish. People need to know what the word means and not just call everyone a racist because they hold different views to themselves.

**Ashleah Skinner**  
email

## Death penalty

John Mann writes: “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” (Letters, January 15).

In a time of socialist revolution I would advocate the use of the death penalty because enemies of the revolution would not be deterred by threat of imprisonment, as they would not expect us to remain in power for that long. But barring its transitional use during that ‘excess of history’, people are not animals (though they may sometimes act that way), and thus the barbaric death penalty has no place within a codified set of civilian laws.

**Michael Little**  
Seattle

## String ’em up

John Mann is exactly correct. Come the revolution, when the working class has the power, then juries of workers will hang Ian Huntley, etc.

In the here and now, they say, communists, anarchists, Trotskyites, etc have to make an unholy alliance with wishy-washy liberals because if the capitalist state has that power who will they hang? Murdering perverts or trade unionists? Actually, in the here and now, we are quite safe in advocating hanging. We ain’t dangerous enough to the state. Unionists are the nearest thing to a danger. They will hang first.

**Dafydd ap Thomas**  
Caerdydd

## Headscarf ban

Without intending any offence to individuals, I must say quite frankly that I am disgusted with you. So too am I with the rest of the leftist groups who joined forces with political islamists on the recent demonstration against the proposed ban on headscarves in French schools.

However problematic some of the implications of the ban may be, there is no excuse for the disgraceful activity of so-called ‘progressives’ on this issue. You formed a block with a gang of misogynists who believe in sexual segregation and cover ‘their’ women from head to toe in the oppressive dress known as the hijab. Manny Neira in his report admitted that the male stewards would not even let your male comrades speak with the women who they regard as their property. Women who were bullied by their partners to attend the demonstration and secretly sympathised with the opposing view (I have no doubt such women exist) can expect no salvation from you and your ilk.

The fact that it has been left to Chirac to defend French muslim girls from religious and sexual oppression shows the redundancy of the male-dominated left when it comes to women’s issues, issues that you brush aside and deem as secondary to class oppression. The insights of Engels, however flawed and incomplete they were, in *The origin of the family*, appear to have been totally lost on you.

Little wonder then that some of your leading members dismiss with contempt all forms of feminism as being ‘bourgeois’, a cheap shot aimed at people whose views they neither have studied nor express any wish to. Ignorance may be bliss for men who wish to preserve patriarchy in some form or other, be it capitalist or ‘socialist’, but for muslim women who have suffered years of male oppression it is bliss no longer.

**Liz Hoskings**  
email

# ACTION

### London Communist Forum

Sunday February 8, 5pm: ‘Imperialism’s mission to mars’. Speaker: Jack Conrad. Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 (nearest tubes: Regents Park, Great Portland Street). See page 4 for more details.

### Wales Communist Forum

Wednesday February 11, 7.30pm: Is there a Welsh road to socialism? Speakers: Leanne Wood, Plaid Cymru AM and Mark Fischer, Communist Party of Great Britain. Sandringham Hotel, 21 St. Mary Street, Cardiff.

### Embassy picket

Israel out of the occupied territories. Free the refuseniks. For a Palestinian state with the same rights as Israel. 5.30pm to 7pm, Monday February 9, Israeli embassy, Kensington High Street/Kensington Court (nearest tube: High Street Kensington). Committee for Two States, PO Box 28124, London SE6 4WS; 07748 185553; outnow@actionforsolidarity.org.uk

### No to sharia law

Meeting in support of a secular constitution in Iraq, Wednesday February 11, 6.30pm, Grimmond room, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London SW1 (nearest tube: Westminster). Speakers: Alice Mahon MP, Nadia Mahmoud, Organisation of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), Houzan Mahmoud (editor, *Equal Rights Now!*) Organised by OWFI: 07956 883001; houzan73@yahoo.co.uk

### Peace, not war

Musical festival, Thursday February 12 to Sunday February 15 2004, to mark anniversary of 2003 global anti-war protests. The Hackney Ocean, Mare Street, London E8 (opposite Hackney town hall). Two stages, visuals, films and workshops. Dozens of top performers confirmed. Thursday February 12: rock, punk, indie; Friday February 13: hip hop, r and b, reggae; Saturday February 14: dance; Sunday February 15: acoustic, folk, jazz. £17.50 per night, plus booking fee. All proceeds to peace campaigns. Wheel-chair access. Peace Not War, PO Box 44212, London E3 4WB; 020 7515 4702; http://www.peace-not-war.org

### Remember Walter Kendall

Socialist and historian, 1926-2003. Memorial meeting, Saturday February 14, 2.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

### 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.

### Stop deportations

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns national meeting, Saturday February 28, 12 noon to 5pm, Hinde Street Methodist Church, 19 Thayer Street, London W1U 2QJ (nearest tube: Oxford Circus or Marble Arch). Lunch provided, crèche available. Reasonable transport costs for anti-deportation campaigns reimbursed by NCADC.

### CPGB history

Exhibition: The story of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Open until Sunday April 25, Tuesday-Sunday, 11am to 4.30pm., Entrance: £1; children and concessions: free. First Friday of the month: ‘Bluffer’s guide to CPGB’ tour. 0161-839 6061; karenm@peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk

### 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

### Democracy Platform

Next meeting: Saturday February 21, 11.30am, United Services Club, Gough Street, Birmingham.

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

### National conference

Saturday March 13, 10.30am to 4pm (registration from 10am). South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 (10-minute walk from Euston station). Motions on two items only: (a) Socialist Alliance and Respect; (b) method of electing SA national executive. Deadline: Friday February 13. Submit to office@socialistalliance.net as attachment (limit for preamble to motions - 250 words). Deadline for amendments: Monday March 1. Registration fee: £13 (£6 unwaged). Pooled fare contribution for London comrades: £10 (unwaged: £5 less own fare). Travelling expenses capped at discretion of conference arrangements committee. Crèche (book by March 1) and catering available.

**www.cpgb.org.uk/action**

## UNIONS

# Mars exploration sites

## Surfing the Red Planet

**H**G Wells's classic *The war of the worlds* has Martians bestriding Victorian Britain in their war machines, and laying waste to the population and the environment. As a thinly-veiled indictment of colonialism, it is peerless in science fiction. However, as a speculative work, Wells's tale of Martian imperialists has thankfully proved to have been wide of the mark. Nonetheless the more mundane freeze-dried reality has not dented its mystique. Questions concerning life, water and the possibility of terraforming have sustained more recent literary explorations of the planet and inform the ideologies upon which current space programmes feed.

The European Space Agency's Mars Express page ([http://www.esa.int/export/SPECIALS/Mars\\_express/index.html](http://www.esa.int/export/SPECIALS/Mars_express/index.html)) is a nice-looking website that trumpets the success of its orbital probe. Prominently featured are the breakthrough spectrometer photographs that conclusively prove the existence of frozen water at the planet's south pole. This links to the latest news concerning Mars Express. Unsurprisingly this involves some lay technical language, as the page explains specifications, which in turn is peppered with phrases such as "unprecedented accuracy" and "stunning information". For once the superlatives live up to expectations, as the images contained in its multimedia pages are breathtaking.

Unfortunately for professor Colin Pilinger and his team, the main story from Mars has been the failure of the British-built Beagle 2 lander. However, its fate seems to have passed the ESA by. Their dedicated page carries a couple of promotional photos, discusses the onboard technology in detail and outlines mission objectives. But it fails to mention how it currently is as much use to Mars exploration as the dustbin lid it resembles. Thankfully this gap is filled by a link to the Beagle 2 homepage (<http://www.beagle2.com/index.html>). This updates the latest attempts to contact the probe, and the ambitious plans to try and image the landing site from orbit. The science page offers Mars enthusiasts a teasing account of the mission, allowing a bit of speculation about what scientific treasures Beagle 2 might have uncovered ...

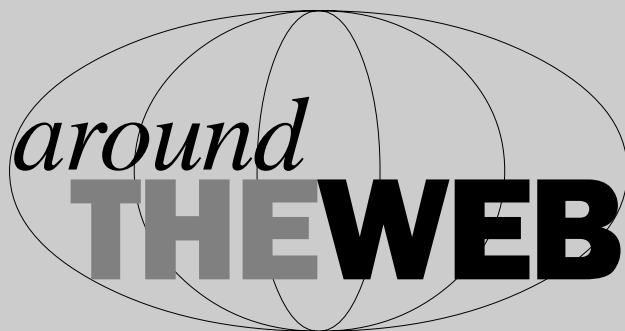
Setting out to prove that being American means bigger and better, the Nasa Mars page (<http://www.nasa.gov/externalflash/m2k4/frameset.html>) inevitably could not resist adding something flashy. It takes a while to load on a dial-up connection, but is worth the wait. The navigation panel is set off against a revolving Martian terrain. Very pretty. Each of the links leads to extremely polished pages with plenty of nice features to play with. However, one does get the impression that it is aimed at a young audience, perhaps explaining why it does not feature as much data as its ESA counterpart.

The best way to look around Nasa for Mars items is to go to the former Mars programme website (<http://www.mars.jpl.nasa.gov/>) which lists nine links. The Mars rovers page seems a good place to start (<http://www.marsrovers.jpl.nasa.gov/home/index.html>). Sensibly Nasa begins the page with the current status of the Spirit and Opportunity vehicles. It appears that the software problems that plagued the former rover last week have been fixed, and technicians are looking forward to a bit of rock grinding. Opportunity, on the other hand, is still busy flexing its robotic arm. There follow a few press releases about the naming of Martian hills viewed by Spirit in honour of the Colombia crew, and some close-ups of the crater rim Opportunity landed in. But will it be able to struggle out of its resting place? So far Nasa is keeping mum.

It is all very well sending probes to Mars, but what is the point? The Mars Society (<http://www.marssociety.org.uk>) attempts to provide an answer. The home page begins with the common refrain, "Humans are explorers". We should go to Mars because "it calls on us once again to exercise our human virtues of curiosity, creativity, heroism and foresight, to create new possibilities for our posterity." An article linked from the home page on British space policy puts more flesh on the bones. Bo Maxwell criticises the government's traditional lack of ambition in this area, arguing that a strong commitment to human missions would capture the imagination of the public, and bring long-term benefits to the UK economy. The founding declaration of the society opines about the knowledge we can gain, the challenge it poses, for humanity and "for a people who are yet to be. We must do it for the Martians."

Fine words. These projects are very exciting and ultimately the future of our species depends on escaping the confines of the Earth. But for communists the immediate interests of humanity do not lie in colonising Mars. It lies in making this world a red planet ●

Phil Hamilton



# SP on the rack after climbdown

**P**ressure is mounting on the Socialist Party-dominated leadership of the Public and Commercial Services Union following the decision of the department of work and pensions (DWP) executive to suspend strike action last week.

The DWP group executive voted by 21 to four to call off the two-day strike, after being offered a paltry increase of an extra £60 *per year*, together with new talks on management's proposed appraisal scheme. This left PCSU members in four smaller civil service departments high and dry in what had been intended as a coordinated action over pay. Union members employed in the prison service, department of constitutional affairs (DCA), home office and the tiny treasury solicitors office went ahead with the planned action in furtherance of their own pay claims. The DCA group executive has now suspended action after also receiving a marginally improved offer.

The day after the 48-hour action the SP leadership came in for severe criticism at a conference of DWP Left Unity delegates in Manchester. Left Unity is the coalition of socialists which puts up slates of candidates for the PCSU national and group leaderships. Its biggest component is the Socialist Party, but it also contains comrades from a range of socialist organisations, as

well as Labour lefts.

At the January 31 conference a motion proposed by SP delegates, which congratulated the DWP leadership for its running of the pay campaign, was carried by 23 votes to 22. Only the SP and its close supporters voted in favour. A motion proposed by Socialist Caucus, the left opposition within Left Unity, was defeated by 26 votes to 18. It read: "This conference condemns the decision of the GEC [group executive] to suspend industrial action for two weeks to allow further talks on PDS [appraisal] and pay. We believe this has left four smaller departments to fight on their own. We demand that management are immediately notified of our intention to call a two-day strike and a work-to-rule."

Socialist Workers Party comrades, who also send delegates to Left Unity but are not part of Socialist Caucus, put forward a rather bland motion, which attempted to steer a

middle course between the two diametrically opposed positions. This motion would merely have noted the position of the GEC, but it was withdrawn by the non-SWP majority of their delegation in favour of the Caucus motion.

While the SP is, for the moment at least, saying that the offer from DWP management is insufficient, it claims that progress has been made and that it really had no choice but to suspend the action. It would have been a 'propa-

ganda coup' for management, say the SP leaders, who would have dubbed us 'strike-happy' if we had gone ahead with the action without putting the new offer to the members. Some of them warn of the difficulty of pursuing the action in the face of a treasury pay cap: 'You can't defeat the government'.

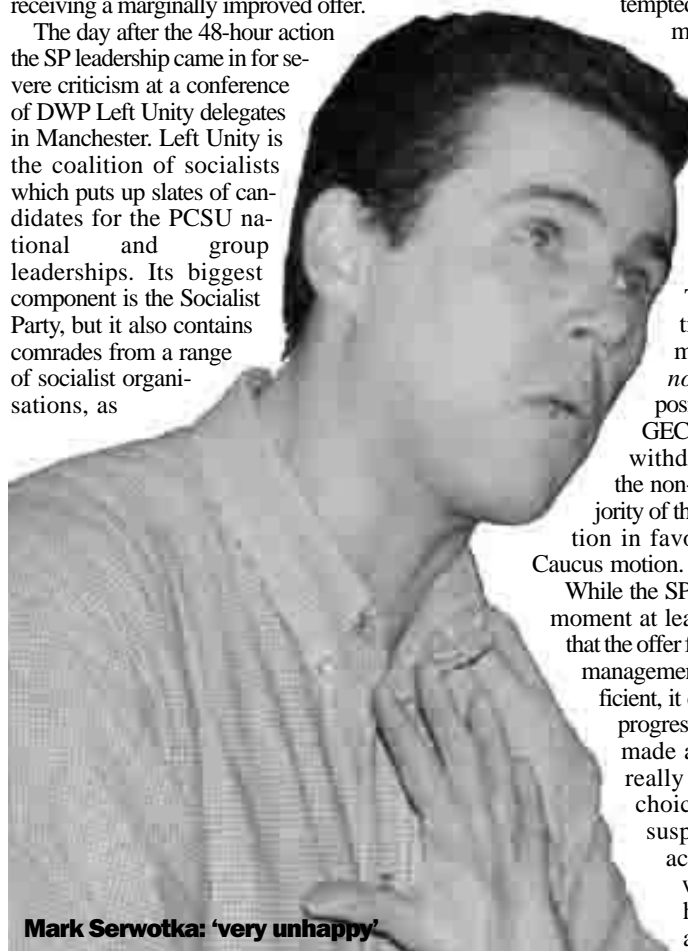
However, management has only offered to negotiate on the appraisal system - the latest pay increase, which most members rightly think is an insult, is presented as a case of 'take it or leave it'. Yet, according to *The Socialist*, it was these puffed up "concessions" - ie, £60 on top of management's "derisory" pay offer, plus an offer simply to talk about appraisal - that led to the suspension of the strike (January 31). But surely with a bold campaign, exposing the 'offer' for the insult it is, it would have been easy to rally the members behind the strike. General secretary Mark Serwotka is said to be very unhappy with the suspension, especially after having so publicly associated himself with the action. But the conduct of the campaign is the responsibility of the group executive, not the top leadership.

As well as feeling the heat from within the Left Unity coalition it leads, the SP is coming under pressure from branches and individual members, many of whom have sent in their protests. It is felt that some elements of the DWP leadership might be prepared to recommend the pay offer if there is movement from management on appraisal. If that happens, there is no doubt that it will be regarded as a major sellout. Hopefully the genuine anger below will cause the leadership to think twice.

We have come so close to actually taking industrial action, that a certain level of enthusiasm has been generated, only to be dashed by the suspension. However, if we are called out again, the coordination with other departments, whose members feel sorely let down after the DWP pulled out, may now prove more difficult.

As a result of its militant approach, Socialist Caucus has increased its representation on the Left Unity slate for the elections to the executive, due in May, from three to five ●

**Lee Rock**  
London regional organiser,  
PCSU



Mark Serwotka: 'very unhappy'

## London communist forum

# Imperialism's Mission to Mars

Millions of people worldwide are fascinated by the idea of space travel and the exploration of the cosmos. Millions logged on to Nasa's website to follow the progress of the Mars Mission. Yet - Jack Conrad argues - Nasa and the whole US space industry is a branch of the military-industrial complex. Satellites, computer-enhanced imaging, Saturn rockets, the space shuttle and other technical innovations owe far more to military requirements than to human curiosity about the universe we live in.

Jack Conrad suggests that, whatever we do in the future, "now, the main subject of humanity must be humanity - as we find it, on earth. Our mission is transforming earth".

**Speaker: Jack Conrad**  
All welcome. Lots of time for debate.

**Sunday, February 8, 5pm**  
**Diorama Arts Centre,**  
**34 Osnauburgh Street,**  
**London NW1**

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

## EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM

# Bureaucratic fist tightens

The first meeting of the UK organising committee to prepare for the European Social Forum to be held in London later in the year took place on Thursday January 29. The meeting very quickly confirmed what many people had feared: that this year's ESF is in great danger of being totally taken over by Ken Livingstone - with the full support of his little helpers in the Socialist Workers Party.

Controversy ensued well before the meeting, because invitations were sent out rather selectively. At our UK assembly the previous weekend, it was announced that all those who signed up to the statement 'For a UK Organising Committee to host the European Social Forum in London' would be invited (see *Weekly Worker* January 29). However, despite signing the document, the CPGB was just one of many organisations which did not receive such an invite.

This was no accident. We were told by Dave Holland (Livingstone's supremo for European and international affairs) that we were not invited, because we are not a "national or regional organisation, but a political party". We were allowed to stay in the meeting, though our attempts to clarify the internationally agreed position on the participation of political parties (see below) was referred to the next meeting of the committee, due to take place on Thursday February 5. It is still unclear why other organisations did not receive invitations.

Fifty-five people attended the meeting, representing quite a wide range of organisations (though I did recognise at least 15 members of the SWP, attending on behalf of this or that front). As has unfortunately been the norm, the atmosphere was decidedly hostile and unfriendly. This was not helped by the fact that chair Alex Gordon was being 'guided' by Redmond O'Neill (Livingstone's appointed policy director on public affairs and transport), who kept whispering instructions into his ear.

Most seriously perhaps, Alex Gordon announced that our four ESF working groups were abolished forthwith. The ESF preparatory assembly on December 13-14, which was attended by many international participants and which is the highest body of the ESF process, had set up working groups to deal with programme, practicalities, culture and enlargement. While the enlargement group never met, the practicalities group was sabotaged by members of the SWP - they used the undemocratic 'consensus principle' to block the group from taking any decisions.

However, the programme group (which contained a number of SWPers) has been meeting regularly since December and is quite far advanced in drawing up methods on how to put together seminars and plenary sessions for our ESF later in the year. Dave Timms from the World Development Forum unsuccessfully tried to deliver a report of the programme group to our UK organising committee, but was prevented by comrade Gordon, who refused to add the item to the agenda. Members of the culture group were equally dismayed at apparently having been abolished.

Redmond O'Neill explained that only the organising committee could decide which groups should exist from now on. "How about the four working groups we already have?" somebody suggested. Afraid not. According to Redmond, working groups will be established at some later stage in the process. "But only seven organisations have officially affiliated to the ESF so far, so we cannot set up those structures yet", he explained, supported by his comrades-in-arms in the SWP. Until the structures are satisfactory to Redmond, "certain

groups should be dealing with certain tasks".

By a strange coincidence, the GLA seems to be involved in all these tasks. As comrade Gordon ran through the list of items to be discussed (venues, website, accommodation, translation, etc), Redmond came in on almost every one to announce that the GLA would take care of them. Was there any other group that would like to help? Anybody apart from the CPGB or Workers Power, that is. "You represent a party, so the minute taker will not be able to take your names down," Alex Gordon declared when we tried to get involved. Jeremy Dewar from WP unsuccessfully tried to convince people that he only represented a newspaper, not a party.

But the rather harmless NGO, Friends of the Earth, was shunned too. When its representative, Hannah Griffiths, said that she would like to get involved in the group that would invite organisations to the ESF, the call for additional help was all of a sudden dropped: "Oh, well, we will all just send out invitations for groups to join; so you can use your database and we will use ours," Redmond said.

That might have been to do with the fact that Hannah has been quite critical of the secret nature of the process and had previously acutely embarrassed the GLA and Globalise Resistance: She announced at a meeting that Friends of the Earth had in fact not signed up to the ESF bid, despite being listed as a supporting organisation. She has definitely been pushed into the 'enemy camp', which is increasingly well staffed with members of the CPGB, Workers Power, the Green Party, World Development Forum, a number of local social forums, *Red Pepper*, Just Peace etc. Whenever one of those people spoke, they were shouted down by SWP hacks - or shut up by comrade Gordon.

Quite clearly, it is becoming increasingly difficult to influence the way the ESF is being organised. As a result, a number of people have unfortunately decided to turn their backs on the process, after having experienced the undemocratic nature of the official structure. However, this is exactly what the GLA and GR are hoping for. Without a democratic opposition, they could just run the whole ESF like another 'Respect' jamboree.

We must fight hard to make the ESF the property of all the interested groups and organisations in Britain and Europe. The event has already been increasingly sanitised since the first forum took place in Florence in 2002. While our first ESF had the flair of a massive anti-capitalist festival, the second forum in Paris already felt like a rather uninspired conference. We cannot allow the ESF in Britain to be remembered for being a boring, bureaucratic non-event.

Tens of thousands of anti-capitalist activists will come to London. They should form the core of the ESF, not Ken Livingstone. While we must carry on arguing for more democracy in the official structures, we should also attempt to break out of any straightjacket. We should fight to make sure that the ESF provides space for all groups; that the workshops will take place close to the main centre; that European and Britain-wide networks will emerge - in short, that



**Redmond O'Neill: carry on lying**

we can achieve a purposeful event, not just a glorified rally.

On a positive note, both the programme and the culture group are planning to carry on meeting despite having officially been abolished. And some people involved in local social forums across the UK are planning to meet in London on February 7-8 to discuss the way forward.

### Money troubles

Redmond O'Neill presented a 'Draft indication of possible expenditure', according to which the whole event would cost exactly £1,488,546. This includes the hire of Alexandra Palace (£218,675), a seven-hectare marquee village on the grounds of Ally Pally (including site rental of £497,909), the professional running of a website (£10,000), free accommodation and expenses for the translators and volunteer transcribers (total of £170,940) and £127,500 for six people who would be employed full-time from April 1 to December 31 2004 to oversee the organisation.

Redmond did not volunteer any information as to how this could be covered. So CPGB comrades asked him how many organisations had already promised any funds. "Well, I'm afraid I cannot give you any information on this, so you'll have to carry on lying in the *Weekly Worker*," he sneered, to cheering from some of the SWP comrades. He was referring to my article in last week's paper, which reported that the GLA was committed to giving £250,000.

Only when a representative of the Muslim Parliament of Britain repeated my question did Redmond feel obliged to give a proper answer. "The GLA will have to go through all our budgets to see if they are relevant to the ESF," he explained. "I can, for example, think of the international budget or the consultation budget and I should imagine that three of four conferences during the ESF will meet our criteria." So how much money are you talking about, Redmond? "I really cannot give a figure." Well, he did at a

number of previous occasions and - guess what - the sum mentioned was £250,000.

According to Redmond, no other organisation has yet committed any money - though Steve Bell of the Communication Workers Union said his union was "discussing our affiliation in two week's time and we will also discuss a donation of £500".

### Party troubles

At a number of meetings, quite a few people have mentioned almost in passing that the ESF is a "party-free space". These have included Alex Gordon (RMT executive), Kate Hudson (chair of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and member of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain) and Redmond O'Neill himself. Livingstone's policy director on public affairs and transport is of course a long-standing member of the sectarian and highly secretive Socialist Action, which operates not only in the GLA and the Labour Party, but is also influential within CND and the National Union of Students.

While SWP comrades have not joined in the witch-hunt against parties, they certainly have not raised any objections. They are safe, of course, by appearing as anything *but* members of the SWP: Globalise Resistance (Guy Taylor, Jonathan Neale), Unite against Fascism (Weyman Bennett), Stop the War Coalition (Chris Nineham, Lindsey German) or even Project K (Alex Callinicos). No doubt, they will think of more fronts soon, as only one representative per organisation is allowed to attend the OC.

Currently, the CPGB is the only political party that does appear under its real name. Workers Power comrades present themselves as "supporters of *Workers Power* newspaper". Members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty never speak, so the question of their affiliation never arises. And the Socialist Party does not turn up anyway.

Redmond O'Neill tried to shed some light on the problem during our assembly - but failed miserably. He said: "The ESF is part of the World Social Forum and therefore parties are not officially allowed to participate. That does not mean if you are a member of a party, you cannot participate. It simply means you cannot take part as a member of the Labour Party, but you can attend as a member of the CND."

It looks as if we have to refight a battle line that has dominated many of the international ESF assemblies over the last two years. So time for some clarification.

The disputed sentence in the WSF 'Charter of principles' reads: "Neither party representations nor military organisations shall participate in the forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity."

Even before our first ESF in Florence many groups and political parties across Europe challenged the interpretation that this would mean parties would have to hide behind some kind of front. Then, our friends in the SWP took a principled stand: at meeting after meeting, Alex Callinicos and Chris Nineham argued alongside comrades in the CPGB against the banning of parties (see, for example, *Weekly Worker* December 12 2002). But now that they have a finger in the pie of this year's ESF, there is no need to fight for principles, it seems.

Anyway, two years ago, our Italian comrades were delegated to reach an agreement with the WSF on the question. They reported to the ESF European preparatory assembly in Vienna on May 11-12 2002 that they had in fact come up with a compromise: According to this, national ESF mobilisations could if they wanted opt to allow parties to openly take part in the process. The next ESF assembly on July 13-14 2002, which took place in Thessaloniki, further clarified this by agreeing that political parties would also be allowed to organise workshops. At the ESF event itself, speakers who were members of parties would not be advertised as such in the programme. However, they were free to state any affiliation in their speeches (see *Weekly Worker* July 18 2002).

Since this agreement has not been overturned or even challenged, it is still valid. The Italian committee decided to allow parties. Dishonestly, the French banned them, despite the fact that most leading participants on the French organising committee were members of the Communist Party of France, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire or the Socialist Party.

It would be a big step back if the British ESF mobilisation decided to follow the French road. Such a ban would be highly hypocritical on a number of levels - not least because the organisational process is being led by a recently readmitted member of the Labour Party (and staffed by members of Socialist Action and the SWP). A ban only leads to party members concealing their political affiliation, thereby making the whole process even less transparent and less democratic. Supporters of the ban foolishly seem to believe that somehow declaring our event a party-free zone will attract more people to it. Surely, the question is - what kind of parties take part? And would a ban really keep any of them out? Hardly.

In Scotland, comrades are not quite so foolish. In fact, comrade Jill Hubbard from the Socialist Worker platform of the Scottish Socialist Party reported at a previous meeting that the SSP and the Green Party had joined the Scottish ESF mobilisation. Are we supposed to throw them out again?

Jeremy Dewar cheekily challenged Redmond O'Neill's authority to effectively take over the running of the ESF, as he was a member of a government body - also banned under the WSF charter. "Well, if you throw me out, I'll have to throw you out of my building," Redmond snapped. Surely, the point is not to throw out either Redmond or WP or the CPGB, but to allow all interested organisations to openly participate ●

**Tina Becker**

**The CPGB is the only political party that does appear under its real name. Workers Power comrades present themselves as "supporters of Workers Power newspaper". Members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty never speak, so the question of their affiliation never arises. And the Socialist Party does not turn up anyway**

## HUTTON REPORT

# Blair's stitch-up backfires

**T**he long-awaited report from James Brian Edward Hutton, former chief justice of Northern Ireland, recently retired law lord, and chair of the public enquiry into the death of government weapons expert Dr David Kelly, has produced incredulity across the length and breadth of the country - indeed around the world. The virtually complete exoneration of the Blair government of any wrongdoing, the avalanche of criticisms directed at the BBC's reports on the 'sexing up' of the September 2002 'dodgy dossier' - all have given rise to a feeling not of 'closure' and 'drawing a line' under the issue, as the government no doubt hopes, but of massive popular revulsion at this Orwellian whitewash.

Opinion polls commissioned by several newspapers consistently show that a majority of the public thinks that Hutton was a whitewash, that the BBC was treated unfairly, that the government was to blame for the death of Kelly and lied about it. As Blair blatantly did on the plane home from his laudatory sojourn in Washington when the news of Kelly's suicide broke, denying he had authorised the naming of Kelly - it subsequently emerged in the Hutton hearings that he chaired the Downing Street meeting where the strategy for naming Kelly to the media was actually decided. The bald assertion that no one in government was to blame for this, that it was all the fault of BBC officials and reporters for making 'unfounded' allegations of government lying in the first place, is so outrageous and at variance with reality that Hutton became in popular terms a laughing stock as soon as the news broke of his 'findings'.

But the BBC is not laughing about it. The immediate result of Hutton was the resignation of the chairman of the board of governors, Gavyn Davies. The very next day Greg Dyke, the director-general, also resigned, followed a couple of days later by Andrew Gilligan, the BBC Radio Four journalist whose material, gleaned from an off-the-record interview with Kelly last summer shortly after Bush prematurely declared an end to 'major combat' in Iraq, started the whole business off. After Dyke's 'resignation', which was subsequently revealed to have been effectively a sacking brought about by a terrified board of governors, thousands of BBC staff walked out at various sites to protest in his defence; many thousands of them later contributed to the publishing of a full-page advertisement in *The Daily Telegraph* denouncing the injustice of the Hutton conclusions. And on Saturday lunchtime, about 200 demonstrators gathered opposite the gates of Downing Street to protest against this fraudulent report. Called by the Stop the War Coalition, supported by Media Workers against the War, the crowd heard anti-war speakers denounce Blair and Hutton, after which a copy of the report was publicly burned.

Of course, overarching the whole affair is the much more significant issue of the war in Iraq itself, the undisputable fact that the government claims that Iraq had in its possession enormous stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, supposedly able to be launched at 45 minutes' notice, has been shown to be utterly false.

Recently, David Kay resigned from the Iraq Survey Group, saying there were no WMDs in Iraq, and probably had not been for at least a decade. Kay was the head of this US team of self-appointed weapons inspectors, put in place by the invaders to comb Iraq looking for evidence to back up the rationale for the war - his resignation statement was more guardedly echoed by Colin Powell, US secretary of state, shortly



Lord Hutton: denounced

afterwards. This being the same Colin Powell who earlier accused Iraq of stockpiling these weapons as part of the Bush-Blair attempt to get official United Nations backing for their planned invasion and occupation of Iraq. And of course, Hans Blix, the UN chief weapons inspector, whose work was a key part of the build-up for war, now publicly states his belief that Iraq's western-supplied WMDs were destroyed under threat of further attack shortly after the end of the 1991 Kuwait war.

For opponents of the war, these were not great revelations at all. Even on this level, Blix, Kay, Powell, etc are simply adjusting their stated views to agree with Scott Ritter, anti-war campaigner and another former UN chief weapons inspector, who testified at length, as the war preparations were getting underway, that the imperialists' accusations of Iraq's possession of WMDs were false. All these facts, even remaining within the framework of the pronouncements made by 'respectable' figures like Ritter, show conclusively that what was involved in the war preparations was not 'intelligence failures', which is the latest pathetic refrain of Bushites and Blairites on the defensive now it becomes clearer and clearer that no WMDs existed in Iraq, but rather conscious, systematic lying on a massive scale.

The report produced by Hutton - the product of a naked political fix by Blair in appointing this ultra-conservative judge, a veteran of Northern Ireland's frame-up system of juryless Diplock courts - is just the latest manifestation of the incredibly arrogant, deeply anti-democratic and thoroughly imperialist and predatory Blair regime (Blair of course also gave the judge a particularly narrow remit to investigate, although, judging by the bias in his conclusions, that may not have been necessary).

However, given the show of openness that pervaded the procedure, with the publication of large swathes of the evidence on Hutton's website, the conclusions are too much at variance with all this material in the public domain to be believed by anyone who is not personally corrupt, or lacking normal intelligence. Hence the almost universal disbelief.

In fact, such was the weight of evidence against the government that the enquiry's proceedings put into the pub-

lic domain that many eminent figures in the ruling class believed that serious and damaging criticism of the government was inevitable. Michael Howard was visibly and obviously rubbing his hands with glee at the prime minister's likely embarrassment - until, fairly late in the day, he was obviously tipped the wink about the nature of the upcoming whitewash. Too late for the Tory leader, who faced the bizarre situation of a supposedly exonerated government demanding he apologise for his entirely justified (if utterly hypocritical) attacks on government wrongdoing and lying.

Indeed, the spectrum of those denouncing Hutton included not just the usual suspects on the Labour left and the anti-war movement, but extended as far to the right as the *Daily Mail* and Max Hastings, the former high Tory and *Daily Telegraph* editor. The *Daily Mail* seemed to read like the *Daily Mirror* over this issue. Pretty much only the Murdoch press remained sycophantic to the government - for obvious reasons, given Murdoch's hatred of the BBC and desire for a Berlusconi-type monopoly of the British and international media.

Indeed the BBC is itself a pillar of the establishment - its wide reputation for 'independence', 'impartiality' and 'professionalism' in no way contradicts that. Such a public image - which, of course, has to be earned by allowing a considerable amount of journalistic freedom and relatively honest reporting on matters considered not fundamental to the well-being of British capitalism - make it an asset, not a liability for the more far-sighted sections of the ruling class. A certain amount of such leeway is essential to allow the BBC to maintain its credibility as a more subtle, and thereby more effective, propagandist and defender of the interests of capital. But such leeway carries with it the risk of periodic clashes with the more flagrantly anti-democratic components of the political system and state machine, which are also vital for maintaining the conditions for capital and in particular its depredations in the wider world.

Something along these lines appears to be behind the Hutton/Kelly affair - hence the divisions and disquiet in the ruling class over this whole messy business. But we should not thereby make the mistake of concluding that this is simply a quarrel within the establishment in

which the working class has no interest. On the contrary, there are quite serious dangers of a chilling of political discussion and attacks on press and journalistic freedom posed in this affair. It is in the interest of the working class movement to actively defend every element of democratic space that exists under this system, and oppose all attacks on democratic rights, even if such attacks begin with what appears to be a quarrel within the establishment.

Workers do have a side, and an interest, in seeing such attacks (which are palpable in the government's aggressive demands for blood and sackings at the BBC, threats to interfere in the process of renewal of the BBC's charter, etc) defeated and the Hutton whitewash comprehensively shattered. Hence the actions of BBC workers in protesting these attacks, and indeed of officials like Greg Dyke in taking on Blair and Hutton over these Orwellian lies and in defence of some measure of press and broadcasting freedom, deserve our critical solidarity.

Indeed, this in large measure is why many bourgeois figures are worrying out loud that Hutton will prove counterproductive. It may bring discredit on the judiciary and the judicial system, they muse. Well they might!

The fact that the government is able to appoint a judge, a supposedly independent arbitrator, to investigate itself is blatantly anti-democratic. Judges of course are drawn mainly from the most privileged social layers; they are selected for their loyalty to the established order and their general social conservatism. They are also official representatives of the crown. This is particularly true of the law lords - judicial appeals to the House of Lords are designated in legal terms

as appeals to the monarch herself. In reality the law lords are simply specialised representatives of the monarch who carry out these functions on a day-to-day basis.

And, of course, what is particularly grotesque about this recent example of judicial-governmental shenanigans is the fact that the key decisions about the tenor of the report into this governmental intelligence scandal were made by one unelected, unaccountable individual - Hutton.

That is why our *Draft programme* demands that all judges "be subject to election and recall." Moreover, all investigations into government-state wrongdoing should "be carried out in complete openness" and be judged by juries made up of ordinary working people. Judges should be there only to advise on technical-legal matters, not to decide the verdict. This is certainly how the wider inquiry into WMDs and the whole Iraq war that the majority of the population now supports, according to opinion polls, ought to be carried out. And if the government persists in rejecting such a basic democratic demand the Stop the War Coalition is well placed to take the initiative and establish a people's enquiry of its own.

With Hutton, the massive democratic deficit in British society has once again been thrust centre-stage. In this regard, it is doubly unfortunate that the principle of republicanism - abolition of the monarchy, privy council, the House of Lords, law lords, etc - which concretely targets the anti-democratic institutions that underpin the British state, was voted down by the Socialist Workers Party majority at the Respect founding convention last week. An own goal if ever there was one ●

Ian Donovan

## Blair lied, thousands died!



George Galloway: interesting

**A**bout 200 people came out on Saturday, January 31 to join the Stop the War Coalition picket of Downing Street called to protest against the Hutton whitewash. The small crowd heard a range of speakers, including Kate Hudson and Bruce Kent of CND, Jeremy Corbyn MP and Lindsey German of the STWC and Socialist Workers Party.

Most interesting was George Galloway. He told us that the recent vote on tuition fees starkly illustrated that there "are too few Jeremy Corbys, Alice Mahons or John McDonnells left" in Labour. This posed "a political question we must address". We can no longer "limit our politics to protest". It was time to "storm the political fortress" of parliament and "let the peoples' voice be heard" - a clear reference to the new Respect coalition ●

# Media manipulation

**T**he day the police found David Kelly's corpse slumped against a tree - his bloodstream riddled with around 30 coproxamol tablets, his left wrist slashed open by the four-inch lock knife found nearby - I had been due to meet Andrew Gilligan to discuss a potential story. A series of emails exchanged earlier that week concluded with Gilligan writing: "See you there. Will call if any last Alastair Campbell-related backwash makes it difficult."

In the event, "Alastair Campbell-related backwash" - the knock-on effects of the spin doctor's determination to beat up on the BBC after it broadcast an inconvenient truth - cost a man his life. Kelly's suicide was a consequence of Campbell's hardball tactics. An unintended and indirect result, maybe, but a consequence for all that.

Oh, how hilarious Whitehall press officers must have found the grotesque children's-party guessing game they devised to humiliate Kelly, with hand-picked hacks given unlimited chances to suggest the name of the mole until they finally lucked out. Pin the tail on the donkey. I spy, with my little eye, a whistleblower beginning with K. And just for an added laugh, after the guy was discovered dead, the Ministry of Truth went to town on his memory, branding him a latter-day Walter Mitty.

Rarely can one man's self-inflicted death have had such an immediate political impact. Faced with public revulsion on a grand scale, the Hutton inquiry was purpose-built to take the heat off. And, like a pack of frozen peas applied as a makeshift compact to a sprained ankle, it managed just that. Hutton spent six months - not to mention millions of pounds of public money - and finally delivered a report the government might just as well have written itself.

No wonder it had to be leaked to *The Sun*. A serious newspaper might have twigged the fairy story. Extra, extra! Read all about it! New Labour did nothing wrong! BBC entirely to blame! [PS: Thank you kindly, Mr Murdoch. Yet again we owe you big time.]

Scrutinise the entire report and you find not one substantial criticism of the government. If Hutton had been just that teeny bit more savvy, he would have thrown in a few token words of censure, if only to lessen the appearance of a snow job bigger than the one undertaken by Britain's road-gritting crews on the day of publication. But no, not even that.

As the opinion polls show, the majority of the population is not taken in. Not that it matters much. The genuine anger of last July has largely dissipated. David Kelly's suicide is, like, so last year.

Hutton was notably keen to demonstrate his most unjudgelike familiarity with contemporary argot. In one of the more unintentionally hilarious passages in the report, we are told: "The term 'sexed-up' is a slang expression, the meaning of which lacks clarity in the context of the discussion of the document."

Not for most of us it doesn't. What Gilligan was openly trying to say is that a second government dossier on weapons of mass destruction - central to the New Labour case for war on Iraq - was built on flimflam. His biggest mistake was being far too polite. To put it in the language used in parliament and courts of law, the dossier was tendentious to the point of mendacity. Or in plain English, rubbish from start to finish. All of the central allegations in Gilligan's now immortal 6.07 broadcast on the *Today* programme last May have been proven completely true. Conversely, the government's denials are ... well, completely not true.

Who knows from where in his soul Blair mustered the chutzpah to tell the

Commons: "The allegation that I or anyone else lied to this house or deliberately misled the country by falsifying intelligence on WMD is itself the real lie." Sorry, Tony. What is in "itself the real lie" is any suggestion that New Labour told the truth at any point in its extended campaign to sell war to the general public.

A first dossier on Iraqi WMDs lost whatever credibility it might have started life with after the discovery that sizeable chunks were ripped off from an ancient PhD thesis. Then a document purporting to prove that Saddam tried to buy uranium from Niger was shown up as a crude forgery.

And it wasn't even third time lucky. Gilligan's story totally took the second dossier apart. Yes, that document was "sexed up" - however Hutton understands or misunderstands the term. Yes, the 45-minute claim was false. And yes, the intelligence services were unhappy about what was written.

Ironically, conclusive proof for all these propositions was thrown up by

the Hutton inquiry itself. Thanks to its deliberations, we know that between September 10 and 16 2002, the threat from Iraqi WMDs went from being simply potential to "current and serious". The first phrase was written by an intelligence officer. The second was written by Alastair Campbell. Again, the first draft described post-1991 production of WMDs as only a probability. Once Campbell had sub-edited the piece, it had somehow become "established beyond doubt".

Hey, judge! Remember all that stuff they taught you in law school about the difference between 'balance of probabilities' and 'beyond reasonable doubt'? Hmm, seems not. But then such nuances probably did not count for much in the Diplock courts.

And there is more. The statement that Saddam was prepared to use WMDs only "if he believes his regime is under threat" was mysteriously dropped, following an email from top Blair aide Jonathan Powell, who described this wording as "a bit of a problem".

## Lord of the WMDs

**L**ast year's *Big read* firmly established fantasy as the nation's favourite publishing genre, tales of unreal worlds such as *Lord of the rings* taking four of the five top places.

New Labour was quick to jump on the bandwagon. Two releases last year - *Iraq, its infrastructure of concealment* (February 2003), and *Iraq's weapons of mass destruction* (September 2003) - were savaged by the critics, who found their plots unconvincing, gratuitously "sexed up" and derivative to the point of plagiarism.

They were set in a world similar to ours, but in which Iraq is a superpower posing a direct military threat to the west through its 'weapons of mass destruction' - not unlike Tolkien's 'one ring'. As a result, the free world stands on the edge of destruction at the hands of the evil dictator, Saddam.

Sensitive to criticisms of implausibility, New Labour brought in a new writer for the third title, *Hutton report*. This takes up the story after Iraq has been defeated, and (nice twist, this) has failed to use any of its WMDs in its defence. Indeed, through some wizardry, the dreaded weapons have become invisible, unlike Saddam himself who turns up living in a hobbit-hole. Though I'm giving away the ending, it has been widely trailed: it all proves to be the fault of a revolutionary, underground group - the BBC.

It's no good: some things are beyond parody, and even Tony Blair seems uneasily conscious that the Hutton report whitewash of his behaviour over Iraq was too blatant for public taste. Hutton justified his findings partly on the basis of his limited remit: to investigate the death of government advisor David Kelly. Until recently, though, Blair refused any suggestion of an inquiry directly into the grounds for the war as "unnecessary", despite the fact that the Iraqi WMDs used to justify the invasion have not been found.

Then came David Kay's resignation as head of the Iraq Survey Group and his public admission that he had been wasting his time. This compelled president Bush to announce an enquiry into the question of WMD 'intelligence', and in turn forced Blair's hand.

Blair has therefore appointed Lord Butler to chair a committee of five privy councillors, including two MPs: Labour chair of the intelligence and security committee Ann Taylor, and Conservative Michael Mates. It will meet in secret, and publish its report in the summer. Its will investigate the accuracy of pre-war intelligence of WMDs, but not the use made of it by the government. Robin Cook, who resigned from the cabinet over the decision to invade Iraq, has criticised this narrow remit, and the Liberal Democrats have refused to join the committee on the same grounds.

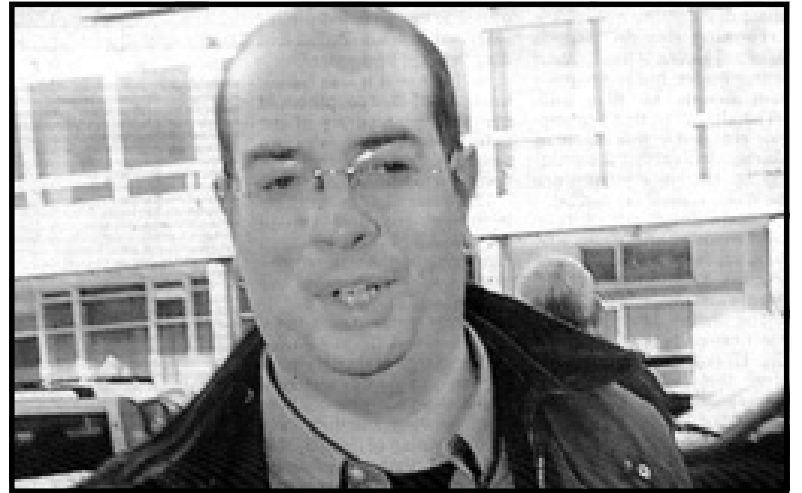
The report may scapegoat the security services for providing poor intelligence, but, given the risk that annoyed spies might brief against the government, it seems more likely that another whitewash is being prepared. Freshly confident after Hutton, Blair has been particularly blatant on this point: "We can do that without casting aspersions on people's good faith or honesty."

It seems it is left to others to cast these aspersions. Most ordinary people remain perfectly aware that they were lied to by Blair. War on Iraq was justified on the basis that the country was in breach of the terms of UN resolutions imposing restrictions on its armaments after the invasion of Kuwait, and it had to be disarmed of WMDs. These WMDs were never found, and the dishonesty of the government's attempts to prove that they ever existed has already been documented, week after week, not least in our paper.

At first sight, the specious justification of the war might seem unimportant. Communists, who begin with an understanding of the reality of capitalism and its international extension, imperialism, would never have been troubled by phoney arguments of 'international law' even if they were nominally consistent.

However, we must fight to expose the hypocrisy of our government, even on its own grounds, and precisely to highlight its true nature. The government's most senior lawyer, attorney general Lord Goldsmith, wrote that the war was "legal" only in as far as it was necessary to disarm Iraq, and explicitly not for "regime change". Without WMDs, the entire war was therefore 'illegal', and Blair is a war criminal not by any rhetorical stretch, but by his own lawyer's definition ●

**Manny Neira**



**Andrew Gilligan: game, set and match**

And more. Dr Brian Jones, of the defence intelligence staff - self-described as "the most senior and experienced intelligence community official working on WMD" - was so concerned about the "over-egging" of the dossier that he made a formal protest. His staff shared his concern.

Final corroboration comes from David Kay, America's top weapons inspector, who recently stated: "There is no doubt that the phrase 'within 45 minutes' included in the British report is incorrect." WMDs could not have been launched in 45 minutes. Not in 45 hours. Not in 45 days. Kay now believes there were no WMDs to begin with. Around 1,400 experts have been looking for them. And how many have turned up? Zero. Nada. Zilch. Jack. They simply are not there. So even the dossier's original draft was largely an exercise in wish-fulfilment fantasy. Game, set and match to Gilligan.

The last of the Hutton inquiry killer facts is the revelation that Tony Blair personally approved the outing of David Kelly. Ministry of defence official Sir Kevin Tebbit revealed that Blair chaired the meetings to decide on what became known as the 'naming strategy'. The prime minister has insisted all along that he "emphatically" did not leak Kelly's name. This is dissemblance of a very high order. Technically, he is right. He did not do so himself. But then he did not have to. That is what Campbell got paid for.

The only proper conclusion from the evidence presented to Hutton is that the government lied and lied again to cover its tracks, with all the inherent plausibility of my three-year-old daughter denying illicit raids on the supply of chocolate buttons kept in our larder. Yet we are asked to swallow the claim that "any suggestion that there was any pressure or intervention from Downing Street is entirely false". The BBC story was "100% wrong", we are told. Blair himself maintains that any allegation that the 45-minute claim provoked disquiet among the intelligence services is "completely and totally untrue". Campbell chips in with the position that there are "no errors of fact in the September dossier". All these assertions stand comprehensively trashed, even as New Labour claims exoneration.

Yet such is the government's reservoir of support among the press that, instead of being acclaimed as Britain's newest investigative journalism superstar, Gilligan's professionalism has been under brutal assault. OK, I'm biased. I know and like the bloke. I could not tell you what his politics are, and he seems to have friends on both the right and the left. But my guess is that Andrew is a natural-born boat-rocker, who would take delight in upsetting whichever party is in power.

After working on a couple of stories with him, I am certain he is a bloody terrific reporter. There is an apocryphal story knocking round that some of his pred-

ecessors as Radio Four defence correspondent spent their working time constructing Airfix replicas of fighter aircraft, when not rehashing MoD press releases. Gilligan did what journalists are supposed to do, and got out of the office and found sensational stories. News is what someone does not want published, remember. All the rest is advertising.

Yet as of the time of writing, I have not seen one unqualified defence of Gilligan in the mainstream press. Even the man himself has partially bottled out, mumbling perfunctory, half-hearted apologies, presumably while keeping his fingers firmly crossed. Why, Andrew? You are vindicated. Don't grovel now.

His work on the Kelly claims has been widely slated as a 'one-source story'. So what? For starters, Gilligan made it absolutely clear from the outset that this was so, and invited listeners to make their minds up on that basis. But what is unusual about one-source stories anyway? Pick up any national newspaper, any day of the week, and you can see plenty of one-source stories, written on the sole basis of a brief, non-attributable phone call from a special adviser. The Kelly revelations were a one-source story of substance, not a piece of overspun, second-hand tittle-tattle on the latest hissy fit between Gordon and Tony.

Granted, there is one aspect of this sorry business where Gilligan comes in for some legitimate stick. After Kelly's name had already been made public by the government, Gilligan sent an email to a Liberal Democrat MP sitting on the foreign affairs select committee, revealing that Kelly was the source of a similar story by a *Newsnight* journalist.

Kelly was questioned by the committee shortly afterwards, and was clearly taken aback when the accusations were put to him. At a stroke, he was made to appear a serial briefer against the government, thereby undermining his position. Gilligan may plead in mitigation that Downing Street was briefing tame Labour MPs on the committee to his detriment, and that he was only attempting to redress the balance. But for journalists, the 11th commandment is that you never reveal your sources. Revealing someone else's is even worse.

But that is essentially a nuance. Clearly the public had the right to know about the concerns Kelly raised. Clearly too, the BBC was absolutely correct to report them. Any half-decent news organisation would have done the same. Yet, thanks to an administration that clearly regards parliament and public with contempt, the Kelly affair fills the nostrils with the stench of media manipulation.

And mingled faintly with that stench is the distant odour of dead bodies - from the woodlands of Oxfordshire to the badlands of Iraq ●

**Dave Osler**

## OUR HISTORY

# 20th anniversary of the miners' Great Strike

# Class war and damned lies

■ Janice Sutherland **Strike: when Britain went to war** Channel 4, Saturday January 24

■ Steven Condie **The miners' strike** BBC2, Tuesday January 27

**T**hroughout the strike 'the media', as we called them, were branded the enemy. A TV camera often produced as much rage as a scab or a police riot shield. Camera crews were frequently attacked.

The 'bosses' press', 'Thatcher's bum boys'. Our writers penned songs slagging them off (not least the veteran communist, Ewan McColl), and we sang in celebration of the 'smooth-faced pundits on the box'. They had earned it all right - most of them anyway: the daily press was a sickly diet of lies and misinformation. TV news channels not only set an anti-strike, anti-union agenda; they engaged in an outright propaganda war against us. Facts were not allowed to interfere, as the terrorist boot boys unleashed by Arthur Scargill went on the rampage. We fumed in living rooms, bars and welfare halls - crowds of families huddled together to catch the progress of the strike jeered and booed TV screens all over Britain, impotent to get our side on the screens.

That was the truth, near as damn it, about the news coverage on press and TV. It was not, however, the truth as far as TV documentaries were concerned. All of them that spent more than five minutes looking at the strike - its cause, the respective arguments - came out for the miners and their families. It was clear that a quick soundbite or barking headline could get away with gross distortion, but a researched and serious attempt to examine the facts always came out on our side. Channel 4 in those days, at least so far as documentary was concerned, was the miners' champion.

With that in mind, we all expected both last week's documentaries to be more or less sympathetic to the miners. We imagined this to be the case, not least since the last 20 years of media studies up and down the country have ruthlessly exposed the bare-faced bias and lies of 1984, and no one would ever imagine anyone with a brain cell to share would wish to repeat it all again, not while we were watching this time. Want to bet?

Channel 4's programme *Strike: when Britain went to war* is probably the worse 'documentary' ever made. If *The Sun* did a documentary this is what it would look like. What we had was just a collection of every myth and falsehood ever put out against the miners, rounded up and repackaged as fact. None of these myths were ever challenged, no fact ever tested, no stone disturbed, never mind unturned, in the search for truth. This was TV slander at its *News of the World* gutter press worst.

The scene is a happy hamlet called London in 1984, like a pantomime set before the baddy appears. Jolly folk are colourfully dressed, and listening to modern rock bands. Clean-cut kids, unconcerned with politics or other dark things, are enjoying the freedom Margaret Thatcher has given them. They are buying expensive clothes, they are earning wads of money, they are free. Britain was a new society, a society of change, a bright, designer-led, everything with a label, very successful place. Then off-stage something from the 1930s



Scargill: was it his strike?

is stirring, the scene almost literally changes to black and white and these annoying working class folk, all muck and complaint, force themselves into the otherwise idyllic world.

The myths, grasping and old, are then let loose. Unions are holding the country to ransom - nay, the *Sun* editor tells us, unions were *running* the country; at the same time 'the country' was sick of unions - Thatcher had been elected to sort them out. Contrast: the new, shiny, money-earning, house-buying yuppie Britain; then shots to the valleys, the slag heaps, the raggy-arsed miners' kids, the north and a dictatorial Scargill - a Marxist revolutionary, commanding his obedient troops into battle, responding just because he had said so: "Fifty-six thousand Yorkshire miners were called out on strike."

Of course facts do not come into any of this. It is just a tale: nobody is asked to comment on the assumptions, no striker is asked if any of the assertions match their reality. Scargill, we are told, invented flying pickets! My old union delegate, Tom Mullanny, once said: "Well, I don't know if Arthur is as old as me, but I remember the flying pickets coming to Hatfield in 1919 - they came in a steam bus and they run over Bell's dog." Flying pickets are as old as unions and probably older. Scargill "closed down the Saltley coke works", which will be news to the thousands of striking Birmingham engineers and foundry workers who downed tools and marched to block the scab fuel depot, along with thousands of miners from all over Britain, not least south Wales and Kent, who knew nowt about Arthur Scargill.

The old, old story: this was Arthur Scargill's strike. He arranged it, led it, 'called people out', presumably kept them out through terror, and "three months into the strike still had the miners eating out of his hand". Offensive, and obscene lies, which rob 140,000 miners of their place in this history. Our history!

The programme is top-heavy with Tory and establishment figures - bitterly anti-union, anti-working class and pro-free market. *Sun* editor Kelvin Mackenzie: "Funnily enough, I didn't get on with the printers." Actually his comments reveal that he quite literally hated them. Richard Ellis, *Sun* infiltrator and informer

on miners' picket lines; Neil Greatrex, leading scab and founder of the Union of Democratic Miners (who interestingly tells us his dad was a life-long union miner and went to his grave never speaking to his son, even refusing to look at him again, for crossing picket lines). The cops talking of their alienation from the working class north, but how much money they raked in: "The Conservative government had looked after us for four years and now it was pay-back time." Boris Johnston, Oxford graduate, upper class twit and Tory; Tim Bell, the National Coal Board's chief admin officer; Bernard Ingham, Peter Walker, Neil Kinnock.

In the middle or on their side - hard to say - Brenda Dean. Predictably she is the sensible lass, the 'get what you can and come out smiling' negotiator, never mind what your members think. Barbara Bloomfield, another Oxford grad who once helped edit an oral history collection on the strike, but said nothing of that on screen. Instead she gives us the memoirs of her Oxford days and her bit of rough stuff from the pit, ignorant and drunk clumping to her dorm for a quick shag and a cup of tea. John O'Farrell, a student from Exeter during the strike, who gives us another impression of what the miners were in middle class eyes - all *Boys' Own* heroes and aren't they strong? - and how unfair the cops were. Phil Woolass (who?), president of the National Union of Student in 1984, who tells us how he supported the miners, but was young and didn't know what he was doing, as if he was six at the time, not 26 - just as well because we never noticed him anyway. He goes on to tell us, as the strike collapsed: "I felt foolish and used." Well, on behalf of the miners and our families who spent 12 bitter months on strike, let me apologise for giving you such a gruelling time.

Midge Ure of Ultra Vox: all it was about was working class men beating up other working class men ... ugh. Then, shock of all shocks, Alexei Sayle - why did I think he ever understood what the class war was about? - tells us a tale: we booed Wham off stage, who were trying to support us in a charity concert because they had bonny hair with highlights and wore shorts. Never heard of that one. Did anybody ever ask anybody about any of this? Not in this film or anywhere else, as far as I've seen.

On our side Ann Scargill and Betty Cook; Carol Jackson, Notts striker's wife; Ron Henson, rank and file printer; Tony Benn, obviously his political overview cut out; Glyndwr Roberts, Arthur Jackson, Russell Broomhead and Kevin Williams, the only four miners in the whole programme who must have spoken volumes but were left with bit lines; and Daljit Singh Shergill from the Birmingham sikh temple.

It must be said of those folk I have described as being in the middle, we do not know what else they said, what was not used in the programme. It is clear this producer had a goal he was driving towards and doubtless if anyone said too much to distract from or distort the image he was trying to present they would be severely cut. It is possible several of the folk in the middle were spitting the blood of fury when they got to see the finished product.

The programme makes assertions - no evidence, no details: just states them as fact without challenge. They were Scargill's pickets. How? How were they organised, how funded, what were the picket structures? Who cares - we just make it up as we go along and repeat what the press said in 84.

Scargill held the strike without a bal-

lot. How was that possible? The strike was called in Yorkshire: Scargill was not there. When after consultation at mass pithead meetings the national conference was convened to discuss whether to call a national ballot, Arthur did not express a view. He was in the chair and in those days respected its objectivity. He did not have a vote and did not speak. Did anyone even ask anyone about this central allegation? Did they hell.

Scargill walked away from the negotiations and a deal in September 84. What was the deal? What was the stumbling block? What was the union's view? They do not even ask, let alone answer. Arthur tells it differently (though not on this programme, since he was not asked). A deal was in view - we virtually had the whole shooting match - but NCB chair Ian MacGregor went off and phoned Thatcher and when he came back everything agreed hitherto had been taken back.

Peter Walker: "There was never a chance of the lights going out." In fact power cuts had taken place - January 16 1985, Barnet, five and a half hours; Holborn, two hours. January 20, Welwyn Garden, two hours. January 22, Hackney, four hours - the sixth in four weeks. On January 18 the Central Electricity Generating Board boasted it had met a demand of 42,000mw. The truth was that 42,800mw were available with all sources going full blast to meet demand, including the final back-up system of emergency jet engines secured to the floor. So when O'Farrell makes fun of the anarchists who told him to join the 'turn something on at 6pm' campaign, it was not stupid at all: the whole thing was actually on the thinnest of knives edges. Walker is just lying now as he did then.

Six months into the strike public interest had switched away from the miners because of the birth of prince Harry. Then it was starvation in Africa, and how badly off were the miners by comparison? A new politics was developing - celebrity-based, not class-based; not old-fashioned workers and strikes, but international, third world and environmental concerns, focused on stars.

Death and one-eyed sadness. The taxi driver taking a solitary scab to work in south Wales, (not "working miners", as stated in the programme, but one bloke) is a big centre of attention. Our two comrades killed on picket lines do not even get mentioned, never mind talked about or reflected on.

Figures. The programme starts by telling us there were 180,000 miners in Britain at the start of the strike. At the end of the programme they tell us by February 1985 - ie, six weeks before the end of the strike - 80,000 miners were at work. "Half the miners". This of course is the same hype and misuse of figures used right through the strike. Twenty thousand miners never went on strike in the first place. That means 160,000 miners did. If we deduct the 20,000 who never struck from the 80,000 at work six weeks from the end, it means 60,000 had gone back, but 100,000 must still have been out after 10 and a half months of bitter strike. This is not the collapse the programme talks of. Neither is it most or even half the men going back. The core of the strike held solid to the end.

Mardy was the only place where they marched back together - the strength of the working class was broken everywhere except there. Hmm. Mardy was closed and the miners dispersed. Incidentally 100,000 miners plus were still in the industry supplying 89% of all fuel power to power stations by 1986 when the miners balloted by a two third major-

ity to go on strike again. So had the miners been so completely defeated? Why bring in enquiry and research at this stage? Why introduce facts at the end of the programme when they have not interested you all through it?

Did the programme explore the miners' tactics? Did it seek to find out if the strike had ever come close to victory, and if so how and when? Did it ask how we were defeated tactically? Nope, a long, long documentary about the miners' strike and it does not even raise the question of how we could have won, or if we had come close to it. Not bothered. It ended with an assertion which drove the programme from its start: "Old, unprofitable industry like coal had no place in Thatcher's Britain." had this conclusion been reached after testing whether Britain's coal industry was old in the sense of out of date, or was it modern? Was it unprofitable or was it the most efficient coal mining industry in the world? Well, that issue may well have been at the centre of this dispute, but it did not get any footage on this programme. It was reminiscent of the newspapers at the time that insisted on telling their readers the strikers were trying to keep open pits that were worked out: in other words had no coal in them. More than one paper on more than one occasion said that. The footnote on this 2004 presentation echoed the same lie.

To call this programme a 'documentary' would be a travesty of the English language. It is, however, a fairly good representation of the kind of lies, half-truths and bias we got for 12 months by the bulk of the press and TV news channels. Future researchers looking to understand the miners' strike of 84-85 will turn up this on tape and use it to produce whatever is the future equivalent of *Star trek*. It will be useless in terms of facts, evidence or historical record - other than recording how bad sections of the media were in both 1984 and 2004.

### Searching for facts

I tried all last year to get a TV sponsor to allow me to make the 20th anniversary strike film. I wanted to revisit the strike and test the legends. Was there a plan to decimate the coal industry? Or was it a plan to decimate instead the NUM and gut the trade union movement? Had Thatcher set out her stall and prepared a battle plan to take us on? To what extent at the end of the strike had it succeeded? To what extent was the character of Arthur Scargill influential in there being a strike, or would it have happened anyway with or without him? What about the ballot issue - how much was it an excuse for gutless scabs and anti-strike tabloids and to what extent a tactical error? Whose error was it? Would it have made any difference in material terms to the two sides? How political was the strike from our end? Was there a plan to overthrow the Thatcher government and impel a revolutionary workers' movement forward? How close did the strike come to victory, and how near was Thatcher to collapse? Was there a key failing in our strategy and the response of our fellow workers? Might we have won? What was the post-strike situation and how was that played out? Could the miners have counterattacked in 1986? Answering those questions would have paid a real tribute to 1984-85, as well as being a useful political and socio-historic exercise.

I did not get to make that programme. Instead BBC2 approached me to cooperate in the making of a miners' strike film. Perhaps I would get the chance to do a political overview, and explore some of



**Miners battle police: just cause**

those key questions through this medium? Despite miles of film footage, hours and days of exploring some of the questions on film, in the end it did not appear. Maybe it was never intended to appear. TV producers, even progressive ones, are not democrats. We are not consulted on how the film is made and what will be in it, let alone allowed to see it and amend it before it goes out.

The producer, a Glasgow lad, must have been mighty impressed with *Train spotters*, since he nicks their opening shots and has the feet and legs of miners running desperately, pursued by cops instead of addicts. He was keen, for some reason, on reconstructions, which have their place if done well. Sadly these were not, by and large, done well and come over as cheap and tacky. Why use off-the-peg actors, in a distant, unrelated place, when the real characters were actually available to play their own parts in the real locations?

Sadly, despite all the evidence presented to them, the makers of *The miners' strike* still repeated the classic mistakes. "On the ballot the union leaders said no." I had explained to this team how the question of whether to have a ballot or not was put to mass pithead meetings all over the coalfield. Men in their thousands voted on whether or not we should have a ballot. When I put the question to 1,200 men at Hatfield they nearly hung me off the welfare roof. They thought we were trying to sell them out.

The film shows thousands upon thousands of swaying miners in the throng greeting the result of the conference not to hold a ballot. This was the democracy we were used to. A mass assembly of their brothers, face to face. Stand on your hind legs, have your say, then vote, where everyone can see you. Then stick by the decision, whichever way it goes. Not whispering behind your hand, voting in private and stabbing your marra in the back. That's the way the men saw it. They told the "union leaders" no ballot, not the other way round. The programme makers had full knowledge of this fact, so why not use it? Is the ballot question so deeply ingrained in the folk myth of TV producers that they are incapable of hearing an alternative view on the subject? It would seem so.

Other key strategic issues are touched on, but not pursued. The overwhelming

vote of Nacods, the supervisors' union, to join the strike. Two votes, both of which returned two-thirds majority votes in favour. The Nacods action would shut every pit in Britain. It would end the scabbing, end the excuse to burn scab fuel - there would have been no new scab fuel, no scab trucks hauling it, no Notts scabs to distract us. It would have released at least 15,000 of our pickets, freed them from risk of injury and arrest and added perhaps another 5,000 Nacods members into the picket ranks. It would have silenced the propaganda of the press and TV. So the decision not to carry out the strike vote was crucial. Taken by whom? For what reason? At what cost?

Another example. Neil Kinnock tells us that he and Stan Orme came up with a plan which would have saved the bulk of the British coal industry and allowed development of all 'beneficial reserves'. The NCB accepted the plan. Scargill, we are told, turned it down flat. Untrue. Day by day we watched the negotiations until disagreement centred on a single word, 'beneficial', and how to resolve conflict over its meaning. It was MacGregor who walked away when Arthur swears everything was all but signed and sealed. The programme chooses not to chase this crucial period for hard facts, despite its central importance in answering the question, how close did we come to winning that strike?

It is clear the producer had decided from the outset that this would be a descriptive film, not an analytical one. It would present through the eyes of five pickets what happened, rather than explore why and what if.

That said, this film is of an altogether different quality than Channel 4's effort. It seeks not to thinly cover the whole canvas of events, but to make a tight focus on the lives and aspirations of five of the Hatfield miners. It follows the events of the strike through their eyes. Contemporary film brings home the intensity of the conflict - the body-and-soul commitment of ordinary folk to a just cause. It is intensely moving. That there are other stories not told by this film is obvious. The women's support groups, the women's flying pickets, the platform speakers, the fundraisers - their stories are not here. The fight for politics - against sexism, against sexist slogans - those discussions and joint learning by

a large section of the class are not here. Indeed we could fill this review with the real politics - racial questions, internationalism, class-consciousness, etc - which infused villages such as Hatfield but are not here. A new sense of class being built upon an already highly politicised workforce with a long history of left politics - we see none of that.

The camera focus is larger than life, but tightly focused at the same time. If this is the lens through which the film will be made, you could not have found five better representatives of the Doncaster miners than these. Hard, down-to-earth common sense; intelligent and articulate. They are the antithesis of the automations presented in the Channel 4 programme. These are the real lives behind the strike, the fabric of its existence. Listening to these men will perhaps allow this new generation, two decades on, to truly appreciate how the ordinary rank and file striker saw and experienced these monumental events. Feelings, insofar as it is possible to capture them on screen, are vividly projected here. In this sense the programme will remain a classic for years to come.

The question of class violence I thought was well presented and explained, as far as the lads were concerned, in a matter-of-fact manner, without glory or machismo. From the Brighton IRA bomb to the death of the scab-herding taxi driver, this was our side against theirs.

However, one item which went out with the programme cannot go unchallenged. This is the legend deriving from Harry, a former Hatfield branch treasurer, according to which I undertook some sort of pacifist deviation in the form of a mass sit-down at the top of the pit lane. Activists, including Harry, will know well my attitude to physical resistance during the strike, so I need not labour that one (actually the producer chose not to include the most violent parts of our resistance - maybe to protect us from prosecution). Harry, to be right, has always taken the piss out of me and the sit-down tactic, accusing me of 'peace, man' hippyism - although it has usually been tongue in cheek. Unfortunately the way BBC2 shot the resulting police charge and riot, straight after Harry's statement, made it look like I had somehow caused the assault on the miners and their families.

I claim a short, indulgent response here for the reason that certain unscrupulous groups on the left (and one in particular) may already have filed this story for future use against me, when the need comes up for the kind of political slander they often engage in. So, for the record, I never suggested the police would not attack because you were sitting down! I cut my teeth in the Tyneside Committee of 100 and numerous such sit-downs at nuclear bases, and the bumps on my head by the time I was 16 had led me to believe they would hit you with as much glee if you were sitting down as if you were standing up. So I had no illusions on that score and neither had anyone else.

No, what usually happened whenever we went to the pit gates in any numbers was the police would find some excuse to charge us and then a fight would happen while the scabs on the bus quietly slipped out of the gate almost without sight or sound of the pickets and the battles further up the pit lane.

The idea of the sit-down, just as the bus was setting off, was to force it to stop. The cops could not pick you up and carry you while they were gripping riot shields, so it was also planned to force them to lose some of their armour. The idea was to hold the scab bus as long as possible while they got some humpty for a change instead of the cops.

Of course, a combination of two things happened. The riot cops were still tooled up in the wings, and for some pickets bricking the cops was a hard habit to lose. When a few bricks went over, as the cops moved in to shift us, that was the cue for the snatch squads to charge into the crowd, many of whom were still sitting down. So, whatever else happened that day, I had an attack neither of pacifism nor naivety. One would have hoped in an otherwise excellent programme such a strong criticism

could have been balanced by an explanation from me as to what the idea was from my point of view. Perhaps they felt it was covered by my own strong comments on the death of the taxi driver a little later.

The contrast between the two films could not be more stark. BBC2 showed the close-up nuts and bolts of the action: the bedrock of the strike, the strikers themselves. Not foot-soldiers mindlessly obeying orders, but intelligent, sensitive members of the working class with a high degree of class consciousness, acting in their class interests. This was their strike - it belonged to them. The film will be a monument to class war and the struggle for a better world. For Channel 4 the old myth - Scargill, the Marxist with his own agenda, gerrymandered a strike, and Thatcher used the opportunity to take him on and smash a crack regiment of the working class. It was all about individuals and manipulation. A programme unworthy of the title 'documentary', it was instead a collage of *Sun* headlines and TV news bias.

Ironically today's Hatfield miners watched the BBC2 programme in a London hotel room, the night before their lobby of parliament in support of the adjournment debate calling for Hatfield colliery to be saved. Hatfield is now in administration, and the miners are still fighting for its survival, 20 years and two closures since the Great Strike of 1984-85. Their current journal *The Hatfield Collier* highlights two issues: one, the struggle to save their pit and the remainder of the industry; and, two, the fight for working class democracy within the union against bureaucracy.

Though now a microcosm of their former strength, the Hatfield miners have lost none of their vision ●

**Dave Douglass**  
branch secretary  
Hatfield NUM

## 20th anniversary Miners Gala

**Saturday May 1, 10.30am, Barnsley.**

**We urge all sections of the labour and trade union movement to join us. We urge *Weekly Worker* readers and our comrades on the far left to march with the Hatfield miners and their banner and band on that day.**

**CANNABIS**

# Send the right message - legalise all drugs!

**F**rom last week the UK state's 'war on drugs' took a new turn. Cannabis is no longer treated by the authorities as a 'class B' drug - like amphetamines/speed - but rather as a 'class C' one, a category which also covers substances like anabolic steroids and tranquillisers such as valium. This is the first significant revision to the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, which broke down drugs into three categories, with 'class A' containing things like cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and magic mushrooms (dried, fried or stewed).

So, spliff away?

Well, not exactly. Cannabis still remains illegal - it is just now a little less illegal, so to speak. It remains a criminal offence to pass marijuana among friends or to allow people to consume cannabis in your home. You must not smoke a joint near a school or children - this is defined as 'aggravated circumstances' and could lead you into hot water. The actual cultivation and growing of cannabis plants is prohibited. Unsurprisingly, possession with intent to supply ('dealing') is illegal and continues to carry a 14-year maximum sentence plus an unlimited fine.

What is new is that the penalty for simple possession is changing - the maximum prison sentence has been reduced from five years to two. Also, police guidelines are to be 'streamlined' in order to iron out all the 'discrepancies' which have arisen over the years concerning how all the various regional police forces deal with those caught in possession of cannabis. From now on theoretically those over 18 caught in possession will have it confiscated and get a flea in their ear from their friendly local bobby, while those under that age will be arrested, taken to a police station and given a stern warning or reprimand - and if it is your second offence you will either receive a final warning or actually be charged, with the added pleasure of being referred to the local youth offending team.

All in all, these new measures hardly radiate laid-back, 'do your own thing, man' libertarianism.

For all that, there were howls of outrage about the cannabis reclassification policy from the usual suspects - the British Medical Association, opportunist Tory MPs, tabloid newspapers, etc. Naturally, for them this 'sends out the wrong message' - that drugs are really not that bad, when the only 'right message' is that *all* drugs are evil *all* of the time: just say no, as Ronald Reagan and the cast of *Grange Hill* once notoriously said. Indeed, for these hard-core reactionaries, the reclassification of cannabis is yet another sign of the creeping 'permissive society' agenda that is being imposed on the long-suffering British people by bureaucrats and liberals. In this vein, the slightly potty ex-leftist Melanie Phillips thundered all last week in the *Daily Mail* about how successive UK governments have succumbed to "defeatism" - the 'war against drugs' should be intensified, not diminished!

Daftly, but somewhat predictably, the latest leader of the Tory Party, Michael Howard - who of course has never lit up a spliff in his life - has pledged to reverse the policy. Obviously, Howard can feel the warm glow of disapproval from 'Middle England' over the new cannabis laws - and the allure of potential votes. We shall see in due course whether this was a wise assessment.

In order to dispel the "confusion" surrounding last week's changes to the



**From 'class B' to 'class C': enjoy!**

cannabis laws, the home office launched a £1 million-pound advertising campaign designed to promote the "one simple message" - cannabis is harmful and remains illegal (so *almost* 'just say no' then?). This campaign has involved the distribution of 2.5 million leaflets and large adverts in the national press proclaiming: "Cannabis is still illegal - the police can arrest you"; and emphasising: "You will be arrested if you are aged 17 or under".

In addition to the literature and the ads, the government has produced radio adverts targeted specially at "the kids" - and, if the content of the ads are anything to go by, the home office doyens clearly think that this section of the population suffer from retarded development. In fact, the general tone of these ads were so patronising that they ended up being comical - indeed, you could be forgiven for thinking that you were listening an extract from an episode of Chris Morris's great surreal-flavoured TV series, *Brass eye*.

Foolishly attempting to speak to 'yoof' on their own terms, the government got obviously hard-up actors to intone a series of supposed slang names for cannabis. Calling on young adults to visit the government's "Frank" education website on drug misuse/abuse, a woman actor intones: "Marijuana, ashes, African, bazooka, blonde, blue sage, bud, broccoli, brown, buddha, bullyon, cheeba, Colombian, Don Juan, hash, J, jive stick, jolly green, kiff, killer, Panama gold, parsley, roach, straw, wheat, Texas T, locoweed. Call it what you like; just don't call it legal." Then we get a male voice which solemnly reminds us that cannabis is "still illegal, still harmful, and you can still get a criminal record that may affect your future career or holiday plans".

Excuse me - "jive sticks"? "Don Juan"? "Bazooka"? "Broccoli"? Aren't roaches the small bit of rolled cardboard placed at the smoking end of the spliff to prevent you from swallowing tobacco, not the actual drug itself? Even worse - or more hilariously, depending upon your point of view - each word has been dramatically clipped, so that the next one begins just before its predecessor ends, creating a juddery alien effect - almost exactly like the famous drug episode of *Brass eye*, where Morris's over-the-top style of delivery is used to used to demonstrate how appalling ignorant those who agitate loudest for a 'war on drugs' actually are. Morris even managed to get David Amess, the Conservative MP for Southend West, to film an elaborate video warning against the dangers of a fictional eastern European drug called "cake" - which purportedly affects an area of the brain called the "Shatner's bassoon". Unbelievably, Amess went

as far as to ask a question about "cake" in parliament. With its £1 million-pound advertising campaign, the government has managed a brilliant self-parody - and revealed its utter vacuity into the bargain.

David Blunkett has his supporters of course. *The Guardian* proposed that a good policy would be "to allow experts - medics, pharmacologists, treatment specialists - to place drugs into the three categories of harmfulness that the Misuse of Drugs Act of 1971 set out. This is the road which, to his credit, the home secretary is following" (January 24).

Presumably then a self-appointed expertocracy should preside over the UK's drugs laws - not very reassuring, seeing the complete hash they made of it in 1971. Interestingly, the current chairman of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, Sir Michael Rawlins - also a professor of pharmacology at Newcastle University - has admitted that the "experts" are not always to be trusted. Commenting on the original 1971 reclassification decision, he said: "The basis on which it did it nobody knows. The records do not explain why. The basis on which any of the things were classified is obscure from reading the minutes. They won't tell you."

In other words, the 'war on drugs' was not launched on the basis of science and rationalism, but was a political decision shaped by the interests and concerns of the British ruling class. Not very far away in the United States, a whole generation had been traumatised, and simultaneously radicalised, by the horrors of the imperialist war in Vietnam and the continuing - sometimes heroic - fight for civil rights. Rebellion was in the air, revolutionary sentiment in the wings. Inevitably, this emerging 'counter-culture' spread even to stodgy old imperial Britain with its monarchical pomp-and-circumstances and *Carry on* films. Alarmed, 'official' Britain needed a crack-down on the 'children of 68'.

Recently released official government papers show how this desire by establishment forces to launch a 'war on drugs' impacted on the modern-talking Harold Wilson government - which, we must not forget, was regarded in some circles as a dangerously subversive administration with distinctly communist leanings (certainly the view taken by the likes of Lord Mountbatten, so beloved by his nephew, Prince Charles).

These state papers confirm that there was a fierce tussle between the 'students' and non-students in the cabinet over cannabis and drugs classification in general. The outcome was that the ascendant 'student' faction was on the verge of getting the then home secretary, Jim Callaghan, to introduce Blunkett-style reforms which, in the words of the



cabinet minutes, would embody the view that "a sharp distinction between the penalties for possession of cannabis and heroin would discourage users of cannabis experimenting with the more dangerous drug". However, the plans were leaked to *The Guardian* and, collapsing under the weight of establishment and press fury, Wilson gave his blessing instead to a maximum five-year sentence for cannabis possession and an unlimited fine - draconian sanctions which remained unaltered until last week.

In other words, the battles that raged around drugs in this period were a debate about the degree of *social control* which the UK state and its multifarious agents can and should exert over its subjects. What was true in 1970-71 remains true in 2004.

Clearly, the recent hullabaloo over cannabis reclassification has served perfectly to expose the fundamentally irrational nature of this 'war' - indeed, it illustrates how the whole debate around drugs in general more often than not generates a sound and fury that normally signifies ignorance and prejudice.

Take cannabis specifically. Here is a drug that *millions* of people take on a regular basis - it is estimated that some 50% of young adults enjoy the recreational smoking of cannabis. Are all these people plunged into a *Trainspotting*-type hell when they light up? Yet in the process of policing the absurd and anti-social drugs laws, each year there are 300,000 stop-and-searches and some 90,000 people are arrested - and effectively turned into criminals. Their offence? The heinous act of *enjoying* themselves and *not* getting into a lager-fuelled fight on a Friday night. The double irony of course is that if alcohol and tobacco were made illegal from midnight tonight and reclassified accordingly, then they could well find themselves falling into 'class A' (imagine the number of police and prisons you would need).

However, far from reducing, if not actually resolving, the contradictions and tensions that underpin the UK's drugs laws, Blunkett's 'rationalisation' has only helped to *exacerbate* them. The Police Federation, for instance, has highlighted one of the most obvious absurdities of the new law - why is cannabis using still an arrestable offence, unlike virtually all the other 'class C' drugs? When was the last time you heard of the police raiding a 'valium den', or arresting an over-zealous body-builder who had indulged in too many anabolic steroids?

On January 30 there was a stand-off in Leith, Edinburgh, between the police and drugs campaigners/users - including leading comrades from the Scottish Socialist Party - outside the Purple Haze cafe, a self-declared 'non-smoking' pri-

vate cannabis club. Three police officers stood outside the cafe doors handing out letters which 'clarified' the new law to those eager to sign up for membership (including comrade Tommy Sheridan). By the end of the day three people had been arrested, two of them on the grounds that they had been "seen smoking cannabis on the premises". Afterwards, the cafe's owner, Paul Stewart, declared that his intention had not been to sell cannabis - only to highlight what he claimed to be the different ways the new drugs laws were being implemented on different sides of the border.

Communists call unequivocally for the immediate legalisation of cannabis - not its "decriminalisation", as recommended by *The Observer* (January 25) and others. There should be absolutely no stigma attached to the taking of cannabis. But we also call for the legalisation of *all* drugs - 'soft', 'hard' and all ports of call in between. This is the *real* 'right-on' and non-confused, non-mixed message to send out.

In this respect, the post-Purple Haze affair comments by comrade Kevin Williamson - the SSP's drugs spokesperson and self-appointed expert on biogenetics, anthropology and gender studies - were disappointing. Far from calling for the legalisation of all drugs, SSP policy is for the 'hard' variety to remain illegal in an 'independent socialist Scotland'. This side of independence, the SSP, in the words of comrade Williamson, is "calling on the executive, the police forces and the local authorities to create Scottish-wide cannabis-tolerant zones until our parliament has the powers to change the law" (*The Scotsman* January 29). In other words, the all-UK bourgeois state should be more lenient to Scottish users/takers than English ones.

As any serious examination of the subject quickly reveals, criminalising drugs and hence drug-users only exaggerates any potential problems tenfold - pushing users to the margins of society and into the hands of usually less than scrupulous professional criminals (or perhaps even worse, desperate amateurs). Self-evidently, it is the *adulteration* of drugs by so many profit-hungry 'pushers' which is one of the biggest causes of severe ill-health, damage and death. Legalisation would bring with it quality control, while at the same time putting the drug gangs out of business overnight.

Alternatively the state could continue to herd users into overcrowded prisons - true drugs free-for-all zones if ever there were any, where you could be taking almost *anything* (though probably not delicious Mexican wild cap mushrooms, fried in a light garlic sauce). An open, honest, non-punitive culture and society will produce a genuinely scientific and humanistic 'hierarchy of harm' when it comes to education about drugs - as opposed to the bogus science, pseudo-education and hysterical moralism we have to endure at the moment.

Drug misuse is a social problem that needs social answers. We have been swallowing, eating, smoking, snorting, etc psychoactive drugs since the dawn of humanity and there is absolutely no reason to believe that this will change in the foreseeable future - if ever. We need to humanise and socialise drug taking/using, just as we need to humanise and socialise *all* aspects of human and societal relationships ●

**Eddie Ford**

# Walk on two legs

Mark Fischer reports on a debate that concerns the whole left

Workers Action - a small, critically-minded Trotskyist group that currently works in the Labour Party - hosted an important debate on Sunday February 1. Titled 'Which way forward for the Labour left and the trade unions?', the meeting brought together around 20 comrades from a variety of backgrounds to listen to platform speakers Graham Bash (editorial board, *Labour Left Briefing*), Pete Firmin (WA) and Martin Thomas (Alliance for Workers' Liberty).

Comrade Bash was perhaps a little harsh when he described the line-up as a "Trot version of *Last of the summer wine*", but the problem he pointed to was real enough. New Labour's crisis has thrown into relief the crisis of the left, he suggested. This manifested itself both inside and outside the party.

Internally, the left remained small, fragmented and its inert nature unchallenged by last year's mass anti-war movement. Externally the situation was largely the same, with the added problem that this extra-Labour left criminally wasted its not inconsiderable energies and talents in a project that was "doomed" because of the intrinsic "nature of the Labour Party itself". It was "futile", comrade Bash stated bluntly, to attempt "to build an electoral alternative to New Labour" - a project that was for him a "key error".

Instead, the task must be "to realise, not destroy, the trade union and working class base of the Labour party". In this struggle, the key allies were to be found on the left - internally and externally. In particular, the comrade identified the need to find "conduits" that could channel the energy, anger and elemental force of developments like the anti-war movement into the party.

Pete Firmin did not add that much to the central points made by comrade Bash - both seemed quite surprised at their level of agreement. He did correctly point to the fact that much of the left - or the "ultra-left", as he referred to comrades outside the Labour Party - "underestimated" the levels of passivity and the low levels of consciousness amongst wide sections of the class.

From this, he drew a similar conclusion to Graham Bash's - that much of this left had a cramped vision of building an alternative to Blair's party. The "narrow concentration" of the Socialist Alliance and the new Respect formation on an electoral challenge to Labour is a no-hoper and distorts the true picture of political alignment on the left. For example, in the unions, comrade Firmin said, "the ultra-left" does not necessary "stand to the left of those in the Labour Party".

In his opening, Martin Thomas usefully reminded the meeting that disaffection with and disengagement from Labour was not the exclusive preserve of what comrades had rather glibly referred to as the "ultra-left". The RMT's position was instructive, he suggested. This is a real workers' organisation, not a small sect. And the summer conference of the firefighters' union looks set to follow the railworkers' lead.

Things have clearly changed and "history cannot be rewound". The channels of democratic debate in the party had been "clogged up", he said. This is slightly less final than the "concreted over" analogy I have heard AWLers use to justify their extra-LP work in the past, but Martin was still keen to stress that fundamental things about Labour *had* changed. Its open, federal structures had gone. The situation where even a small group like the AWL could force a conference debate every year had disappeared: now the RMT cannot even get a discussion on vital questions such as the war.

Left life in the unions was reviving, but very slowly and unevenly, he correctly noted. Therefore, comrades should be mindful of what the last year or so of British politics had taught us - "there are different paces and tempos to different strands of the movement". While the fight to get the unions to reassert themselves within Labour remains a key task

for the reconstitution of working class politics, should revolutionaries effectively boycott the tens of thousands of new activists drawn into struggle by the anti-war movement? Surely the task was to intersect with these new fighters, to equip them with an effective programme and orientate them to the workers' movement.

There was much to agree with in comrade Thomas' contribution, particularly his comments on the experiences of the left outside Labour. He pointed to the electoral successes of Lutte Ouvrière and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire in France. He cited the limited breakthroughs of the Scottish Socialist Party. The problem in England and Wales was "the *politics* of the revolutionary left". The Socialist Alliance had been "criminally mismanaged" by the Socialist Workers Party, he said. Exactly.

Much of the debate that followed reflected the high level of formal agreement the main speakers had displayed. However, the key problem for most LP comrades was the question of *electoral* challenges to Labour. Comrade Firmin suggested that challenging Labour in the ballot box effectively constituted worthy initiatives like the SA as "a barrier", not a "link" for activists in the party. Comrade Bash underlined this idea in his summing up - it was "not possible to build a mass electoral alternative to Labour", as that historical 'space' simply did not exist. Thus, we had to be "'outside' in one sense, but *not* on the electoral level", the comrade stressed.

I backed up many of the points made by comrade Thomas in my contribution, but expanded on a critical aspect of the SWP's 'mismanagement' of the SA. Its attitude to Labour was a crippling weakness. Since its lurch towards electoralism, the SWP had shifted from auto-Labourism ('Vote Labour, but ...') to an almost punk auto-anti-Labourism. I reminded comrades that the CPGB had fought in the SA for a tactically nuanced orientation to Labour candidates. Such an approach could be as varied as critical support on an agreed minimum platform, support for other working class candidates, standing our own or even - inconceivable given the current configuration of forces in Labour, of course - blanket support.

Comrades were wrong to equate building an "electoral alternative" with block-headed opposition to every Labour candidate - left, right or centre - on the basis of some prissy moralism. I cited the example of Hackney SA. Here CPers had fought a long battle against

the stance of local SWPers. These comrades were prepared to vote against Campaign Group MP Diane Abbott (and *for* a local Green!) simply on the basis that she was a member of "bomber Blair's" party. This sort of guilt by association method has no place in serious working class politics.

We had to "walk on two legs", I suggested - both inside *and* outside Labour. That *had* to include the tactical possibility of direct electoral challenges to Labour, not simply work in the trade unions or in what comrade Firmin called "united fronts" like campaigns to defend asylum-seekers or against privatisation, etc.

The dilemma of comrades who argue against *any* electoral challenge to Labour was illustrated by a light-hearted exchange between comrade Bash and myself. During his summing up, I heckled him. A recent front page and editorial in *Briefing* had dubbed Blair a "war criminal" - what would the comrade do if the prime minister was opposed by an anti-war candidate at the next general election? Would he vote for the official Labour candidate - a *war criminal*?

Comrade Bash good-naturedly brushed off my interjection with the comment: "Like what I do in the privacy of my bedroom, what I do in the privacy of ballot box is my own affair." No argument about the bedroom of course, but revolutionaries *have* to make very public what they intend to do in the ballot box and what they call on others to do. So the question for Graham is not so much what he would do if Blair *were* to be challenged - despite his joking, the comrade made that abundantly clear - but *should* he be confronted in the ballot box?

If yes, what about all the other cravenly pro-war wretches on Labour benches? Then what tactics should we have to the marshy middle ground, the vacillators? Should we just advocate an automatic vote for these spineless wonders simply by dint of the fact that they are Labour candidates - or should support have strings attached? And ditto the left of the party, of course. Contributions in the meeting which cited the distinctly dodgy recent voting record of Campaign Group MPs underlined that these are - at best - inconsistent allies.

Clearly, there is huge confusion inside the Labour Party and outside about how to fight New Labour, what are principled tactics for revolutionaries in relation to Blair's party. This key debate must be had, however. We need more meetings like this useful discussion staged by Workers Action ●

## Fighting fund

# Challenge

"Mindful of the financial appeal in the last *Weekly Worker*," writes comrade NB, "I have increased the standing order which I currently pay as a subscription to the paper." The comrade has doubled his contribution to £12 a quarter, paid in monthly instalments of £4.

"I know it's not a huge increase," he continues, "but I am still a member of the SWP with all the financial obligations that entails. Nevertheless I have found the *Weekly Worker* a valuable source of information and I welcome its polemical character, whether or not I agree with it all."

And *we* welcome both your kind words and the increased donation. Yes, an extra £2 a month is not a vast amount, but if all those with standing orders did the same it would make a tremendous difference to our £500 monthly fund. And, as I keep saying, if just a few of the thousands who read us each week gratis on

the web were to chip in with donations, it would be an enormous help. Last week we had 10,541 hits. I would be more than happy with £1 from each one of them!

A challenge then. Are there 20 readers out there in cyberspace prepared to offer £5 per month? Either donate through our PayPal facility or email me and I will send you a standing order form. And of course those who take the printed version are not barred from taking up the challenge either.

Last month ended with a surplus of £85, thanks to gifts from KP (£25), MN and FT (£20 each). This month has started slowly with just three donations: £30 from JG, plus an extra tenner from both SW and JH, who added it to their annual subs. Thanks a lot, comrades. We start February with £50 towards our target ●

Robbie Rix

Ask for a bankers order form, or send  
cheques, payable to Weekly Worker

# 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 ready 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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# weekly Worker

Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

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**Convention of  
Trade Union Left:  
Saturday 7 11am,  
Friends Meeting  
House, London**

## Don't break the link

**T**he Rail, Maritime and Transport union is facing summary expulsion from the Labour Party. Unless its Scottish region drops support for the Scottish Socialist Party the Blairite axe will come down. On Friday February 6, RMT representatives meet in Glasgow to decide their response. They are not expected to climb down. So it is quite likely that this union - which helped found the Labour Party in 1900 - will be thrown out in 2004 for daring to endorse socialist candidates who support its policy on safety and public ownership of the railways.

Clearly, the debate around trade union affiliation to Labour and the question of working class representation is no mere invention of the Marxist left. Not just RMT, but just about every major union has been debating the link with Labour.

The aim of the February 7 Convention of the Trade Union Left, initiated by the Socialist Alliance, ought to be about providing some clarity around the issues raised by the delabourisation of Labour. Yet the event is likely to be no more than a rally with very little by way of serious discussion. The highlight of the day is billed as a debate between Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS civil servants union and prominent supporter of Respect, and Billy Hayes, general secretary of the Communication Workers Union, a keen advocate of 'reclaiming' Labour. However, I understand that brother Hayes will not be turning up. Various unsatisfactory explanations - from pressure within his union to forgetting his son's birthday - have been mentioned.

The opening session will consist of keynote speeches (ie, a rally), then, after what now looks like being a rather one-sided debate, a final rallying session in the afternoon. Not an inspired agenda. Discussion will be pinched. Despite this, the fact that the convention is taking place at all has caused difficulty for some union bureaucrats. Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison, the public sector union, has issued threats against branches and regions sending delegates to the convention, notably the London regional committee.

Divisions in RMT are particularly sharp. There is a left versus left and right split. Non-Labourites face a united bloc of Labourites. The standing orders committee was due to meet on Thursday February 5 to decide the final agenda for its Glasgow conference the following day. It is still not clear whether motions will be taken from branches, since the executive has not, at the time of writing, published its proposals. However, Camden No1 branch, home of Pat Sikorski, deputy general secretary, has submitted a motion insisting that, while the RMT does not wish to leave the Labour Party, it should not reverse its decision. It is likely that the RMT executive will propose a similar stance. Quite correct in my view.

The struggle in RMT will provide a dramatic backdrop to the convention on Saturday. No doubt Bob Crow, RMT general secretary, should he speak, will get a deserved standing ovation. Yet any triumphalism over the outcome of the RMT conference will be misplaced. While the expulsion of unions from the Labour Party

brings dramatic opportunities, without the foundation of a serious working class alternative it can also pull the labour movement towards dangerous waters. Comrade Crow has previously endorsed non-working class candidates, from Plaid Cymru to the Greens. It remains unclear what the RMT stance will be regarding the left populist Respect coalition.

Many in the Socialist Alliance have proposed a campaign for union disaffiliation from Labour - a position previously held by the Socialist Workers Party before it agreed to go along with the correct tactic of demanding the democratisation of union political funds. The left nationalists of the SSP argue for breaking the link, as does Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party. Nick Wrack, SA chair, has said he would not have opposed disaffiliation of the Fire Brigades Union had Andy Gilchrist summoned the courage to hold an annual conference last year. They are all wrong.

Here lies the danger. Over the past decade, the left has failed to form a coherent and united organisation that is able to do long, patient and consistent work in the unions, in working class communities and in the Labour Party. The SA was deliberately held back as an electoral front and prevented from fulfilling that role. Now the SWP looks set on killing off the alliance and attempting a short cut to electoral success that will most likely be a dead end.

In these circumstances calling for disaffiliation is tactically foolish. Worse, it is another desperate attempt to *bypass* the Labour Party. It does not engage with one of the central struggles facing the working class - the overcoming of Labourism: ie, bourgeois ideology in the workers' movement.

The trade union convention comes at an interesting time. The decline of Blairism is well underway. Teflon Tone is no more. Backbench MPs do not see the premier as an absolute necessity in keeping their seats. Indeed many view him as a liability. Alongside this there is discontent in the unions. Not only in the RMT, but also in the FBU, CWU, TGWU, Amicus and Unison. The rank and file and sections of the bureaucracy are deeply disaffected with the deal they are getting from New Labour.

It is unfortunate that the Socialist Alliance majority has plumped for a populist electoral coalition at this stage. Such a formation is unlikely to develop into a working class political party, though this cannot be ruled out completely. Had this convention taken place with the Socialist Alliance united around a platform for independent working class representation, our case would be far stronger. Even so, our arguments would not simply be 'Come and join us'. Ours must be a many-faceted struggle: in the unions, in the workplaces, in the localities, in the Labour Party, in the ballot box.

The SWP and its International Socialist Group poodle do not have the necessary politics. Formerly auto-Labourites, they have flipped into auto-anti-Labourites - a development which has led directly to the pursuit of a broader, classless, non-socialist electoral bloc.

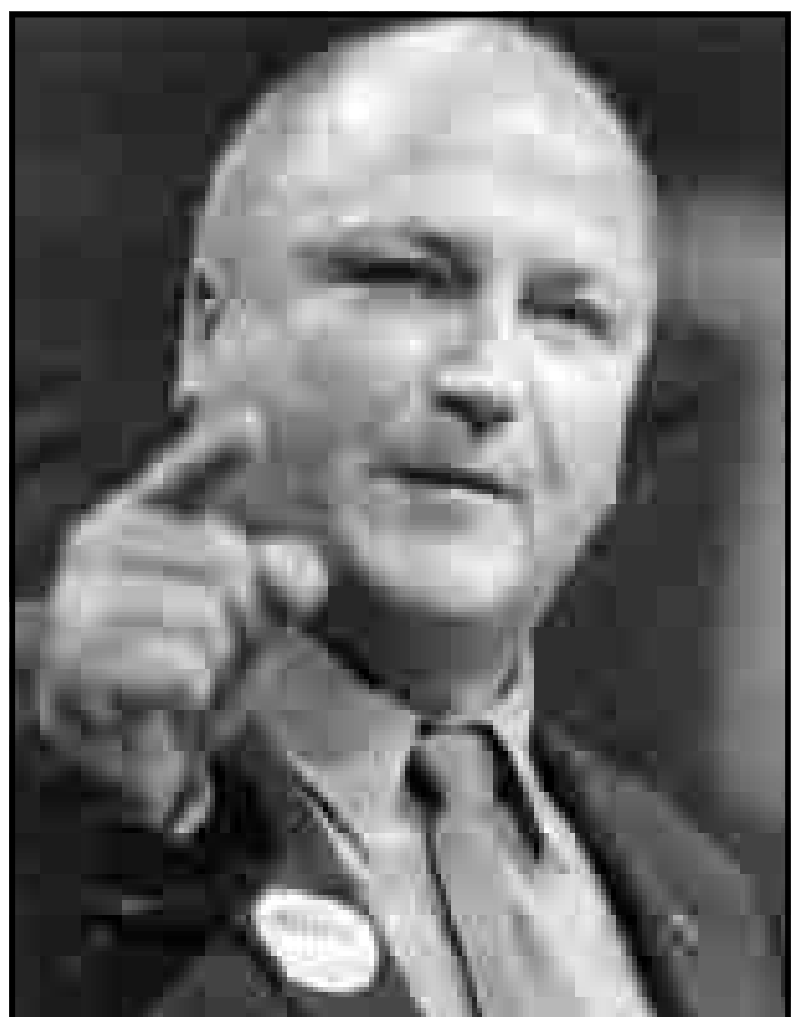
So we now have Respect. Rather than a positive engagement with the Labour

left and Labour's mass base, the SWP and ISG are increasingly treating the Labour left as *simply* part of the problem, not part of the solution too. Even before the days of Respect, an unsigned editorial in *Resistance* (presumably written by comrade Alan Thornett) said: "The [Socialist] Alliance needs to prove itself and to develop a credible presence if it is to make the gains that it should, and to play the role it should in opening the way to a new working class party. There is competition: already there are signs that the huge [anti-war] movement that began on the streets is having an impact on layers of the Labour Party: the Campaign Group of left MPs, until now little seen or heard under pressure from the Blairite machine, have called for Blair's removal as leader and for pro-war MPs to be deselected - and even urged people to join the Labour Party to promote this campaign" (*Resistance* April 2003).

In short the comrade views the growth of the Labour left as a *competitive pressure* for Marxists organised outside the Labour Party rather than as an encouraging sign. The SWP sings from the same hymn sheet. Struggle in the Labour Party is a diversion. On Ken Livingstone's readmission to Labour, Alex Callinicos said: "he is swimming against the political stream, as larger and larger elements of the left regroup outside the Labour Party" (*Socialist Worker* January 24).

This is fantasy politics. Respect contains the SWP and its new allies but hardly counts as a new mass force. Even if it were, it would be a profound mistake to boycott or stand aloof from the internal struggles in the Labour Party. In this week's plebiscite on Livingstone's candidacy as mayor, 94% of London Labour members voted to support him. Not something to ignore.

Compare Callinicos's approach with the more considered thoughts of George Galloway. He said: "No progress on the left is going to be possible that does not win the hearts and minds of Labour's members and - most importantly - its voters. Labour retains the electoral alliance of perhaps 10 million or more British people - the major-



**Bob Crow: endorsed non-working class candidates**

ity of them working people whose families have often supported this party for generations. So, an acerbic, sectarian approach to Labour and its supporters is not only wrong: it is counterproductive ... We should not allow a false dichotomy to be created. If outside Labour a progressive, mass left burgeons and starts to score successes, that can only have the effect of strengthening the left inside the party. It will encourage people to pull the plug on Blair and the New Labour clique" (*Weekly Worker* December 4 2003).

Clearly he wants to leave open the possibility of triumphantly returning to

Labour's fold. Nevertheless he is right to insist that a mass movement *will* find reflection in the strengthening of the Labour left. Instead of bemoaning that fact and issuing empty appeals to jump ship, we need a strategy to defeat not just New Labour, but *Labourism*. The SWP does not even recognise that need. The central point here is that struggle in the Labour Party and the unions and struggle outside the Labour Party is not a counterposed dichotomy. The Socialist Alliance majority have never grasped this point and that hardly bodes well for Respect ●

**Marcus Ström**

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