



weekly **worker**



**Lula's neoliberalism: the
nationalism and economism
of the Brazilian left**

- Graham Bash
- Funding Labour?
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- ESF and Livingstone

No 515

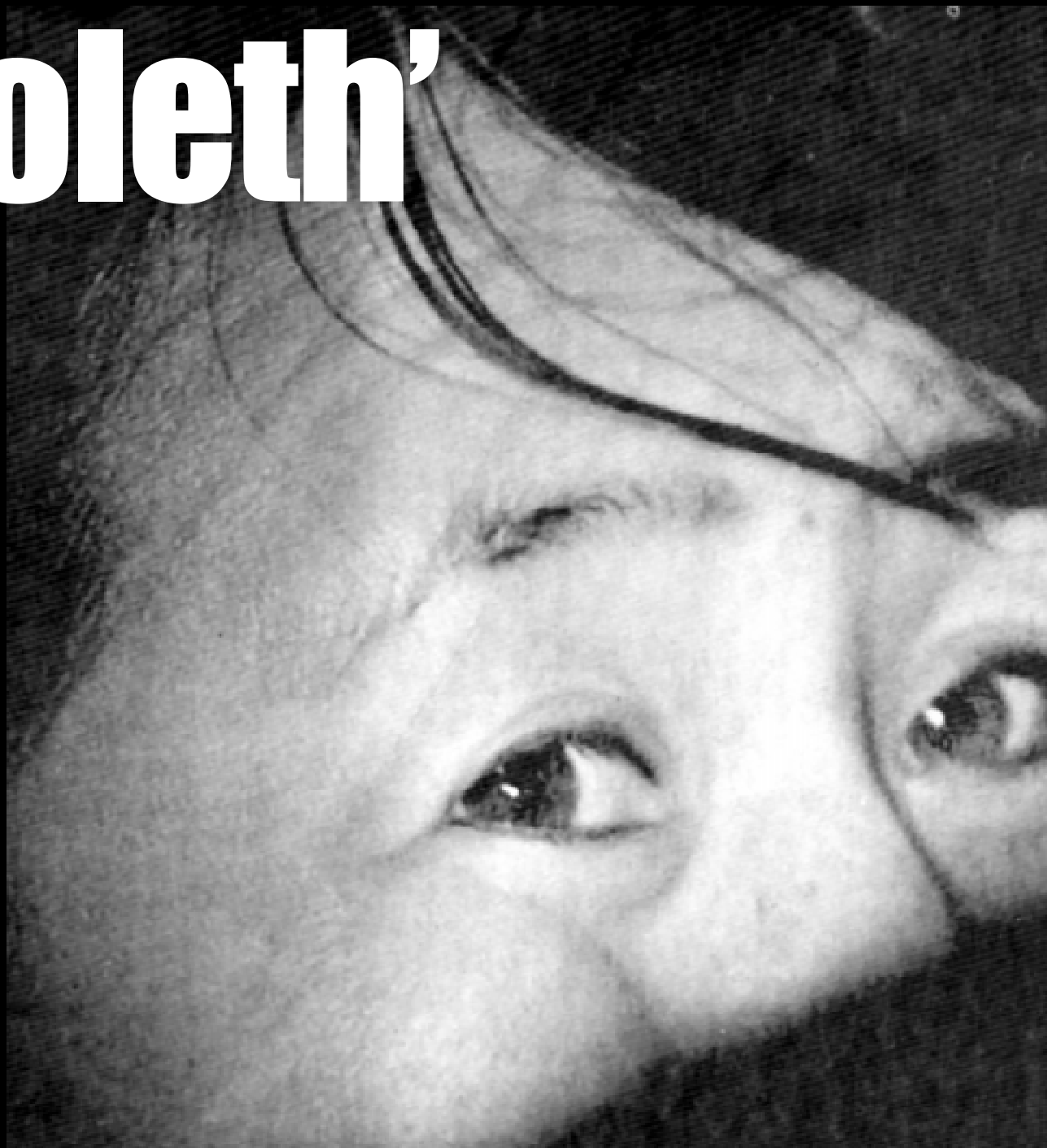
Thursday February 12 2004

Towards a new workers' party

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Why open borders are more than a mere 'shibboleth'



LETTERS



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

Engagement?

It seems to me that the CPGB's 'critical engagement' with Respect could cover a multitude of sins - and perhaps the phrase has been chosen for this very ambiguity.

It could mean simply using a Respect membership card as a way into meetings, in order to argue for the politics that the working class needs and which Respect is a definite turn away from supplying. This wouldn't differ terribly much from what the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has decided to do from outside Respect.

But 'critical engagement' could equally mean enthusiastically endorsing the project, while criticising its leadership. In the Socialist Alliance, the CPGB as well as the AWL campaigned for Socialist Alliance candidates - indeed stood our own candidates under the SA banner, while criticising the majority leadership.

Will the CPGB be standing/supporting Respect candidates in the June elections? Since the entire purpose of the unity coalition is as an electoral coalition, this seems quite an important question to answer. It may be that CPGB comrades have differing answers to that question. Marcus Ström, for instance: "We shall energetically work in Respect and seek a wider audience there for what is needed: a mass working class alternative to both Labourism and the non-class politics of populism ('John Rees airbrushes out history', January 29).

This sounds to me not very different from the approach taken to the SA. But other comrades seem to emphasise the 'critical' part of 'critical engagement'. Since the AWL was accused of 'sitting on the fence' in relation to the issue of the French veil ban, can we now expect to see the *Weekly Worker* owning up to sitting on the fence over Respect?

Given the elections are a few months away and candidates are already being selected - George Galloway and John Rees in that particularly Respect-ful form of democracy known as the 'behind-closed-doors stitch-up' - it would seem quite urgent to 'get off the fence'. Will the CPGB be supporting Respect candidates or arguing for the SA to run under its own banner? Are there minimum terms for support for Respect?

Gerry Byrne
AWL

Resting

The conclusion of the article 'John Rees airbrushes out history' was that of the editorial team and not my own. It read: "We shall, of course, strive to coordinate with those individual socialists who remain in the SA. But communists have no wish to haggle over a corpse. We shall energetically work in Respect and seek a wider audience there for what is needed: a mass working class alternative to both Labourism and the non-class politics of populism."

It is clear that the Socialist Workers Party is killing the Socialist Alliance in order to pursue its left populist turn in Respect. Apart from a dozen or so branches, the SA is inactive. In those active branches, the SWP is passing motions opposing standing candidates in the June local elections in order to pursue the Respect campaign alone. There will be a handful of branches in which non-SWP forces have a majority.

I said in my article that John Rees's speech at Respect was his epitaph for the SA. John Molyneux writes in *Socialist Review*: "The Socialist Alliance was created for this purpose [to stand in elections], but it is plain, despite the odd good result, such as Michael Lavalette's victory in Preston, that it is

not up to the task. The Socialist Alliance is not linked in people's minds with the opposition to the war and is not distinguishable on the ballot paper, except to a small minority, from any sect that can afford a deposit" (January). It seems that, for the SWP, the SA is no more. It has ceased to be. It is not even pining for the fjords. It is unlikely the SWP will gracefully leave the SA to those that may wish to use it for socialist activity.

It is quite right that communists should join Respect to gain a hearing for our politics and to expose the shortcomings of the SWP's misguided turn. Yet the CPGB should remain in touch and work with those comrades not following our lead into Respect and who are not as yet ready to join our own ranks. The place for that contact is still within what remains of the Socialist Alliance.

Hence, my original conclusion, in part, read: "Those in the alliance pursuing an independent working class perspective must seek unity to expose the SWP-led liquidation of the Socialist Alliance. The revivalist euphoria of the SWP is likely to turn sour on June 11 when George Galloway's promised one million votes do not materialise. Then we will need to seek a relaunch of a project for serious unity of the socialist left and the working class, if not the Socialist Alliance itself."

The Socialist Alliance as was is dead. Where comrades remain organised through the Socialist Alliance, they should continue as such. Where they can stand credible campaigns for the local elections, they should do so. However, comrades should also join us in Respect and seek an audience for our politics of consistent democracy and revolutionary socialism.

Marcus Ström
London

SWP cult

The SWP is a cult. The shouting down of AWL members trying to defend important socialist principles such as a worker on a worker's wage at the recent Respect (how ironic!) conference is the living proof. The courageous SWP members in Liverpool and elsewhere who went against their central committee opportunist diktat on this issue should leave it and become better socialists as a result.

It's in nobody's selfish interest to be a member of a cult. And it's certainly not in the interests of the working class. The SWP did the same thing to me, as I complained about their undemocratic methods at a conference on the war in Kosovo a few years ago in Edinburgh.

The other lesson is the necessity for the rest of the far left to be hard on the SWP for this authoritarian intolerance. Otherwise they will continue to get away with it. Their actions are partly driven by fear of alternative views carrying more weight than theirs, but also a belief that they can get away with this stuff and that does not reflect very well on the rest of the far left.

A truly democratic socialist social system can only be brought about by a genuinely democratic far left.

Peter Burton
Edinburgh

SA opt-out

At Sheffield Socialist Alliance's most recent, and well attended, meeting unsurprisingly we discussed Respect and its impact on the future of the alliance.

Most of the discussion went along very similar lines to that within the *Weekly Worker*, and at the launch convention (which one SWP comrade argued must have had a far wider attendance than just the "old left" - because if the SWP had been able to fill that hall on their own, well, we'd be

almost at the point of revolution! Funny, I thought the SWP claimed 10,000 members).

The discussion was framed around two motions - one saying that Respect does not negate the need for a Socialist Alliance and that we should still stand in wards in the local elections where possible; and one saying that we would put *all* our energies and resources into Respect in the European elections.

The arguments for the latter were that we don't have enough bodies to do both (untrue, as around half Sheffield SA activists are very unlikely to support Respect, especially now), that it would be confusing and contradictory to be arguing for candidates from different organisations (no more so than saying, 'We don't care about local councils') and that the Euros are far more important and could change British politics forever (you know, like the UK Independence Party did when they won three seats). The latter motion prevailed by nine votes to eight, with all the SWP members voting for the SA to stand down, and everyone else voting for us to continue.

Hopefully other areas will not be repeating the mistakes the local SWP have forced upon Sheffield SA - mistakes that will allow the Greens and the BNP a free run on June 10.

Richard Belbin
Sheffield

Real task

Jack Conrad and James York are profoundly mistaken for believing that exposing the SWP's sectarianism and opportunism is the most important task facing communists and revolutionary socialists in Britain today (*Weekly Worker* February 5). Why expend yet more time, money and other resources chasing after these Stalinoid hooray Henriets?

George Galloway and his cohorts have unintentionally helped the SWP destroy the SA. As a consequence, the *real* immediate task facing communists and revolutionary socialists is to help found a leftwing alternative to Respect - an alliance where the principles of revolution, republicanism and socialism are not horse-traded by opportunists, sectarians and careerists.

Philip Maguire
Wolverhampton

Alternative

I am writing to correct a small but critical error in Mark Fischer's report on a debate between myself, Pete Firmin and Martin Thomas ('Walk on two legs', January 29).

It was reported that I said it was futile to attempt to build an electoral alternative to New Labour. I did not say that. I said it was futile to try to build an electoral alternative to the Labour Party.

I have put forward the view on several occasions that the reason for the failure to build an electoral alternative to the Labour Party is not the side-show of what the Socialist Workers Party has been up to, but the centrality of the Labour Party itself - whose continued existence, whose historical political expression of the British working class and whose base of a unified trade union structure - together with the 'first past the post' electoral system - is the reason why there has never been any serious split-off from or serious electoral alternative to the Labour Party.

I do not accept, nor do I believe, that it is futile to try to build an electoral alternative to New Labour. The logic of my position is quite obvious: that the electoral alternative to New Labour must be built from within the Labour Party itself. Comrades must distinguish between New Labour, the explicitly pro-capitalist controlling faction of the Labour Party, and the Labour Party itself which is, however weak and at present feeble, a distorted and bureaucratised political expression of the working class.

Graham Bash
email

Priorities

In his reply to my clarification, Mark Fischer exposes the problem with the modern communist left (Letters, February 5). He is grieving for the massive defeats of the working class in the last century.

Surely it is clear that working class militants of 21st century Britain cannot continue to carry the failed ideological baggage of the past? Marxist-Leninist parties didn't save the working class in times of massive class struggle, and they won't save them now. We are living in post-industrial Britain, not semi-feudal Russia. We must think in the here and now.

Without doubt, the Independent Working Class Association has done more to strengthen working class consciousness in the various regions it has been active than the Socialist Alliance ever has (except perhaps in the mosques of Preston!).

And why? Because they address the issues identified by working class people to be their immediate priorities - whether it is anti-social behaviour, drug-dealing, mugging, housing, mobile phone masts, miscarriages of justice or privatisation of services. Working class people actually come out of their homes and join IWCA demonstrations, pickets and patrols of crime hotspots.

What do the left have to offer? 'Wait until after the revolution, brother!' We don't have that long!

Mick O'Conaill
email

Legalisation

After reading Eddie Ford's article calling for the legalisation of all drugs, I must say that I agree (*Weekly Worker* February 5).

The police and healthcare officials claim that drugs can have adverse effects, but then again that's what is said about the use of mobile phones. In the 1960s cannabis was widely used by people such as the infamous 'hippies'. Even famous people such as prince Harry have smoked drugs and not had any bad reactions related to it. One police officer recently sparked debate when he claimed that if drugs were on the market for £1 drug dealers would lose business resulting in less crime.

I agree with this. Some countries offer addicts free drugs to keep them from committing crimes and it has worked, but the United Kingdom has clearly not agreed to this. Even former police commissioner Brian Paddock started a 'softly, softly' approach in the streets of Brixton in Lambeth, south London and it was later proved to be successful.

Ashleah Skinner
email

Miners

Twenty years after the miners' Great Strike, is it possible to clarify just exactly what was the role and motivation of the Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and Peter Carter, the CPGB's so-called industrial organiser?

We know the allegation that Stella Rimington - later director general of MI5 - headed up the secret offensive against the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984-85 strike, even to the extent of sending in *agents provocateurs* into the NUM in order to destabilise and sabotage the union.

Given Carter's key role in stoking up internal opposition within the NUM to Scargill and Heathfield, and the Eurocommunist manipulation of the South Wales and Scottish coalfields to split the NUM and drive it politically to the right, would it be possible for those who held leadership positions in the Communist Party at that time to now clear the air by making explicitly clear that as individuals

they never had any connections with either MI5 or the special branch?

Andrew Northall
Northampton

Crèche crisis

I was elected by my union branch as our delegate to the Stop the War Coalition national conference on February 28. Given past disappointments, I asked the secretary to check whether there would be a crèche.

He has just informed me of the following response: "Unfortunately we are unable to put on a crèche at this conference. We have looked into it very seriously and the costs of a crèche are just impossible for us to meet. As I am sure you are aware, we depend on donations and affiliations from both individuals and organisations. The six national demonstrations, as well as the one coming up on March 20, leave us with very little money. Please apologise to the delegate who has a child and please assure them that when we are financially better off we will of course lay on crèches. [signed] Ghada Razuki."

I consider this to be totally unacceptable and outrageous. It appears that parts of the left have forgotten (if they ever knew of) the struggles of the 60s and 70s to establish collective responsibility for childcare, and, with the growth of 'post-feminist' discourse, again see this as the individual responsibility of parents. This is no way to build a broad and inclusive movement.

Roland Rance
email

Headscarves

The French assembly is wrong to ban muslim headscarves in public schools.

France claims to be a secular state. This is not true. The christian and jewish sabbaths are holidays in France, but not the muslim sabbath, Friday. The principal christian festivals are all statutory holidays in France. France subsidises religious schools. Crucifixes will still hang in schools in Alsace-Lorraine.

What is next? Will they forcibly shear sikhs whose hair is 'liberated' from the tidy turbans they usually wear? Will they cut off circumcised muslim or jewish penises that appear in school showers?

The ban on wearing religious garb and manifesting one's faith we can expect from savage dictatorships like Saudi Arabia, but not from France, the very cradle of equality, fraternity, and liberty!

I urge the French senate to abandon this act of intolerance. In the short run, it encourages racism and bigotry. In the long run, this law will segregate muslims into madrassas, where fanatics are hatched, or on to the streets uneducated where they can learn a life of crime.

Tom Trottier
email

Patent abuse

January was a busy month for Ken Livingstone, what with being readmitted to the Labour Party and all. Yet it wasn't so busy that Ken and the Greater London Authority couldn't lodge trade mark application 2353980 on January 21 with the UK patent office.

What could this trade mark be? It's none other than the GLA's attempt to gain the sole right to use the term 'Respect' across classes 16, 35, 36, 41, 42 and 43. It is worth repeating the remit of class 42, namely: "Political lobbying and political research services." How strange that this should have been lodged just four days before the founding conference of Respect.

By the way, trade mark class 16 includes playing cards. So there will be no Respect decks with John Rees as joker if Ken gets his way.

Martin Blum
London

COMMENT

Another cul de sac

Graham Bash is on the editorial board of *Labour Left Briefing*, an influential monthly magazine on the Labour left. This is the first of an occasional column in which he looks at developments in the party and the broader movement



I am concerned that Respect is a diversion from the major question facing the workers' movement. Most comrades in the Labour Party have not even *heard* of it from my experience. That's the reality. Those comrades who have heard of it regard it as another *delusion*.

If the Socialist Alliance - which was a far more viable project - could not make an electoral impact, what chance has Respect? It's an SA mark II, but at a much lower level. More of the same on a less principled basis. Some think it may do better because of the presence of George Galloway, but I remain very sceptical.

Even if it could get a few people elected, it is a cul de sac. People on the left of Labour treat it with a degree of sadness. It is such a waste of the time, energy and resources of talented comrades. There is no resentment against the project, or against George for fronting it. But there is a weariness that comrades don't seem to learn any lessons from history.

I have put forward this view in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* before, but let me state it again. There is no objective space to build a left electoral alternative to Labour. Unless and until a grouping comes forth which actually speaks in the name of labour and is actually in the process of recreating a mass party of labour, then *sects* - however they package themselves - will not achieve anything substantial.

Galloway

George Galloway continues to excite comment and controversy. There are probably as many opinions about this comrade on the left as there are lefties to hold them!

No doubt, there has been scepticism about the man on the left of Labour. He was never part of the Campaign Group and he certainly has had a less than spotless record in the past. For myself - and I am probably in a minority on this - I take a more favourable view of the comrade. His record in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was outstanding. He was a major spokesperson for the Stop the War Coalition.

At the same time, I deeply regret that expulsion from Labour has led him down the Respect road. I think I understand the pressures that were on him and pushed him in that direction. However, once you stand against Labour in the ballot box, a lot of your formal relations with your ex-comrades can become sectarian. I'm afraid this is what could happen to George.

The same process was observable with Scargill - although he had tendencies that way already, of course. But the pattern is familiar. In order to justify what you are doing and where you are doing it, you must *overstate* your position on the Labour Party.

This is not to deny that some of his recent comments have not been correct. Of course, there *ought* to be hundreds more Jeremy Corbyns, John McDonnells and Alice Mahons. But there aren't. Therefore, to the extent that he is saying there are too few socialists in the party, that the left is weak, he is undoubtedly right.

But he overstates his case. He has to do this in order to justify his current stance. My worry is that through this the broad anti-war movement, in which

George played such an outstanding role, is being reduced by trying to squeeze it into a non-existent space - that of an electoral challenge to the Labour Party. There, it will be a failure.

As for the comrade's comments about Livingstone - where he suggests that Ken has crawled back into Labour - that is *very* strange. I'm used to the left painting defeats as victories; this is the opposite - painting a victory for the left as a defeat!

The truth is that Blair has been forced into a climbdown. Ken's return to the party is a victory *against* New Labour, a victory for the left *against* the right. Let us not overplay it, but it is a limited victory. He has come back insisting that *he* is going to be Labour candidate for mayor, that *he* will be responsible for the manifesto. He is asserting his will against New Labour. Does that sound like a stooge of New Labour? Hardly!

Labour and the unions

The key question facing the left is how it breaks its isolation, how it starts to rebuild the structures of the party that have been devastated by New Labour, how we bring the trade unions and trade unionists back to reassert their power in their party.

That's a long-term question and there must be an ongoing debate about how this happens. The idea of a Labour Representation Committee was floated at the end of last year by some trade union leaders like Mick Rix. Whether or not it can be built in practice remains to be seen, although I plan to be part of the fight to build it if possible.

Of course, this is part of the more general question. To what extent can the trade unions collaborate with each other and with the constituency left in forcing key issues onto the agenda of the party? The strengths and the weaknesses of the unions were illustrated at last year's conference. Yes, they forced labour movement issues onto the agenda, but ultimately it was the responsibility of the unions - with the honourable exception of the RMT - that the war was not debated.

A few months later on, and the RMT is disaffiliated from the party. The NEC took the disgraceful decision to expel the union when its special conference on February 6 decided to ratify the decision of the organisation in Scotland to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party.

The responsibility for this lies firmly with New Labour. They have made the party more and more uninhabitable for working people and their organisations. The FBU could be going the same route - a real problem for the left. In its own way, this is another cul de sac for working class militants.

I think the general view that comrades on the left of the party will take is that the schism beginning to open up between Labour and the trade unions is something we must work to overcome rather than exacerbate. Therefore, I strongly believe that it is incumbent on that left of the party to maintain as many links as possible with those unions that disaffiliate from Labour, however much we disagree with their decision. I know that there will be some sections of the Labour left who will take the stance that we must have no more formal links with the RMT at all after it is outside our ranks.

That would be a profound mistake. It would mean that we on the left of the party would be part of the *problem*, not a potential *solution* for the unions. Our task is to look to the Labour Party not only as it is today, but as it will be tomorrow. We have to have a vision of rebuilding a party of labour which can appeal to those tens of thousands who have left the party in disgust in recent years and to the unions that now seem set to follow them.

How can we think of cutting off our comrades? I have infinitely more in common with the 'disaffiliationists' of the RMT and FBU and with those socialists who have left the Labour Party than the Blairites and their hangers-on.

These are our comrades in the RMT and FBU and we have to be linked with them in as many structures of the workers' movement as we can. They are the raw material for rebuilding a genuine party of labour •

Critique conference 2004 Nationalism - enemy of socialism

Saturday February 28, 10am to 6pm, London School of Economics

The following statement will be discussed:

"The socialist movement has been crippled first by the great power nationalism embraced by one-time Marxist parties in World War I and then by first and third world nationalism supported by Stalinism, under the banner of socialism in one country and of national liberation. With the demise of Stalinism and social democracy, nationalism remains as the prime barrier to socialism. Socialism requires that the working class takes power in its own name and abolishes the market and so itself. In this process there is no room for unity of labour and capital, worker and capitalist, employer and employee."

Round-table discussion - 'Nationalism and socialism at the present time'. Speakers: István Mészáros, Hillel Ticktin, Jack Conrad.

'The new American empire.' Speaker: Mick Cox.

'A critique of American patriotism.' Speaker: Bertell Ollman.

'Nationalism in Africa.' Speaker: Latief Parker.

'Capitalist decline, nation-state - state of emergency.' Speaker: Savas Matsas.

'Islam and nationalism.' Speaker: Yasmine Mather.

Admission: £10 (unwaged: £5)

Email marxistforum@hotmail.com for transport from Scotland

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 15, 5pm - 'Is methodology neutral?', using István Mészáros's *The power of ideology* as a study guide. Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 (nearest tubes: Regents Park, Great Portland Street).

Remember Walter Kendall

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

Peace, not war

Music festival to mark anniversary of 2003 global anti-war protests. Ends Sunday February 15. The Hackney Ocean, Mare Street, London E8 (opposite Hackney town hall). Saturday February 14: dance; Sunday February 15: acoustic, folk, jazz. £17.50 per night, plus booking fee. All proceeds to peace campaigns. Wheelchair access.

Peace Not War, PO Box 44212, London E3 4WB; 020 7515 4702; <http://www.peace-not-war.org>

Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting: 'South Africa under the ANC'. Thursday February 19, 7.30pm, Woodside Halls, Glenfarg Street (near Maryhill Road and St George's Cross underground station). marxistforum@hotmail.com

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.

Argentina Solidarity Campaign

Annual general meeting, Sunday February 22, 3.30pm, the Sols Arms, 65 Hampstead Road, London NW1.

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 23, 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

Unite Against Fascism

Rally, Wednesday February 25, 7pm, Astoria, Charing Cross Road, London WC1.

www.uaf.org.uk

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, crêche available.

ncadc@ncadc.org.uk; <http://www.ncadc.org.uk>

Scottish Socialist Party

Annual conference, Saturday March 27, Sunday March 28, 9am to 5pm, Edinburgh University, theatre, George Square. Deadline for amendments to motions: Sunday February 22.

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.

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).

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.

Crêche (book by March 1) and catering available.

www.cpgb.org.uk/action

MORECOMBE

Migration Watch UK -
www.migrationwatchuk.org

Damned lies and statistics

There are few things more stomach-churning than tabloid hypocrisy, and there has been no shortage of it over the last few days. The tragic death of 19 migrant workers has occasioned the ritual shedding of crocodile tears by the likes of *The Sun*, *Daily Express* and *The Mail*. Yet these rags think nothing of fomenting hatred against all immigrants with their usual fare of 'Asylum-seekers ate my hamster' headlines.

Unfortunately these papers are but one component of an informal alliance of convenience between little England Europhobes, foam-flecked Tory fossils, Countryside Alliance supporters and the BNP. The Migration Watch UK 'think tank' (despite pretensions of being "an independent and non-political body") slots nicely into this motley collection by providing a 'respectable' and 'academic' veneer to the right's anti-asylum agenda.

"Concerned about asylum and immigration?" asks the website's main field. Clicking on to the 'We are' link throws up a short piece on the rate of immigration from outside the European Union to the UK (implying that migration within the EU is fine by them). This is backed up by what purports to be a short analysis of a 2001 home office report (which is available here for download). Sadly for MW the numbers it dredges up are not referenced to any source, other than being ascribed to the 'latest government projection'.

Turning now to the 'Who we are' statement, it is immediately apparent that MW is keen to stress its 'independence' and opposition to far-right hate-mongering. Instead it claims to be motivated by a wish to get all the facts about immigration into the open, free of misinformation, in order to stimulate "an open and frank policy debate". Coincidentally the hacks at *The Mail*, etc justify their outrageous scapegoating with the same kind of line. Nevertheless this introductory piece does make interesting reading, as its position is firmly based on the same political terrain as New Labour. For instance, "We are not opposed to immigration that is moderate and managed" and "We entirely accept that genuine refugees should be welcomed" could have come straight from Blunkett's Sunday morning sofa chats with Frost.

Like New Labour, MW wants to prove its anti-racist credentials by inviting viewers to peruse the "diversity" of its advisory council. I for one was not surprised to see a 'respectable' list of retired state bureaucrats, lawyers and academics. *Weekly Worker* readers from Sudan and Syria will be pleased to see they are represented by George Kronfli, "a businessman who has been resident in Britain for many years". At just 25 words he has by far the shortest biographical notes, but I am confident his inclusion is not simply a tokenistic sop.

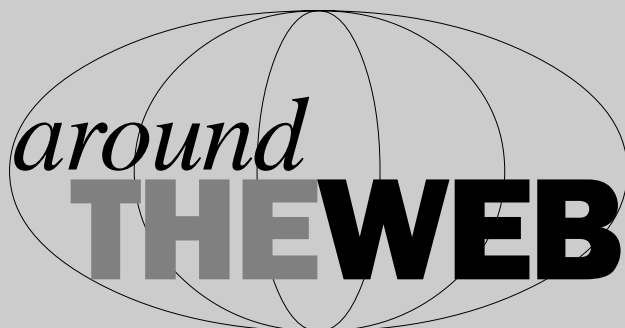
Next along is 'News desk', an archive of press releases from the last four years. Its publications page is very comprehensive indeed, with dozens of position papers available to download. These certainly require careful study if we are to effectively answer the Blairites and the right on immigration. 'Overview' takes a look at the history of immigration and policy. On the whole they back up their statements with government figures and references to legislative provisions, suggesting that "serious practical consequences" will ensue from the current rate of population inflow.

With its guarded criticisms of the 'economic case for immigration', and comparisons with the tough stances taken by other EU countries, it is not hard to see what kind of solution MW implies. This is doubly reinforced by the 'Frequently asked questions' page, where "myths" are posed - such as "migrants contribute a net £2.5 billion to the exchequer" - before MW hits us with "the facts". The measured tone is dumped altogether on the donations page. In its bid for viewer's cash, it proudly boasts of its robust challenge to the "multi-million-pound pro-asylum and immigration 'industry'".

'Key messages' is yet another page setting out the MW stall. 'What you say' is a selection from MW's mail bag. Of course, in the interests of "open and frank policy debate" all of these dovetail nicely with the general thrust of the website as a whole. Do not expect any dissenting voices among these 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' types. Finally, 'What the papers say' could really do with renaming as 'The selected works of Sir Andrew Green' - most of the articles/letters featured here are penned by MW's chairman himself.

While it is relatively easy to expose MW's bogus independence and political neutrality, shockingly it is a lot harder to get the left to look critically at these issues. Failing to do so only hobbles our own working class internationalism.

Phil Hamilton



Respecting immigration

Eddie Ford argues the case for the free movement of peoples and exposes the SWP's crass opportunism

Life is cheap. Or, as the gruesome deaths last week of 19 Chinese cockle-gatherers in Morecambe Bay showed, at least open to negotiation on the basis of a realistic, profit-based assessment. The evening following the tragedy - as the emergency services were still looking for survivors - another wave of immigrant workers arrived at the treacherous Lancashire sands to harvest the highly-prized mollusc.

When the news of the deaths broke, there was an avalanche of high-octane outrage and tortuous hand-wringing. How could this have happened? What is to be done? We were subjected to a well-rehearsed rage over "snakeheads", "human traffickers", "gangsters" and all the other sinister forces deemed to be responsible for the Morecambe deaths. Naturally, the media and the establishment are whiter than white - how could you suggest otherwise? - and only want to punish the criminals responsible for this outrage.

So, for instance, home office minister Beverley Hughes proclaimed: "It demonstrates yet again what can happen to people when the highly organised criminal elements that are behind the trafficking in the first place - and here with mostly Chinese people we are talking about the ruthless gangs, the snakeheads and so on who operate globally and transport people for labour exploitation - at what great risk people put themselves." Such sentiments were amplified in the media, especially the tabloids, which like to do nothing better than feed their readers with lurid stories.

Already there is a private member's bill going through parliament. Moved by Labour backbencher Jim Sheridan, the Gangmasters Licensing Bill is due for a second reading on February 27 and is ostensibly designed to spearhead a crackdown on 'the snakeheads'. Law and order will be restored, we are promised.

Of course we have been here before. Almost four years ago we had similar headlines when 58 Chinese illegal mi-



Where there's muck, there's brass: but not for them

grants dies from suffocation while being transported into Britain from Belgium in a truck which was meant to be delivering tomatoes. The truck was sealed in order to prevent the immigration officials from finding the occupants.

Just like now, there was a torrent of hypocrisy. After all, if any of those 58 Chinese 'illegals' had been detected, they would have been arrested, detained for months and then sent back to China - to god knows what fate. No wonder they did not want to be caught - just like many of the survivors on Morecambe Bay, who, having watched so many of their

compatriots drown, still tried desperately to avoid the attentions of their 'rescuers'. Talk about being caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

When we look at Morecambe Bay we are just seeing the tip of a very dirty, nauseating iceberg of illegality and super-exploitation. Every year thousands of 'illegals' like the cockle-gatherers are smuggled into Britain and the other developed western countries by unscrupulous profiteers and criminals. The vast majority of these workers are 'economic refugees' - a term which, when used by the tabloids and many mainstream poli-

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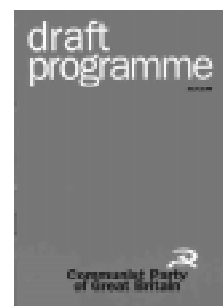
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ticians, nearly always denotes disapproval, if not explicit hostility. The only 'crime' for which these migrant workers are guilty of is the one of trying to escape poverty of their country of origin in the search for a better life - and it has to be pointed out that a significant proportion of Chinese 'illegals' come from the Fujian province in south-eastern China, which is scarred by extreme poverty, if not downright squalor.

Yes, Norman Tebbit, where are you now? These enterprising workers did not just get on their bikes. They got on trains, trucks, boats, etc - and paid a fortune for the 'privilege'.

Given these conditions of illegality and economic desperation, the 'snakeheads' can make a killing - just like so many of their drugs-running counterparts. It has been widely reported that the Chinese cocklers had to fork out something in the region of £20,000 to be smuggled into the UK. This is a vast sum and naturally such impoverished migrants cannot stump up the cash up front, so usually the only way to repay their 'benefactor' is through a cruel regime of indentured servitude - becoming waiters, dishwashers, laundry workers, cockle-gatherers, etc. Often extortionate rates of interest are levied and added to the original loan - which means that you could end up even worse off than you were in your country of origin. And of course, should you default on your debt, the 'snakeheads' always have the option of resorting to blackmail, threats and outright violence - not only against the migrants themselves, but also against the families they have left behind.

On discovering what life was and is like for the immigrant cockle-gatherers, very many people - including Morecambe residents themselves - were genuinely appalled. Descriptions of the chronically overcrowded, Dickensian conditions endured by the immigrants made for particularly grim and depressing reading - dozens stuffed into a single room. However, this is common practice. 'Snakehead' properties are often specially adapted, with bunks put in every room and the workers made to sleep in continual, rolling eight-hour shifts. Many of these properties do not have hot water or electricity. For this splendid service, it is not uncommon for the unfortunate residents to be charged between £20-30 a week - or, more likely, just have it added to their already spiralling debt.

But where there's muck there's brass, as they say. Cockle-gathering can be a very lucrative business indeed. It is estimated that in total Morecambe generates some £8 million a year in profits from cockle-gathering. It is possible to collect 400 tonnes of cockles in intensive nine-day sessions - the result being that the cockle gangmasters end up pocketing tens of thousands of pounds. No wonder there are fierce and vicious 'cockle wars' - as a local journalist reported, a concrete block had been thrown through one of the windows of a 'snakehead' house, and on at least two occasions workers' vans have been set alight by rival gangs.

When times are lean, one cockle gang will launch 'raids' on another gang's patch, mak-

ing off with as many of their cockle bags as they can manage. You will also not be astonished to learn that many of the processing plant bosses do not care where the cockles they use come from - or how they were obtained.

The Guardian remarked "how discreet this part of the economy has contrived to remain" (February 7). When tragic events like Morecambe happen, a window suddenly opens and we get a glimpse of the so-called 'hidden economy'. In their ruthless and relentless drive to reduce consumer prices, today's food, manufacturing and agricultural sectors are heavily dependent on hidden armies of cheap migrant labour - both illegal and legal. Leek and onion-pickers in Worcestershire. Daffodil-cutters in Cornwall. Carrot-packers in Lincolnshire. Factory workers in Devon. Fruit-pickers in Kent. Etc. For the new 'flexible ordering system', you need a 'flexible' labour force - *in extremis*. In order to turn labour on and off like a tap, it stands to reason, you must have a surplus. If these workers are routinely exposed to danger, so be it.

It is important to fully understand the scale and extent of this 'hidden' work force. It is estimated that more than 60% of workers in London's catering trade are illegal immigrants, and a government white paper estimated that two years ago, overall, there are "hundreds of thousands" of such workers in Britain as a whole. Naturally, these workers are open to exploitation at below minimum wage rates and employers use 'illegals' to undercut the wages and condition of 'legals'.

The novelist, Margaret Drabble, recently commented: "On a brief sleepless visit to Stanford University, California, recently I couldn't help but notice that the night-time population servicing the campus was wholly Hispanic, the daytime population of students and academics almost wholly white. When I commented on this, my remarks were met with denial. I can't get worked up about the wickedness of the gang leaders: there must be something more deeply wrong with societies that live happily with unseen exploitation and poverty until it is put under a spotlight" (letter to *The Guardian* February 9).

Given all this, it is absolutely shameful that the Socialist Workers Party, backed up by their hangers-on, saw to it that the January 25 conference to launch Respect *rejected* a call aimed at legalising all migrant workers. In so doing the SWP turned its back on its own history and the *People before profit* manifesto on which we all stood in the 2001 elections. The SWP took the lead in voting down the amendment to Respect's founding declaration, moved by the Democracy Platform of the Socialist Alliance, which simply stated: "The unity coalition fights for freedom of movement, open borders and an end to immigration laws."

The excuse? If the amendment had been passed, "We'll have to face down arguments from people who don't understand" (in the now justly notorious words of the SWP's Elaine Heffernan). This is depressingly reminiscent of the sentiments expressed over the years by comrades from the Militant Ten-

dency and now the Socialist Party in England and Wales - while of course we are for open borders, workers are not so advanced, so best not to mention it at all. Not in front of the children, you see - it might upset them. In other words, such comrades are committed in the abstract to open borders, but in the concrete are unwilling to swim upstream and challenge the bourgeois consensus. Not many votes in it - so they coldly calculate.

It would be nice to think that such opportunism has been shamed and rebuffed - or at least dented - by the images that have come so recently from Morecambe Bay. But it would not be very wise to bet on it. On the other hand, real socialists and communists fight for open borders in the *here and now*. Why? Because it is *necessary*.

Capital, money and goods can move freely around the world - yet workers cannot. This is the point that communists hammer home again and again: what gives international capital the right to determine where we can and cannot live? Why should a DVD player or a Microsoft PC have more rights than a worker? The world should belong to humanity as a whole, not to the ruling class of each state. Capital itself switches investment from one country to another, dislocating millions and forcing millions of others out of work.

Yet those cast on the scrap heap as a result of this (legal) activity are expected to stay and rot - whether in miserable Chinese villages or grim eastern European cities or towns. It is they who become illegal if they try and escape their predicament or, as in Lancashire, end up losing their lives so the bosses - national or 'foreign', big or small - can increase their profit margins.

When we examine the outpouring of anguish and liberalistic angst provoked by the wretched fate of the 19 Chinese cocklers, it is sometimes difficult - though certainly not impossible - to find the words to describe the despicable hypocrisy of those who, on the one hand, condemn the 'snakeheads' for taking advantage of desperate people, while, on the other hand, are quite happy to pitilessly add to their plight by incarcerating them in detention centres and in general spend great time in devising, planning and implementing laws and measures which can only ensure that such tragedies will happen over and over again.

It is not as if charging people for transporting them from one country to another is *not* under normal circumstances a perfectly lawful activity. As in so many other cases under capitalism (like drugs, for example), the very illegality itself produces 'criminal' activity which would not otherwise pose a problem. If the state did not insist on maintaining its inhuman border controls, there would, needless to say, be no illegal trafficking (ditto with drugs).

For communists, immigration is a progressive phenomenon which breaks down national differences and national prejudices. It unites British workers with the world working class. And, unlike the SWP, SPEW and the rest, we are not afraid to tell the working class this essential fact ●

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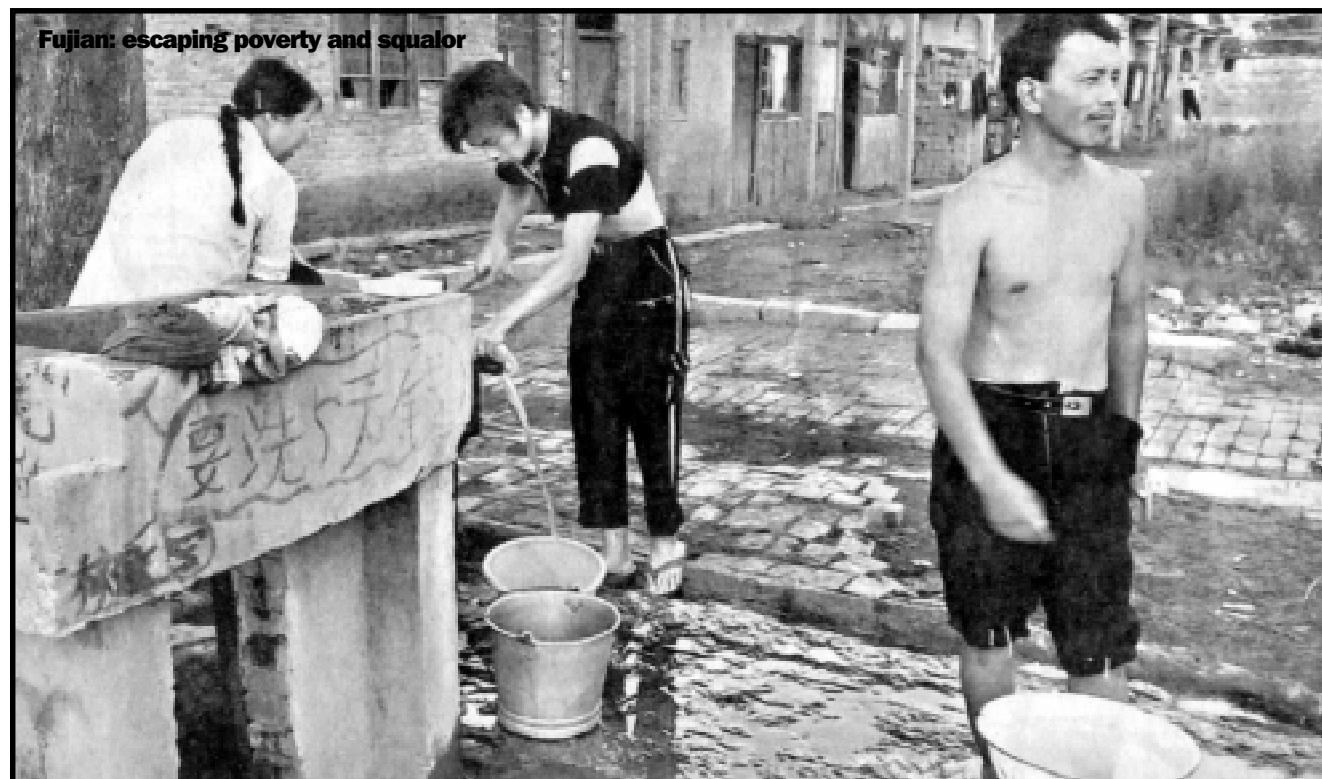
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INTERNET

Net profit and empowerment

Since the conviction of murderer Graham Coutts, who testified to using internet pornography, there have been calls for greater censorship of the net. **Manny Neira** evaluates the relationship between cyberspace and reality

I do not often read *The Mirror*, but my guess is that it did not remember the victims of US murderer Ted Bundy with the headline, 'Killed by the printing press'. This is despite the fact that, on the night before he was executed in 1989, he gave an interview blaming pornography for provoking his crimes: pornography *printed in magazines*.

On February 5, though, *The Mirror* ran the headline "Killed by the internet". This was their comment on the death of young teacher Jane Longhurst at the hands of Graham Coutts, who testified during his trial to viewing pornography: pornography he found *on the internet*.

There is something about the net which troubles even wiser heads than those at *The Mirror*. Some years ago, there was a brief stir when journalists heard of something called *The anarchist cookbook*, apparently freely available on the net, which gave advice on making drugs, weapons and explosives. One website which provided information about the title received so many enquiries, it added the following to its 'FAQ' (frequently asked questions) list:

"Q. I'm a journalist. Isn't it terrible that people can get *The anarchist cookbook* over the net? Shouldn't this be stopped?"

"A. Note that *The anarchist cookbook* is available from nearly any bookstore in the US. These dangerous institutions will also sell you Nazi and hate literature, pornography, instructions on growing drugs... as an interesting department of justice report points out, over 50 publications describing the fabrication of explosives and destructive devices are listed in the library of Congress and are available to any member of the public, as well as being easily available commercially."

The FAQ goes on to list some further fascinating titles - all books, all legally available - including *Home workshop explosives*, *Secrets of methamphetamine manufacture* and (I want this one for Christmas) *A do-it-yourself sub-machine gun*. It comments: "For some reason, getting this stuff from a bookstore is not news, but getting it over the internet is."

Net power

So why does the mere *medium* of the internet provoke such fear?

The answer lies in two subtle but important shifts in *social power* the net has brought in its wake. Both undermine existing social controls, and so earn the suspicious mistrust of government and

established media.

Firstly, it empowers the young. Many adults watch their children take to the net with an ease which leaves them floundering by comparison. The technology can be learnt, but (rather like a language) seems to be soaked up more naturally by young minds. It might be imagined that, as the current generation grows up, this disparity will disappear, but the technology is changing so quickly that the gap may remain open. While it does, the young will enjoy a power which their parents do not fully share and find difficult to regulate. The net is a space in which the young enjoy unusual freedom, and there is an uneasy social awareness of this: partly because of the risks it entails, but also because of the loss of control *in and of itself*.

Secondly, it lowers the threshold for self-publication; or rather, it lowers it further, for this has been a trend ever since the invention of the printing press. As print technologies push down unit costs, the ability to publish becomes wider and wider. Organisations associated with the common people could thereby easily put their ideas and programmes into print. Now the net brings the power of self-publication within the grasp of the tiniest group and even most individuals. The *de facto* censorship of those who could not match the resources of the already powerful and wealthy has been weakened.

Some cyber-utopians have stretched this idea too far, though. The real social battles of the future will take place in the real world: the net is a part of that world, and not an alternative reality. Indeed, the political freedom to publish ideas in *any* form was won through real world struggle: it did not fall into the laps of working people along with the technological means. It is worth remembering also that power structures in society are amply reflected on the web. The most popular sites are still run by states and large companies. However, the net brings an important quantitative shift towards the ease of democratic expression and, again, the bourgeoisie is aware of this.

Porn laws

I sense you are still concerned. But what about all the porn? It is not just a myth, is it?

It certainly is not. Analysts estimate that 20-30% of the *entire traffic* on the internet consists of an endless stream of images and video of people dressed with varying degrees of inadequacy and involved in acts of varying degrees of



World Wide Web: reflects society

improbability.

Much of it is entirely free, and is simply exchanged between users. A good deal of this is amateur - snapped at home with digital cameras and shared for no more, it seems, than the thrill of sharing it; it ranges from the endearing to the frankly alarming. Who would have guessed what was happening behind those rows of net curtains? *Big brother* has nothing on this. Much of the rest is scanned in from magazines, or was originally collected from 'pay sites'.

Indeed, the free supply is such that it is surprising anyone parts with their money to access pay sites at all. Part of the reason lies in the distribution channels. Much of the free material is distributed via the oddly named 'usenet': a collection of public message boards or 'newsgroups' to which people send emails which may be read by anyone. There are tens of thousands of these newsgroups, most hosting public discussions, on subjects ranging from philosophy to British soap operas. Some, however, encourage people to attach files to their submissions. From these, you can download free music, software, electronic books and (of course) porn. So for the latest Robbie Williams, the full text of *Pride and prejudice* or images of Frank experimenting with a vacuum cleaner somewhere in Chichester, try usenet. As you might imagine, it attracts millions of users, but is still not as well known as the world wide web: and it is on the web that the pay sites are found.

The porn pay site industry is huge: literally tens of thousands of sites exist, and earn their owners an astonishing \$70 billion a year. This money is entirely collected through debit and credit card payments, earning the major banks very substantial commissions.

And here lies the truth at the core of the internet porn industry. Governments have long faced demands for it to be regulated, but have pleaded technical

difficulty in 'blocking' sites. This difficulty, as far as it goes, is perfectly genuine. The Internet grew from a US military networking project called 'Arpanet', the point of which was to create a computer network which would continue to work even if bits of it were destroyed by enemy missiles. Any single block can be bypassed, and information can be moved from one computer to another on the far side of the world and still be accessible. No single government can therefore regulate a determined site operator.

However, governments *could* regulate the banks, forcing them to vet the nature of any pay site they accepted as a client, and imposing conditions on what it might contain. A pay site unable to collect fees would not have to be blocked: it would be closed by its owners. The government does not pursue this route for the simple reason that electronic porn is big business, and it does not want to rock the boat.

You may recall that in 2000, the mobile phone operators paid the government £22 billion in auctions for licences to operate 'third generation', or 3G, networks: an enormous fee paid at the peak of the growth of the mobile phone market, which has left the companies with heavy debt burdens on their balance sheets. In the event, 3G phones, which allow the transmission of pictures, are selling slowly. Desperate to recoup their investment, a couple of weeks ago companies attended a conference sponsored by *Total Telecom* magazine on the subject of 'Delivering mobile adult content responsibly'. *They hope to recover £6 billion a year in porn sales*. Clearly, you cannot control who sees porn delivered to a mobile phone, but you can expect no more intervention from the government here than over the ubiquitous sex-lines swelling BT's profits.

Exposing government cant, though, should not be taken as an argument for censorship. *Consensually* produced pornography may not be to all tastes, but the freedom to produce and distribute it is the same political freedom which should be extended to all forms of published texts, literature and art. The state ought not to have any role in deciding what I should, and should not, read or see.

Children

The greatest public concern has been over pornography depicting children. Clearly, a child will have neither the life experience nor the social independence to give meaningful consent, and to have sex or take eroticised photographs without meaningful consent is abuse. However, the focus on this danger may be serving as a distraction from the real problem of protecting children. The vast majority of abused children fall victim to members of their own family: most fre-

quently parents, siblings, or other close relatives. The archetypal paedophile stranger preying on the young is extremely rare, and the number of abductions and attacks committed by such people is very low and has remained roughly constant for years.

Despite the huge publicity which has surrounded the issue of child pornography on the net, in fact it represents a vanishingly small percentage of the total. It makes little commercial sense for most operators to provide it, given the far larger markets and easier profits to be won, at considerably less risk, from providing adult pornography. Jim Bell, who served two years for downloading child pornography, wrote in *The Guardian* last year:

"The worst child pornography is free, posted on news servers by individuals who want to share their interests with others. By this I mean pictures of small children forced to engage in sexual activity with adults. I remember a picture of a sad little Asian child prostitute in a leather harness, seated on her client's knee. Such extremes of child pornography are free, fairly easily accessed by journalists and researchers, and tend to set the standard of discussion about this problem. There are a few hundred such pictures that circulate on the internet. Few new ones ever surface: they are part of a grubby tradition of internet extremism."

The few pay sites which operate do not show such explicit material:

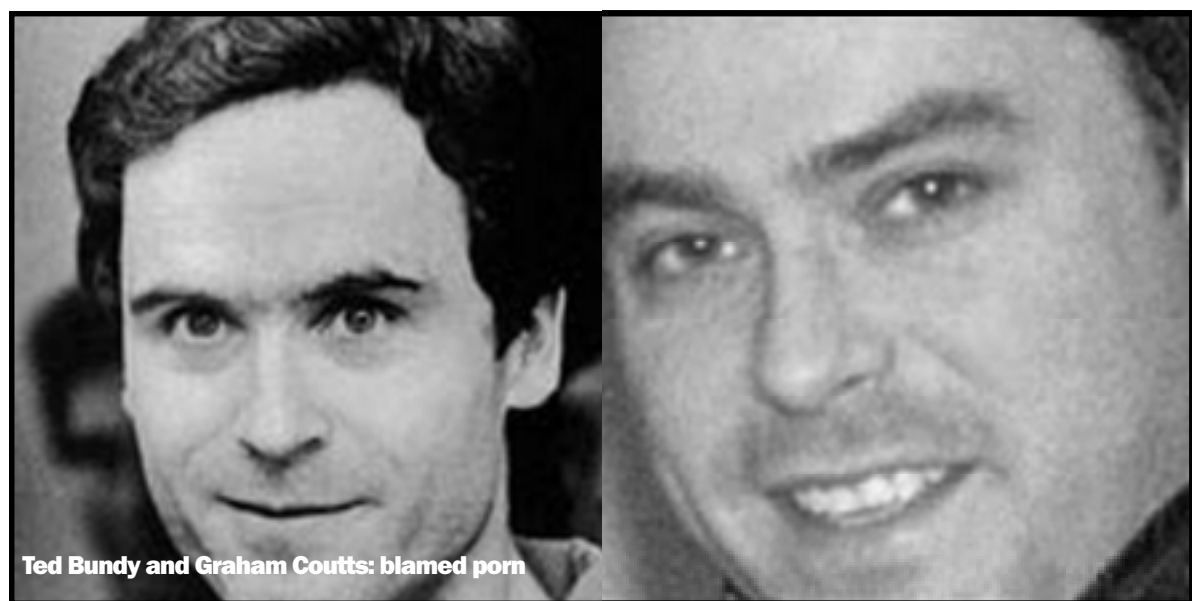
"All the subscription sites I ever came across advertised little girls (I never looked at the ones with boys) looking 'pretty'. Or 'pretty and sexy'. The ages would range from adolescent down to perhaps nine or 10. There was a very clear distinction between American and European artistic sensibilities. American sites would feature the girl next door, in a bikini or a sexy little outfit, looking like a fashion model or a pop star. European sites would favour nude little girls indoors or outdoors, singly or in groups, with a high standard of photography."

Many of these photographs are taken with the *consent of parents*, chasing dreams of wealth or fame.

"There is a wider perspective to be taken on this. The internet wonderfully reflects western society. It is not a separate world: it mirrors the attitudes and values of ordinary life. The sexualisation of children through television, pop music and fashion is acceptable; it is done for fun. The world of internet child pornography merely completes that process. Please don't think that the two are unrelated. Many of the American credit card sites I visited purported to offer girls a first step to a modelling career. Of course they did. What better way to get a young girl to pose sexily, and her parents to agree to it?"

Child pornography is clearly an abuse of the rights of children, but the key to the protection of children does not lie in control of the internet. It is made possible by the powerlessness of children in our society, hidden in the core of a bourgeois conception of the family, and fed by the alienation commercial interests have brought to human relationships. The relevant commercial interests are not merely or even primarily those of the pornographers, but of a continuum which is firmly planted in legal and indeed mainstream business norms.

It seems no-one at Jim Bell's card company thought to question the charge "Pretty Preteens, Colorado - \$40" ●



Ted Bundy and Graham Coutts: blamed porn

TRADE UNIONS

Don't disaffiliate - democratise

Over 700 comrades gathered in Friends Meeting House, London, on February 7 for a fruitful discussion on Labour and the unions at the Convention of the Trade Union Left, organised by the Socialist Alliance.

Like the meeting at the same venue to launch Respect two weeks earlier, the largest section of those present, perhaps the majority, was made up of members of the Socialist Workers Party, although SWP attendance was by no means as overwhelming as it had been on that occasion. Unlike the Respect launch, however, there was a positive atmosphere of democratic inclusivity last Saturday.

There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the SWP is much more keen to debate with those it considers are to its right - eg, the Labour-supporting union leaders and rank and file militants it was hoping to attract to the convention - than with its left critics. Secondly, neither of the two speakers billed to open the main discussion turned up. This meant that the entire two hours earmarked for the debate on the political fund and the Labour link was freed up for speakers from the floor.

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union, was called away to deal with a crisis in a PCSU branch, while Billy Hayes, leader of the Communication Workers Union, sent his apologies - he had apparently forgotten that the convention clashed with his son's birthday. Brother Hayes stated in his message to the meeting that he regarded debate as both "necessary and healthy" (although not so necessary on this occasion, obviously) and that our differences ought not to prevent united action.

One general secretary who did show was Bob Crow of the Rail Maritime Transport union, fresh from its Glasgow conference the previous day. The RMT refusal to bow down before New Labour threats over the affiliation of the Scottish region and several of its branches to the Scottish Socialist Party had, of course, provoked a Labour Party ultimatum which actually expired as comrade Crow was speaking. As the clock above the hall showed 12 noon, he announced that, now that his union had been disaffiliated by the Blairites, he felt "free, like the Birmingham Six".

This was an unfortunate attitude. Free to do what? Yes, the RMT has decided, correctly, that branches and regions may, subject to the leadership's endorsement, offer support to political parties, groups and individuals that give their backing to union policy. But this hardly constitutes a strategy for the labour movement. And what about the struggle inside the Labour Party itself? Wishing to be "free" of that sounds like a cop-out.

Nevertheless, comrade Crow's main points were good ones. He placed the blame for the split fairly and squarely on New Labour, which had "treated us with contempt", not on the RMT's moves to democratise its political fund. He explained that it was impossible to continue writing Labour a blank cheque, while it was implementing policies in direct contradiction to his members' interests: eg, rail and tube privatisation - "I can't see why we should support that."

Privatisation was the same, whether it was carried through by "someone wearing a blue or a red rosette". In fact he would rather have an "independent rosette" if the man wearing it - he referred to John Marek, independent member of the Welsh assembly and now leader of Forward Wales - backed working people.

Such statements are perfectly consistent with the viewpoint of a militant union leader - the RMT will continue to sponsor John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn, etc, but it seems that just about any other politicians who "roll up their sleeves to fight for our members as hard as I do" could be backed (he specifically ruled out only the British National Party) - however, you could see how they gave rise to fears of "fragmentation", as Pete Firmin of Workers Action put it.

In the absence of brother Hayes, comrade Firmin was called upon to open the debate after comrade Crow had departed. Precisely at a time when Blair was "in trouble", he said, it was all the more necessary for the unions to "step up the fight" to force New Labour to retreat. Since the "big four" unions were in Labour to stay, it was pointless smaller unions like the RMT letting themselves be ousted. It was also pointless for socialists to "continue to put motions for democratisation" instead of "fighting to influence Labour". The RMT case had shown that it was one or the other: "Democratisation and affiliation does not work."

John Rogers, a member of Unison's national executive, went further. Though he was right to stress that the party was a key "site of struggle", since "tens of thousands of party members hate New Labour", he was wrong to conclude that "you shouldn't set up a party outside Labour". As I pointed out in my contribution, the key issue, both inside and outside of Labour, was the fight for a genuine working class party.

I argued that democratisation and continued affiliation were perfectly compatible - it all depended on the strength and breadth of the democratisation campaign. For example, when several major unions openly backed Ken Livingstone for London mayor in 2000, there were no moves from the Blairites to try to bring them to book.

However, I warned against calling for disaffiliation - a recipe for the depoliticisation of the unions in the absence of any viable political alternative. This absence was highlighted precisely by the case of RMT support for the SSP. "Why hasn't Bob Crow advocated support for Socialist Alliance candidates? Why haven't RMT branches tried to affiliate to the SA?" The alliance had been held back from becoming a party and Respect, as an electoral coalition pure and simple, was hardly likely to attract much in the way of union support either, despite the appeals from Linda Smith (Fire Brigades Union) and Unjum Mirza (London RMT and SWP).

This only served to underline the weakness of SWP speakers' arguments in contrast to the 'fight within Labour' protagonists, who, unlike the SWP, could not be accused of lacking a strategic vision. For example, SWP member Yunus Bakhsh of Unison, Mark Serwotka's stand-in, said that the influence of the unions, who were "treated with absolute disdain" by New Labour, had never been weaker in the party: "Look reality in the face." For him democratisation was necessary not in order to take on and defeat Labourism within the beast itself as part of the fight for a revolutionary party, but because such a fight inside Labour was not possible.

A completely different view was put by Tony Richardson, a Labour councillor and Bakers Union militant: "Labour is *my* party, not Tony Blair's." What is more, because of the lack of any vibrant branch life, the party was "there for the taking". Despite his conviction that Labour must be 'reclaimed', comrade Richardson reported that he had moved the motion at his union's conference in favour of democratisation. Although this was overwhelmingly defeated, he saw it not as a means to jump ship, but as a way of pressurising the Labour leadership.

Neil Williams of the FBU was another who stressed democratisation, not disaffiliation: "We don't want to cut ourselves off." He called for members of every union to put in emergency motions condemning the decision to expel the RMT and demand its reinstatement, emphasising the need for rank and file action to control the bureaucrats. Several other comrades pointed out that union representatives on Labour's executive had backed not only the disaffiliation of the RMT, but the expulsion of George Galloway too.

Comrade Galloway was the final speaker in the closing rally, following Sue Bond, an SWP member on the PCSU executive, and Geoff Martin, Unison's London region convenor. Comrade Bond made an eminently forgettable speech, almost entirely devoid of political content. I noted only her rhetorical

Peter Firmin: stay in



question: "Is it really seven years ago we celebrated the end of Tory rule?"

By contrast, comrade Martin's contribution was to the point. While he was a "supporter of continued affiliation", he was absolutely clear on the need for a campaign for the right of the RMT, like every other union, "to decide what to do with their own money". Why should it be used to back MPs who continually voted against union policy? It was a "disgrace" that most of Unison's parliamentary panel backed the invasion of Iraq.

Comrade Martin said he had heard that general secretary Dave Prentis had consulted a QC about the "legality of this convention" and had been considering taking out an injunction to prevent him speaking. It was "nonsensical to say don't engage in debate", said comrade Martin.

Galloway's speech was also largely sound. He warned of the "false dichotomy" of opposing Labour Party

work to organising outside it. "Respect is not calling on unions to disaffiliate," he said, but, at the same time, they must not be "wholly owned subsidiaries of New Labour". However, while it was important not to walk away from the party, it was "equally important not to exaggerate the possibility of success in the Labour Party". He urged RMT branches in particular to consider supporting Respect.

During the lunch break, there were caucuses for the main union groupings, although most of them were talking shops that seemed to have no clear purpose apart from the vague idea that it might be useful to get together.

Nevertheless the day as a whole was - perhaps surprisingly - rather constructive, with around 30 speakers able to put forward positions that attempted to grapple with this key question facing the union movement - the Labour link ●

Peter Manson

Rank and file 'reclaim' FBU

Following a meeting on Friday February 6 in central London, a new organisation has been launched by rank and file members of the Fire Brigades Union, with the purpose of reclaiming their union.

The meeting, attended by FBU members from all over the UK, voted to support the setting up of Grassroots FBU, which stresses that it is not a breakaway organisation, but aims to represent the views of firefighters and control staff throughout the UK who feel betrayed at the surrendering of the national pay campaign last year by the FBU leadership and wish to see a more democratic union.

The national convenor of the new body is Andy Dark, while its chair is Steve Godward, former vice-chair of the Socialist Alliance. Comrade Godward has just won his appeal against dismissal from the fire service on trumped up charges. Also involved is another prominent SA comrade, London FBU militant Matt Wrack, author of *Whose money is it anyway?* and a member of the Socialist Party.

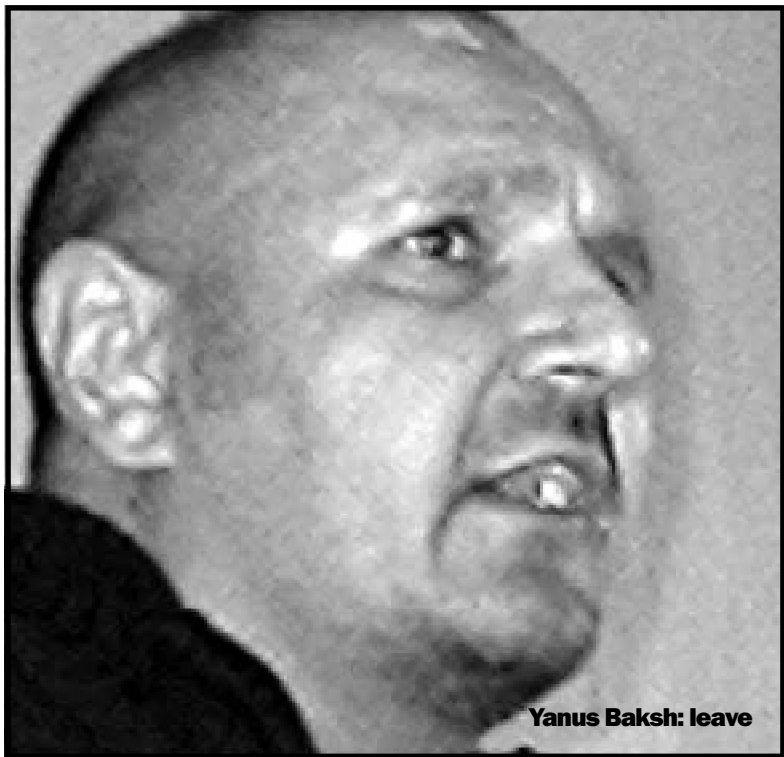
Paul Embury, a member of the group's steering committee, said: "It's no secret that, for most members, the outcome of the pay dispute was bitterly disappointing. The leadership of our union managed to take a nine-to-one mandate in favour of industrial action and turn it into a final settlement that can only be described as totally inadequate. Throughout the dispute, their strategy was deeply flawed. "Aside from the issue of the derisory pay increase - which itself is yet to be honoured - the deal has led to the tearing up of our conditions of service and paved the way for swingeing cuts in fire cover. Consequently, we need a union equal to the task of fighting those cuts. Grassroots FBU is in favour of a different kind of leadership, but we also want to encourage a more active and better organised membership."

The dispute, says comrade Embury, also highlighted a serious lack of democracy in the FBU: "Members feel that senior officials have become totally disconnected, and things at the top have become very cloak and dagger. We will fight to win this once proud union back for its members."

As a reaction to the government's treatment of firefighters during the strike, several FBU brigade committees have submitted motions to the union's annual conference in May, calling for the FBU to disaffiliate from Labour. Such resolutions are likely to command huge support amongst rank and file FBU members disenchanted by the government's pro-big business, anti-trade union agenda.

Following the disaffiliation of the RMT, it is essential that Grassroots FBU stands against the understandable urge to break the Labour link. It should follow the advice contained in comrade Wrack's SA pamphlet and strive to ensure that the FBU's political fund is democratised, rather than walking away from the battles in the Labour Party.

Alan Fox



Yunus Bakhsh: leave

BRAZIL

Workers Party and its

The Fourth International's Brazilian section is in disarray over its relationship to the government of president Lula.

Mike Macnair looks at how Democracia Socialista ended up with comrades on both sides of the class divide

In December 2003 the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party or PT) leadership expelled a group of leftwing elected representatives - most prominently the senator, Heloisa Helena, a supporter of Democracia Socialista (DS). Their crime was to oppose the Lula government's attacks on public sector pensions - part of its commitment to the International Monetary Fund's 'structural adjustment' policies. Those expelled have announced that they will form a new party. Meanwhile, DS supporter Miguel Rosseto continues to serve as minister of agrarian development, with responsibility for land reform.

The result is that the DS, the Brazilian affiliate of the 'Fourth International' (linked in Britain to the International Socialist Group/*Resistance*), is in the peculiar and embarrassing position that one of its comrades holds a ministerial portfolio in a government whose supporters in the PT leadership have expelled another leading comrade for opposing Lula's pro-IMF policies. How have the Brazilian 'Fourth Internationalists' got themselves into this position?

Lula's election

In October 2002 Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva - or 'Lula', the most prominent leader of the PT - won the Brazilian presidential elections. He replaced the ex-Marxist, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who had accepted the IMF's structural adjustment requirements and governed with a centre-right coalition. The result was not a simple victory for the Workers Party: Lula's running mate, Jose Alencar, is a capitalist and a member of the bourgeois centre-right Liberal Party. Moreover, the PT did not have and has not obtained a majority in the Brazilian congress: in fact it holds less than 20% of seats both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, and the whole governing coalition - various semi-left and populist parties, including the ex-communist Popular Socialist Party (PPS) and the post-Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCB), plus the Liberals - is in a clear minority in the Senate.

Lula had already given unambiguous commitments to cooperate with the IMF before the election, and these were repeated after his victory. Francisco de Oliveira, one of the founders of the PT, has commented: "This is not the first year of the Workers Party government: it's the ninth year of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government" (quoted in the *New York Times* December 15 2003).

People's Front?

The participation of Alencar and the Liberals, as well as the complex patterns of voting and of representation and the formation of coalitions in the legislature, make Lula's presidency most unlike the People's Front victories in Spain and France in the 1930s. These triggered mass class offensives of the working class, not so far visible in Brazil. Still less is it like the Communist and Socialist Parties' use of small *left of centre* bourgeois parties to create formal 'popular fronts' in Europe immediately after 1945 or - to give a Latin American example - in Chile before the 1973 coup.

In these countries there was a pre-existing polarisation of electoral politics between rightist coalitions of the 'party of order' and bourgeois-liberal, bourgeois-radical and socialist coalitions of the 'party of democracy'. This sort of political structure appears to be the normal

pattern of capitalist electoral politics: it appeared first in the division between Whigs and Tories in late 17th century England, and has been replicated in a variety of forms in the USA. It appeared in explicit coalition forms in various European countries as electoral politics developed through the 19th and 20th centuries.

In contrast, in Brazil the 'party of order' proper, the Party of the Liberal Front, is regionally limited and holds only 16% of seats in the Chamber and 17% in the Senate. The other main parties who supported the outgoing government and Lula's opponent in the run-off were the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) and the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB). The PMDB originated as a broad-front coalition against the military dictatorship which governed Brazil from 1964 to 1988. The PSDB originated as a left split from the PMDB. There are, in fact, a total of 16 parties represented in the Brazilian legislature, and the large majority of them have formally radical-populist origins and positions, or emerged from diluted attempts to create labour or socialist parties which gradually slid into generic populism. Through the 1990s these parties were characterised by relatively weak party discipline, and by a high frequency of individual deputies and senators changing from one party to another.

Behind this lies large-scale political clientelism. Individual bosses, bureaucrats and elected representatives command votes and other forms of political support by providing *individual* benefits to their supporters. Similar phenomena can be seen in the fluid British parliamentary party politics of the 1760s to 1780s (after British victories in the Seven Years War had undermined the basis of the existing Whig-Tory party alignments), and in those of the Spanish monarchy's semi-parliaments between the late 19th century and 1920s. Brazil, in other words, has not (yet) acquired a stabilised form of capitalist electoral politics on a national scale. Nor has it acquired a national-scale class consciousness of the type that has supported the European mass workers' parties, and which meant that People's Front electoral victories ushered in large-scale class offensives on the ground.

In this context, the passage of Lula and the PT leadership into 'business as usual' coalitionism does not look like something new in Brazilian politics. It looks like a repeat of the normal passage of Brazilian left and populist projects, through lesser-evil coalitionism, into the morass of corruption and clientelism which is the normal mode of functioning of the Brazilian party system. But this result is radically different from what the left expected of the PT.

The PT as a new start

The PT was founded in 1979-80, by a combination of trade unionists led by Lula, various (mainly Trotskyist) groups of the far left, and radical catholic supporters of 'liberation theology'. The social basis of the party was a forward movement of the class in the later 1970s which had led the Lula grouping in the trade unions to adopt a more militant stance, distancing the unions from the military regime. This development was part of a broader movement internationally, which also found expression in the rise of independent trade unions in South Korea and of the Cosatu trade union confederation in South Africa. In



Backwards to populism

Brazil it naturally pointed towards the formation of a party to represent the distinct interests of the working class, in the same way that the rise of union militancy in Britain in the early 20th century pointed towards the formation of the Labour Party.

The left catholics were drawn in because the new party was one growing out of the grassroots struggle. The Trotskyist groups that participated were applying the 'labour party policy' developed out of some of Trotsky's arguments in relation to the USA. The idea here was that if the trade union leaders were led to break with the capitalist parties and form a party to represent the independent interests of the workers, there would be no guarantee that it would be a reformist party like British Labour; rather it would be possible to fight to transform it or a large fraction of it into a revolutionary party.

The PT appeared to be a 'new start' in two ways. First, it was grounded in the trade union movement and asserted the independent interests of the working class. This had originally been true of the Brazilian Communist Party, but the political concept of the People's Front adopted at the 7th Congress of the Comintern (1935) had led this party back into populism. The involvement of radical catholics and Trotskyists in the PT had the consequence that it overtly rejected the politics of Stalinism, leading to an initial resistance to populism. However, the radical christians and Mandelites asserted as an alternative to Stalinism an *ethical* democratism - not a class-based radical republicanism. This ethical democratism could itself form part of a route back to populism.

Second, both anti-Stalinism and the origin of the PT in a coalition of somewhat politically diverse elements, including a substantial Trotskyist component, led to a practical commitment of the party to pluralism in its internal affairs. This is not quite the same thing as being fully democratic. We may compare the tension which existed in the British Labour Party before Kinnockism between traditions of pluralism originating in the party's roots and its close connection with the trade unions, the practical control of the party's public policy and practice by the trade union tops and elected representatives, and the policy of bans and proscriptions starting in 1918. The PT was in this respect not unlike the Labour Party, before it attained stable status as a capitalist second party after 1945, only without the bans and proscriptions. There was open, democratic *discussion*,

but the party centre round the trade union leaders retained effective control.

Growth and impasse of the PT

The PT leaped more or less immediately into being a mass party, with 245,000 members by 1982. But it did not immediately break through electorally. It obtained only 3.5% of the vote in the legislative elections of 1982, and 6% in 1986. This rose to 10% in 1990, 13% in 1994 and 1998, and 18.5% in 2002. In the presidential elections of 1989, however, Lula beat the 'left' alternatives in the first round and won 47% of the vote in the second round. In 1994 and 1998 Cardoso won outright on the first round, Lula coming second with 27% in 1994 and 31% in 1998.

Meanwhile, the PT had through the late 1980s and 1990s won control of a number of Brazil's local governments - most famously Porto Alegre, site of the first World Social Forum. Here the party ran up against the underlying difficulty facing successful electoral campaigns by radical workers' parties. Working class voters vote for such parties because they want to see concrete improvements in their conditions of life. But *within the framework of the bourgeois constitution*, substantial changes are simply not within the gift of local governments, since their budgets are constrained by national laws - as the Militant Tendency and other elements of the Labour left discovered in Britain in the 1980s.

Bourgeois constitutions are designed, by their 'checks and balances', to prevent radical changes at the expense of the property-owning classes. The property-owners secure the changes they want not primarily by electoral struggle but by forms of corruption: find the successful politicians and buy them, or buy a judicial decision. This in turn is replicated within bourgeois politics in the form of horse-trading and clientelist influence networks: thus, for example, Austin Mitchell MP has admitted selling the whips his vote on top-up fees in exchange for ministerial support for projects in his constituency.

The choices open to leftists who win a local majority are therefore (1) to engage in 'gesture politics' by defying the state; (2) to administer the system, but achieve nothing or only minimal changes for their constituency; or (3) to enter into the bourgeois political system of trading in influence in order to achieve concrete gains for constituents (what the Americans call 'log-rolling' and 'pork-

barrel politics' - or 'pork' for short).

The PT's 'solution' to this problem was to assert that it was creating, in some of the localities it controlled, 'participatory budgets', through various forms of mass meetings. This was to apply the rhetoric of "participatory democracy" to what were in substance no more than consultation exercises on a very large scale. It was an attempt by the elected representatives to escape from *their* responsibility for decision-making. Genuine workers' democracy would involve the representatives not merely consulting with, but accepting recallability by, the bodies which elected them, and extending this principle not merely to the elected representatives but also to the various unelected officials and so on. It would thus be inconsistent with working within the constitution. The limits of the 'participation' policy can be seen in the fact that in the same 2002 elections in which Lula was elected, the PT lost the governorship of the state of Rio Grande del Sul - whose capital is Porto Alegre.

Coalitionism

It is the need to achieve something concrete which has ultimately driven the PT leadership's entry into mainstream Brazilian bourgeois-clientelist politics. Cardoso's IMF structural adjustment policies formed an iron cage round the PT's local administrations; Cardoso's - and through him the PMDB's - possession of the presidency blocked the PT from effective log-rolling and from access to pork. Getting rid of Cardoso thus became not merely a personal goal of Lula's, but an apparent key to the PT being able to 'do something' for its constituents, to - as John Rees puts it for Britain - 'represent the unrepresented'. But getting rid of Cardoso meant that the PT - with less than 20% of the national vote - would have to construct a coalition with at least some element of the bourgeois parties. The heavy presence of the USA, breathing down Brazilian politicians' necks meant that this would involve reassuring *the USA* that any changes would not threaten its interests: ie, would be marginal. Hence the coalition with Alencar and the Liberals - not a party of the left, but of the right. Hence Lula's explicit commitment to continue Cardoso's "fiscal virtue".

But this choice merely replicates at the level of national government the iron cage which already enclosed the PT municipalities. The Lula government can be little more than "the ninth year of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government" because the constraints of the bourgeois constitutional order apply almost as much to national governments as to local governments. A president needs a coalition in the legislature; in Brazil, also, an unusually high proportion of finance goes through the state governments, so that, while the central government can block the action of the states and municipalities, so too the states can block the action of the central government.

In addition, governments under bourgeois constitutions have depended for their finance on central banks backed by markets in government securities since the invention of this mechanism by the Dutch in the 17th century. (The first instance of direct coercion of government by the money markets in Britain was under queen Anne [1702-1714]; the most recent was against the Wilson-Callaghan Labour governments in the

fragmented left wing

1970s.) This dependence on the money markets is made more acute by the deregulation of exchange controls, etc, which the USA has been pushing since the 1970s. 'Keeping the markets happy' is in Latin America to some extent code for 'keeping the USA happy', but it is also a perfectly normal feature of European capitalist politics, where the dependency on the USA is less direct.

Neither the USA nor the Brazilian capitalist class is presently willing to make substantial concessions to the workers and the poor. The historical evidence is that they will not be willing to do so until the capitalist class as a whole is *put in fear*, as happened first with the early rise in Europe of the workers' movement as a revolutionary force, and again in 1945-50. But the PT leadership has precisely decided to obtain office by *not* putting the capitalist class in fear.

We end, accordingly, with 'reformism without reforms'. Under Lula unemployment has increased, and the average unskilled wage has fallen by 10%. The much-heralded proposals for land reform - the reason Miguel Rosseto continues to serve in the government - have been on a minimal scale and even these have not been implemented; the government has supported the landowners against land seizures and imprisoned peasant activists. The 'pension reform' has triggered the attack on leftist elected deputies and senators.

The left

The Brazilian Marxist left is, like the far left almost everywhere, divided into multiple, mutually opposed tendencies. Some are within and some outside the PT. The Argentinian Partido Obrero's report of the June 2003 congress of the Brazilian CUT trade union confederation (<http://www.po.org.ar/english/804art5.htm>) gives some indication of the relation of forces. The leadership mainstream obtained about 53% of the vote; the PCB 14%; the DS 8%; a bloc including the French-centred 'orthodox Trotskyist' Lambertist tendency, O Trabalho, obtained 16%, the Lambertistes themselves having about 4%; the Morenista 'orthodox Trotskyist' PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers Party) had about 7%; a variety of other small tendencies shared the remaining 2%. The PCB and PSTU are outside the PT: the PCB received 2.2% of the vote in the 2002 elections and the PSTU 0.2%. To get onto the executive 20% of the vote was needed, which forced the PCB and DS to align with the leadership majority, and several of the other tendencies to bloc to form an opposition. It can thus be seen that Marxist tendencies (not including the DS) lead in aggregate above 25% of the CUT; but their disunity means that they have less effective weight.

At the time of the formation of the PT the fall of the USSR was yet to take place, and 'official communism' (PPS) and Maoism - both Beijing-line and Tirana-line (PCB) - still existed as such. Among the Trotskyists, the dominant tendency was the Morenista PSTU, part of an international tendency then centred in Argentina, though the Loristas (Bolivian-centred) and the Lambertistes also had some forces; they split from one another in 1979, leading to a short-lived unity of the Lambertistes and Morenistas. The Mandelites, who were later to form the DS, were marginal.

Most of the Trotskyists went into the PT, many with a short-term perspective of winning forces to their own organisation and then splitting - the type of entry policy applied by James P Cannon to the US Socialist Party in the 1930s. The Lambertistes have had a rather

longer-term orientation, but one still governed by the fundamental goal of building their own tendency by denouncing the PT leadership as a scab grouping. As is reflected in the current multiplicity of Trot tendencies, they were unable to unite among themselves. The PSTU has recently indicated its unwillingness to participate in the proposed new party called for by the expelled PT deputies on the ground that it would ... allow permanent factions (<http://brasil.indymedia.org/eo/blue/2004/01/272621.shtml>).

The Mandelites

The Mandelites had a distinctive approach to the Lula leadership. This was given by the 'replacement leadership strategy' which the Trotskyists developed in the aftermath of World War II. This strategy argued that the Trot groups were too small to make any impact with their own policies. Hence, left breaks from the ascendancy of reformism and Stalinism would have confused centrist or left-reformist leaderships. The immediate task was to work alongside these lefts and build them as an alternative to the traditional leaderships; at some undetermined later stage the Trotskyists would come out in the open and fight for their own policy.

Transposed into the conditions of the PT, this meant that the Mandelites sought to build a left which would give critical support to the centre leadership of the PT round Lula. This has been a consistent thread in their policy, still reflected in last June's CUT congress. It has allowed the DS to grow from marginality to a substantial presence in the PT. It is understandable that they should cling to this policy even while the leadership to which they give critical support is attacking their members. Nothing new here: the old Pablo-Mandel-Frank International Secretariat of the Fourth International followed the same approach when the Cuban Castro regime (admittedly a long way to the left of the Lula government!) suppressed the Cuban Trotskyists in the early 1960s.

The underlying problem with the policy is that if you engage in self-censorship, suppressing your own views for the sake of unity, after a while you lose all sense (other than gut morality) of what these views are. The DS has thus for quite some time ceased to be in any real sense a Marxist tendency which seeks socialism through the leading role of the proletariat, and become a left ethical-socialist one which seeks to 'unite the dispossessed'. This evolution has been shared with, and perhaps led, the similar evolution of the 'Fourth International' as a whole. The tendency now seems likely to divide between those like Heloisa Helena, who follow their gut class instincts to oppose the Lula government's attacks, and those like Miguel Rosseto, who cling to the possibility of achieving a few crumbs for the poor through a government which is a 'lesser evil' to the right (just as Blair is a 'lesser evil' to the Tories).

The ortho-Trots

If the DS has evolved away from Marxism, its 'orthodox Trotskyist' opponents have not evolved at all. Their comments have a formulaic character: if only the Brazilian workers would accept the 1938 *Transitional programme*, all would be

well. Their historic insistence that Stalinism was alien to the workers' movement leaves them splintered by their own insistence on Stalinist internal bureaucratic centralism. They have insisted on the scab character of the Lula leadership, not merely now but from the beginning of the PT (when the trade union leaders' prominence in the PT represented a sharp left turn on their part). As well as having a 'boy who cried wolf' effect, this insistence conveys the impression of tendencies unwilling to address the practical problems of the workers' movement in conditions which are not, at present, conditions of revolutionary crisis.

Economism, nationalism

The ability of the PT to deliver anything for the workers is constrained partly by the structure of the Brazilian constitution, which is designed to *prevent* the working class making gains at the expense of the capitalists and landlords. It is constrained partly by US dominance of Latin America. And it is constrained partly by the simple fact that the PT has not won a majority, either in the electoral sense or - given Brazil's class make-up - in the sense of majority support among the working class. It is therefore forced into coalitions and partial agreements if it wants to achieve anything.

The difficulty of the Trotskyist left in Brazil has three corresponding elements. The first is the underlying economism of the 1938 *Transitional programme*, which defines their current even when (as in the case of the Mandelites) the substance of the programme has been abandoned. The consequence of this underlying economism is that the Trotskyists are prepared to explain to the workers *in abstract* that the state is a capitalist state, but not to place at the centre of their active policy the *actual constitutional mechanisms* which make the state a capitalist state (presidentialism at national level, strong governors in the provinces and mayors in the municipalities, federalism, central bank finance, judicial review, etc). On the contrary, they place at the core of their agitation substantive economic improvements in the condition of life of the workers and poor peasants, which could only be achieved by the prior overthrow of the Brazilian state ... and of all the Latin American, and the north American, states. In taking this approach the Trotskyists are bound either to appear as ultra-left ultimacists (the ortho-Trots, like Workers Power in England) or to abandon bit by bit any demand which actually challenges the constitutional order and become simple reformists (the DS; the same evolution happened to Ken Coates in England and now seems to be happening to the Socialist Workers Party and ISG).

The second difficulty is nationalism. To put the point concretely, it is blindingly obvious that it is totally unrealistic for Brazil, acting alone, to repudiate the foreign debt, or even to take serious measures against capital flight. The US response would be swift and merciless. At the same time, to wait for US politics to move in the interests of the third world working class could well be to wait forever. On the other hand, collective action of the working class in the whole of Latin America would shake the founda-

tions of the capitalist world order. *Concrete class internationalism implies 'continentalism'*: that is, the practical collaboration of the workers' movement, on a continental scale, *prior to* seizing state power.

This sort of practical internationalism was the foundation of the First International. It was a goal of the left wing of the Second International, and a goal of the Comintern. In the 1920s, however, the Stalin-Bukharin-Zinoviev-Kamenev leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union obliterated efforts towards regional and continental organisation of the CPs in the name of world centralism through the Moscow-based executive committee of the Comintern. 'Internationalism' was transmuted, for the 'official communists', into subservience to Moscow; for the Maoists into subservience to Beijing or Tirana.

The Trotskyists, meanwhile, transmuted the internationalist strategy of Marxism into an illusion of the repetition of the world effects of October 1917: 'If we could just get someone to lead a revolution, we could get a new mass international ...' In their internal organisation, they simply lifted the Stalinist model, which devalued continental relations in favour of relations through the international centre. The result is a multiplicity of little 'Cominterns' with the role of Moscow played by Paris (Lambertistes), London (currently the SWP's International Socialist Tendency, the Socialist Party's Committee for a Workers' International, Workers Power's League for the Fifth International, etc), New York (the Sparts) and so on. These pseudo-internationals exacerbate the divisions among the Marxist left.

If this 'internationalism' is singularly unattractive, what is publicly substituted for practical internationalism is sentimental 'internationalism' in the form of international conferences and gatherings which have no operative consequences. This style of 'internationalism' was pioneered by Willi Muenzenberg for the Comintern in the 1930s, and has continued a staple of the 'official communist' movement. Among the Trotskyists the Lambertistes have been long-time exponents. The World Social Forums, initiated by the PT, have carried it to new heights. But it remains ultimately decorative rather than practical. Without a real strategy for international action of the class, the Trotskyists in Brazil, as elsewhere, remain *moral* rather than strategic critics of left trade union and labour leaders.

Unity in action and coalitions

The third problem is that of forms of unity and coalitions. A political tendency - including one as large as the PT - which completely abjures blocs and coalitions will be unable to do anything except make propaganda. The classic example is the Socialist Party of Great Britain. The impasse of the PT municipalities in the face of Cardoso's "fiscal responsibility" is merely a large-scale example of the problem.

But, on the other side of the coin, entering or staying in any and every coalition or 'broad party' which appears to be a 'lesser evil' - ie, to enable some very limited goal to be met - leads rather rapidly, as the example of the PT shows, to

political collapse. It is this lesser-evilism which kept British trade unionists in the Liberal Party for many years, which to this day keeps US trade unionists in the Democratic Party, and which has led in Brazil to the collapse of every attempt at a left coalition into a group of populist influence-traders.

'Official communists' and Trotskyists alike have been unable to resolve this problem, over many years, and not just in Brazil. Either they have gone for policies of 'critical support' which end in supporting capitalist governments' projects, like those of the DS in Brazil - and Lora in Bolivia, Moreno in Argentina, the LSSP in Sri Lanka, and so on and on. Or they have gone for denunciation and sterile independence, like the PSTU in Brazil (and more groups than it is worth mentioning). What is peculiar is that they have never tried the concrete advice of Marx and Engels to the German workers' movement.

Leftists often quote Marx's comment, that "Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes." John Rees did so at the January 25 Convention of the Left in London. But no-one seems to read the advice of which it is part - as a covering note for Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme*. *Do not* set up coalitions and broad parties on the basis of vague generalities about principles and values which mask underlying disagreements. *Do* enter into agreements and broad parties, but do so on the basis of *concrete limited tasks* on which there can be genuine, if limited, agreement. Retain and continue the open struggle between the differing political tendencies within the agreement on their points of disagreement. On this basis it is perfectly legitimate to have partial agreements, including electoral agreements, even with bourgeois parties.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognise that a party which genuinely represents the independent interests of the working class cannot take responsibility for running a capitalist *government*. To do so is - as the PT is in the process of demonstrating - to abandon the actual interests and struggle of the class wholesale, for the sake of marginal reforms which will be swept away when the disillusion of the electors results in the return of the traditional capitalist parties. The point is that Marxists should not accept responsibility for a government *within the existing capitalist constitutional order*. Electoral agreements therefore do not imply, for Marxists, agreements as to the formation of a *government*.

Brazilian lessons

The Brazilian PT has been the largest-scale test in many years of the policy of building a broad left workers' party which does not define itself programmatically for or against the existing capitalist constitutional order. It has also tested the led variants, the 'labour party policy', the 'replacement leadership strategy' and the 'critical support' approach to non-Marxist left leaderships. It is already clear that these approaches have failed. There is no reason to attribute this failure, as the ortho-Trots do, to the Lula leadership acting from the outset in bad faith. The evolution of the PT towards populist lesser-evil coalitionism reflects the *weakness* of its political ideas and of the Marxist alternatives offered.

The question of constitutions, the question of practical internationalism, and the Marxist approach to coalitions turn out not to be abstract sectarian shibboleths, but practical choices in real politics. The left in Britain would do well to learn from this experience ●

The ability of the PT to deliver anything for the workers is constrained partly by the structure of the Brazilian constitution, which is designed to prevent the working class making gains at the expense of the capitalists and landlords

ESF

Wheels start to roll

At last there is good news to report regarding the organisation of the next European Social Forum, which will take place in London. We might still not know when exactly it will happen, we might not know where or how, we might criticise the bureaucratic and dominant role that Ken Livingstone's Greater London Authority is playing; but undoubtedly things have started moving rapidly forward in the last couple of weeks.

However, the biggest problem is still unresolved: there is a serious lack of money. Although we are not allowed to report in detail on this question (see below), no trade union or other organisation has made any firm commitment of financial support yet. This has even led to suggestions by Redmond O'Neill (Livingstone's policy director on public affairs and transport) that the ESF in London might not take place in 2004 at all, but "maybe in November 2005" - a possibility that was rejected outright by Socialist Workers Party and GLA representatives when it was previously put forward by a wide range of 150 groups and individuals (see *Weekly Worker* November 6 2003).

For the time being though, we are planning for an event in 2004. But there is not much time: a European ESF assembly on March 6-7 will make the final decision as to whether holding the 2004 ESF in London is a viable option. This means that firm bookings for venues cannot be made until then. Alexandra Palace, which has been provisionally booked by the GLA for the end of October and all of November, demands that we make up our mind by the end of February. If they cannot be convinced otherwise, the ESF might have to move to 2005, as no other venue in London is really appropriate.

Big centres like Earls Court, Olympia, the Dome or the Excel Centre would have to be divided up with fabric curtains to create smaller meeting spaces - but this would present real problems in terms of sound-proofing. Alexandra Palace has also quite a few downsides: it is a brisk 25 minutes walk from Wood Green tube station, and can only host a maximum of 25,000 people - and that only with the setting up of large marquees around the building. According to comrade O'Neill (who is a leading member of the Trotskyist sect, Socialist Action), it can host 14 plenary sessions and 90 smaller seminars and workshops per day. But the two previous ESFs have attracted over 50,000 people, attending almost twice that number of meetings.

To move things forward more quickly, a coordinating committee has been set up which is supposed to deal with the day-to-day organisational tasks coming up. There is no question that such a body is of absolute and urgent necessity. However, the way it has been set up is fully in the spirit of the process so far - ie, secretive, rather undemocratic and with no advance notice at all. The UK organising committee, meeting on February 5, was unexpectedly presented with a proposal to establish such a body.

A few people criticised the lack of prior notice, with Jeremy Dewar from Workers Power at one stage threatening to withhold his consent, thus vetoing any decision under the ESF's 'consensus principle' (unless of course the chair decides to override this by declaring a consensus anyway). Like ourselves, WP is officially in favour of ditching 'consensus' cum arbitrary rulings in favour of voting. But comrade O'Neill hit the nail on the head: "The GLA gets criticised for organising things, but now you are against setting up a committee that could take over most of the work."

CPGB comrades suggested that - like all other ESF structures - the coordinating committee should be open to inter-

ested observers and publish its agendas and minutes. This proved more controversial than should be the case, with Jane Loftus (SWP member representing the Communication Workers Union) and Fred Leplat (member of International Socialist Group, representing London Union) calling "no, no" during our intervention, while other SWP members present shook their heads.

Fortunately, reason won - at least in part. Two amendments were accepted by the majority, which commit the organising committee and all other sub-groups to allow observers and publish agendas and reports of its decisions. However, following strong objections from the SWP and GLA, a little clause with big implications has been added. Meetings of sub-groups can "meet in closed session by agreement". A day later, at the coordinating committee, this clause was already being put into practice. The majority in the meeting decided that I should not be allowed to report any financial details of the ESF: "Nobody can openly talk about figures if it is going to end up in a newspaper," comrade O'Neill stated.

At the next meeting of the committee on February 11, the screws were tightened further: Thanks to comrade Jeremy Dewar from Workers Power, attendees who happen to write for newspapers will from now on have to leave the room whenever finance is being discussed (and that includes such minor items as registration fees, as well as general fundraising). After comrade O'Neill again raised the problem with "people from newspapers" being present, Jeremy incredibly suggested that "those journalists should be excluded who write for newspapers that have a record of leaking discussions. And I want to empha-

sise that *Workers Power* newspaper has no intention of reporting on any of these discussions in the future." And *Red Pepper* has been behaving well, too. It was only the bad *Weekly Worker* he wanted to see excluded.

I guess Jeremy hoped he would gain some new friends. And those people present who are used to operating through backroom deals and secret meetings certainly jumped at the opportunity. Chris Nineham (SWP, aka Stop the War Coalition) suggested that observers should no longer be able to attend meetings of the coordinating committee. Although his proposal was not put to the vote, I would not be surprised if observers will be shown the door at next week's meeting.

Nick Sigler (Unison's head of international affairs) supported Jeremy, stating that "the mistrust that exists has nothing to do with exclusions or secret meetings. It has got everything to do with certain newspapers reporting these meetings, to the extent that these papers are read in any case." This is a theoretically very interesting concept, which was greeted with enthusiastic nodding from the likes of Chris Nineham: without the *Weekly Worker*, people would never have known about those secret meetings - and would have had no reason to feel excluded ...

Although I declared that of course the *Weekly Worker* will adhere to last week's decision and has certainly not broken it, the overwhelming majority voted to exclude me. Then the wolves turned around and decided that now they needed some desert: Jeremy Dewar was duly expelled, too. A beautiful example of what happens once you start calling for bans, if ever there was one. Instead of sucking up to his new friends, Jeremy



Chris Nineham: temporary GLA loyalist

had to spend the next 30 minutes listening to me telling him off.

This ban shows of course that the GLA and co are in fact not very confident about raising the necessary funds. Last year's forum in Paris was subsidised by PCF-run local authorities and the central government of Jacques Chirac to the tune of over €3 million (£2 million), while the comrades in Italy were given free use of the main venue to stage our first ESF in Florence. Imposing a blackout on reports of these shortcomings will certainly not make them disappear. All organisations in Britain and Europe should be informed immediately about this grim situation so that they can start to discuss their financial input.

The discussion around this item points to the biggest problem for the GLA-SWP alliance. I think I have heard the sentence, 'The organisation is not broad enough', at least twice at every single ESF meeting I have attended. Some national unions might have signed up to the ESF, but in reality they are not involved. Representatives from Unison and the CWU are almost exclusively members of the SWP. The South East Region TUC's Laurie Heselden has not attended any meetings since he walked out of the ESF assembly in December. The TUC has so far refused to give its support. Maureen O'Mara (president of Natfhe) and Alex Gordon (RMT NEC) are the only 'real' and regularly attending trade unionists at these meetings.

This shows quite clearly that we are dealing with a qualitatively different situation from that facing our comrades in Italy in France in 2002 and 2003. The working class in Britain has a lower level of consciousness and neither the SWP, Respect or the Socialist Alliance have anything more than tenuous roots in society. They certainly lack the authority of a Rifondazione Comunista or a Parti Communiste Français (PCF).

For example, at the first meeting of the coordinating committee on February 6, Jane Loftus (CWU) and Alan Rae (Amicus) were the only trade union representatives among the 16 people present - they are also members of the SWP, of course. There were five GLA employees, one member of the CPGB, one from *Work-*

ers Power (newspaper), one from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (aka No Sweat), three non-representative members of the Green Party, three from the SWP and the CND's Kate Hudson, a member of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain. There was also a comrade from the Kurdish Federation/Halkevi centre. Oscar Reyes, representing *Red Pepper* magazine, was the only one present who is not a member of a leftwing party (this of course also highlights the idiocy of the current ban on political parties openly participating in the ESF process).

In short, we had the usual suspects. And I very much suspect that the composition of this committee will not change too much (though at our second meeting on February 11, Nick Sigler and Adrian Weir (TGWU) were some welcome additions). A sad, but pretty accurate reflection of the reality of the left in Britain, which in the absence of a vigorous campaign from below means everything hangs on the GLA bureaucratic machine and Ken Livingstone's ability to persuade national unions to financially support the ESF. Desperate for the thing to go ahead, in order to maintain its self-image of being a European mover and shaker, SWP comrades have therefore opted to be constitute themselves *temporary* GLA loyalists.

Of course we will adhere to the majority decision, which was in fact not as bad as it could have been. A couple of comrades suggested that there should be a ban on reporting *all* decisions of the committee. "Who would be interested anyway in reading about these meetings?" comrade Loftus asked. While minutes remain so pitifully uninformative, while agendas are not being distributed and while meetings are being called at one day's notice, I would suggest quite a lot of people will find open reporting rather useful.

Anyway, at the ESF European assembly on March 6-7 comrade O'Neill will have to come clean about the financial side of our ESF. He will have to tell us what Ken Livingstone's talks with trade union leaders have come up with. He will have to let us know if there will be an ESF in London in 2004 ●

Tina Becker

Essential ESF information

UK organising committee

Replacing the old 'UK assembly', it brings together representatives of all affiliated organisations. Open to observers, it will meet once a month.

UK coordinating committee

With only one representative from each affiliated organisation, this body is dealing with the day-to-day decisions of the ESF and is "accountable to the OC". It meets at least once a week - currently every Wednesday afternoon at 2pm in the GLA's City Hall. This is a working group and attendees are expected to be able to commit at least one day's work per week to the ESF. Observers are allowed, with the right to exclude them when sensitive issues are being discussed.

Central email address: ukesfcommittee@gn.apc.org

This is currently being controlled by GLA employees, which means that for the time being requests and queries are being handled rather selectively. With a properly staffed office and accountable personnel, this could be transformed into a useful tool.

In order to sign up to the very lively and informative email discussion list go to <http://lists.mobilise.org.uk/www/info/esf-uk-info> and follow the instructions.

Important dates

Monday February 16, 5.30pm, Unison HQ, Mabledon Place: First meeting of the newly established programme group.

Thursday February 26: Meeting of culture group. Details to be confirmed.

Sunday February 29, 12noon-5pm, City Hall: Meeting of UK organising committee, mainly to discuss if our bid is viable. Will also discuss organisation of European preparatory assembly.

Saturday and Sunday March 6-7, City Hall: European preparatory assembly. This body will take the final decision as to whether the ESF will be held in London and set the date. Saturday from 10am-5pm, Sunday from 10am-1pm.

Remaking internationalism

Eve of European assembly meeting: 'Social forums and the politics of global solidarity' - Friday March 5, 7pm, Hong Kong lecture theatre, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, WC2. Nearest tube: Holborn.

Speakers: Tariq Ali, Annick Coupe (SUD PTT union, France), Marco Berlinguer (Rifondazione Comunista, Italy), John Appollis (Anti-Privatisation Forum, South Africa), Annie Pourre (No Vox, France).

Organised by Radical Activist Network: info@radicalactivist.net

‘Old’ as good as ‘new’

As the SWP had not been able to mobilise quite as many of its members to the latest meeting of the UK organising committee as previously, they lost on a rather emotive issue. With their GLA allies, the comrades attempted to immediately close down the ‘old’ ESF programme group in favour of a newly established group, which would be far better, far bigger and “far more representative”, as comrade Jonathan Neale (Globalise Resistance/SWP) argued. But why we should expect those who have shown no interest in the ESF programme one week to come on board the next remains a mystery.

The ‘old’ group had successfully been meeting since December and discussing, amongst other things, methods to decide on speakers for the ESF and how we could facilitate the staging of meetings by organisations from across the world. Between 20 and 40

people had been attending, representing a wide range of groups. According to Redmond O’Neill, though, this was “simply a small group of self-selected people. There is no way that serious organisations will get involved in this most sensitive group if it has been hijacked by one particular political outlook.” I somehow doubt he meant the GR/SWP, although it has been by far the largest group attending.

The reason for wanting the group abolished is quite clear. For some reason, the GLA had not managed to attend any of the working group meetings and therefore had had zero impact. Undoubtedly, it will send a number of representatives to all gatherings of the ‘new’ group to ensure that it does not make any decisions not to Ken’s liking.

Dave Timms from the World Development Movement, who has played a positive role in trying to maintain some democracy within

the ESF process, was finally able to convince the majority of people at the organising committee that the work of the programme group should not just be thrown into the bin. Dave’s compromise, which was backed by Hannah Griffiths from Friends of the Earth and Hilary Wainwright of *Red Pepper*, was declared the ‘consensus’ by chair Alex Gordon (RMT), against the protests of GR/SWP and GLA. According to this, the ‘old’ programme group would meet one last time the following Sunday to “wrap up its work” in order to be able to report back to the organising committee the following week. Of course, the underlying implication was that the group would be in the position to present some authoritative recommendations on how to move forward.

About 40 people attended the last meeting of the ‘old’ programme group on February 10, which opened with Jonathan Neale giving a rather dishonest report-back from the OC. He stressed the positive attitude the majority of people in the meeting had towards the work of the programme group, conveniently forgetting that he was most certainly not amongst them.

We moved on to discuss the timetable and format of the programmatic aspect of the ESF, and reached consensus on a number of important recommendations. We agreed, for example, that we should have fewer plenary sessions with fewer speakers on the platform. In Paris and Florence, top tables were often overloaded with up to 12 speakers, sometimes making identical points. We will also recommend that our website should facilitate interactive communication between various organisations so that they would be encouraged to internationally discuss their political ideas - and then stage real debates during the ESF.

This is of extreme importance if we are really interested in facilitating the coming together of the European left. Surely, at a time where our ruling classes are moving towards the creation of a European superstate, we have no time to lose when it comes to building our own, continent-wide structures.

There was consensus (including from the SWP) that workshops should be centrally facilitated - a clear rebuttal of the proposals from Dave Holland (Livingstone’s appointed manager for European and international affairs) and Redmond O’Neill, who had claimed that workshops must be “self-organised”, implying that it would be up to organising groups - for example, those based in Spain or Poland - to find their own venues in London.

The ‘new’ programme group should be able to get off the ground efficiently on the basis of the good work already done - and will undoubtedly carry on with an identical composition to the ‘old’ one. With the addition of our friends from the GLA, of course ●

Anne Mc Shane

Johnathon Neale: far bigger



Culture relief

What a relief to go to a meeting that rose above the political infighting and got on with organising. I am referring to the ESF culture group, which is not officially recognised by the organising committee (OC).

The politically diverse and artistically vibrant group includes, amongst others, people from Artists Against the War, Cardiff and London social forums, Oxford and London Globalise Resistance, Iraqis for Democracy and Against the Occupation, theatre directors, actors, street performers, film makers, artists, architects and poets.

The culture group discussed the bizarre relationship between the working groups and the OC, where at the moment the working groups do not have a voice, apart from through affiliated organisations. It was decided that there was a need to establish a formal relationship, giving the culture group representation on the committee and control of cultural budgets. It was agreed that two people will be chosen at each meeting to report back to the OC - this time one person from GR and one from the London SF were picked.

Much discussion was given to the venues. The culture group wants to organise events in venues all over London and elsewhere during the build-up to the ESF in order to mobilise for the event as well as raise important funds. A number of directors and actors announced that they would like to put on plays to that effect, other mentioned the possibility of staging concerts. Of course, the group also wants to be integral to the whole event itself and not a ‘tack-on’, as culture appeared to some in the Florence and Paris ESFs. People discussed the need for space within the programme and central cultural interventions if there is a main site. The group also wants to coordinate the discussion of cultural themes in the various seminars and workshops. A mapping sub-group was set up to draw up a plan of public spaces and venues that could be used around the Bloomsbury area, linking up to Alexandra Palace via Kings Cross station.

The next step is outreach and all the members committed to sending a statement out to hundreds of art and political organisations. Organisational and creative sub-groups are also being set up.

The culture group will meet every two weeks and monthly at weekends to allow people from outside London to come along ●

Teresa Hoskyns

Fighting fund

Learning

Many avid readers of this paper will insist, almost guiltily, on asking whether or not our concentration on the left is justified. The implication is that we should try and launch a *Pravda* and appeal directly to the mass of the working class.

My own response is to say, ‘Go ahead.’ However, I warn, the results are not promising: either complete political collapse into abject localism or mind-numbingly dull publications like *The Socialist* and *Socialist Worker*, which no-one reads.

Meanwhile - taking into account the low level of class-consciousness in Britain - we shall continue to model ourselves on Lenin’s *Iskra*, fight to reorganise the left and, slowly but surely, gain a wider and wider audience. Last week we had 8,836 e-readers, and this plus our estimate of print-readers keeps our total circulation healthily just above the 10,000 average we achieved by the end of 2003.

Comrade AG from New York clearly grasps our strategy. He reads the paper every week “as soon as it is published on the web” (incidentally we had 2,401 US e-readers last week). “Without papers like the *Weekly Worker* and learning from the history of the real movement of the working class we are surely doomed to repeat and repeat again the tragedies of the 20th century,” comrade CM concludes. And as a measure of his appreciation and solidarity he sent £100 through our PayPal facility. This was added to by one other donation from comrade PM in Wolverhampton.

Thanks to both of you, our £500 monthly fighting fund now stands at £155.

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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Keep the link, but don't bow to Blair

Reinstate the RMT

Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT transport union, was in full flow at Saturday's Convention of the Trade Union Left in London: "It's two minutes to go now," he said. "And I feel like the Birmingham Six when they got out of jail. In fact, it's almost a relief. I feel free. And perhaps some of you might try it as well. You'll feel just as good, just like I feel today."

It was, of course, two minutes until the moment the Labour Party's ultimatum to the RMT came into effect - reverse the Scottish region's affiliation to the Scottish Socialist Party or be expelled from the Labour Party. The day before, at a special general meeting of the union in Glasgow, delegates had voted 42 to eight in favour of upholding the union's policy of allowing branches to back political parties that support union policy, and specifically backed the executive's decision to endorse the Scottish region and its seven branches to affiliate to the SSP.

Communists, of course, defend the right of the RMT branches to support the SSP. Despite its explicit nationalism, for sections of the working class in Scotland it stands as a beacon of socialism. It supports renationalisation of the railways under workers' control and it calls for the end of Blair's anti-trade union laws. It calls for a socialist society.

But are Bob Crow and the RMT really free? Is the fight against Blairism weakened or strengthened with the RMT outside the ranks of the Labour Party? This is no quibble. As we have said many times, the fight against Blairism and for a new workers' party must take place on many fronts: in the unions, at the ballot box, in the workplaces, in the localities and in the Labour Party. Our strategy aims to coordinate the battle. Work in one area must complement all the others: they are not counterposed arenas of struggle. Tactics will be different in different fields of battle, yet we are not about withdrawing from any one of them.

Many on the Trotskyite left have taken up the cry, 'Break the link'. From automatic support for the Labour Party, they have plumped for its polar opposite now that they can no longer stomach issuing the ritual 'Vote Labour, but ...' at election time. Of course, neither approach is correct. To break the link is to abandon a vital site for struggle in the unions and in the Labour Party. It is moralistic and unserious. The working class does not free itself of Blairism, let alone Labourism, by abandoning the Labour Party and leaving it uncontested.

Quite rightly, the RMT did not quit the Labour Party. It did not jump: it was pushed. As Bob Crow said at the February 7 convention, "We've sent the affiliation cheque. If the Labour Party doesn't want to cash it, that's interest in our bank account." Comrade Crow and the RMT have been at pains to point out that the union has not had a fair hearing in the Labour Party. And no right of appeal. At the special general meeting (SGM) in Glasgow, brother Crow said to delegates: "Even Harold Shipman got a trial; we didn't even get a hearing."

According to Martin Wicks, Socialist Alliance member and a delegate from Swindon to the SGM, there was no real

argument on the substantive issue. The only resistance came from people such as Steve Smart, a delegate from East Anglia. He argued on constitutional grounds that the annual conference resolution only allowed for "support" for non-Labour candidates and parties, not outright affiliation. This was brushed aside by the SGM. Affiliation, after all, is one form of support.

One shipping delegate argued that New Labour was not so bad. For example the privatisation of the shipping industry was not the government's fault: the European Union was making them do it. Pretty desperate stuff.

Rick Grogan, station grades committee secretary, told me there were seven motions submitted from branches, but these were laid on the table as being outside the remit of the SGM. The final vote of the SGM was taken on a report from the standing orders committee. Grogan said that, of the seven branches submitting motions, six were of the 'You can stick your ultimatum' variety, with only one coming from a "pocket right" branch supporting maintaining the link with Labour even at the cost of dropping support for the SSP.

Encouragingly, it seems many delegates at the SGM support a campaign for reaffiliation. While Bob Crow may breathe a sigh of relief at being outside the Labour Party, his union should begin a campaign of reaffiliation and call on all unions to defend the RMT. The Finsbury Park branch motion argued that: "This SGM ... instructs the council of executives to immediately launch a campaign within the labour movement to defend the RMT's affiliation to the Labour Party against the party's threat to expel us. In particular:

- (1) all our representatives on Labour Party bodies should raise this issue as a matter of urgency;
- (2) we call on other Labour-affiliated unions to demand the Labour Party withdraw its threat;
- (3) we call on other unions to take an RMT speaker at their conference this year;
- (4) we call on other Labour-affiliated unions to ensure that this issue is debated at Labour Party conference this year, with an RMT speaker there;
- (5) we call on constituency and regional Labour Parties to continue to recognise RMT delegates even if the expulsion goes ahead;
- (6) an initial meeting to organise this campaign should be held within one month of this SGM."

This is in general the correct approach. It is a disgrace that only three members of Labour's national executive committee voted against the ultimatum from Blair to the RMT on January 27: Mark Seddon, Christine Shawcroft and the RMT's Mick Cash. Twenty-one voted for the report, which was moved by Mick Griffiths.

Dennis Skinner moved an amendment to the report calling for a special meeting and for negotiations. It received seven votes: Skinner, Black, Seddon, Shawcroft, Holland, Cash and Beecham. Shahid Malik abstained. It fell. Subsequently, the Communication Workers Union executive condemned the Labour Party's move.

Where now for the RMT and other unions contemplating the democratisation of their political funds? Where will they put their money? Already the RMT has

backed John Marek, an independent for the Welsh assembly, as well as the SSP. In 2000 a whole number of unions endorsed Ken Livingstone's campaign for London mayor.

In the background looms the Galloway/Socialist Workers Party left populist Respect coalition. Sunday's *Observer* carried a report by Stephen Khan, the paper's Scotland editor. In it he claims: "Candidates standing for George Galloway's Respect coalition at the European elections in June will be supported by the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, following its exclusion from the Labour Party." Either someone has been briefing the reporter or he is jumping to conclusions.

Unjum Mirza, the RMT London region political officer, is quoted as saying: "A lot of people are keen to see us formally support Respect and should the union's policy be upheld at this Friday's meeting then moves will soon be made in that direction."

Comrade Mirza, a member of the SWP, spent a fair amount of time at the RMT special general meeting drumming up invitations about Respect to speak at various RMT branches. Good luck to him. However, according to Martin Wicks, there is "no groundswell" of support for Respect.

My attempts to gain clarification on this issue did not get very far. The RMT's press officer said he had not seen the *Observer* article and referred me to the London regional office. I had little luck there. Attempts over two days to speak to Alex Gordon, a member of the RMT council of executives, yielded nothing, despite brother Alex's most helpful voicemail message on his mobile phone assuring any caller that he would "be right back to you".

While comrade Wicks says there is no hunger among RMT delegates to back Respect, there are obviously moves by the SWP and others to gain the support, if not the affiliation, of the RMT. Yet even by the RMT's own yardstick there may be some problems with this.

Bob Crow said of the SSP affiliation: "The Scottish branches - all seven of them, through debate - said that they



Bob Crow at the convention

wanted to affiliate to the SSP and we endorsed it. The Scottish regional council, by 70% to 30%, voted to affiliate to the SSP. We are now going to put our full-time official on the executive of the SSP."

What was the basis of this? - "If an independent branch has a debate and wants to support a political party whose aims and objectives are the same as ours, which says that we want a socialist society, subject to the executive committee endorsing it, why shouldn't they?" asked Crow.

And herein lies the rub. The RMT's objectives, set out in its rule book, includes socialism as an aim. Rule 1, clause 4 (b) states that an object of the union shall be "to work for the supersession of the capitalist system by a socialistic order of society". This is more than Respect aims for. Even the RMT's mooted support for Plaid Cymru candidates is dressed up as support for a party that has socialism as an aim, as indeed Plaid formally does.

The expulsion of the RMT puts us on a new political terrain. The left must re-

spond with all the seriousness this deserves. For the RMT to blithely affiliate to a political coalition with an uncertain shelf life and no serious political commitment to the working class is a questionable move. The fight within the Labour Party is far from over: it has barely begun.

The RMT's expulsion has sharpened the debate, but it does not mean that all unions should be rushing to follow it outside the Labour Party. The call should be: maintain the link, but don't bow to Blairite ultimatums.

Bob Crow invites other unions to "try it too". Well, that depends. Different unions, different tactics. Our aim is to swing the balance of forces throughout the entire working class movement - not only away from Blair, but away from Labourism itself. We aim to lay the basis for a genuine party of the working class that not only calls for the "supersession of capitalism" but can assemble the political and material tools to accomplish this historic task of the working class ●

Marcus Ström

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