



weekly **Worker**

**Blunkett presses panic
button over east Europeans:
we say, open borders**

- SA Democracy Platform
- London ESF October 14-17
- Howard and BNP
- STWC conference

No 517

Thursday February 26 2004

Towards a new workers' party

www.cpgb.org.uk

50p/€0.85

Pour le droit de porter le voile ! Pour le droit de ne pas le porter !



For the right to wear the veil! For the right not to!



PARTYnotes

Opportunist wrongs

Banning the hijab in France's state schools has nothing whatsoever to do with defending vulnerable young women, upholding the values of 1789 or combating religious obscurantism. It is islamophobia pure and simple; and that demands an unambiguous, principled and vigorous response from the organised left.

Communists are for the right to wear the hijab and by the same measure the right not to wear it: a voluntary discarding of the veil - because of what it symbolises in the way of women's subordination to men, etc - is of course something we positively wish to bring about. However, that can never be achieved by a law imposed from above. What is required is full involvement in the ongoing struggle for extreme democracy, female equality and working class self-liberation.

President Jacques Chirac and his rightwing UMP government pursue an overtly anti-working class and thoroughly obnoxious agenda. Theirs is the tradition of imperial France, Vichy and general Charles de Gaulle. And in that conservative spirit a fifth of schools will continue to be run by the catholic church (and receive generous state subsidies and tax breaks). Chirac is certainly no "prisoner of the left". A laughable promise made by the French Socialist Party, Parti Communiste Français and Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire - and co-thinkers in Britain such as Alan Thornett of the International Socialist Group - when they excitedly urged voters to support Chirac in preference to Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Front National during the 2002 presidential elections.

Chirac and his government are cynically demonising France's five million muslims - an oppressed minority which is overwhelmingly working class, often poor and disproportionately unemployed. The hope is to rally patriotic France and outflank Le Pen: he poisonously bemoans the "promotion of islam in our country". By taking the lead against islam Chirac calculates that he can stem or reverse the growth of the FN.

Shades of the Dreyfus case. In 1894 captain Alfred Dreyfus - a member of the army's general staff and from a wealthy background of Alsatian jewish textile manufacturers - was found guilty of high treason by a court martial. Secret plans had been conveyed to Germany. He was imprisoned on Devil's Island and kept in severe solitary confinement. The charges against Dreyfus were baseless; nevertheless his case excused a tidal wave of patriotic anti-semitism. The archbishop of Paris acted as the patron of the anti-Dreyfusards. There were anti-jewish demonstrations, riots and even an attempted ultra-rightist coup. Dreyfus - white-haired and physically broken - finally received a presidential pardon in 1899.

Whether or not Chirac captures FN votes remains to be seen. However, one thing is for sure - the influence of islamic fundamentalists will be strengthened. They will demand separate muslim schools for girls, for example. The main blame for this lies with the abject failure of the left.

Frankly the left in France - with a few honourable exceptions - has shown itself to be deeply compromised by chauvinism, economism and thus islamophobia. The SP, PCF, LCR, Lutte Ouvrière - all of them. Instead of treating seriously the hijab ban, the left has either passively wrung its hands or actually sided with the government. Shades of Jean Jaurès and Jules Guesde - respectively the right and left leaders of French socialism - who disgracefully issued a joint manifesto telling the working class to stay aloof from both sides in the Dreyfus case.

By contrast, here, on the other side of the English Channel, the left has not been too bad on this question - with a few dishonourable exceptions. Eg, till February 19 the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and its fortnightly paper *Solidarity* maintained a cowardly evasiveness and is reportedly still rent by divisions. Mark Sandell has resigned from the executive committee in protest, while Sean Matgamna remains sulking in his tent.

Unfortunately the majority of the left in Britain suffers not from islamophobia: rather from a distinct softness towards islam. This is particularly so with the Socialist Workers Party, which appears to view pan-islamism as a strategic ally against imperialism in general and New Labour in particular.

Abroad that explains the SWP's apologetics for Iran's Khomeini movement, the Taliban in Afghanistan, FIS in Algeria and refusal to condemn the murderous September 11 2001 attacks on New York and Washington carried out by Al Qa'eda. At home that explains the attempt to fashion Respect so that it can include the Muslim Association of Britain as partners and the attendant temptation to water down or discard awkward principles. Notoriously at Marxism 2003 Lindsey German urged her comrades not to regard women's and gay rights as "shibboleths".

Socialist Worker editor Chris Harman once solemnly pledged that, when we "find ourselves on the same side

as the islamists", the SWP would "argue strongly with them" - not only over their "attitude towards women and minorities", but for the need to overthrow "class relations" (C Harman *The prophet and the proletariat* London 1999, p56). This has gone by the board. Instead of strong arguments there is the weakness of accommodation. And in the attempt to belittle its differences with islam the SWP is now doctoring history.

An example is Dave Crouch's generally useful article, 'Bolsheviks and islam: religious rights', which is promoted with the strap-line, "Socialists can learn from how the Bolsheviks approached the muslims of the Russian empire" (*Socialist Review* December 2003).

The comrade begins unproblematically, outlining a few pertinent facts. The overthrow of tsarism in 1917 radicalised Russia's 16 million muslims, "who demanded religious freedom and national rights", and on May 1 1917 the first all-Russian congress of muslims took place in Moscow. After heated debates the congress voted for women's rights, "making Russia's muslims the first in the world to free women from the restrictions typical of islamic societies of that period". At the same time, conservative muslim leaders were "hostile to revolutionary change".

What lessons do the Bolsheviks teach? Under the first subhead, 'Atheism', the comrade tells us: "Marxism is a materialist world view and so is thoroughly atheist. But, because it understands religion to have roots in oppression and alienation, Marxist political parties don't demand that their members or supporters are atheists too. So atheism was never included in the Bolsheviks' programme."

They welcomed leftwing muslims into their ranks. Leon Trotsky is quoted as saying that in some of the eastern republics as many as 15% percent of members were "believers in islam". Trotsky called them "raw revolutionary recruits who come knocking on our door". Indeed, comrade Crouch reckons that in some parts of central Asia, muslim membership of the Communist Party reached as high as 70% in the early 1920s.

Comrade Crouch is being economical with the truth. The Bolsheviks did not require party members to be atheists - that is right. Their programme did, however, include a section on religion. By the way, the very idea of adopting a programme is fearfully dismissed by the SWP leadership and neither *Socialist Worker's* 'Where we stand' column nor the SWP constitution contain any mention of religion.

For Bolshevism religion is both a refuge from alienation and a weapon in the hands of the ruling class. Therefore religion should be declared a private matter *as far as the state is concerned*. Religious discrimination is wholly intolerable. Everyone must be *absolutely free* to profess their own religion and the party should carefully avoid anything that would upset the feelings of believers. As a basic component of political freedom there must be the "separation of the church from the state and of the school from the church".

However, Crouch fails to mention the Bolshevik's call for extensive scientific propaganda aimed at overcoming "religious prejudices" (eg, in the 1918 programme). Nor does he refer to the party's attitude towards its own members and their beliefs. Hardly oversights, especially when one considers the SWP's drive to court islam and gain muslim recruits.

In this context let us turn to Lenin. He states that, so far as the party of the socialist proletariat is concerned, "religion is *not* a private matter" (my emphasis). As the party opposes "every religious bamboozling", the ideological struggle against religion cannot be "a private affair" *for members*, but is the concern of "the whole party, the whole of the proletariat" (VI Lenin CW Vol 10, Moscow 1977, pp84-85).

While the programme contains neither the demand for party members to be atheists nor a ban on recruiting believers, it is "based entirely on the scientific, and moreover materialist, world outlook". An "explanation" of the programme necessarily exposes the "true historical and economic roots of the religious fog". The programme therefore implicitly "includes propaganda of atheism" (*ibid* p86).

Naturally Lenin warns against the danger of elevating the religious question to the first rank. Religion cannot be overcome through "purely propaganda methods". Religion is sustained by class society and it can only be finally overcome through ending class society. Unitedly fighting for paradise on earth "is more important to us than the unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven" (*ibid* p87).

That is why the Bolsheviks did not include any demand that all members immediately free themselves from religious superstition. The Bolsheviks were convinced that the class struggle would educate and enlighten far better than any number of atheistic tracts. Towards that end they tirelessly strove against the hate-mongering and splitting tactics of the Black Hundreds - akin to today's BNP, FN, etc - and the tsarist state's discriminatory laws and attacks on religious minorities ●

Jack Conrad

LETTERS



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

Democracy Platform

As a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, I was dismayed to learn that John Bridge led a walkout by our contingent to the recent meeting of the Democracy Platform of the Socialist Alliance.

He gave the reason that the group decided to allow non-Socialist Alliance members to vote, and by doing so became an independent political organisation rather than a platform within the SA. As it happens, I think this is daft. The DPSA was formed precisely to oppose the anti-democratic, anti-socialist trajectory that the SA was being dragged into by the Socialist Workers Party. It aimed to defend the politics of *People before profit*, to campaign for democracy within the SA and to campaign for the creation of a new workers' party. Some of those who left the SA did so precisely because they were unhappy with the SWP's leadership, and were therefore natural allies of the platform. The DPSA should have organised all of those who supported its aims, including those who felt forced out of the SA by precisely the drift they were opposing.

However, this is not my main concern. Even if comrade Bridge was correct in opposing the opening up of the platform, he was wrong to walk out on losing the vote. Even if the platform had qualitatively changed its nature, it remained a united front of socialist organisations still committed to a democratic, partyist perspective that the CPGB has long supported. Indeed, throughout its sponsorship of the DPSA, our group has also been a member of the M3 committee, a group which brought together most of the same forces, but which was never tied to SA membership. The M3 included a number of groups and individuals who had met first on May 3 to organise support for democratic and partyist resolutions at the 2003 SA conference. It is true that the CPGB later argued that the M3 should wind itself up and concentrate on the DPSA, but it did not withdraw from membership on the 'principle' that it could not support a group which did not stipulate SA membership as a precondition of involvement.

Indeed, on this point comrade Bridge's move seems singularly perverse. I have long argued that the CPGB should be playing an active part in building a campaign for a new workers' party, and co-operating with other groups to do so: but the party has instead adopted a passive 'wait and see' approach to political developments. It was therefore left to Steve Freeman of the tiny Revolutionary Democratic Group to cohere the M3, and make strenuous and indeed heroic efforts not only to navigate a way through the political differences of its main sponsors, the CPGB and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, but to involve others, such as Workers Power and the Socialist Party. The project was doomed by the lukewarm approach which united the CPGB and the AWL even when nothing else did, and the perspective that the M3 was, in any case, reduced to irrelevance by the DPSA. However, at precisely the point when the DPSA was taking on the wider, united front perspective of the M3, the CPGB walked out. Having described arguments over the SA as "haggling over a corpse", it seems bizarre that we should suddenly attach absolute importance to the DPSA being purely a limb of that corpse.

Personally, I think that we are right to critically engage with Respect: the SWP remains the largest national revolutionary group, and Respect will win some support, given the absence of a genuinely socialist working class voice. I am

also pleased that we have again begun addressing the issue of work in the Labour Party, which retains the affiliation of most trade unions and many individual socialists. But I remain convinced that we must work too with those who were or are supporters of the SA: the AWL, Workers Power, the Socialist Party, and those individual SA activists who remain committed to the project of building a new workers' party based not around the petty sectarian ideology of an individual group, but the objective interests of the working class (and, through them, humanity) and the method of genuine, democratic centralism.

Manny Neira
Surrey

Draft query

The CPGB's draft programme appears to contain incompatible demands on the issue of democratic rights.

Section 4.2 - the socialist constitution - states that "Supreme power in the state will be workers' councils, composed of delegates who are elected and recallable at any time". It's the classic Marxist position on workers' democracy, usually taken to mean that electors can instantly dismiss and replace their workers' council delegates if they are unhappy with them. This suggests that if a majority of the electorate are dissatisfied with the performance of a representative, there would be a mechanism to enable them to remove him/her in between general elections.

But the same section of the draft programme then goes on to say that "Elections should be on the basis of proportional representation with an open count". If we really do mean that delegates should be "recallable at any time", surely this would subvert PR on the workers' councils. The whole point of the PR electoral system, and presumably the reason why the CPGB advocates it, is that it ensures the representation of minority viewpoints in a democratic process.

Given that fact, who would have the power to recall an unsatisfactory delegate from a workers' council? The majority of electors? Surely not, as this would simply enable them to replace the minority voices with that of the majority position and give frightening power to the strongest political parties in the new dispensation. The people who voted for a particular delegate? If we're still using secret ballots, we wouldn't know who had voted for that person.

If we simply mean that all delegates' mandates would be renewed on a much more frequent cycle than that used by the current bourgeois democratic system - say on an annual basis - then it is possible to see how this might work: every delegate would face the possibility of being replaced pretty quickly if his/her constituents so wished. Pretty quickly, but not "at any time".

Has this policy been fully thought out? Perhaps comrades could help me out with this one?

Steve Cooke
email

Bin Laden found

Two years, five months and nine days of the so-called 'war on terror'. Billions of dollars spent invading and occupying two countries. Tens of thousands of Afghans, Iraqis and 'coalition' dead. And a German TV company found Bin Laden in Pakistan in less than a month!

Here is part of the TV company's report: 'How the Al Qa'eda chief is hidden and protected': "Ever since the Americans bombed the caves of the Tora Bora mountains in southern Afghanistan, he has gone missing. All the secret services of the world cannot find the enemy No1 of the USA since 9/11.

"Really? Franco-Algerian journalist Mohamed Sifaoui follows OBL's trail

through mountains, steppes and cities. He risks his life several times and films the governors of the terror network with a hidden camera - right up to the top of the Pakistani bureaucracy. Finally he finds the hideout of OBL, and the question arises: why does no one arrest the Al Qa'eda chief?"

This proves to me, without a shadow of a doubt, that this whole 'war on terror' thing is a fraud aimed at implementing the programme laid out by the neo-cons, and formulated by the Project for a New American Century. And, to make matters worse, the American media knows this documentary is coming out, and has known that for a while. My guess is that the Bush regime knows it, too. But neither one is even paying attention to it.

Again, more confirmation of the fraud that is the 'war on terror'.

Martin Schreder
USA

Reformist PRC

I don't agree with comrade Becker's 'scepticism' about the European Left Party (*Weekly Worker* February 19).

I'm a regional coordinator (in Florence) of the Marxist minority inside the Refoundation Communist Party (PRC) in Italy. We are fighting inside the party to stop the unacceptable stand that this reformist party is taking. And since this opportunistic party, left of Monsieur Le Capital, is planning to go back to the government in 2006 with the Olive Tree coalition of the technocrat Romano Prodi, I don't see that the formation of this pathetic ELP party represents any step forward for workers' interests.

It surely represents a step forward in the ruling class's attempts to use the reformists to calm down the workers' demands. I'd like to remind you that in 1997 the PRC voted in the Italian parliament for a labour law that introduced the legalisation of all kinds of 'flexible' work: jobs on call, temporary contracts without any guarantees, and so forth. And now they are asking the United Nations to go into Iraq!

The workers need a real revolutionary party. Maybe with a diversity of views, but with one clear strategy and programme on the side of wage workers all over the European Union. We don't need a whining, moralistic party that begs the rich for some crumbs from the banquet.

Hernan Kurfirst
Florence

Greek CP

In the *Weekly Worker* of February 19 there is an article about the so-called European Left Party that contains a reference to the position of the Communist Party of Greece around the issue. However, the reference does not reflect the position of our party in any way.

For the information of your readers, here is our letter to the United Left of Spain, dated September 19 2003.

"We thank you for the invitation you have extended to our party to participate in the meeting that will take place on September 21 concerning the European Left Party ...

"Our party, according to its nature and character, was and is always open to initiatives promoting the coordination and common action on European level between communist and other radical left parties, always respecting the sovereign responsibility of each party for its own country. We consider that under the current conditions of growing imperialist aggressiveness in the context of the heightened capitalist crisis, of which the impact is obvious in all aspects of social life, as well as in the reactionary development of the EU, close cooperation and coordination are imperative.

"We strive to develop cooperation, rallying around specific topics of common interest, in order to support popular resistance and struggles. In this sense, we have supported and participated in many bilateral and multilateral initiatives taken by European parties ...

Nevertheless, in our opinion, the debate under way about the founding of a European Left Party does not help in this direction.

"We consider that this project ignores the deep ideological and political disparities - even contrasts - in our parties' points of view concerning: crucial issues of European unification and the European Union; the role of the present capitalist EU in international developments; programmes; the type of society we are fighting for; the overthrow of capitalism and the path towards socialist change; the role of political parties and anti-imperialist popular movements; the stance towards monopolies; the policy of alliances; the stance towards social democracy ...

"Ignoring this reality and endeavouring to create a single party would cultivate false expectations within the working people, and would disturb equity, sovereignty and independence that should characterise relations between the different parties. This will finally turn against all parties, and their commitments to their members and people.

"These developments have been triggered, among others, by the provisions of the European Union on the establishment of European parties. These European parties must explicitly accept the treaties of the EU and be subject to ratification and endorsement by the EU through concrete proceedings. This situation would lead to the elimination of essential elements referring to the independence and action of radical anti-capitalist forces. In fact, this event constitutes an intervention of the European Union in the political systems of the member-states, one that will also turn against the numerous movements contesting the European Union and its policies ...

"As we have pointed out on other occasions as well, our Party, especially facing European elections, will undertake initiatives, and pursue the broadest possible cooperation within the frame of the European parliament, as well as outside of it against the policies of the European Union. We believe, however, that the discussion on the founding of a European Left Party gives rise to additional difficulties in the development of cooperation and common action that have been achieved so far. Consequently, dear comrades, our Party will not be able to participate in the meeting you are holding in Madrid on September 21."

International section
Communist Party of Greece

Open borders

The article 'Respecting immigration' is good enough (*Weekly Worker* February 12). But you make no reference to an article, book, etc where a reader can learn *why* and *how* the battle for open borders profits not just the worker abroad, but also the worker in the advanced capitalist country.

One must either explain or point the reader in the right direction. You must be convincing and tell *how* low wages in Poland or China depress wages in England and why an aggressive labour movement bringing into its ranks the immigrant, helping overseas organisers and so forth is an essential part of a communist's duties.

Rod Holt
email

Bible on marriage

- Marriage shall consist of a union between one man and one or more women (Gen 29:17-28; II Sam 3:2-5).
- Marriage shall not impede a man's right to take concubines in addition to his wife or wives (II Sam 5:13; I Kings 11:3; II Chron 11:21).
- A marriage shall be considered valid only if the wife is a virgin. If the wife is not a virgin, she shall be executed (Deut 22:13-21).
- Marriage of a believer and a non-believer shall be forbidden (Gen 24:3; Num

25:1-9; Ezra 9:12; Neh 10:30).

- Since marriage is for life, no government or law shall be able to permit divorce (Deut 22:19; Mark 10:9).

- If a married man dies without children, his brother shall marry the widow. If he refuses to marry his brother's widow or deliberately does not give her children, he shall pay a fine of one shoe and be otherwise punished in a manner to be determined by law (Gen 38:6-10; Deut 25:5-10).

- In lieu of marriage, if there are no acceptable men in your town, it is required that you get your dad drunk and have sex with him (even if he had previously offered you up as a sex toy to men young and old), tag-teaming with any sisters you may have. Of course, this rule applies only if you are female (Gen 19:31-36).

Tom Trotter
Ottawa

Libertarian

You are right to argue that the French government's ban on the wearing of muslim headscarves and other religious symbols in state schools is oppressive and wrong.

Surely what we need is libertarian education. The state system in practice is just a big gulag - day prisons for the young. Their main purpose is to teach the majority of working class kids to fail. Any bureaucratic, state-imposed curriculum can end up being a totalitarian nightmare, as the French situation shows. And, the more money you throw at it, the more oppressive it gets.

Parents and communities should have access to the necessary resources and the opportunity to teach their kids at home or in the community if they choose. If they want to send them to schools, these should be independent and should set their own curriculums in co-operation with the parents and pupils.

Paul James
Reading

Defend Yanar

Yanar Mohammed is the head of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) and the editor in chief of the only progressive women's newspaper in Iraq - *Almosawat* (Equality). As you know, she has recently received a death threat from islamists because of her effective activities against the violation of women's rights and for equality and secularism.

Yanar's commitment to change the situation for women, and her ideals for a better world, have been warmly received by the population at large in Iraq, Middle East and the world. Today, Yanar Mohammed is an international figure renowned for her humane ideals and courage. Her life and the principles she personifies must be defended.

The aims of the Committee to Defend Yanar Mohammed include:

- To unequivocally defend and protect Yanar Mohammed's life.
- To defend secularism - namely the separation of religion from the state and educational system and full equality for women.
- To cancel all discriminatory laws towards women and institute laws that are pro-women.
- To defend the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq's activists.
- To strongly denounce islamic terrorist groups.
- To hold the US government fully responsible for Yanar's life and safety.

You are invited to join the committee, sign our petition online (www.Petition-Online.com/Yanar/petition.html), write letters of protest to the US government, raise Yanar's defence via resolutions in trade unions, send a donation, political parties, human and women's rights organisations, and highlight the issue in the media by writing letters or articles.

Committee to Defend Yanar Mohammed
houzan73@yahoo.co.uk

ACTION

London Communist Forums

Skylight Studio, Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnauburgh Street, London NW1. Nearest tube: Great Portland Street or Regents Park.

Iran - after the elections

Sunday February 29, 6.30pm.

Speaker: Mehdi Kia (*Iran Bulletin* and the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran)

The miners' Great Strike - 20th anniversary

Sunday March 14, 5pm.

Speaker: Dave Douglass, branch secretary, Hatfield National Union of Mineworkers.

All welcome. Lots of time for debate.

UK out of Iraq

Lobby Scottish Labour Party conference, Saturday February 28. Assemble Bugh Park, Inverness, 1pm.

Organised by Scottish Coalition for Justice Not War.

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).

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

International Women's Day

Celebration, Saturday March 6, 7.30pm, West London Trade Union Club, 33-35 Acton High Street. Programme includes: speaker, theatre, poetry and other readings, live music, buffet. Admission: £5.

Organised by West London Trade Union Club.

Miners' Great Strike

Commemorative meeting, Friday March 12, 7pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include Arthur Scargill (honorary president, National Union of Mineworkers), Mike Mansfield QC.

Organised by Socialist Labour Party, Kent NUM.

No more lies

Demonstration outside Labour conference, Saturday March 13, Manchester

Al Richardson

Memorial meeting, Saturday March 13, 2.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

End the occupation

National demonstration, Saturday March 20. Assemble Hyde Park, march to Trafalgar Square.

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.

No more WMD

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

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

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

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

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).

Deadline for amendments: Monday March 1.

Registration fee: £13 (£6 unwaged). Pooled fare contribution for London comrades: £10 (unwaged: £5 less own fare). Travelling expenses capped at discretion of conference arrangements committee.

Crèche (book by March 1) and catering available.

www.cpgb.org.uk/action

ISLAM

Muslim Association of Britain - <http://www.mabonline.net>

Weak at the knees

It is hard to believe that just two years ago, the Muslim Association of Britain barely registered on the radar screens of the left. But a couple of years is a long time in politics even by the left's sclerotic standards. Its co-sponsorship of mass anti-war demonstrations, along with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Stop the War Coalition, has allowed the MAB to assume a prominence out of all proportion to its size. So, what is it about the MAB that makes the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party go weak at the knees?

Perhaps it was the nice corporate-looking MAB website that caught the SWP's eye. After all, the header is a nice dark shade of red, and it may signify the objectively anti-imperialist character of the MAB. Or was it have been the link to the MAB's youth magazine, *Life of a Believer*? In the sample editorial, Rizwan Macwann quotes a muslim student saying about the west: "There is too much stuff for one to desire. Too many temptations." The solution for Macwann is that "families and communities must invest time and resources to provide the youth with all the education and training they need". So there we have it. Not only is the MAB anti-war, but SWPers can assure themselves that its anti-commercialism is implicitly anti-capitalist too. Comrades looking for a quick and easy way to pick up muslim votes for Respect in the forthcoming European elections will find their opportunist needs catered for on the merchandise page. MAB placards, t-shirts, and information booklets are all available to enthusiastic Respect activists keen to ingratiate themselves with their local imams.

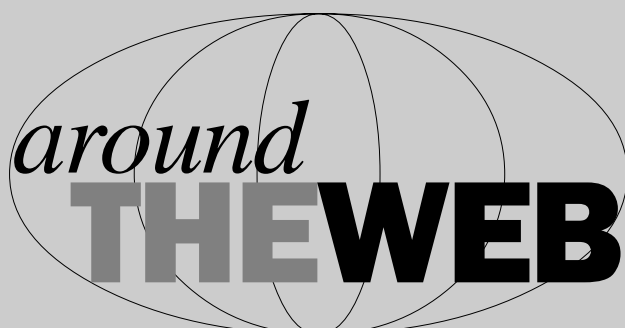
The last in this first group of links is a Noddy's guide to islam, designed, it seems, to accommodate the barest levels of political education. So even those SWP hacks that slavishly follow their leadership's every turn should have little difficulty. The page starts off with 'The message of islam', which is that allah alone is worthy of worship, and that Muhammad is his messenger. Then a list of other beliefs is given, such as the acknowledgement of angels, other holy books, etc. This is followed by the five pillars of islam: the shahada (belief in god and Muhammad as his messenger), the salah (observance of the rituals surrounding prayer), zakat (charity tithe), siyam (keeping to the fasts of Ramadan), and the hajj (Mecca pilgrimage). Sadly that is as far as it goes, as the dedicated pages addressing each pillar are undergoing construction.

However, 16 other articles are available for download in pdf. The one essay that interested me was tucked away at the bottom. In a piece called 'Boys will be boys - gender identity issues', Abdal-Hakim Murad draws on the mutually antagonistic sources of 'scientific' socio-biology and the postmodern turn of feminism away from concerns with equality to issues of difference to justify the common islamic position on gender. He manages to construct a convoluted argument suggesting that to oppose sharia law is to reject the scientific data on gender. This allows Murad to treat gender and the discourse of sex as the outcome of the universe's (god-given) innate nature, and not the result of historically variable human relationships. However, since Lindsey German has proclaimed gender issues a shibboleth, SWPers need not bother challenging this nonsense. Votes are more important.

The rest of the main field is split into four sections. 'Events and activities' includes study circles, conferences, and kung fu classes (!). 'Latest news' contains some bits and bobs from the bourgeois press, including an item on the 14,000 white Britons who have converted to islam. Needless to say, figures for those who have "succumbed" to secularism are conspicuously absent. 'Press releases' and 'Action alerts' display the issues currently exercising the MAB.

The navigation column offers the usual mix of resources, mailing list, news, and contact details. 'Links' carries dozens of websites, both islamic and secular. Unfortunately for comrades Galloway and Rees, their game of footsie with the MAB has yet to yield a link to Respect, and, to add insult to injury, the only party listed are the Greens! The other page of interest is 'About MAB', which lists the group's aims and objectives. These bullet points are hardly controversial - and certainly contain nothing threatening to the fabric of western civilisation, as the BNP and co like to pretend. Yet neither is there anything particularly radical about them either - which probably explains why the SWP is happy to have the MAB as a bedfellow ●

Phil Hamilton



French left looks away



Values of the revolution: taking to the streets

The massive vote by the French national assembly to ban conspicuous religious and political symbols from state schools has not ended the opposition to what is regarded by all genuine secularists and democrats as a scandalous attack first and foremost on France's five-million-strong muslim population.

February 10 saw 494 votes in favour of the bill, with only 36 against. The 21 deputies of the Parti Communiste Français were, incredibly, given a 'free vote' and seven of them actually backed the new law. Apparently an assault on religious and political freedom and the rights of minorities is regarded by the PCF as a matter of 'individual conscience', not an issue requiring disciplined, coordinated action and the mobilisation of the working class.

Yet the stance of France's 'official communists' was actually *better* than most of the revolutionary left. At least the PCF leadership was *formally* opposed to the bill. Lutte Ouvrière, for example, while claiming it is unnecessary, nevertheless welcomes it as a "point of support" for those who wish to discard the headscarf - the rights of those who do not wish to do so must be sacrificed, it seems. LO teachers have been in the forefront of those actually campaigning to exclude young muslim women from schools - all in the name of secularism and opposition to women's oppression.

On February 14 a demonstration in Paris of between 5,000 and 10,000 opponents of the bill united supporters of 30 or so groups under the slogan, 'A school for all'. There were up to 8,000 protestors in other towns and cities across France - small numbers, considering the nature of the attack. The demonstrations brought together civil rights, immigrant and muslim groups - but the left and working class movement, to its shame, was almost entirely absent. A statement was issued by organisers of the Paris march condemning forced integration and demanding that women should not be obliged either to wear or discard the veil: "Emancipation cannot come through repression; only through the winning of rights."

The PCF did not sign the organisers' statement, although some individual PCF leaders gave their backing. The Parti Socialiste is *for* Chirac's anti-democratic measure. Lutte Ouvrière ignored the protests, of course, while the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire also stayed away: "We don't want to take part in a demonstration that might appear ambiguous on the wearing of the veil," said Christian Picquet of the LCR political bureau. The LCR, like the PCF, is formally opposed to the bill, but its teaching members have also gone along with exclusions of school students whose attire offends their sensibilities.

However, a group of minority LCR mili-

tants issued a call against "discriminatory exclusions" and backed the protests, as did the LCR's youth section, the Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires. The JCR also went against the leadership line in refusing to vote for Jacques Chirac to keep out the Front National's Jean-Marie Le Pen in the presidential elections of 2002.

It might be thought that, in the absence of the left, the February 14 protest would have been dominated by islamic fundamentalists. Not so. In fact several muslim groups urged their followers to stay away. They did not approve of the demonstration's secular nature, with its demand that women should have the right both to wear and *not* to wear the veil.

"Those who say we are communarians should take a look at the streets today," said one of the speakers, Hamida Ben Sadia. She was referring to the fact that more than half of the women (a majority of those present) did not have their heads covered. All joined in the chanting: "With or without the law, we won't give up the headscarf."

Another theme was opposition to the demonisation of migrants in general: "We don't care: we belong," they sang. To emphasise the point, a group of young women wearing red, white and blue tricolour headscarves marched along singing La Marseillaise ●

Peter Manson

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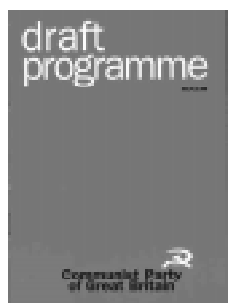
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New Tories take on BNP

Michael Howard made a brief sojourn to Burnley last week. In half Churchillian, half smarmy mode, the Tory leader proclaimed that he was going to the Lancashire town in order to 'take on' the British National Party. His weapon of mass deception was a vile speech on immigration and asylum policy: being anti-BNP and anti-migrant makes for a powerful combination of patriotism and common-sense economics.

Burnley has, of course, proved fertile ground for the neo-Nazis. There is deprivation - Burnley is ranked 46th in the list of most deprived council areas in England. Consequently housing is poor, unemployment is high and education standards are low. But BNP success hinges not on poverty or neglect: rather the absence of class politics and the establishment's racialisation of local government.

Instead of having to confront the working class, councils rule over *rival* supplicant groups, each defined on the basis of multiculturalism and so-called ethnicity: ie, white British, Irish, Asian, Asian-British, West Indian, Jewish, Chinese, Somali, etc. That plus the irrational fear of being swamped by a massive wave of benefit-scrouring outsiders (whipped up by reactionary papers such as the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*) has been cleverly exploited by Nick Griffin and the BNP.

Two years ago, Burnley - along with Bradford and Oldham - was the scene of so-called 'race riots'. Subsequently, in the May local council elections, the BNP scored something of a spectacular success by winning just over 12% of the vote and eight (now down to seven) seats on the council. The local Tory Party performance in those elections was particularly woeful - it won just three seats and, unsurprisingly, had to face severe criticism for failing to put up a full list of candidates (three fewer than the BNP).

Incidentally this does tend to contradict the claim made by leading SWP Julie Waterson at last May's Socialist Alliance conference. She insisted that the BNP got its vote from the "collapse of the Tory Party". True, she instantly contradicted herself, claiming that the BNP won Labour votes - but only from the lumpen "scum" on the housing estates.

Frankly, this just about sums up the patronising and insulting attitude of cosy middle class reformism when confronted by backward *white* workers who are actually on the receiving end of some of the worst jobs, worst housing, worst education, etc. They react to this mistakenly - by voting ethnically. A by-product of multiculturalism.

Comrade Waterson is not alone. The same elitist and haughtily dismissive spirit informed the Electoral Reform Society's report on Burnley, published last month. The ERS warned about the possibility of stupid white folk giving the BNP control over the council. To stop that happening they do not quite propose abolishing democracy - merely moving the goal posts. They recommend a proportional voting system - ideally one based on the single transferable vote (STV). Their report states: "At present the votes of many people who oppose racism are wasted on losing candidates, but STV would allow those votes to be transferred to other candidates opposed to extremism. Using STV, the BNP would win only those seats which its electoral strength justifies."

All in all, it must surely be a merely objective observation to note that the Conservative Party needs to do something about its presence (or rather lack of it) in Burnley - and northern towns and cities in general. Indeed Howard seems to be



Michael Howard: multiculturalist convert

mapping out a strategy to outflank the Labour Party and win the votes of that backward section of the white working class that believes it has been ignored or neglected in favour of other sections. Howard has confirmed that his party will be fielding a full list of candidates in Burnley in the next local elections.

This was actually welcomed from what might appear to be an unusual quarter. Peter Pike, the Labour MP for Burnley, remarked: "If Howard says to traditional Tory voters who have been attracted by the extreme right, 'Come back and vote for us', that is not a bad thing for mainstream politics in the town". This opinion - or hope - was concisely summarised in *The Guardian* by journalist David Ward: "Burnley desperately needs to get back to mainstream politics" (February 19).

Most Labourites were not so keen, however. Unlike Pike, his colleagues seemed outraged just by the mere fact that Howard had gone to Burnley at all, let alone that he had delivered a speech on immigration and asylum. Indeed, some of Howard's detractors positively oozed arrogance: Burnley is Labour territory and forever shall be so.

Hence Fiona Mactaggart, the home office minister with 'responsibility for race equality' (whatever that means), attacked the Tories for having "no asylum and immigration policy" - an obviously nonsensical claim. As for Shahid Malik, Labour national executive member and Burnley resident, he was almost apoplectic - or at least did an excellent impression. Malik made the somewhat odd claim that Howard's visit could only strengthen the BNP, arguing: "We have got a 90,000 population here of whom, I think, 57 are asylum-seekers. Yet, if you ask people why they voted for the BNP, many will say because we have been swamped with asylum-seekers."

Malik's logic is curious. If this is indeed the case - and there is no reason to fundamentally disagree - then surely one conclusion to draw is that the question of asylum-seekers, immigration, etc urgently needs to be *confronted* in Burnley. If not, this fear of being "swamped with asylum-seekers" will continue to

prove something of an electoral bonanza for the likes of the BNP. Exactly the point made by Michael Howard - whether opportunistically or not.

What about his speech itself? He attacked the "cancer of extremism" and described the BNP as "a bunch of thugs dressed up as a political party", who have cast "a stain on our democratic way of life", adding: "Imagine the shame of this great nation if Britain sends a member of the BNP to Brussels." No surprises there - it would be astonishing, and almost certainly suicidal, for any mainstream politician to say anything else. The ideology of anti-fascism (and thus anti-racism) is central to the post-World War II

UK state and its institutions.

More interestingly, Howard expressed *explicitly* pro-multiculturalist sentiments - not something we would have necessarily associated with Tory leaders of yesteryear. He told his audience that the UK is "a stronger and better country, rich in our cultural diversity, because of the immigrant communities that have settled here" and actually applauded them for holding on to "their traditions and culture, while at the same time embracing Britain's and playing their full role in our national life".

Of course, the modern-day Tory Party is now part and parcel of the official anti-racist consensus - that is unarguable, whatever most of our comrades on the left insist. But it is still worth stressing that Howard's comments are a far cry from Enoch Powell's fanatical devotion to 'Anglo-Saxon' values and the British empire - even from Margaret Thatcher's fears in 1979 that UK was on the verge of being "swamped" by immigrants. Those - whether from the reactionary right or the economic, business-as-usual left - hankering for the familiarity of an unashamedly racist Conservative Party are in for a disappointment.

However, the Tories have been historically resistant to the multiculturalism so assiduously pushed by the liberal/Blairite wing of the bourgeoisie. The professional and well remunerated ideologues of multiculturalism - whether in local government or academia - have never been natural Tories. But Howard's speech indicates that the Conservatives may well be coming to recognise - albeit a bit slowly perhaps - that multiculturalism is useful as a *new* means to secure the domination of the ruled by the rulers.

Maybe Howard has made a quick trip to the website of the home office's race equality unit, which tells us that multiculturalism aims to create "one nation", where "every colour is a good colour" and "racial diversity is *celebrated*" (my emphasis). This "celebration" of *difference* means shoe-horning every UK subject into their appropriate 'ethnic' box. Workers who are busily celebrating their

"diversity" or "roots" are hardly likely to forge any sort of *class* consciousness, let alone class *unity*. No wonder local government bosses are so keen to get their employees to attend 'anti-racist' and 'multicultural awareness' courses. Howard would be a fool not to become a convert. (The likes of the SWP have long since signed up, of course, myopically believing that the experience of multiculturalism has been "overwhelmingly positive" - *Socialist Worker* December 21 2001.)

Welcome then to Michael Howard's New Tories? At Burnley, Howard issued a stern challenge: "It is important for politicians from mainstream parties to face up to extremists. It means acting justly but decisively on issues such as immigration. People want to know that immigration is controlled. They want to know that the asylum-seekers legislation is being used to protect those genuinely fleeing persecution, and not abused by those seeking a back door into Britain." Howard finished his speech by lambasting the government's supposed "failure" to put in place "transitional arrangements to deal with immigration from the new EU accession countries".

These final remarks by Howard are indicative. What we are witnessing between the Tories and New Labour is not a tussle over the validity of anti-racism, multiculturalism, etc. Far from it. There is a mainstream consensus over these issues. Rather, what we have is an ugly squabble as to who is going to be toughest and meanest when it comes to dealing with migrant workers - especially the 'illegals'.

Which immediately poses a thorny question for the left - especially the Socialist Workers Party, now fronting the populist Respect coalition. In many ways, the views expressed by Peter Pike MP, *The Guardian*, et al are not a million miles away from the perspective offered up the SWP.

A scandalous suggestion? Sadly, no. Faced by the BNP, the SWP has traditionally rushed around like a programmeless chicken, frantically urging the working class, 'Don't vote Nazi'. As we communists have always said, this is effectively a cry of despair. Was the SWP *really* urging workers to suppress their disgust and vote for Tony Blair's New Labour? Or how about the Lib Dems, or even - swallow hard - the ... the *Tory Party*? Maybe the SWP thought that we should all go in for a spot of tactical voting? Whatever the case, 'Don't vote Nazi', is a call to "get back to mainstream politics".

However, the SWP and its allies are clearly in a different situation today. They are in Respect - trying to 'make a difference' - and inroads into mass electoral politics (or so the theory goes). From auto-Labourism to auto-anti-Labourism. Given this, surely it is now untenable to wheel out the 'Don't vote Nazi' slogan. But, come 'Super Thursday' and the June 10 elections, what are SWP candidates going to tell the potential voter who has just read a BNP leaflet and wants to know Respect's position on immigration and asylum?

Tragically, at the moment, the 'advanced' SWP or International Socialist Group member - if they adhere to the rejection of open borders by the January 25 Respect convention - will inform the 'non-advanced' voter that they oppose the "anti-European xenophobic right" and defend the "rights of refugees". Such platitudes could, of course easily come from the mouths of Michael Howard or David Blunkett. And there's the rub ●

Eddie Ford

Border controls - essential weapon

Home secretary David Blunkett - under intense pressure from the tabloids - has announced a benefits clampdown on the 75 million people - mainly from the former Warsaw Pact - who become citizens of the European Union on May 1.

Needless to say, Blunkett's desire to repel the "benefit tourists" won the support of both the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress. The UK government plans to restrict their access to benefits for up to two years. The only exception are those from Cyprus and Malta. The rest will be required to register their UK jobs. Ministers also insist that they will deport "fraudsters" and are at pains to emphasise how determined they are to stop migrants sliding into "the exploitation of the sub-economy" - like the 20 Chinese cocklers who drowned at Morecambe Bay, for instance. Just think how lucky those unfortunate people would have been if, instead of dying, they had been deported to the squalor and misery of their former lives in China.

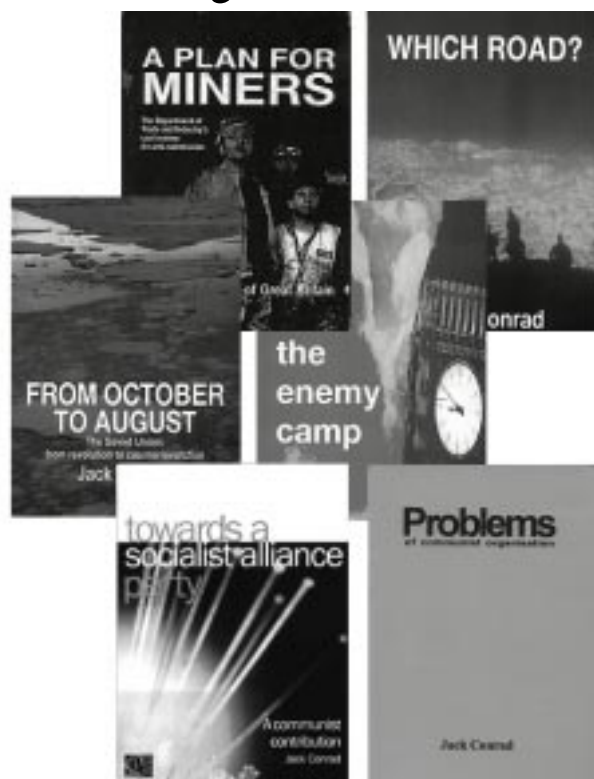
Blunkett's proposals are based on the officially sponsored predictions that no more than 13,000 new EU citizens will arrive in the UK each year. If these calculations prove to be wrong, the UK will follow France, Germany and most of the other EU states in blocking the new entrants altogether, as EU transition rules permit, for up to seven years.

However, if the numbers expected are really so low, you might be forgiven for wondering what the fuss is all about. The answer, surely, is that it suits the bourgeoisie to be able to dip into a constantly replenished pool of cheap labour - mainly the thousands of illegal workers without whom sections of catering, building and agriculture would collapse - but also those like the EU newcomers who will have the threat of deportation permanently hanging over them if they step out of line. Border controls are an essential weapon in the armoury of the capitalist class ●

Paul Greenaway

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Stakes are high



Students: symbolic

This week saw a rolling series of one-day strikes in universities. Association of University Teachers members came out in Wales on February 23 and England on February 24; both the AUT and the National Union of Students called for strike action throughout Britain on February 25; AUT members were due to strike on February 26 in Scotland and in Northern Ireland on February 27. From March 1 the AUT begins a boycott of formal examinations and assessments, of staff appraisal and job activities, and of forms of out-of-hours and absent colleagues cover, which affect staffing levels.

AUT and NUS are calling for joint action on the basis of an agreement to combine the AUT's campaign over pay with that of the NUS against top-up fees. The government and the employers have immediately condemned this link-up as "opportunistic" (this argument assumes that the government and employer majority line on fees - that higher fees are the only way to provide more money for universities, including higher pay for staff - is true). However, the evidence so far is that the NUS has not been able to deliver much in the way of mass student action in coordination with the AUT, though there has been some support from the activists.

The willingness of AUT members to take action has to be understood as part of the general increase in willingness to take industrial action which has developed over the last 18 months, as the Blair government has lost legitimacy - a change in mood also reflected in the development of the 'awkward squad' in the core manual trade unions. However, this AUT action, like many other union campaigns, is defensive. The university employers withdrew from negotiations and are currently standing on a 'non-negotiable' offer. This ties a pay increase at around the rate of inflation to changes in pay structures which would provide openings for the breaking up of the current national bargaining system, would separate "academic-related" staff from lecturers' pay scales and would increase managerial discretion over individual rates. What began as a negotiation about pay has thus become a dispute about managerialism versus solidarity.

The one-day strikes are, like all such actions, aimed at mobilisation and publicity rather than directly forcing the employers to negotiate. The decision to go for a series of regional one-day strikes, as opposed to a single concentrated action across the UK, must be seen in this context. However, it was probably the wrong decision from this point of view: though the AUT walkout achieved good support, there was only limited media coverage of Monday's action in Wales and

less of Tuesday's action in England.

The real industrial action will begin with the examination and assessment boycott, starting on March 1: if carried through successfully, this could cause major disruption and inflict significant financial costs on universities. The strike ballot saw 81% support for action short of a strike, on a turnout of 54%, but it remains a question how far AUT members will collectively hold our nerve.

Industrial action by the AUT reflects a sig-

nificant 'proletarianisation of intellectual labour': ie, universities have become increasingly like other employers and many lecturers, reflecting this, see themselves as white-collar workers. However, the ideology of professionalism has in the past limited members' willingness to actually carry through actions which adversely affects students.

This year the stakes are higher ●

Mike Macnair

Movement to resist

The 'week of action' against top-up fees called by the National Union of Students to coincide with the lecturers' strike is, of course, welcome - it is rare nowadays that one sees student protests or sit-ins on anything like the scale of the past.

In reality however, we have not seen a 'week of action', but for the most part small numbers of students - mainly organised by the various left groups - appearing symbolically alongside AUT members. A mass student walkout occurred on Wednesday, which is usually allotted for sports activity anyway. Most campuses, far from being alight with revolutionary foment, have been quite quiet. Students either stayed at home in bed, or just carried on as usual with their scheduled timetables.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the issue of top-up fees could breathe some life into student politics, which has been relatively passive for quite some time, in spite of the objective conditions for campus-based change - the continuous attacks on student finances, forcing many more into long hours of low paid work, and, alongside that, the radicalisation brought about by last year's mass anti-war upsurge.

The "Stop fees now" headline on the NUS website initially strikes you as energetic and radical, but a quick glance at the various subheadings - "email your MP", "visit your local surgery" - soon disabuses you of the notion. It would be useful, then, if the left groups were to offer a viable alternative to this official dead end. Economism, however, rears its ugly head even in student politics - with the 'Fuck fees' (or more precisely 'F**k fees') banners flying high and mighty.

Is this the true state of higher education? The inadequacy of mass-mailing MPs, or enjoying tea with a sycophantic Labour MP (who will probably not be there anyway), is not dealt with by the student left. Rather than looking at why such individual protests are unlikely to be successful and attempting to put forward concrete, collective alternative actions, we get caught up in pseudo-revolutionary posing.

What is needed is a student movement that is not only well organised and militant, but encourages democratic debate in the search for genuine solutions to the problems that students face every day. Such a movement must not simply be a vehicle to recruit to this or that left sect, gagging independent voices in the name of creating mere paper-sellers, but a means to united and effective student action.

Then and only then will we be able to fight back with the ferocity of the Blairites and resist their assault on student conditions ●

Ben Lewis

Show electors some respect

Will the Socialist Alliance stand any candidates in the local elections on June 10? That was the main question that exercised members of the SA executive committee, meeting in London on February 21. If those in the central leadership group have their way, the SA will effectively be liquidated in all but name at our annual conference on March 13. The intention of the Socialist Workers Party is for the SA to stand no candidates at all. This is strongly supported by national chair Nick Wrack and Alan Thornett of the International Socialist Group, the SWP's closest supporters on the executive.

Given that the Socialist Alliance was formed in part to achieve leftwing electoral unity, to stand no candidates on 'super Thursday' June 10, is effectively to shut up shop. This will complete the process of liquidation begun immediately after the 2001 general election and which markedly accelerated with the UK-US war on Iraq in 2003. The SWP is clearing the ground for the formal winding up ceremony at the SA annual conference in the autumn. Even in Preston, where the SA had its one success story with the election of SWPer Michael Lavalette, it is proposed that a Respect candidate stands in the neighbouring ward.

The motion put forward by the SA task group - the small committee entrusted with the SA's 'left unity' initiative which led to the formation of Respect - reads: "Conference agrees that, given the Socialist Alliance's support for Respect - the Unity Coalition, it would be inappropriate to stand Socialist Alliance candidates in any of the aforementioned elections [European, Greater London or local] and the Socialist Alliance will, therefore, not stand any candidates in these elections." This is despite the fact that Respect has no intention of contesting local elections itself as of yet. Its January 25 convention agreed: "We will begin by standing in the elections to the European parliament and to the Greater London Assembly."

While the task group motion concedes the possibility of standing socialist candidates, it wants them to stand under the Respect banner. It proposes a procedure for the effective adoption or veto of any Socialist Alliance candidates by the Respect executive. This is SWP control-freakery gone mad. It has brought protests from many quarters - and not just from the SA's usual 'awkward squad', but also from within the SWP itself.

The main discussion on local candidates was kicked off by a report from the SWP's John Rees, national secretary of Respect. He claimed that the coalition's public meetings were showing that a high proportion of activists in the Stop the War Coalition were supporting Respect. Further, he stated that the formation of Respect was impacting on the unions. Comrade Rees and George Galloway met with Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT, just before the union's February 6 special conference in Glasgow that reaffirmed the Scottish region's affiliation to the Scottish Socialist Party and subsequent expulsion from Labour.

Comrade Rees said that there were motions before a number of RMT branches in England, including the London regional committee, calling for support to Respect. In addition, firefighters supporting Respect were organising to win a democratisation motion at the FBU conference in May and would then push ahead to win support for Respect in their branches. Obviously the London region is the key for Respect when it comes to union support.

Comrade Rees reported that no electoral arrangement had been made with the Greens for the European elections,

but he said that there were divisions at the very top level of the Green Party on this matter. He expected the Greens to reflect this division on the ground in the lead-up to the June 10 elections.

I asked if there had been any agreement with the Socialist Party for them to stand councillor Ian Page in the first-past-the-post GLA constituency of Greenwich and Lewisham in return for them calling for a vote for Respect in the GLA and European elections. Comrades Rees and Wrack said that neither they nor the Respect committee had been approached on this matter by the Socialist Party, though comrade Rees said there was an unopened email in his in box that morning from the Socialist Party. I have not found out the content of that email, as we go to press. John Rees said that he expected that negotiations with the SP would see the re-emergence of the same problems which plagued relations during its time in the Socialist Alliance.

Martin Thomas of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty asked a series of questions regarding recent reports in *The Guardian* about funding for George Galloway's political charities. Comrade Rees said that he had nothing more to add to what had already been stated in a letter to the newspaper from Galloway.

Matthew Caygill (Leeds independent), Will McMahon (SA office worker) and Andy Newman (Swindon SWP) - all supporters of Respect - pointed out problems in dictating to Socialist Alliance branches whether or not they could stand in local elections. They argued that there were many sincere members who were sceptical about Respect and by effectively banning candidates there was a danger of driving them into the camp of those openly hostile to the coalition.

Comrade McMahon said that we should not "ignore genuine SA loyalists", while comrade Newman said that in Swindon there were "serious people sceptical of Respect". He said that the SA should not "push them into the arms of our opponents". Andy Newman is not the only SWP member expressing differences with the task group line. As nominating officer I have received requests - pleas almost - from SWP members in the SA wishing to stand candidates in the local elections. Simon Joyce, another SWP member on the executive, said that people would approach Respect at different speeds and that it was the role of the SA leadership to win local organisations through persuasion.

Comrade Wrack said that, while Respect had been established to stand in the European and London elections, he was now more open to the idea of contesting local elections. Comrade Thornett was more forthright. He said it was the "desirable thing" to stand as Respect in the local elections.

In his summary, John Rees said that we should not get in a knot about this: most people were enthusiastic for Respect. The most strategic aspect of the campaign was the proportional representation elections, so local contests were less important. In typical SWP speak, he said that we should "give a heavy steer" on this matter; meaning that we should make sure what we want happens. For him, whether or not Respect candidates stand in local elections should be judged on whether it adds to or subtracts from the main strategic aim of the best possible PR campaigns.

I agreed with comrades McMahon, Newman and Caygill that local Socialist Alliances should be allowed to stand candidates for council elections if they wish. Of course, this would not detract from the right of the majority in the SA from trying to persuade them one way or the other. But to ban them was certain to be counterproductive. A number of



Nick Wrack: liquidator

amendments are expected to the task group motion at SA conference.

Lowestoft Socialist Alliance, led by the local SWP, is not alone in wanting to stand candidates. Its argument is that, as it has stood in three previous local elections, to withdraw from the field now would display a lack of serious commitment. The Socialist Alliance needs to show the electorate and the working class some respect.

Martin Thomas argued that the task group motion violated the constitution. He pointed to a minute of the October 2003 national council that "the NEC accepts the constitutional position that local SAs can decide on whether or not to run in local elections. That any advice the NEC might have should be given prior to the meeting of the local SA that decides whether or not to stand."

However, the SA constitution states: "E1: The local Socialist Alliance will have the responsibility for all elections contested by the Socialist Alliance within its area ... and for all arrangements regarding local candidate, agent, treasurer, *in line with Socialist Alliance requirements nationally*" (my emphasis). It goes on: "E3: The steering committee of the local Socialist Alliance or a relevant regional body or the national executive, in consultation with one another, may nominate the Socialist Alliance candidate to stand in a particular election in exceptional circumstances. *The final decision will lie with the nominating officer who is accountable to the national executive*" (my emphasis).

In his report of the meeting, posted on the AWL website, comrade Thomas said: "The situation thus remains unclear. Much will depend on the personal fortitude of the nominating officer, but that is Marcus Ström, who made it clear in the debate that he has no stomach for a conflict with the SA leadership on this." Constitutionally I have no right to defy the executive on these matters, irrespective of my fortitude. And even if I did, I would be immediately replaced in what

is a purely functional position. I think my record has shown I have plenty of "stomach" for conflict with others on the SA leadership. However, I have no stomach for pointless gestures.

While we are clearing matters up, comrade Thomas claims that I said: "If Respect emerges as a genuine force in elections, then the SA should be wound up." What I actually said was a repetition of my statement at the January national council, that, to the extent the Respect coalition emerges as a genuine socialist alternative, the SA should be wound up.

The SWP is clearly throwing all it can into building Respect, something it did not do for the Socialist Alliance. Nick Wrack, as a practised attorney for the SWP, called for all of us to "give Respect a chance". A pity the SWP did not offer the SA the same opportunity.

I had tabled a motion noting the absence of any report of previous executive meetings of Respect, either to Respect members or the general public. The motion also called on SA members on Respect's leadership to report within 48 hours of a Respect executive meeting to the SA NEC. Comrades said they did not want this to be the first motion passed by the SA executive since the formation of Respect and asked me to withdraw it if its spirit was accepted.

I agreed to lay it on the table. Perhaps a mistake: the Respect executive met on February 22 and, as I write (February 25), there has been no report of its decisions. In response to my request for feedback on the SA executive mail list, Rob Hoveman (SA national secretary and SWP member) said: "The sentiment, as opposed to decision, of the Socialist Alliance executive was that we would communicate to the Respect executive the desirability of more communication if possible. Not that minutes of meetings should be produced to comply with the *Weekly Worker's* deadlines." Not a good sign. Was this desirability communicated? What was the response? We are

left in the dark.

Fiona Prior, SWP member and RMT activist, gave a report of the Convention of the Trade Union Left. She said that of the 700 who attended 350 were delegated by union bodies. Over 130 trade union branches formally supported the convention.

I said that in our approach to the unions, we could not just skip over the historical grip of the Labour Party on the organised working class. We should be taking the fight for working class representation *into* the Labour Party, as well as building electoral possibilities outside it. For that reason, we should not just call for disaffiliation. At the FBU conference we should oppose disaffiliation motions.

It was reported that Camden No3 branch of the RMT was discussing the possibility of backing Respect for the Camden and Barnett GLA constituency. There will be some conflict here, as the RMT council of executives has already endorsed Lucy Anderson, the Labour Party candidate, after she agreed to the four-point minimum platform of the RMT: for renationalisation of the railways, opposition to privatisation of the tube, defence of the shipping industry and repeal of the anti-union laws.

Comrade Hoveman answered this by simply dismissing Lucy Anderson as a Blairite. A funny sort of Blairite that openly supports the RMT's minimum platform. Attempts to build a working class alternative will be doomed if we are unable to relate tactically to the Labour Party.

Finally we received the annual accounts of the Socialist Alliance from SA treasurer Shelly Margetson and dealt with organisation for the March 13 special conference. Nick Wrack, Mandy Baker, Simon Joyce, Rob Hoveman, Will McMahon and myself were appointed to the conference arrangements committee ●

Marcus Ström

DEMOCRACY PLATFORM

Moving to split away

On Saturday February 21, the Democracy Platform of the Socialist Alliance held its second full meeting in Birmingham. The DPSA was established in November last year in order to defend the socialist policies of the Socialist Alliance's *People before profit* manifesto and, in the words of its website, "to uphold the principles of inclusivity, openness, tolerance, representation of minorities, transparency and accountability in decision-making contained in the SA constitution."

The meeting, attended by 32 people, got off to a bad start. Tony Greenstein proposed that comrades like himself who are not members of the alliance should be able to become full voting members of the DPSA. This motion was opposed by the CPGB, the Revolutionary Democratic Group, Lesley Mahmood, Pete McLaren and John Pearson, but supported by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and various independent SA members. Comrade Pearson argued that such a membership basis would undermine the importance of involvement in the SA itself. However, his correct analysis failed to convince most of those present and the resolution was passed by a two-thirds majority.

As the DPSA's newly adopted membership criteria effectively ended the group's status as a platform *within* the SA, the CPGB delegation declared that they could no longer support the DPSA and withdrew from the meeting. A number of comrades attempted to dissuade us from this action, including comrade Greenstein, who promised to rejoin the SA. Welcome though this commitment was, comrade Greenstein was confusing personalities with matters of principle and his pledge proved hollow when later in the meeting he said that he would be rejoining the SA only so that he could resign again after its special conference on March 13.

Moreover, some of the decisions taken later in the meeting were to push the DPSA even further away from its founding purpose of promoting SA democracy so that it became nothing more than a front for those who wish to campaign against the recently launched Respect unity coalition (and, in the case of the AWL, George Galloway).

Next on the agenda were debates about the DPSA's intervention in the forthcoming SA conference and its attitude towards Respect. There was some disagreement about whether these items should be discussed separately or taken together, with John Pearson accusing the chair, Lesley Mahmood, of "bureaucratic manoeuvring" when she ruled that Stockport SA's conference motion on Respect could not be considered during the conference discussion. The meeting overwhelmingly rejected his challenge to the chair's authority, but narrowly voted in favour of merging the two agenda items.

The context for the debates that followed was the motion being recommended to conference by the national executive's task group. If passed, this would mandate the SA to provide financial and practical support to Respect and back its candidates in June's elections for the Greater London Authority and the European parliament. The task force motion also requires SA branches who wish to stand candidates in the local elections in May to seek the approval of Respect's executive. Any such candidates would then have to seek election under Respect's banner rather than the SA's.

Stockport SA's conference motion rejects and overturns the SA national executive's endorsement of Respect, describing it as "not socialist and not a working class coalition". Citing the



Founded on high hopes

threat posed by the British National Party, the motion calls on SA branches to consider mounting local election campaigns.

There was much opposition to the task force resolution in the meeting and a general air of pessimism about the future prospects of the SA. Speaking in support of the Stockport motion to the DPSA, Barry Biddulph claimed that the Socialist Workers Party was putting in place bureaucratic obstacles so that SA branches would "need approval from the queen and Prince Philip and to be sanctified by the spirit of Lady Di" in order to stand candidates in the local elections. He argued that Stockport's motion would prevent the SWP from blocking local candidates. It proposed that the DPSA should itself register as a political party (the Democratic Socialist Alliance) with all that entails: eg, registering a leader and nominating officer. This is all to be 'held in reserve'.

Steve Freeman (RDG) tabled a motion on Respect that would have enabled the DPSA to accommodate the different positions taken by its member groups. It endorsed a policy of "critical engagement" from the outside and proposed that the platform seek a meeting with George Galloway and negotiate with other non-Respect socialists such as the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Alliance for Green Socialism. It sought "further clarification about what sort of organisation Respect is aiming to build" and did not rule out joining Respect or urging workers to vote for it in the future.

Pete McLaren was broadly supportive of the Freeman motion. He argued that, although it was set up in an undemocratic way and appeared to have few principles, it was still too early to assume that democratic socialists could not engage with it. Comrade McLaren pointed out that Respect might be the only alternative to New Labour in areas such as his (Rugby and Warwickshire) and that at least it was left of centre and opposed to the Nazis. He felt that he would not be able to continue as convenor of the DPSA if it voted to oppose Respect.

Barry Biddulph said it was a "sad motion" that took a deferential approach towards Galloway, politely requesting a meeting as if he were a working class hero. Tony Greenstein argued that further clarification about Respect was not needed, because it was already obvious that it was not a working class organisation and was extremely unlikely to develop into one: "Pigs tend not to fly," he concluded.

Pete Radcliff (AWL) agreed with comrade Greenstein and proposed numerous amendments to delete the greater portion of the Freeman motion. Respect, he said, was "just a cynical ploy by the SWP to ditch the electoral strategy agreed by the SA". The DPSA should be fighting for working class representation and working in the trade unions.

Garth from the AGS thought that the DPSA's intervention at the SA conference should be aimed at SWP cadre rather than at the independents. He felt that the SWP was now reminiscent of the last days of the Workers Revolutionary Party - lots of big-name speakers but no debate. He reported that the AGS had already raised the money to fight the Euro elections and warned that the group was not going to disappear.

Steve Freeman was strongly opposed to the Stockport motion because it sought to create an alternative SA (which comrade Pearson denied). He warned that he would find it hard to stay on board if this was passed.

Dave Landau opposed both the Stockport and Freeman motions, saying that they were both sectarian. In many parts of the country Respect would be the only party standing on a platform even remotely close to *People before profit*. He advocated support for Respect candidates except where they stood against SPEW and argued that attempting to engage with Respect from the outside was unrealistic. We could only get across our message by joining.

Chris Jones (RDG) spoke against the Stockport motion and claimed that the Freeman motion did not debar anyone from joining Respect. He suggested that local SA branches could follow the example of dissident Labour Party members in Liverpool who stood for election

as 'Ward Labour' by seeking election under the name of their SA branch if the national executive attempted to prevent them being nominated.

Sue Blackwell supported the Stockport motion, believing it to be an attempt at self-defence rather than a move towards a breakaway group. She felt that DPSA members needed to compromise if the group was to make progress. Comrade Blackwell said that she would vote for Respect if there was no alternative in her area, but she would do so with a peg on her nose.

John Pearson said that his motion was a "fall-back position" in case local SAs were blocked from standing. He supported all the AWL amendments to the Freeman motion because they would establish an "absolutely correct position". Respect, he claimed, was "dragging back the working class with a millstone around our necks".

Lesley Mahmood advised the group to consider the possibility that Respect might do much better than many anticipated and receive a good vote, especially in London. She argued that individuals in the DPSA ought to be able to hold different views on Respect. However, she declared that she would certainly be standing in the local elections, whatever the Respect executive had to say about the matter. Even if she had to be nominated under a different banner, comrade Mahmood felt it was important to stand against the BNP.

When it came to the vote, the Stockport motion was approved by 17 votes to four with three abstentions. As Chris Jones subsequently pointed out, "It is clear the direction this leads towards: a new organisation, not the Socialist Alliance as was". This adds weight to the CPGB argument against remaining in the SADP. The Democratic Socialist Alliance will be registering as a political party even if it decides not to act upon that registration.

The meeting then moved to a vote on the Freeman motion. Amendments from Barry Biddulph and Tony Greenstein were passed, but these were superseded when Pete Radcliff's proposal to delete five of the original eight paragraphs was supported by 14 votes to eight (four

abstentions).

The amended motion was supported by 19 votes to five (two abstentions), but the deletions so changed its character that the original proponent, Steve Freeman and fellow RDG Chris Jones, felt unable to support the final version.

The final version approved by the DPSA was as follows:

1. This meeting recognises that there are a variety of views on Respect amongst individuals and groups which make up the Democracy Platform.
2. We recognise that the DPSA should take an official (majority) view on Respect which can be represented in our leaflets, etc. Individuals and groups will retain the right to act autonomously.
3. The Respect conference did not resolve any issues the DPSA raised. Therefore the DPSA resolves not to join or support Respect."

The discussion then moved to the DPSA's intervention at the SA conference. Dot Gibson argued that the DPSA should organise a response to the likely defeats on Respect at the conference. She favoured staging a walkout protest by DPSA supporters.

There was much support for comrade Gibson's idea, with Bill Hunter saying that a conference recess should be requested, Chris Jones advocating disruption of the meeting to prevent business from proceeding and Sue Blackwell suggesting that the protest be made more visual by carrying posters, giving out leaflets and wearing black armbands to symbolise the death of the SA.

Lesley Mahmood proposed that the DPSA should book a meeting room in which the group could assemble to discuss the future of the SA after leaving the conference. She thought it best to book one in the same building, as this would make it more likely that others would join them as they walked out of the main hall.

Tony Greenstein went further, arguing that a walkout of the conference was not enough. If the taskforce motion was passed, it would effectively wind up the SA. In that event, the DPSA should "seize the moment and make a stand" by establishing itself as the new Socialist Alliance. Despite having promised to rejoin the SA a few hours previously, Tony Greenstein said that he was only doing so in order to resign at the conference.

Only David Landau and John Pearson spoke against the walkout strategy. Comrade Landau argued that the group needed to remain at the conference even if it was defeated on the task force resolution because that was the only way it would be able to put forward the platform's ideas to the SWP rank and file. Comrade Pearson said that a fringe meeting at the end would suffice, whereas a walkout would be "pathetic", a "bit of mischief" and an "inconsequential ejaculation".

When it came to the vote, the fringe meeting proposal was rejected, whilst the demand for a recess and a walkout to hold a meeting were backed overwhelmingly.

Lesley Mahmood and Pete McLaren were concerned that forewarning of the DPSA's plans might enable the SWP to limit their impact, so they requested that the *Weekly Worker* not report this decision.

Before the meeting closed it was agreed that the DPSA's existing committee continue in office until the next full meeting on April 3. However, Martin Ralph (International Socialist League) was elected to replace the CPGB's Marcus Ström and Barry Biddulph was co-opted onto the committee to act as its nominating officer, a role required by the passing of the Stockport motion.

Steve Cooke

You don't steer a wheelbarrow by sitting in it

The Socialist Alliance is not dead. But it is certainly dying. The key issue for all Socialist Alliance members is whether we should fight to save the patient or whether we should turn the life support machine off to save the electricity. The Socialist Workers Party has been strangling the SA ever since they restricted it to the role of an electoral front. Now after the launch of Respect, the SWP sees no reason for two rival electoral fronts. The end of the SA is nigh.

If all SA members agreed to join Respect, then the SA could simply be left to die of natural causes. But a minority of SA members are refusing to join Respect. The 'refuseniks' will not leave the SA and give up the fight for a broad-based workers' party around the SA's (republican socialist) programme. Consequently the SWP and their allies are now trying to prevent SA members and various local alliances standing candidates.

The resistance of SA members has forced the SA task group, the leading inner body on the SA executive committee, to submit a motion to SA conference to clamp down on them. It says: "This conference welcomes the establishment of Respect - the Unity Coalition. The Socialist Alliance calls on all its members to support Respect - the Unity Coalition by activity and finance and to join it." It goes on to call for a national conference at the end of 2004 to decide whether the SA will continue.

Meanwhile the rest of the motion, if passed, would end the rights of local alliances to take democratic decisions to stand, as the Socialist Alliance, in local council or parliamentary elections. Prospective candidates would be subject to approval of another organisation (Respect) and only permitted to stand in the name of Respect regardless of the democratic decisions of SA members.

The motion says that, "where a local branch of the Socialist Alliance, after discussion, decides that it wants to stand a candidate/candidates in the local elections the following procedure will be adopted:

- The local Socialist Alliance branch will canvass the proposal with the local organisation of Respect - the Unity Coalition;
- The local Socialist Alliance branch will inform the national executive committee of its decision along with an outline of the reasons for that decision;
- The national executive committee will raise the wishes of the local SA branch and the reasons with the executive committee of Respect - the Unity Coalition for it to consider adopting the SA proposal to stand a candidate in the local elections under the banner of Respect - the Unity Coalition."

Last Saturday the Democracy Platform of the Socialist Alliance, the main opposition to the liquidation of the SA, met in Birmingham to discuss this motion, together with the SA conference and the launching of the Respect Unity Coalition. By the end of the meeting the DPSA had voted overwhelmingly not to support or join Respect and to oppose the SA task group motion.

Martin Wicks, a member of the RMT union and Swindon SA, summed up the anger about the task group motion (email February 22). He says: "The task group resolution re SA candidates is nothing other than a ban on standing candidates. Even worse, given the fact that not all members of the SA are joining Respect, the resolution tells them that they can only stand candidates under the banner of Respect, and only then with the per-

Dave Craig of the Revolutionary Democratic Group gives his view of the decisions of the SA Democracy Platform

mission of the SA executive and the Respect executive. In Swindon there is no Respect group. To set one up in opposition to key members of the SA would simply destroy years of work."

He goes on to say that "the SWP now seems to be denouncing anybody who opposes Respect, or is even sceptical, as sectarians. You cannot build anything lasting on the basis of such methods. The task group resolution is completely destructive, since it wants to enforce a split based on a disagreement on the issue of Respect. Anybody who opposes the ban on standing SA candidates should attend the SA conference and speak out against this proposal. Do not walk away. Challenge this sectarian and bureaucratic proposal."

Martin is not a member of the DPSA and did not attend Saturday's conference. Yet his message is a militant one. In fighting to defend socialism, he comes to exactly the same view as the DPSA meeting. No support for Respect. Go to SA conference and oppose this task group motion. "Do not walk away. Challenge this sectarian and bureaucratic proposal."

The second major issue at the DPSA meeting was our attitude to Respect. Here there are real differences between a bloc comprised of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the Stockport SA and the International Socialist League and, on the other hand, the Revolutionary Democratic Group and our allies from Birmingham and Liverpool. Both 'factions' are agreed not to join Respect. But the politics behind this are quite different.

The AWL starts from what Respect is not. Respect is not a workers' party. It is not comprised just of workers. George Galloway is not a worker. Apparently he does not want to be paid a workers' wage if he becomes a Respect MEP. The AWL line is anti-Galloway and anti-Respect. They will not support or join Respect. They will intervene in the trade union movement to try to prevent Respect getting any support. The AWL mirrors the SWP. It wants to liquidate Respect and build the SA rather than the other way round.

The RDG starts from what Respect is. It is the product of the massive anti-war movement which mobilised both the working class and the middle class. The anti-war movement was implicitly a pro-democracy movement. The role of Marxists is not to take this movement over, but rather assist its development or transformation into a democratic and social movement. The working class has nothing to fear from such a broad movement. On the contrary, the advanced part of the working class must organise itself into a republican socialist party and fight for the leadership.

The broad democratic movement and the workers' party are complementary. To counterpoise the workers' party to the democratic movement inevitably leads to left sectarian politics, whose ideological character is economic and workerist. This means that Respect can only succeed in so far as it is built as a democratic movement. The SA can only succeed in so far as it is built as a broad workers' party capable of leading the democratic movement. This is the only

position inside the SA that does not logically demand the liquidation of either the SA or Respect. But it does require us to fight to change the political direction of both.

Respect is being built as an electoral front, not as a democratic movement, because of the confused politics and perspective of the SWP. When Respect rejected calls for a democratic republic at its founding conference, it made a fundamental and fatal political error. It defined itself dangerously against the democratic movement. It cannot therefore succeed. It will behave like a bull in a china shop. It is destined to blunder about crashing into the Green Party, dividing the Communist Party of Britain, creating problems in the Stop the War Coalition, wrecking the Socialist Alliance. The fact that George Monbiot did not join is a warning sign.

Oh lord, forgive the SWP, for they know not what they are doing. But if god forgives them, the working class should not. We have to say loud and clear - no

to Respect. Do not go down the road the SWP are dragging you. We must not follow them. We must stand out against the populist tide which is flowing into Respect. We must have the political courage to say no. The unfortunate thing is that the CPGB have not had the politics to resist the pull of Respect. As Chris Jones reminded them, "You don't steer a wheelbarrow by sitting in it".

Therefore 'not joining Respect' comes from two sides. First is resistance to the liquidation of the SA. Second is the need for resistance and opposition to the false perspective that the SWP is imposing on the anti-war movement. But this is not enough. We have a responsibility to intervene in Respect and challenge its false perspective. With this in mind the DPSA debated the motion on Respect from comrades Chris Jones, Sue Blackwell, Steve Freeman and Rummy Hasan. This read:

1. This meeting recognises that there are a variety of views on Respect amongst individuals and groups which make up the Democracy Platform.
2. We recognise that the DPSA should take an official (majority) view on Respect which can be represented in our leaflets, etc. Individuals and groups will retain the right to act autonomously.
3. This meeting endorses the policy of critical engagement that informed our

intervention at the Respect conference as follows:

- a. DPSA request to meet with Galloway before the conference;
- b. DPSA proposed an alternative strategy set out in 'Britain at the crossroads'.
- c. DPSA amendments on (i) republicanism, (ii) immigration controls, (iii) worker's wages for elected representatives.
4. The results of our intervention in Respect were as follows:
 - a. we were unable to meet with Galloway;
 - b. our alternative strategy and all amendments were defeated;
 - c. the aims of Respect, whether as a democratic and social movement or a workers' party were not clarified. No longer-term perspective was outlined beyond the forthcoming election campaign;
 - e. despite Respect pointing to a "crisis of representation" and a "democratic deficit" in the UK, it failed to produce any democratic policies or solutions.
5. The Respect conference did not resolve any issues the DPSA raised. Therefore the DPSA resolves not to join or support Respect.
6. We will continue to build the SA and intervene in Respect as the SA or DPSA.
7. The DPSA intervention around Respect will:
 - i. explain why we are not joining Respect on the basis of the policies we put forward to the Respect conference;
 - ii. seek a meeting with George Galloway to put our concerns directly to him and report back;
 - iii. seek discussions with other non-Respect socialists such as the CPB, Socialist Party and Alliance for Green Socialism to consider whether a joint policy is possible;
 - iv. seek further clarification about what sort of organisation Respect is aiming to build.
8. We do not rule out at some time in the future either joining Respect or urging workers to vote for Respect candidates. However, we do rule this out now. This policy will not change until a general meeting of the DPSA makes a decision to the contrary."

Naturally this motion came under heavy attack. The workerist 'lefts' were particularly annoyed that we should want to seek a meeting with Galloway. They will not touch Galloway with a bargepole, whereas we have no problem seeking a meeting with him, or anybody else, if we believe it is in the interest of the working class. Whether Galloway will meet with us is another matter. But there is no harm in asking. We are not joining Respect, but our attitude remains constructive.

A series of amendments were moved. At the end of the voting the motion was in tatters. Everything had been deleted except points 1, 2 and 5. The RDG comrades voted against the amended motion in protest. We can live with the result. But the consequence is that the DPSA has no agreed policy to intervene in Respect.

The worst aspect of this was that the CPGB walked out at the beginning of the DPSA meeting before any of these crucial issues were discussed or voted on.

At the start, the meeting quite wrongly voted to accept the right of non-SA members to vote. The RDG, our allies, the CPGB and John Pearson voted against this. We lost the vote. But it had no practical consequences for voting in the meeting, except the CPGB got up and left. This was a piece of theatrical stupidity, which simply helped the AWL, Stockport SA and ISL against the RDG.

Still, there is only one answer. We intend to fight on ●

Socialist Alliance: not dead, but dying



Donation 'sets ball rolling'

London Unison is the first trade union branch to stump up some serious money to help run this year's European Social Forum, which is due to take place on October 14-17 (the European assembly on March 6-7 will give the final go-ahead). The London region agreed on February 25 to firmly commit £50,000.

Sensibly, members of the CPGB were not excluded from the latest meeting of the ESF coordinating committee on February 25. Two weeks ago, we were forced to leave when the vital subject of finance was discussed (see *Weekly Worker* February 12). Last week's meeting did not discuss finances, so exclusions were thought unnecessary. Now thankfully it seems comrades want to leave behind such undemocratic practices. Excluding comrades was always an indication of the difficult financial situation - not that keeping it secret was the way to rectify anything. The implication appeared to be that the *Weekly Worker* was to blame for trade unions not coughing up. Obviously ridiculous.

Spirits were markedly lifted once the meeting was informed about Unison's donation. "This should be seen as a starter," an enthusiastic Rahul Patel, until recently London Unison press officer, told the ESF coordinating committee. Comrade Patel, a member of the Socialist Workers Party, indicated that other branches and regions might follow this excellent example: "This donation will set the ball rolling," he predicted.

Hopefully he is right. Unfortunately, the TUC general council has so far only given its "in-principle support". Redmond O'Neill (Ken Livingstone's director of public affairs and transport) reported that the "degree of support depends on how the ESF develops". So, for the time being, no money from the TUC. This is a setback, which was somewhat glossed over at the meeting. The GLA had expected a major financial contribution from the TUC and comrade O'Neill previously indicated that both the TUC and GLA were expected to come up with similar amounts.

Presented with what is still viewed as a cash-strapped situation, the GLA has now put forward the idea of a slimmed down version of the ESF. But rather than explaining that the lack of money was

Chris Nineham: "I really do not think that our ESF will be any smaller than the first two. In Paris, 20,000 non-French people participated. Unless we really fuck up, our ESF is going to be a lot bigger than 20,000"

responsible for this proposal, Redmond O'Neill (who is a leading member of the Trotskyist sect, Socialist Action) questioned whether the ESFs in Paris and Florence really were as big as publicly announced. "I do not believe that 50,000 people attended either of these events," he said, mentioning a figure of around 38,000 instead. "We should plan to accommodate 20,000 people and look into the possibility of expanding the event, as more support and more money comes in."

This was strongly opposed by the SWP's Chris Nineham: "I really do not think that our ESF will be any smaller than the first two. In Paris, 20,000 non-French people participated. Unless we really fuck up, our ESF is going to be a lot bigger than 20,000." We should certainly aim at least to match the attendance at the first two forums.

There is another serious problem with the GLA's slim-line event: it risks sidelining the workshops, which make use of the only self-organised space at the ESF. The GLA will want to make sure that nothing too controversial gets discussed and that Ken Livingstone can bask in the success of the ESF. Fortunately, there is a real consensus in the programme working group, which regards workshops as central. It is up to all our groups and organisations together to make sure the London ESF is both big and democratic ●

Tina Becker



Chris Nineham: don't slim down

Forthcoming ESF meetings

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

Wednesday March 3, 2pm, City Hall: Regular meeting of the UK coordinating committee (the smaller body with one rep from each affiliated organisation). Observers allowed.

Thursday, March 4, 6.30pm, Unison HQ, Mabledon Place: Meeting of the ESF programme group.

Saturday and Sunday March 6-7, City Hall: ESF 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, 10am-5pm; Sunday, 10am-1pm.

Reds and the greens

Phil Kent reports on the open warfare that has opened up between Respect and the Green Party

More than 200 people crammed into the main hall of the West Indian Community Centre for the launch rally of Respect in Haringey on February 24.

In keynote speeches Ken Loach and George Galloway explained how Labour has become a party

of big business, hence the urgent need to form a broad coalition that can challenge Blair at the ballot box and not just on the streets. The top table speakers were completed by a young activist originally from the Green Party who had joined the Socialist

Alliance and who has now moved seamlessly on into the ranks of Respect, and a Kurdish militant, who made the very welcome call for migrants to become active in British left politics.

The main note of controversy was provided by a member of the Green Party speaking from the floor. She said that there was already a party that had a democratic constitution, a programme similar to Respect's, which opposed the war in Iraq and defends immigrants. Everyone should join the Green Party rather than split the anti-Blair vote.

In his closing remarks George Galloway explained how he had thrown an expensive dinner for the lead-

ers of the Green Party to get them into the Respect coalition but had been turned down before the soup course was finished. The deal could have included them taking the first eight places on Respect's GLA list and the top spot on the European parliament list for London, George taking second spot (assuming he is chosen as our representative, of course).

Galloway pointed out that we were not just greens, but red, black and muslim too. The Green Party had not had much success in recruiting from minority groups, he said. What is more, Respect would be standing on its own platform, not trying to piggyback on the Greens ●

Respect events

York: Friday February 27, 6.30pm, Langwith 047, York University.

Ealing and Hillingdon: Sunday February 29, 4pm, Dominion Centre, Southall.

Harlow: Sunday February 29, 3pm, Latton Bush Centre, Southern Way.

Manchester: Sunday February 29, 1pm to 5pm, Great Hall, Manchester Town Hall, Albert Square.

St Albans: Monday March 1, 7.30pm, Jubilee Centre, Catherine Street.

Bromley: Monday March 1, 7pm, United Reform Church, Widmore Road.

Southend-on-Sea: Tuesday March 2, 7.30pm, St Marks church hall.

Brent and Harrow: Tuesday March 2, 7.30pm, Corrib Rest Irish Centre, Salusbury Road, Queens Park.

Lambeth and Southwark: Wednesday March 3, 7.30pm, Lambeth town hall.

North East London: Thursday March 4, 7.30pm, Round Chapel, Lower Clapton Road, E5.

Croydon: Thursday March 4, 7.30pm, Cedar Hall, Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Road.

Hackney: Thursday March 4, 7.30pm, old school room, Round Chapel, Powerscroft Road, London E5.

Lewisham and Greenwich: Thursday March 4, 7pm, Christchurch Forum, Trafalgar Square, Greenwich.

Wandsworth and Merton: Friday March 5, 7pm, Tooting Leisure Centre, Garratt Lane.

East Midlands: Saturday March 6, 3.30pm, Comfort Hotel, George Street, Nottingham.

Cambridge: Saturday March 6, 3pm, McCrum Lecture Theatre, Cambridge University, Benets Street.

West Midlands: Saturday March 6, 1pm, Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham city centre.

Birmingham: Saturday March 6, 1pm - West Midlands launch, Carrs Lane Church, city centre.

Cambridge: Saturday March 6, 3pm, McCrum lecture theatre, Cambridge University, Benets Street.

Hammersmith: Sunday March 7, 11am, Hammersmith town hall, King Street.

City and East London: Tuesday March 9, 7pm, East Ham town hall, Barking Road.

Oxford: Tuesday March 9, 7pm, Asian Cultural Centre, Manzil Way (off Cowley Road).

Yorkshire and Humberside: Sunday March 7, 12.30pm, Conference Auditorium, Leeds University.

South East region: Sunday March 14, 2.30pm, upper hall, University of London Union, Malet Street.

Critique conference 2004

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)

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SOCIETY

Unkindest cut of all

Though TV programmes and womens' magazines normalise plastic surgery, it is a form of self-harm, argues **Zoë Simon**

The essence of adolescence is the crushing realisation that your *internal* reality has no bearing on your *external* reality. Why don't the most difficult and the darkest emotions burst out of us, mark us, maim us, mark the world? There is no answer to this question other than they just *don't*. We know that they don't - experience has taught us that.

The aching sense of this contradiction continues into adulthood, and the creative mind frequently draws on it: Munch's *The Scream* and Rothko's split canvasses have become its epitome.

Adolescence remains the fulcrum - the point at which these difficult feelings explode. There are, as always, statistics. Self-harm leads to about 15,000 attendances in accident and emergency units each year, while an estimated 25,000 adolescents end up in hospital after self-harming. A survey commissioned in 2003 reported that 66% of hospital staff considered adolescent self-harm to be on the rise; one in 10 teenagers have deliberately harmed themselves ...

I reiterate that the discrepancy between realities continues into adulthood. How do adults reconcile themselves to it? Some continue to self-harm; some - like Munch - fill the world with images of their internal reality; some make their bodies their own canvas - they resort to plastic surgery. Perhaps you find the link tenuous? You may claim that plastic surgery is designed to make people look *better*, and if you have ever had sight of a deliberate cut or burn on the body of your child, sibling or friend, you may argue that a spliced lip or breast is a lot *less* upsetting, and a lot *more* appealing. I argue that the two things have the same root, and that is the square root of pain.

Those who undergo plastic surgery have such a deep-rooted, internal sense of their body's wrongness that they will undergo painful procedures - cutting, splicing, stretching, scraping - in order to realise their internal self. Society's reaction? Some treatments are available on the NHS, and, if you can afford it, at luxurious private clinics. Whether we travel economy or business, shame isn't on the in-flight menu. By contrast, a self-harmer will arrive at A&E in severe pain to be accused of time-wasting. Serial self-harmers report being told that they are wasting bed space, of waiting hours for treatment, and of having strips put on wounds rather than stitches. A particularly distressing anecdote tells of a young man



Michael Jackson: some make their bodies their own canvas

being made to wait in a room full of razor blades.

Did the hospital staff imagine that the individuals concerned felt good about what they had done? Clearly they do and it is a widespread misconception - the media labelling it a 'cutting craze', and its young participants 'wannabes' eager to join the ranks of the disappeared Richey Edwards and Garbage's glamorous front woman, Shirley Manson.

In reality self-harm is accompanied by huge feelings of guilt, and fear at what you have done to yourself. What I want is not

society's labelling of a self-inflicted cut or burn as an acceptable *aesthetique*. I am not hankering after the lurid society as depicted in Ballard's *Crash*. That, after all, wouldn't lead to tolerance: rather *fetishisation* of injury. I want a recognition that the desire to have plastic surgery, and the desire to self-harm come from the same place - a place of pain and depression.

Most depressives describe a loss of contact with reality, a constant battle to achieve the sense that they are 'still here'. Self-harmers say that seeing blood or a burn is proof that they still exist. I don't doubt that anyone desperate enough to have plastic surgery has any less of a fragmented sense of their own identity. That they feel unrealised by their outer appearance to the extent that they are willing to alter it permanently. And society not only supports these changes: it *prescribes* a set of acceptable changes.

Sociologists have begun to document the homogenisation of the female face through surgery - a prominent upper lip or 'trout pout' being one of the sought after looks. When I was at school, a friend was absent for a week owing to a nose job. When I asked what it looked like I was told she had had a "number 8". I'm still reeling from the late Paula Yates's tale about choosing a pair of silicone breasts - she was ushered into a room walled with breasts, and asked to point out the ones she wanted.

It seems to me the worst form of bullying. Society not only caters for people's insecurities, but also makes money out of them. A spliced lip is just as indicative of a psyche in crisis as a self-inflicted wound. And, what is more, we are familiar with the idea of self-harm through drug and alcohol abuse, and eating disorders. We know that people risk inflicting long-term harm upon themselves for the short-term benefit of relief. So why make self-harmers the pariahs?

As communists, and as human beings, we have the sense that reality doesn't always come up to scratch. It is the tragic essence of the human condition. As a society it's high time we stopped allocating people a MacDonald's menu of how to deal with it ●

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 Communist 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.

Become a Communist Party supporter

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Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

Fighting fund

In with a chance

Last week I was able to report that our £500 monthly fighting fund had already reached £409 and that this put us in a good position to finish with a surplus. We are not there yet and there are only a few days to go before the end of February. Despite that we are surely still in with a chance.

Three readers sent in donations. JP and LW each gave £10 and JS £20. Thank you, comrades. Your help is much appreciated. Together you lifted our fund to a total of £449. But we still need a minimum of £51 in just three days.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that our fighting fund is vital. Like the rest of the leftwing press we have no rich backers; nor do we sell valuable space for advertising the products of big business. Apart from bookshops, subscriptions and sales at meetings, demonstrations, etc, we have no other source of revenue. That is

why week after week I am forced to make my heartfelt appeals.

I know that many, perhaps even a majority, of you disagree here or there with the political line and tactics of the CPGB. Nevertheless we all know how widely read and influential the *Weekly Worker* has become both in Britain and across the world (9,319 web readers last week, which once again pushes our total circulation well over 10,000).

Our success is no mystery. The *Weekly Worker* consistently provides news of events, honest analysis and the polemics and arguments that cannot be found elsewhere. And on that basis, if no other, it deserves wide and generous support ●

Robbie Rix

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

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Paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain

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**STWC conference:
Saturday February
28, 10am,
Camden Centre,
London**

Drawing a class line

This Saturday's conference of the Stop the War Coalition meets in conditions where Blair and Bush, and indeed their 'war on terrorism', are in considerable trouble.

The failure to find any WMDs in Iraq, the major political convulsions that have afflicted the Blair government because of its lies, the beginnings of similar problems for Bush, as the US 'Iraqification' stratagem gets blown to hell by those resisting the occupation - all this is widely recognised as vindication of those millions who fought against the imperialists' war plans in the run-up to the invasion, and the unprecedented numbers who continued to mobilise and march, even as the invasion went ahead.

The mass movement in Britain, whose highest point was the massive, two-million-strong demonstration on February 15 2003, was of course merely the most dramatic manifestation of what was in fact a global movement. One that demonstrated enormous potential for the future - potential for mass struggles against imperialism and its barbaric depredations around the world, against wars and conquest, against capitalist superexploitation of workers in 'developing' countries, from China to Indonesia to Mexico. Against the massive and criminal neglect of the millions suffering from poverty and diseases like Aids, which capitalism has the means to conquer, but chooses not to because it is not profitable. Against the ruination of the environment and the threat that poses for the future of humanity.

Yet the war was not stopped. And even now, with the exposure of these lies, the occupation of Iraq goes on. Despite the clear majority opposed to war, and the millions on the streets, although Bush and Blair were compelled to manoeuvre, in the end we were unable to stop them invading Iraq. Even now, for all their problems with the occupation, they hope to prevail in the face of the anti-war movement and will stop at nothing - as the Hutton affair, among other things, showed yet again. And even if particular politicians and particular ruling parties come unstuck, there are others ready to step into their place. In America, John Kerry is promising to replace Bush with something 'nicer'. In Britain, the Liberal Democrats, and New Labour's Robin Cook, posed as opponents of the war - right until the moment it actually started. Such capitalist 'anti-war' politicians are contemptible hypocrites - if the war was criminal when it was being planned, it was doubly criminal when it was actually happening. These people were not opposed to invading Iraq in principle, but merely because they feared it would probably backfire.

Many of them have their own skeletons in the cupboard. Who remembers Bill Clinton, and his own bombing of Iraq in December 1998 - 'Operation Desert Fox' - again over what were then, as now, fictitious 'weapons of mass destruction'? Who remembers that Robin Cook was foreign secretary when that slaughter of the Iraqi people happened? Who remembers the support of politicians from all three major parties for this barbaric mini-war, based on the same lies as last year, not to mention the first 'desert slaughter' of 1991? Who can trust any of these

class enemies to stand up for the victims of imperialist aggression? The answer is obvious.

Mere protest - all good people marching together - is not enough to stop the war machine. For what stands behind government is the interest of predatory capital with its ownership and control of industry and business, as well as domination of the weapons of state power - armies, police, the spooks and much more. For popular discontent to prevail over that is actually quite a tall order - it requires confronting these highly organised social forces with another, even more powerful social force. That can only be the working class, a force that, on an international scale, has more social weight and, if organised, social power than ever before in the whole history of capitalism. To go beyond simple protest we need a political alternative that can begin to organise working people into an independent social and political force in our own right.

Much of the debate at the STWC will touch on the role of politics in the anti-war movement, and how we go about fighting the war and the occupation concretely. There will be debates about whom STWC activists should be supporting in the elections that are coming up in the spring, whether or not to support the new Respect coalition or other parties, or indeed none. Probably correctly, given the fact that good anti-war fighters come from a number of different political standpoints, all of which have their faults, there is no concrete proposal from the leadership of the STWC to give blanket support to any particular political party. However, and this is crucial, there is no class line being drawn against the false friends of the anti-war movement, the likes of Charles Kennedy and Robin Cook, against these bourgeois politicians who would like to exploit the anti-war movement for their own, anti-working class ends. This is a crucial failing.

The steering committee's draft resolution 17 calls for support for only those candidates or parties that "opposed the war in Iraq, are urging an end to the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq, and are against British support for George Bush's programme of endless war, providing only that such candidates or parties share the coalition's founding values of support for civil liberties and opposition to racism". This is simply not enough, and could easily embrace the likes of Cook and the Lib Dems.

This is not the only weakness in the steering committee proposals, but it is the most glaring. There are of course many people in the anti-war movement who are new to any sort of radical politics, and whose ideas are in flux and in many ways unformed. However, many leading figures in the STWC are leading members of working class and socialist organisations, such as the Socialist Workers Party and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain.

In refusing to draw any kind of class line against the hypocritical, half-hearted opponents of the war, these comrades are failing in their duty to the future political development of the movement. By at least attempting to do so, they could actually strike a real blow not only against Bush and Blair, but against the 'reluctant war-makers' and middle class politics within



Anti-war movement needs working class politics

the anti-war movement (in the form of the Greens, for example). It is doubly unfortunate that the SWP has deliberately diluted class politics in Respect, as compared to, for instance, the Socialist Alliance. This can only make working class, socialist forces in the anti-war movement far less distinct, less capable of drawing the healthiest elements further to the left.

There are many other problems with the various resolutions and political strands that make up this conference. An important one is pacifism, as expressed most classically by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. This is the same CND that failed to strike any serious blows against imperialism in the two deepest phases of the cold war (1950s and 1980s) - there is little reason to believe it will do any better in today's 'war against terrorism'. A strategy of seeking to persuade the capitalists to give up nuclear weapons is utterly illusory - why on earth should they do that? Since when has any ruling class ever given away its ability to wage war against its enemies? We, the working people, will have to take all their weapons away from them by our own overwhelming, revolutionary force.

The Stop the War Coalition led possibly the biggest protest movement in British history, but it is just as full of con-

traditions as many earlier formations. However, the STWC is not something that can simply be written off as uniformly bourgeois or pacifistic. Mixed in with the bourgeois pacifism - the calls for United Nations intervention, for example - and the opportunism of the left, there are also real glimmers of the kind of working class politics the movement needs.

Of particular note at this conference are the motions from Labour Against the War and the Jewish Socialist Group, not to mention that of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The LAW resolution clearly calls for "the broadest possible campaign to demand the immediate withdrawal of British and US forces from Iraq". Furthermore it puts forward a strategy for achieving this by building real working class solidarity: "encourage the development of direct links between the trade unions, women's groups, student unions, campaigns, social and cultural organisations in Britain with social movements in Iraq... this should involve... major trade unions visiting and helping to rebuild the independent trade union movement in Iraq... practical support to helping rebuild civil society in Iraq by supporting those organisations not aligned to the occupying forces" (resolution 5).

Likewise, the Jewish Socialist Group

motion clearly draws a line against the United Nations. It notes that "no outside force can substitute itself for the self-determination of the Iraqi people and that the United Nations is not truly independent of the world's most powerful nations". It proposes instead: "Build links with emergent progressive and democratic forces in Iraq and provide solidarity to defend them from attack from the occupation forces, the Iraqi puppet movements and from fundamentalist forces" (resolution 22).

Both of these eminently supportable resolutions make many parallel points to our own shorter motion, which simply calls on the STWC to "campaign in solidarity with the democratic, secular and socialist forces of resistance in Iraq" (resolution 25).

The point is to inject working class politics into the anti-war movement, in order to make a start in taking this tremendously important movement to a higher level. So that in future, when the imperialists threaten a new resurgence of world barbarism, we - the anti-war, progressive forces of the world - can take them by the throat and bring them crashing down, confronting them with our alternative: world socialism, the rule of the working people ●

Ian Donovan

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