



# weekly **worker**

**Sheikh Ahmed Yassin  
assassinated in Israeli  
state provocation**

- SSP conference
- Miners' Great Strike
- Dockers' second front
- CPGB aggregate

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Towards a new workers' party

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# Still marching, but where to?

# PARTYnotes

## Two conferences

The contrast between the Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales could hardly be more marked. One is living, confident and growing; the other lies dying - struck down, foully murdered by its own misleadership.

By a margin of two to one the SA's March 13 special conference voted not only to suspend electoral work - which in effect means ending all activity - but to actually forbid surviving branches from standing in the forthcoming June 10 local elections. This control-freakery was imposed at the insistence of the Socialist Workers Party. No opposition was brooked. There could be no compromise nor any accounting for different, specific local circumstances. Everything, above all the continued existence of the SA, must be subordinated to the untried and untested Respect coalition and getting John Rees elected as an MEP.

Not that the SWP is itself giving 100%. Before London's March 20 Stop the War Coalition demonstration Chris Bamberg, SWP national secretary, issued one of his infamous weekly circulars: only 100 SWPers were to be assigned to work for Respect (email, March 18). The rest were told to sell *Socialist Worker* and dish out SWP placards. According to what we know about the real size of the SWP's membership that translates in the language of mathematics into a mere 5% commitment to Respect.

The March 27-28 SSP conference in Edinburgh faces no such demands to liquidate from the Socialist Worker platform, nor from any other faction for that matter. On the contrary the SSP faces the challenges that come with proven success and growth. Specifically that means quickly integrating RMT and other potential trade union affiliates into its regional and national structures (there is a whole raft of constitutional changes proposed by the SSP executive committee) - that and gearing up for the June 10 elections, in which the SSP is expected to do well.

As with the SA, the SSP began as a unity project between left groups. In that sense the SSP holds up a mirror of what might have been in the rest of Britain. Quite clearly the much more favourable situation in Scotland results not from objective conditions. Eg, strikes throughout Britain remain at historically low levels and the 2003 anti-war movement saw its biggest manifestations in London, not Glasgow or Edinburgh.

The difference is subjective. Scottish Militant Labour, under the leadership of Alan McCombes and Tommy Sheridan, had the necessary foresight and accumulated organisational weight behind them to rally the left in Scotland and then patiently build a party based on a culture which still tolerates minorities and generally operates in a spirit of openness.

Not that we communists are uncritical. The SSP cannot strictly be regarded as a socialist party. Yes, unlike Respect, it calls for socialism week in and week out in the pages of *Scottish Socialist Voice* and in every election manifesto. Tommy Sheridan eloquently expounds upon its virtues and rails against the inequalities of capitalism. The SSP's five other MSPs hammer home the same message. However, the socialism of the SSP is both reformist and nationalist.

For Marxism, of course, socialism

is a universal, *revolutionary* task. The capitalist state has to be dismantled by the *armed* power of the working class, and capital superseded at the global level. Using the existing state to introduce 'socialism' - which usually means nothing more than the nationalisation of the means of production - inevitably leads to attacks on the working class. Nationalised capital is still capital and workers remain exploited wage slaves. That is the lesson of history and the real movement of the working class in the 20th century. In short, there can be no socialism in one country, not even in a breakaway Scotland.

SSP leaders disagree. The 'tartan revolution' would not, we are assured, suffer the horrible starvation and wars of intervention witnessed in Russia or Cuba's isolation and grinding poverty. Scotland will not be "brought to its knees" by an American economic blockade. A socialist Scotland will be able to "stand up" to the forces of global capitalism and become an international "symbol of resistance" to economic and social injustice (T Sheridan and A McCombes *Imagine* Edinburgh 2000, p189).

Scotland can succeed apparently where others before it have failed because it is "fabulously wealthy". Scotland already has the "material foundations" for a "thriving" socialist democracy. Besides "long coastlines" and a "clean environment", Scotland has a "flourishing" culture and "legions" of internationally acclaimed musicians, writers, actors and film directors. On top of these blessings Scotland has "land, water, fish, timber, oil, gas and electricity in abundance". Better still, Scotland has a "moderate climate" (*ibid* p189). While a "fully-fledged socialist society" might not be possible in Scotland, nonetheless a "socialist government" could move in that direction by taking control of the country's wealth and using it for the common good (*ibid* p190).

Frankly this is threadbare and deeply worrying. Joseph Stalin used to rebuff Leon Trotsky with reference to Russia's continental proportions and immense wealth in natural resources. Land, oil, forests, gold, a population that stood at around 150 million ... and a very, very long coastline. He did not mention a "moderate climate", true. Despite that absence Stalin boasted in his version of *Imagine* - the second edition of *Foundations of Leninism* - that Russia had all it needed *internally*. Not to achieve the "final and complete victory of socialism" - that needed the efforts of other countries - but to "build up a socialist society" (JV Stalin *Works* Vol 6, Moscow 1953, p111).

In the McCombes-Sheridan schema Scottish nationalism is proletarian. British nationalism bourgeois.

Logically this has led the SSP leadership to pursue a strategic alliance with the Scottish National Party. Nowadays the SSP is quite clear: independence in and of itself would be progress. A capitalist Scotland which has its own armed forces, currency and bureaucracy is bizarrely proclaimed as a step in the direction of socialism. Last year the SSP national council duly agreed the perspectives document, 'Where now for independence and socialism?', drafted by comrade McCombes, and subsequently an independence convention was launched.

Thankfully there is some opposition - implicit and explicit - to this outright capitulation to left nationalism (though unsurprisingly not from the Republican Communist Network). Motions 9, 10 and 11, plus the amendment to motion 11 from the Workers Unity platform, all ap-

pear to take issue with the McCombes-Sheridan strategy.

Motion 9, submitted by Edinburgh Pentland, is, to be frank, mealy-mouthed and to all intents and purposes worthless: eg, the position of the SSP regarding Scottish independence should be based on whether it "will strengthen or weaken the political, ideological and industrial position of the working class". The Cathcart West and Cathcart East motion 11 is no better. It too has the sticky fingerprints of the SW platform all over it. Being for, or against, independence is conveniently skirted round. Pure opportunism.

On the other hand motion 10 from Dundee West reflects the new thinking of the Committee for a Workers' International. They want to put some clear red water between themselves and their former Militant comrades who now dominate the SSP leadership. The independence convention was "mistaken". No "significant numbers" have been attracted and "support for national independence" has fallen in the past few years.

Though damning the "concessions" made to nationalism by the McCombes-Sheridan leadership, the CWI shares essentially the same rotten programme. It would "support" an independent capitalist Scotland, "as a democratic right", if wished for by the majority of the population (supporting self-determination does not, of course, oblige communists to *advocate* the Balkanisation of Britain - or anywhere else, for that matter). But instead of campaigning for this outcome the CWI wants to "prioritise" other issues - "the fight for a decent minimum wage, the scrapping of the council tax, a shorter working week, public ownership of industry and anti-war work."

Nevertheless the CWI holds out the long-term goal of achieving independence. This would, though, be a "socialist Scotland" and part of a "voluntary and democratic socialist confederation with England, Wales and Ireland".

But why exactly the British nation-state needs to be broken up remains unexplained. As is well known, the CPGB calls for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales and an independent, *united* Ireland under existing socio-political conditions. That would simultaneously provide a democratic solution to the national question and deepen working class unity in the British Isles. But it should be emphasised that in general Marxists seek to bring about the organisation of the working class in the biggest possible, *centralised* states. Federalism in Britain and an independent Ireland would today represent a real step in that direction.

The only remotely principled position is the one advocated by the Workers Unity platform. Though it appears to reject the right of the Scottish people to self-determination - a piece of unnecessary Luxemburgism - the comrades advocate working class unity, not as a pious, empty slogan, but concretely. They call for unity against the existing United Kingdom state and sketch out a plan for the "building of a British socialist party" using the "strength of the SSP" as a lever.

Naturally such a genuinely internationalist and partyist approach commands our support

Jack Conrad

## LETTERS

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

### Hunger strikes

Eight days into the glorious hunger strike by Colombian Coca Cola workers and the struggle for union rights continues, but neither the corporation nor the national government concern themselves with the grave health problems now affecting the participants in this important protest for life and dignity.

Several comrades are now in a lamentable state of health; they have deteriorated seriously through emanation (accelerated loss of weight) and profound dehydration. The health of our president, Luis Javier Correa Suarez, is very delicate. Symptoms such as dizziness, headaches, fainting, palpitations, chest pains, lack of sleep have become constant (all the participants are kept under the observation of doctors and nurses).

Coca Cola has visited the social security centres that provide health services to demand that they do *not* give medical attention to the workers from Coke bottling plants unless they have already ceased their hunger strike. This is the worst ever crime committed by the multinational, which has also suspended six comrades at the Bucaramanga plant for participating in our activities.

For the above reasons we make Coca Cola responsible for the health and life of our comrades and we make an urgent call to the multinational's directors in Atlanta and Mexico so that they stop this violent action against its workers. To continue with this situation could unleash unfortunate events.

In the same manner we make the Colombian state responsible for its continued deafness toward the urgent calls from the workers, who have on repeated occasions asked that it ensures that the labour rights and work security of the comrades are respected.

The attempts by the police to dislodge the hunger strikers are still the order of the day. Situations as have occurred in Bogota and Barranquilla especially are a very clear proof of the help that the multinational has been getting from the state security organs with the aim of breaking the workers' protest. Paramilitary threats against the Sinaltrainal union are now taking place across the country. If the paramilitaries manage to weaken the protest the only beneficiary will be Coca Cola.

We call on all social organisations, human rights defenders, politicians, religious people to show solidarity with the Coca Cola workers and demand of the

corporation a prompt agreement that avoids more loss of life and the destruction of the trade union.

**Colombia Solidarity Committee**

London

### Arrogance

I often read the *Weekly Worker* and like many others find it a useful window onto the workings of the left. However, after reading last week's 'Party notes' I don't think I'll bother any more ('Towards the Anthropocene', March 18).

I doubt that I'm the only reader who feels alienated by Jack Conrad's articles. Why, comrade Conrad, do you feel the need to use your articles to show off how many 'big words' you know? 'Party notes' last week was the last straw. To use a word ('anthropocene') in the headline which you know full well isn't in the common lexicon is just plain arrogance. Is your self-esteem so low that you must use words that you know hardly anyone will understand, just to make you feel better?

The crux of my point is this: if comrade Conrad wants to write articles that are accessible to a chosen few, that's fine. Just don't do it under the banner of Party notes. I truly hope that this elitist use of language isn't representative of the party. If it is, then I'm sorry, I'm far too poorly educated to qualify for membership.

Grow up, comrade. If your arguments are worth hearing, put them in an accessible form.

**Rae Hancock**  
Surrey

### Anarchism

I am not a communist but an anarchist, although I am not a psychotic madman who believes in madness and destruction, as the media today so often portrays.

The essence of anarchism is for peace, for the abolition of all laws, as there will be no need for them: ie, there won't be a law against murder, because nobody would ever want or need to commit it. I view communism as a stepping stone towards this system, and your system of collectives especially is one I agree with.

But is there a point at which you believe the party would find it possible to actually hand control to them? Is it possible that another Stalin-like regime will arise, or do you believe your Party leaders to be sufficiently in control and have enough faith in Marxism to prevent this from happening?

**Guilam Wainwright**  
email

## Fighting fund

### Some way

Last week puts us on the way towards meeting our £500 monthly target. Time, and the next few days will, of course, tell.

On the March 20 demonstration in London we got a steady trickle of small donations, usually £1 instead of the 50p cover price. Pleasingly that included a couple from *Socialist Worker* sellers. Altogether that added up to a nice little sum: £19.50.

Besides that boost, JB from Surrey sent in £5 and SW from Norway £10. Both are longstanding subscribers and regularly send in a bit extra. Your continued help is very welcome. Another comrade who once again must be mentioned is TR of County Durham. He donated £60. Neither of us have been able to speak face to face for a long time - I have not been up north and he has not been down south - but let me assure him that his

unstinting support is appreciated by all of us.

Unfortunately I cannot report any donations via our PayPal website facility. Shame on the freeloaders. But still, whether our e-readers like us or loathe us, there can be no denying that the *Weekly Worker* is slowly but surely gaining influence. At the time of writing - 10pm on Wednesday night - I have been told by our webmaster that we notched up exactly 8,617 electronic readers last week. Not bad, especially given our many extra sales on March 20.

Anyway in total our fund stands at £289.50

**Robbie Rix**

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



## FRANCE

# Mixed messages

The March 21 first round of the French regional elections saw Jacques Chirac's rightwing UMP punished for its anti-working class policies and full frontal assault on France's system of social security. Unfortunately, however, it was not the alliance of the country's two main revolutionary groups that reaped the benefit, but the mainstream left parties, whose own neo-liberal record in government up to 2002 had opened the way for Chirac's current attacks.

While the Parti Socialiste, Parti Communiste Français and Greens polled 40% in total (as against 34% for the UMP and allies), the joint Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire-Lutte Ouvrière lists won just under five percent. Although this was a marginally higher percentage than that obtained in the equivalent elections in 1998, it was desperately disappointing compared to the two groups' performance in the presidential elections of 2002, when the LCR's Olivier Besancenot and LO's Arlette Laguiller together totalled almost 10%.

This last figure is the minimum necessary that lists must achieve in order to progress to the second round in any given constituency. But the LCR-LO bloc fell well short of the 10% threshold in all 21 regions and 94 departments. While the winning of over a million votes nationwide is no mean feat, the fact that these were more or less evenly spread across the country, rather than concentrated in particular localities, meant that there was no chance of a morale-boosting success in the second round (in 1998 - before the undemocratic 10% barrier was introduced - one LCR and seven LO councillors were returned in the Nord-Pas de Calais region under the PR system).

In a joint statement after the results were announced, the two organisations condemned the "electoral method that favours the dominant parties", which meant that there are now "no revolutionary representatives on the regional councils despite our increased vote".

The revolutionary left's best performance was in the Sarthe department, where it won 7.49%, and in the Picardie and Limousin regions (over 6.5%), but it exceeded 5% in seven regions and 4% in all but four. The overall achievement establishes the LCR-LO as the country's fourth electoral force, but still far behind the third - Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National, which held its 15% share and qualified for next weekend's second round in 19 of the 21 regions.

Putting on a brave face, comrade Laguiller declared the campaign to have been useful nevertheless: "We are not electoralists," she said, and it was necessary to convince workers that there are "other ways to change their lot". The problem is that those "other ways" did not really feature in the LCR-LO campaign, based almost exclusively on an economic wish list of opposition to redundancies, cuts, privatisation and demands for better wages, working conditions, pensions and services.

The common protocol agreed between the two groups has the stamp of Lutte Ouvrière all over it. Partly the problem is that they cannot agree on some very basic policies - the LCR's orientation to the anti-capitalist 'movement' and the European Social Forum, for instance, or LO's effective support for Chirac's ban on the Islamic headscarf (going just a bit too far for the LCR). Neither of them take seriously the question of the way we are ruled - specifically, in France, the building of a movement from below to overturn the undemocratic Fifth Republic with its monarchical president and system of undemocratic 'checks and balances'.

When it comes to the protocol's sec-



**Olivier Besancenot: down**

tion on the EU elections, it seems that LO has let the LCR have more of its way. While the comrades state that they are against the European Union of the capitalists, they are also "against the 'sovereignists' of right and left". They declare themselves "partisans of a united Europe, from one end of the continent to the other - the Socialist United States of Europe, free of borders and the dictatorship of industrialists and financiers alike" ('Common protocol', November 13 2003). However, apart from opposing the constitution, the protocol makes no demands on the EU for the here and now.

The French Communist Party, the PCF, in contrast to the revolutionary left, has reason to be pleased with its performance in the regional elections - particularly after the disastrous showing of its presidential candidate, Robert Hue, who polled less than 5% in 2002. This was especially the case in view of the fact that the party is divided three ways on its attitude to elections - not least as regards the alliance with the Parti Socialiste.

After the debacle of the 'pluralist left' administration from 1997 to 2002, the PCF left wing has been agitating for a break with the PS in elections - at least in the first round - and for the party to stand on its own. However, a group around national secretary Marie-George Buffet favours a new 'People's and Citizens' Left', an alliance that actually came into being for last Sunday's elections in the key Ile de France region, which includes Paris. The third PCF grouping wants to maintain the alliance with the PS, come what may.

All three can take comfort from the elections. In 14 regions the PS-PCF-Green alliance held together - and in 13 of them topped the poll. In six others the PCF stood autonomously, crossing the 10% threshold in two. And in Ile de France, where comrade Buffet topped the PCF's 'open' list (which also fea-

tured unemployed activist Claire Villiers), its 7.2% easily surpassed the 3.99% achieved by LCR-LO, headed by Arlette Laguiller herself. A parallel battle took place in what used to be the red heartlands of Seine-St Denis, a department within Ile de France. This time comrade Buffet won over 14% to comrade Arguiller's 5.67%. Similarly, a large part of Olivier Besancenot's vote in the regionals was this time taken by the PCF - he won only 3.24% as head of the LCR-LO list in Paris, well behind the PCF.

Perhaps the biggest setback for the left bloc was in the Nord-Pas de Calais region, where the LCR-LO had high hopes of beating the 10% mark and as a result in all likelihood seeing its councillors re-elected in the second round. In the event it picked up only 5.11% - less than half the PCF score. Here the PCF ran a vigorous campaign, posing left in a successful attempt to win back its traditional voters from the Trotskyist bloc.

Lutte Ouvrière comrades in the region had at first opposed the alliance with the LCR, fearing it might jeopardise the re-election of its councillors. No doubt they will be far from happy now. There was a more substantial opposition to the alliance within the LCR, however, which has now resurfaced with a vengeance over the bloc's recommendation for the second round.

No doubt against the leadership's better judgement, the LCR had gone along with LO's insistence that there could be no question of calling on their voters to switch to the 'pluralist left' if the LCR-LO was eliminated. Remember, this same leadership had actually called for a vote for Chirac, the main representative of capital, in order to defeat Le Pen in the second round of the 2002 regionals.

But this time, in line with the common protocol, the LCR leadership issued a statement which said that LCR-LO voters would "determine freely for themselves" how to vote on March 28: "It is

clear that our electors will vote neither for the right nor the extreme right. Some will abstain, other will vote for the left ... It is up to [the Socialist Party] to convince those who voted for our lists in the first round" (March 22).

This statement was issued in response to the 'Appeal of 24 members of the LCR national leadership' - the minority (representing almost 30% of the membership) which had opposed the alliance with LO: "For our part, we take our responsibilities seriously and call on left voters ... to mobilise massively on March 28 to beat the right and the FN by voting for the left lists." This faction looks to build "a new party" from "beyond the far left alone" (March 22).

In my opinion, these oppositionists are correct inasmuch as it is the duty of communists to "take our responsibilities seriously" when it comes to giving a lead. Leaving it to individual supporters to decide what to do for themselves is a clear abrogation of duty. However, the actual advice offered by the LCR oppositionists - who see their most important task as reducing the number of Front National councillors to an absolute minimum - is questionable, to say the least.

Nowhere is the FN in a position to gain control of a department or region. Communist tactics should be aimed first and foremost at winning workers to the need for a genuine Communist Party, armed with a revolutionary programme of extreme democracy. Except in the most unusual of circumstances, that cannot mean writing a blank cheque to the parties of the establishment left.

If the PS neoliberals still claim to stand for the workers, they should be challenged to prove it by accepting a raft of minimum demands in our interests. If, under the pressure of its left wing, the PCF declines to form a common list in a given department or region with the PS, a tactical vote for Buffet's party might also be considered □

**Peter Manson**

## ACTION

### Communist Forums

**London:** Sunday March 28, 5pm - 'Living philosophies and competing methods', using István Mészáros's *The power of ideology* as a study guide. Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 (nearest tubes: Regents Park, Great Portland Street). **Sheffield:** Friday March 26, 7.30pm - 'Lessons of the Great Miners' Strike'. Speaker: Dave Douglass, branch secretary, Hatfield NUM. Halifax Hall, Fiction Library, Endcliffe Vale Road, Sheffield S10. Phone 07855 279416 for details.

### Solidarity with Iraq

Public meeting, Tuesday March 30, 7.30pm, Wood Green Labour Club, Stuart Crescent, Wood Green, London N22 (nearest tube: Wood Green). Speakers: Abdullah Mushin, Iraqi Trade Union Federation; Alex Gordon, South Wales RMT, union delegation to Iraq; Jeff Engles, US trade unionist; Ewa Jasiewicz, solidarity activist, back from Palestine and Iraq. Organised by Haringey Trades Council.

### Free the refuseniks

Picket Israeli embassy, Monday April 5, 5.30pm (and every two weeks - same day and time). Kensington High Street/Kensington Court, opposite Palace Green (nearest tube: High Street Kensington). For a Palestinian state with same rights as Israel. Organised by Committee for Two States: 07748 185553; outnow@actionforsolidarity.org.uk

### 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 CND, Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp and other local groups.

### CPGB history

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

### Long live May Day

March and rally, Saturday May 1. Assemble Clerkenwell Green, 12 noon, for march to Trafalgar Square. Speakers include Ken Livingstone, Frances O'Grady (deputy general secretary TUC), Globalise Resistance, Stop the War Coalition. Organised by London May Day Organising Committee, c/o GFTU, Central House, Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0HY. Sponsors include Sertuc, Unison, TGWU, GR, STWC.

### RDG

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

### CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our Party's name, address and what you want to give in your will. If you need further help do not hesitate to contact us by post, telephone or email.

## STOP THE WAR COALITION

Other mining unions

# Digging for inspiration

**I** hear on the internet grapevine that the National Union of Mine-workers is going to get its act together where cyberspace is concerned and finally invest in its own site. Before doing so, it should at least take a look at what other mining unions have to offer.

A near perfect example of what not to do is the rubbish site of the scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers ([www.pin-point.org.uk/pinpoint/pinpoint.nsf/0/180a23e6ebb746dc80256dce005975ad?OpenDocument](http://www.pin-point.org.uk/pinpoint/pinpoint.nsf/0/180a23e6ebb746dc80256dce005975ad?OpenDocument)). It is interesting to note that this tiny outfit can afford to pay vastly inflated salaries for its president, Neil Greatrex, and his cronies, but cannot muster funds for even a simple website. This page (hosted on Notts county council's local information pages) contains the barest information, such as snail mail and email addresses, and frequency and locations of meetings. On the plus side, a quick google search under 'Union of Democratic Mineworkers' offers more interesting information, such as UDM bosses pimping miner's compensation funds, allegations of preferential compensation allocations to UDM members and so on.

Instead, our would-be NUM web designers would be better off looking overseas for inspiration. The United Mine Workers of America site ([www.umwa.org/homepage.shtml](http://www.umwa.org/homepage.shtml)) does not start off too great, if the prominent stars and stripes and the legend, "The UMWA proudly supports our troops", are anything to go by. The introductory blurb goes on to make the usual noises about defending members' rights, etc. What saves this dull opening is the link to a group of striking miners at a pit in Utah. This came about after 74 miners were sacked for protesting against unsafe working practices, and the victimisation of a UMWA activist. An address for solidarity messages and donations is given, but unfortunately recent updates of their struggle seem thin on the ground.

Turning to the navigation panel, it begins with 'Organizing' - a piece of corporate-speak emphasising the importance of providing training for union personnel around workplace themes. That the UMWA is prioritising recruitment in conditions of generally low union density is welcome. The *UMW Journal* link features an archive of the union's bi-monthly publication going back to 1999. The latest issue is dated September-October of last year, but, as it is a special on the 2003 convention, it does provide an indication of where the union is headed. 'Press releases' offers a couple of items for March, and also carries an archive for the last five years. 'Movies! Books! Music!' is self-explanatory, promoting a number of mining-related entertainment products. 'Information resources' is the final link in the panel, leading to a number of theme-related links, such as health, the economy, legislation and so on.

A better site is provided by the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa ([www.num.org.za](http://www.num.org.za)). Its home page is quite impressive, avoiding the corporate looks unions in Britain usually go for. Subtitled "Members first - today and forever", it begins with a scrolling photo link featuring former miners' leaders, rank and file members and of course the ubiquitous Saint Mandela. In the main field, the links are arranged around the militant-looking union symbol. The first is about the union, leading to a series of short pages setting out its aims and objectives, a history that locates the NUM in "the inherent contradictions that exist between capital and labour" (Could you imagine these words ever escaping the lips of the TUC's Brendan Barber?). 'Leadership' offers very limited biographies of the NUM's leading members, concentrating on when they joined the union and were elected to particular positions. The final page here lists the union's achievements in terms of recognition agreements, winning affordable housing for miners, etc.

The services the union offers range from the usual workplace bread and butter stuff, to educational facilities for members, death benefits, and an 'after-care' service for ex-miners. These certainly beat the dull loan and credit card deals beloved of too many unions in Britain. Sadly, the 'Publications' pages are a bit of a let-down because the most recent speeches, press releases and newsletters are six months old. 'Events' carries some documentation from February's Mining Charter Summit, and material from last year's 11th NUM congress. Other items include an ominously blank 'What's new' page, a copy of the NUM constitution in all its labyrinthine detail, a site map, and an interesting links page to South African political and mining sites, and international union bodies.

The UMWA and NUM have set the minimum benchmark the NUM (Britain) web design team should be aiming for. However, whether it will touch anywhere near Dave Douglass's superb Miners Advice website (*Weekly Worker* March 11) remains to be seen □

Phil Hamilton



# Leadership still

On March 20, coordinated protests around the world commemorated the first anniversary of the US-UK invasion of Iraq: in the US, Italy, Spain, Australia, Greece, Holland, Germany, and of course Britain. **Manny Neira** joined them in London

**P**erhaps 50,000 demonstrators assembled in Hyde Park. They marched across London to shouts of "Blair out", and assembled in Trafalgar Square, where they listened to the 30 speakers who were lined up for them that afternoon.

Clearly Tony Blair is still haunted by Iraq. A large minority in the country was always bitterly opposed to the war and never believed his lies about WMD and Saddam Hussein representing an imminent threat. Then there were the resignations of Robin Cook, Clare Short and the backbench rebellions.

Now the occupation is going badly. The list of US and UK casualties continues to rise and rise and Iraq remains in a state of virtual anarchy. Economically the country lies in ruins with the mass of the labour force unemployed. There are daily attacks by Islamic bombers and remnants of the Ba'athist regime and the most likely scenario after the US-UK hands over 'sovereignty' in a few months is a takeover by Shia fundamentalists.

Hardly an imperial triumph. No wonder George Bush is in trouble and no wonder José Maria Aznar was booted out by the Spanish electorate.

The main question under such circumstances is whether or not the popular opposition to the war and occupation of Iraq can be turned into a radical, working class-led, movement for constitutional and social change or whether it will simply remain an amorphous protest movement and eventually peter out. Clearly it is not enough to simply say 'no' to the war and 'Blair out'. The whole constitutional monarchy - with its presidential prime minister, unelected head of state and House of Lords and monstrous military and bureaucratic machine - must be swept away. And, of course, to stop war it is necessary to stop capitalism, the system generates war by its very nature.

Unfortunately, while the mass opposition and the protests against the US-UK war and occupation continue almost unabated, our political leadership is still far from adequate. The Stop the War Coalition can still mobilise tens of thousands onto the streets, but politically it offers little more than populist platitudes. Neither Britain's constitutional monarchy nor the capitalist system are challenged. Instead fire is concentrated almost exclusively on the personality of Tony Blair.

Andrew Murray, chair of the STWC, opened proceedings in Trafalgar square in exactly that populist spirit. He also demonstrated that the suspicions of his comrades in the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain were justified: he has been around the SWP too long and has clearly gone native: "Tony Blair says we should draw a line. We should draw a line - exactly as the Spanish people have done!"

The victory of José Luis Zapatero's PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) in Spain's recent general election was to be another consistent theme of the day. Clearly the Spanish people had punished prime minister Aznar both for supporting the invasion of Iraq against their wishes, and then showing a breathtaking cynicism in attributing the Madrid bombings to the Basque separatist group Eta (Eskadi Ta Askatasuna), given that Spanish intelligence suggested al Qaeda might be responsible from the

outset. However, the Spanish people could turn to a mass party opposed to the war.

It was difficult to see how this event might translate into a British political perspective, given that both our major parties *supported* the war. While the SWP is clearly pinning its hopes on anti-war feeling being translated into electoral support for Respect, even it cannot believe that the coalition will actually defeat Labour if it stands in the next general election. As for Andrew Murray's CPB, much to his chagrin it voted by a narrow majority to reject Respect at its recent special congress. It remains committed to the *British road to socialism*, which involves 'reclaiming' Labour: the most this might achieve in the short term is an anti-Blair coup within the party: but the most likely successor, Gordon Brown, is scarcely politically distinguishable.

The Spanish theme, though, was picked up by Keith Sonnet, deputy general secretary of Unison: "¡Viva España! ¡Viva Zapatero! Twelve months ago we demonstrated in our millions against the war. We were right to do so. The world we live in is less safe now than it was then! We condemn this government, a Labour government, for taking us into this illegal war. We salute the Spanish people who voted for regime change."

A Muslim Association of Britain speaker took up the baton. "I'm here on behalf of MAB, hand in hand with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the STWC. We will not lie down for Blair and his lies!"

Yvonne Ridley, a journalist once held by the Taliban in Afghanistan, was introduced as a "recent convert to Islam". She demanded: "Bring our troops home from Iraq, and our brothers back from Guantanamo Bay. If Blair really has a special relationship with Bush, why can't he bring our brothers home? I was lucky. I was captured by the Taliban. If I had been captured by the US, I'd have been abused, crated up and sent half-way around the world." Not all Afghan women would share her view of the humanity and respect for human rights of the Taliban. Opposition to the US is not enough: communists would not replace imperialism with Muslim fundamentalism.

Leanne Wood, leftwing Plaid Cymru member of the Welsh assembly, at least floated a new idea: "If Wales had a vote in the United Nations, we'd have voted for peace." Just for something to do, I ended up wondering about how this might work. Would we perhaps adopt a policy of supporting independence for any geographical region likely to oppose the US in the UN, until progressive statelets *outnumbered* them in the general assembly with votes from members like Wales, Cornwall and the Basque country - all of whom have leftist independence movements?

The problem is that no vote was taken in the general assembly: only in the security council. Wales would have been fortunate indeed to enjoy temporary membership at the appropriate moment, and so the demand must be for Wales to join Russia and China as US-phobic, veto-wielding permanent members. Another problem: the security council *did* effectively 'vote for peace': the US never presented a resolution supporting invasion as they knew it would not pass.

Perhaps comrade Wood felt that the additional disapproval of an independ-

ent Welsh superpower would have made Bush think twice. Back on earth, though, she would do well to remember that the majority in England opposed the war too: the problem is not to divide the English from the Welsh, but to abolish the democratic deficit of the British government.

"I hope when we meet next year, Bush and Blair will be yesterday's men." Even if they were, are we to trust the world to John Kerry and Gordon Brown?

Jenny Tonge MP, sacked from the Liberal Democrat front bench for saying that she understood why the hopeless plight of the Palestinians might persuade some to become suicide bombers, sent a message of support: "Our stand against the war has been vindicated. We are more at risk of terrorism than ever." Whether the "our" was a reference to the STWC or to the Liberal Democrats was unclear. STWC activists will remember how Charles Kennedy, who spoke at the STWC demo in Hyde Park on February 15 2003, then led his MP's to "support our troops" once the war started.

Bob Crow, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, attacked the Labour Party which had started the war, and then expelled the RMT for allowing its Scottish region to formally support the Scottish Socialist Party: "The government has cut thousands of jobs, but can afford the war. Prescott flew out to Spain to march against terrorism. But he is one of the terrorists who supported this war. If Labour won't support working people, we won't support them."

Cut adrift from Labour, the support of the RMT south of the border is being hotly contested by Respect and the Greens. When Bob Crow spoke at the Green Party conference, he said: "The fact is that the Green Party promote rail-workers and seafarers far more strongly than the Labour Party." Since then, though, some English branches have voted to support Respect. For the moment, the general secretary stuck to the anti-Blair theme: "We say that not just Blair but his cabinet of war criminals must go!"

Left Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn had a message for his leader: "The people of Spain heard the lies of their government and kicked them out. Bush faces re-election in November. I suggest Blair listens to us and pulls the troops out." He referred to Bush's wider imperialist agenda: "This is the project of the New American Century: for US domination, forgetting that the rest of the world does not want to live the life of an American consumer. We represent ordinary people, here and around the world, who want lives of peace. Another world is possible, a world of peace and justice. You can't have one without the other."

Paul Mackney, general secretary of the National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education, spoke "on behalf of all those in colleges and universities who oppose the war. The STWC is still here and will not go away! We will keep coming back until the occupation is ended." He too applauded the Spanish people: "They didn't appease terrorism; they threw out a pack of liars!" He called on those present to "get ready for the European Social Forum in London, join a trade union, and join the struggle for justice! Together, we will build a better world!"

We then observed a minute's silence

# lags behind the led



for the dead of Iraq, the British servicemen who had been killed, and those killed in the Madrid bombings.

There was a definite coyness as the next speaker was announced. At the STWC conference, we had been given hints that there might be some surprises on the platform, but these had slipped to the back of my mind until recalled by the oblique way this introduction was going. The reason then became clear: violinist Nigel Kennedy was to address us.

I was somewhat startled, having not realised that Kennedy supported the anti-war movement. In fact, he spoke rather well: "The people living here and throughout the world want democracy, not capitalism and consumerism. One dictatorship being replaced by another by the US is not a solution." He had bought his instrument, and played some music he felt had been written "for the human spirit".

It was Bach. Conditions were not ideal for this recital, and the public address system introduced some jarring distortion, but the beauty of the music and the sheer unexpectedness of this pleasure provided a very special experience. I closed my eyes, felt the light rain fall on my face, and spent a grateful few moments away from all my immediate thoughts and frustrations. Looking around as the music faded, I saw I had not been alone.

Bruce Kent of CND then approached the microphone. I can never hear a CND speaker now without recalling the meetings the campaign organised in the 80s at which I spoke. Arguing that nuclear weapons were weapons of war, and war was a feature of capitalism, always brought me the same response: CND was not party political, and brought together *all* those who wished to abolish nuclear weapons, whatever their politics. These days, the CND argues politics, while the SWP worries about alienating monarchists and anti-immigrationists.

"I have a message for Tony Blair. He wants to 'move on'. We think that's a good idea. I'll give him a lift to the Hague, and the international criminal court. I'm not a member of the Labour Party, but if they want any chance at the next election, they'll move him on."

He mocked the search for weapons of mass destruction: "They've had trouble finding WMDs: but it's easy. Eight countries have got them, including Israel, the one we're not allowed to mention." CND had clearly lost its 'non-political' reticence: "The ESF is coming to London, for all those, like you, who don't believe in capitalist exploitation. Another world is possible!"

Caroline Lucas, left Green MEP, echoed the 'Blair out' theme: "Our message to Tony Blair is simple. No more lies! We've had the Hutton whitewash, the UN bugging, the Katherine Gun affair: Tony Blair and his government must

go!"

In a clear complaint about Respect's founding claim to be "brought together by the great mass movement of our age", she said: "Our movement is founded on diversity, and diversity is strength. No one political party has a monopoly on peace. Together, we will get closer to peace and justice."

A message of support from the recently returned to Labour London mayor Ken Livingstone was read out: "Welcome to London. We are proud that London has played host to the largest demonstration in history; and everything that has happened since has shown we were justified to protest."

Four children, youthful veterans of the school students protests, addressed the crowd with enviable confidence: "We're here because a year ago, we walked out of school and took over Parliament Square. We were angry, and still are. Thousands of lives were lost and the threat of terrorism is still here. We cannot vote, but we can protest. I would ask you to use your votes to kick Blair out."

Stewart Hemsley, chair of Pax Christi, added a biblical perspective: "The scriptures, which our Jewish, and Muslim brothers and sisters share with Christians, contain words which sum up the British prime minister and government well. I quote: 'Their words are full of deadly deceit; wicked lies roll off their tongues, and dangerous threats, like snake's poison, from their lips; they open their mouths and pollute the air. They are quick to hurt and kill; they leave ruin and destruction wherever they go. They have not known the path of peace.'"

On a note I found personally cheering during a long afternoon's note-taking, he added: "Today the prophets aren't found in the churches, but in the few brave journalists who write and report truth." A complementary copy of the *Weekly Worker* is on its way to the reverent gentlemen for these encouraging words.

He ended with a plea which would certainly take Christian leaders back to a closer teaching of Jesus's revolutionary message of freedom and social justice: "I close by repeating my call for the leaders of our churches to speak out boldly, loud and clear on these issues and add their voices to the cries of the poor, the oppressed, the prisoners, the ordinary people of this country and our world who long for justice and peace."

Though doubtless sincere, I fear his call will be in vain. The established churches long ago made their deals with the oppressors. Individual Christians will have to consult their own consciences, and reflect on the unmediated meaning of Christ's words for themselves, to see where their loyalties should lie. As an atheist, I do not share their faith, but if I did I could only be a communist.

Lindsey German, convener of the STWC and editor of the SWP's *Socialist Review*, spoke next: "I have nothing

but contempt for the prime minister who speaks of good and evil though he knew the war would cause terrorism." So what were we to do? "The Spanish people have shown the way, marching against terror and war, and voting against the government." Marching and voting, the boot and the ballot box: the new revolutionary programme of the SWP. It is even enshrined on the Respect website: "Protest with your vote and your feet."

Comrade German continued: "Our movement exists everywhere - keep demonstrating." Marching and voting. "They are in crisis because of what *you* have done. We are the real force in British society." Not the working class, not the organised labour movement, led by a revolutionary party, but a pacifist coalition led by political opportunists. Voting and marching. Come back Tony Cliff: all is forgiven.

George Galloway, presumably now Respect's first and only MP, reflected on the lessons of Spain: "Brothers and sisters, comrades and friends. We must take two lessons from the people of Spain. They rejected the false dichotomy of terrorism or war: war *is* terrorism." The solution? "That Spanish people also showed that after you march, you vote!" Ah, I was forgetting. "I will be standing in London as a candidate for Respect, to put some respect back into London! Join us to make that election the last nail in Tony Blair's coffin." He seemed to think that if he were elected an MEP, Blair would resign out of sheer chagrin.

Dr Azzam Tamimi spoke for the MAB: "My heart bleeds for the victims of the Madrid bombings. The criminals were provoked by Bush, Blair and Aznar: one down, two to go. We want genuine democracy. We must prepare ourselves for the next election. Let us join together - Muslims, Christians, atheists, whites, blacks - for a change of government."

David Gentleman was introduced as the designer of the STWC posters: "Last year, I was so horrified by the invasion of Iraq I offered the STWC the first poster I did for them: it said simply, 'No!' The latest carries its own message." (The 'Blair out' placard being carried everywhere made explanation superfluous.) "I hope they have played a part in this movement so many have come to believe in." Though it was not mentioned from the platform, the Respect website also credits David Gentleman as the designer of the multi-coloured 'graffiti' Respect logo.

Salvinder Singh Dhillon of the Indian Workers Association, and Respect candidate for the GLA seat of Ealing and Hillingdon, spoke of the scapegoating of Muslims: "I am proud to join the thousands here and millions around the world in opposing the occupation of Iraq and blaming Muslims for the consequences of Bush's crimes. What could be more criminal than fighting terrorism by killing innocent people? The Spanish people have seen through this policy, as we can

do on June 10. This movement has given rise to Respect, and we ask you to support us."

David Shayler, imprisoned MI5 whistleblower and now civil libertarian, denied that Tony Blair was ever given intelligence linking Saddam Hussein to terrorists: "In fact, he acted as a brake on them." From the horse's mouth.

Carol Regan, chair of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, referred to Israeli military action as the "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians. The so-called Israeli security fence being built in the occupied territories "is not for security, and is not a fence".

The last speaker was another celebrity surprise: and if I had been taken aback at the introduction of Nigel Kennedy, I was gobsmacked this time. Our final speaker would be... former super-middleweight boxing champion, Chris Eubank.

To be fair, comrade Eubank had already been in the news for campaigning against the war. He drove a truck covered in anti-war slogans to Downing Street in October last year, sounded the horn for a full minute, and demanded to be arrested. The police, showing their typical disregard for the rights of protestors, refused. He left, and came back later, this time reversing his truck into a delivery van: and was finally cuffed and wheeled away. It was a spirited, if eccentric, protest.

"I am a fighter, as you know. I am courageous, and strong. But I am afraid. Afraid because I can't see how to make a difference. The government we have elected to represent us are not listening." At the recent 'Pride of Britain' awards ceremony, the boxer had taken the issue up directly with Tony Blair: "I said, 'If you want people to respect you in years to come, you must undo what you have done.' He looked me deep in the eye, and said nothing." Eubank warned us he had something to say to Blair that we might not like: "I believe that you are one of the best politicians in the world, but you are wrong, and you have the intellect and emotional courage to fix the problem you have made."

There can be little doubt that Chris Eubank thinks and speaks for himself, and this is worthy of respect. In his own, admittedly distinctive, way, he probably voiced the feeling of many who protested when nearly two million marched into Hyde Park on February 15 2003: people who had real faith in the current political system, who felt genuinely let down by Tony Blair, and who may have been joining a demonstration for the first time in their lives. To those who still have faith in the leadership of the world's professional, bourgeois politicians, we must present our argument: they fail to represent ordinary people not because they are individually bad, but because their very job is to maintain a capitalist society, and a capitalist society is one in which the interests of a small ruling class

simply cannot be reconciled with those of ordinary people.

Of course, this is also the answer to the SWP leadership, and their moonshine of equating 'Blair out' with regime change at home. Regime change lies not in the defeat of a single politician, however despicable he may be. When Thatcher's fall finally came - after years of chanting, 'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie! Out, out, out!' - did it bring liberation to working people? When the entire Conservative government fell in 1997, did that repeal the anti-trade union laws, or open our borders, or bring democracy and social justice?

The SWP is not providing leadership to Chris Eubank. He is campaigning against the war, and may yet be persuaded that it requires revolutionary change and not tinkering reform. The SWP already knows this, but seeks to hide this understanding from the STWC and Respect fronts it has created for fear of losing support.

Whatever dreams of political relevance this brings the leadership of the SWP, it cannot indefinitely satisfy its rank and file, which contains many sincere and committed socialists who work hard not to get George Galloway elected again (he has been elected before, and that has not changed society), but to achieve democracy and social justice in the interests of the working class, and through them, humanity.

If I might be forgiven for recording a personal anniversary, this article marks one year of writing for the *Weekly Worker*. My first report appeared under the title, "Leadership lags behind the led", and described the Hyde Park demonstration organised by the STWC, against the invasion of Iraq (March 22 2003).

In that report, I wrote: "Lindsey German ... promised that she will 'continue to demonstrate as long as it takes', but if that is *all* she does she may be demonstrating long after the US has occupied, set up their puppet government and left. The SWP claims to be a revolutionary party, seeing wars like this one as symptomatic of the imperialist rule of the few, and only reversible by the action of the working class: and in this we agree. Why not a word of this to the thousands listening to her?"

Well, the US has occupied, set up their puppet government and plans to hand over 'sovereignty' to them in a few months. Lindsey has been as good as her word, and is still demonstrating: but she still has not found her voice. Last year she played the moderate to appease the supposed gentle stomachs of the anti-war movement, and this year to maximise a soft Respect vote. She is underestimating the will and understanding of the protestors who bravely demonstrated in Britain and around the world last Saturday.

One year on, the leadership still lags behind the led ☐



## RESPECT

### North East London

# Candidate demands open borders

Over 130 people attended the March 23 meeting to select Respect's candidate for North East London in the elections to the Greater London Assembly. Long-standing SWP member Dean Ryan will undoubtedly do a good job and all socialists in the area should work hard to secure him the best possible vote on June 10.

The meeting, which brought together comrades from the three boroughs of Waltham Forest, Hackney and Islington, also chose a steering committee that will oversee comrade Ryan's election campaign. Unfortunately, the Socialist Workers Party majority did not feel confident enough to allow even a single critical voice onto the committee and voted against the CPGB's Anne Mc Shane.

As the first speaker, George Galloway set the tone of the meeting. His speech was bold, radical, and if anything to the left of the SWP: "Respect is different," he said. "We can do so much structural damage to New Labour on June 10 that we will bring the government down in the weeks and months to follow. Just like the Spanish people brought down their lying, twisted war government, we can bring down ours. No other party stands for the things we do. No other party represents the anti-war movement like we do."

Quite clearly a dig at the newly revamped Green Party and the Liberal Democrats. "We have to tear off the anti-war mask of the Liberal Democrats", comrade Shaun Dougherty (SWP) later declared. "They are total filth, hypocrites, a sham. They run Islington in order to push through more privatisations." True, true and more. However, it was the SWP in the Stop the War Coalition that allowed the Lib Dems and Greens to present themselves as the

political representation of the anti-war movement during its high point. No other party representatives were allowed to speak at the big anti-war demos: Respect had not yet been born, while the Socialist Alliance was already half-buried.

Comrade Galloway went on to explain what the 's' in Respect stands for: "We want socialism. We want a system that is not based on the exploitation of other people or the exploitation of other countries. We want to bring back into public ownership all the big privatised companies. We are against globalisation, which is just a trick name for the exploitation of the many by the few. We want a system that is based on public services and cooperation." That sounds nice, but is it socialism? He did not mention the working class once, let alone stress that socialism must be the rule of precisely that class.

"We are a broad and diverse movement," comrade Galloway explained. "Respect candidates stand up for what they really believe in. They speak clearly what they think. We act according to our consciousness and our beliefs." One example: "We stand for asylum-seekers. We stand for immigrants, the legal ones as well as the illegal ones."

Quite right. So why did we not include it in our list of founding principles? When the CPGB put forward a proposal in favour of open borders at the launch of Respect, this was rejected by the SWP majority. Far from standing up for "what they believe in", the comrades voted against principle after principle. "It makes me sad to vote against something I agree with," SWP member Elaine Heffernan, who spoke against our motion, had said. And of course, in the undying words of John Rees, who summed up the conference: "Today we

voted against the things we believed in, because, while the people here are important, they are not as important as the millions out there."

To his credit, Dean Ryan, Respect's unopposed candidate for the North East London constituency, was more honest. Unusually for an SWP comrade, he openly presented himself as a "long-time member of the SWP and the Anti-Nazi League". When questioned by CPGB members if he would fight for open borders, he made a firm commitment to do so: "I totally agree. There should be no restrictions at all, no immigration controls whatsoever. As far as I am concerned, we live in one world and everybody should have the right to live wherever they want."

However, the fact that this was the only question that was put to comrade Ryan is slightly troubling. Surely, a vibrant and new political movement would be interested in finding out more about each other, finding out what their political views are - especially as Respect's founding principles does not exactly cover things in detail. While there were a couple of new faces in the room, the overwhelming majority of those present knew each other well: most of them had been involved in the three local Socialist Alliances. If anything, the meeting was smaller than even Hackney SA meetings used to be and a lot of committed and prominent SA members seem not to have made the leap into Respect.

The new interim steering committee, too, has few surprises: the majority are SWP members or SWP hangers-on, such as Will McMahon (full time SA office worker) and Fred Leplat from the International Socialist Group. Comrade Mc Shane, who served as a long-time chair of Hackney SA, was the only pro-

posed candidate to be rejected. Although she said in her speech that she would "work hard for Respect, despite the differences we have", the SWP could simply not bear the thought of a dissident voice.

Their member Gareth Jenkins, who had previously advised comrade Mc Shane to "fuck off and die", got up to oppose her candidature (see *Weekly Worker* January 29). "It is very important that we have a steering committee that is completely in favour of Respect's manifesto. The CPGB has opposed Respect and it has opposed Respect's manifesto. Anne would undoubtedly be operating in a way that would not be very helpful." Another SWP member, John Rose, who is a leading activist in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, shouted: "And she supports open borders!"

As the SWP chair, Diana Swingle (who will also sit on the committee), did not allow us to reply to the charges, most were left positively puzzled and abashed. Although a few prominent activists cast their vote for comrade Mc Shane, including Nick Rogers from the Scottish Socialist Party and Eddie Barnes, an ex-Labour councillor who is on Respect's South East region executive, the large SWP bloc was enough to keep her off the steering committee.

As the last item of the meeting, this did not make for a positive ending and half a dozen or so people crowded around Anne once the meeting had finished. "What the hell was that all about? I thought Respect was all about inclusivity and building a broad movement," a young Turkish comrade commented.

Hopefully she and other local socialists will stay involved in Respect and



**George Galloway:**  
really believe?

fight to make it a more democratic force. If we are serious about building a movement that is capable of taking on the Greens and the Liberal Democrats, we need to involve far more different and dissenting voices, not fewer. We need more politics, not less. Comrade Ryan Dean has set a good example in honestly stating his view - irrespective of the shortcomings of Respect's platform □

**Tina Becker**

### Barnet and Camden

# Populism or principle

The fledgling Barnet and Camden branch of Respect met on March 18 to select a candidate to contest the forthcoming Greater London Assembly elections.

There was considerable enthusiasm for the Respect project on display amongst the 30-odd people who gathered at the Friends Meeting House on Euston Road. Linda Smith of the Fire Brigades Union, one of the two speakers from the Respect executive, encapsulated the mood perfectly when she said, "I'm really excited and I think we can make a real difference."

Comrade Smith and the other executive speaker, Sait Akgul, made much of the absence of a viable leftwing alternative in Britain. They highlighted the anger felt by many over the invasion of Iraq, and the growing opposition to New Labour amongst sections of society that had supported it in the past. The message was clear: Respect would provide political representation for the disillusioned and disenchanted electorate.

A laudable aim, but Respect has a long way to go to realise its ambition. In fact, if the Barnet and Camden branch is representative of Respect's fortunes thus far, it has a very long way to go to reach the Socialist Workers Party's stated aim of reflecting the diversity of the anti-war movement. Although there were people of different ages, sexes and ethnic origin at the meeting, it was evident that most were members or supporters of the SWP. Not in itself a bad thing, but the

SWP clearly hopes that by adopting Respect's tissue-thin platform of platitudes they would attract a wider spread of people to the cause.

Despite this somewhat negative observation, the inaugural meeting of Barnet and Camden Respect demonstrated a real sense of commitment. There is clearly a great deal of energy and experience that the branch can draw upon in the coming election campaign.

Liz Wheatley, a member of the SWP and the convenor of Camden Stop the War Coalition, was selected by the branch to be our candidate in the GLA elections, and a committee was also agreed. In a spontaneous acceptance speech comrade Wheatley spoke of how exciting her experience of the anti-war movement had been, and her background as a Unison steward in Camden council. Optimistically she too thought that, for the first time, Respect offered the chance of a real "breakthrough."

There followed a discussion on ways to promote Respect locally. There were some interesting and ambitious suggestions put forward, including a rock concert/rally on May 21. The organiser hoped that it would attract such luminaries as George Galloway, Ken Loach and Mike Rosen. Unfortunately, at the time no bands had been booked. A young comrade drew attention to the fact that six percent of those living in the constituency are Bengali, and stressed the importance of attracting them.

As the meeting drew to a close, I took

the opportunity to congratulate Liz Wheatley for having been selected as candidate. Having done so, I asked the comrade whether she would pledge herself to the maxim of a worker's rep on a worker's wage. Comrade Wheatley replied that such a question was an academic point. Not so, I countered: it was a point of principle. Her cryptic response was that a worker's wage would represent a pay rise for her (she had obviously been listening to John Rees's rejoinder at the March 13 Socialist Alliance conference).

The ability to avoid answering a question may be an invaluable skill for bourgeois politicians; but a working class politician should not resort to such

cheap shenanigans. Comrade Wheatley should have been able to give an honest answer to an honest question.

Feeling dissatisfied, I then asked her where she stood on the issues of open borders and republicanism. She stated that she had been selected to stand as a Respect candidate, and that was the platform that she would stand on. When I pointed out that the said platform had nothing to say on either issue, the comrade agreed, but, having only just been selected, she wanted to "get out there" and talk to the people she would represent.

If I have interpreted this correctly, it is an alarming confession of populism and opportunism. Rather than declare her

principles, and provide political leadership to the class, comrade Wheatley implied that she intended to merely hold a mirror up and reflect the perceived sentiments of a heterogeneous and amorphous electorate.

The elections of June 10 are just a few weeks away. Despite the enthusiasm and political experience evident in Barnet and Camden, Respect has a lot of ground to cover if it is to become a viable choice in the elections. The involvement of minor leftwing celebrities and street activities may have worked in the Stop the War Coalition but, when it comes to elections, there is no substitute for principled politics □

**Warren James**

## Join the Respect Unity Coalition

Complete this slip and send it to:

Respect - The Unity Coalition  
Winchester House  
259-269 Old Marylebone House  
London NW1 5RA

Include a cheque for a minimum of £10, or more if you wish to make a donation, payable to Unity Political Fund.

☐ I wish to join the Respect Unity Coalition

Name

Address

Town/city

Postcode  Phone

Email

## AGGREGATE

# Assessing Respect

**H**ow should communists relate to Respect? This was the main question for the March aggregate of the CPGB. Members discussed how the coalition should be characterised, what its prospects are, and to what extent our Party should support it.

Comrade John Bridge opened the debate by describing how the CPGB, as the only organised opposition to the Socialist Workers Party in the Respect coalition, is able to challenge its leadership by asking simple, straightforward questions. Our comrades are also being excluded from committees and candidate lists, but at great cost to the SWP. In this sense Respect is negatively shaping itself in relation to us. The SWP mistakenly imagines that as a 'hard' sect it is immune from opportunist degeneration, but it is in the process of being transformed into its opposite. Comrade Bridge reminded comrades that before its current turn the SWP claimed that any left group which stood in elections would inevitably sell out its principles. This is not so, but the SWP is fulfilling its own gloomy prophecy. The SWP's John Rees hopes that on June 11 he will be an MEP, but if he is not elected he is ready to blame the CPGB for its policy of 'critical engagement'.

The politics of Respect, continued comrade Bridge, are a mixture of supportable demands and platitudes aimed at attracting votes for their own sake. There is no socialism in its platform and no challenge to the current constitutional set-up of the British state. However, in contrast to its on-off coverage of the on-off Socialist Alliance, *Socialist Worker*, the paper of the SWP, is full of Respect. Meanwhile SWP cadre are being forced to argue against democratic and socialist ideas and any pretence of inclusion. If Respect performs badly on June 10, the current SWP leadership, not to mention the organisation itself, may be in deep trouble. We do not want to see another leftwing group implode, which would mean the dispersion of a generation of activists into disillusionment and passivity - that would be a terrible waste. We must therefore continue to warn the SWP of the possible dire consequences of its opportunism - for instance, if Respect achieves an unlikely success on June 10, it will no doubt persuade some leading figures that moving even further to the right is the only way to 'make a difference'.

Our perspective of joining Respect and arguing within it for basic socialist and democratic principles is correct, comrade Bridge argued. We should be in there seeking its transformation into a partyist project. At present the SWP has no serious organisational rivals on the left - it has stayed the same size, while all the others have either shattered or slowly withered into insignificance. It is correct for us to be inside Respect because that is where the crisis of the largest section of the left will find its most acute expression.

We should have no problems working to build Respect. At present the SWP feels able to treat us with utter contempt - it dismisses our principled calls with dishonest and often absurd arguments, knowing it can rely on a solid bloc of its own well trained comrades to win any vote. But this is short-sighted. When the SWP behaves in this way, it is not just doing so in a given meeting - its actions will be faithfully reported in the *Weekly Worker* and made known to its sizeable readership. Comrade Bridge concluded by saying that, of course, after June 10, we, along with everyone else on the left, will reassess the situation.

Comrade Phil Kent said the project of left unity has suffered a setback, and in the June 10 elections Respect candidates will be standing on non-socialist policies. But this has caused groups like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty to retreat into

their own sect world. Comrade Anne Mc Shane described Respect as the SWP's attempts to win votes by dumping leftwing baggage. She disagreed with those who claim that Respect is similar to the early days of the Network of Socialist Alliances; at least then communists were allowed to stand on their own politics. Respect is undemocratic, the SWP censors the views of others and also censors itself. Comrade Bob Paul agreed. It was anti-democratic in the SA too, but at least the alliance had half-decent politics which we could work to cohere others around.

Comrade Cameron Richards argued that Respect is a popular front, which he defined as an organisation whose programme "does not go beyond the existing capitalist order". George Galloway proves it is a popular front by his calls for liberals and conservatives to be drawn into it, he said. Comrade Peter Manson, editor of the *Weekly Worker*, rejected this, pointing out that a popular front involves working class forces collaborating with a section of the bourgeoisie in order to form a capitalist government. According to comrade Richards's definition, many trade unions must be popular fronts. In his reply to the debate, comrade Bridge stated that if Respect really did represent an alliance with bourgeois forces, we would certainly not be part of it. Respect consists of leftwingers standing on a minimalist, populist platform.

Comrade Mike Macnair analysed the SWP's behaviour as repeating the pattern of the 'official' CPGB in its heyday, except that the SWP does not have real roots in the working class. It poses as a hard sect on the campuses, and at the same time runs a number of front organisations trying to draw in wider forces and recruit to the SWP. The emphasis shifts between the two poles - 'party' and front - as circumstances dictate, and Respect is simply an extreme example of such a front: political demands are toned down so as not to upset the vicars - or, in the SWP's case, the imams.

Most speakers shared comrade Bridge's view that the prospects for Respect are poor. Comrade Mc Shane analysed some of the problems it faces. First, Ken Livingstone will lead the Labour slate in London. He was against the war on Iraq and is perceived as leftwing. Secondly, the Green Party is posing left, has been working with Livingstone and already has a presence on the Greater London Assembly. Thirdly, the Liberal Democrats are also perceived as anti-war and, according to opinion polls, have the support of a large number of muslims. Fourthly, George Galloway is not trusted by many voters.

Comrade Marcus Ström thought comrades were being too pessimistic. Unlike in Spain, Australia and even the USA, there is no opposition bourgeois party capable of forming the next gov-

ernment that is against the war, and there is a large electoral space opening up to the left of Labour. He argued that no one should be reluctant to call for a vote for Respect, as it could attract a section of anti-war radicals and might even develop into a site for our struggle for a Communist Party. However, comrade Tina Becker and Mike Macnair both pointed out that, if it looked as if the Tories were likely to do well, then the space to the left of Labour would close quickly. In those circumstances, the SWP could easily revert to auto-Labourism.

Many comrades expected the SWP to treat Respect the same way as it did the SA - turning it off immediately after June 10. Even if Respect does well and John Rees and Paul Foot become MEPs, the SWP would use their newly found prominence for their own narrow purposes. However, comrade Macnair agreed with comrade Bridge that the disintegration of the SWP was a possibility. He thought that this means we should be prepared for other possibilities in the fight for left unity.

There was a range of opinions about how much support we should give to Respect. Of those present the most sceptical was comrade Richards, who said the Party should not give the SWP an alibi and a blank cheque. We did not support it last summer when it was looking to form something called 'Peace and Justice'; neither should we support the SWP's current attempt to cohere "reactionaries and fundamentalists". Comrade Kent said our aim should be to try to split it. Comrade Mc Shane said we do not want Respect to succeed in its own terms: only if we can transform it into what the working class needs.

Comrade Lee Rock said we have to be inside Respect because that is where we can try to influence healthy elements in and around the SWP, but we should be as forceful in our opposition to SWP abandonment of principle as the SWP leadership is hostile to us. Our message should be, 'Respect will fail because of your misleadership.' He accepted that if we are seen as not building or supporting Respect, it will be easy for SWPers to dismiss us. However, Respect should not be our main area of work.

Comrade Ström asked what other possibilities there were in the short time before June 10. Of course Respect must be our main focus of our work right now. We should be in it, fighting for the best outcome, and ready to respond to whatever happens on June 10. If it is successful, it will develop a partyist logic, such as functioning branches and a publication, which we would welcome. But if it fails, we should be ready to work with whatever comes out of it.

Comrade Manson advocated full support for Respect in the coming weeks, while at the same time fighting to channel anti-war, pro-working class sentiment into a campaign for a party. To this end we should call for an unconditional



John Rees: MEP dreams

vote for the coalition. Comrades Mc Shane, Becker and others advocated challenging Respect candidates to support a minimum platform as a condition of our support, as we do with other candidates who pose left. Comrade Manson said this is the correct tactic in relation to Labour candidates who claim to stand for the working class, but not for Respect.

Comrade Manson proposed the following motion: "Recognising the need for the anti-war, pro-working class opposition to Blair to take on partyist form, the CPGB will work to ensure the biggest possible vote for Respect on June 10." The motion was passed with only comrade Richards voting against, although there were several abstentions.

After lunch comrade Ström introduced a short discussion on the Socialist Alliance. He outlined the events of the February 21 SA Democracy Platform meeting and the March 13 special conference of the alliance. CPGB comrades walked out of the first and did not join in the Democratic Platform walkout at the second. Both these actions were endorsed by the aggregate, although some comrades

thought we should have a broader discussion on our attitude to those SA branches which refuse to subsume themselves in Respect, as ordered by the SWP. It was agreed that comrades who lived in areas where this happens should continue to support their SA branch, but that this would clearly not be the main focus of *Weekly Worker* coverage.

At the end of the aggregate comrade Mark Fischer gave a report on the Party's financial position. As always, we are fully stretched, which of course is how it should be. Nevertheless, it was essential that changes were made urgently, particularly in relation to the printshop. In order to meet the Party's increasing need for finance he proposed that regions be set collective fundraising targets. Comrades on the periphery of the Party are encouraged to take out standing orders and pay dues in the same way as full members.

Some comrades suggested making online readers of the *Weekly Worker* pay a subscription, but this idea was rejected - our most important task in this period is political: to get our ideas across to as many people as possible □

Mary Godwin

## Respect conventions and rallies

**Walsall:** Meeting - Friday March 26, 7.30pm, the Crossing, Darwall Street.

**North East:** Convention - Saturday March 27, 2pm, Royal Station Hotel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

**South West:** Convention - Sunday March 28, 12.30pm, St Werburghs Community Centre, Horley Road, Bristol BS2.

**Eastern:** Convention - Sunday March 28, 3pm, Griffin Suite, Latton Bush Centre, Southern Way, Harlow.

**Cambridge:** Rally - Monday March 29, 7.30pm, Parkside School.

**Northampton:** Meeting - Tuesday March 30, 7.30pm, the Guildhall, St Giles Square.

**Bolton:** Launch - Wednesday March 31, 7.30pm, Albert Halls, Victoria Square.

**Oxford:** Meeting - Wednesday March 31, 7.30pm, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes Street, off Cowley Road.

**Portsmouth:** Meeting - Wednesday March 31, 8pm, Fratton Community Centre, Trafalgar Place, off Clive Road, Fratton.

**Luton:** Rally - Thursday April 1, 7.30pm, large auditorium, Luton University.

**East Midlands:** Convention - Sunday April 4, 3pm, Moat Community College, Maidstone Road, Leicester.

**Willesden:** Rally - Tuesday April 6, 7.30pm, Pakistan Community Centre, off Station Parade, Willesden Green, London.

1984-85

# Solidarity squandered

In the third article of his series **Ian Donovan** looks at the attempts to coordinate action alongside the miners

**A**s the miners settled in for what seemed destined to be a long struggle in the spring of 1984, the class struggle in British society was very much in the balance.

Obviously, as analysed in the previous article, there were serious, but not necessarily fatal, divisions in the miners' ranks (*Weekly Worker* March 18). Nottingham area was still largely working, albeit with a fiercely loyal and often heroic minority defying the scab majority and throwing in their lot with the bulk of the strikers. In some of the other fringe areas, there were wide divisions - for example North Derbyshire mainly scabbed, whereas in South Derbyshire there was rather a different story.

The Tory propaganda mills, the gutter press, and indeed the so-called quality media, including the BBC, ITV, etc, were putting out the message that the National Union of Mineworkers was isolated in society as a whole; that no union would join the miners; that the winter was over and coal stocks were high; and that therefore the miners were as good as defeated. But this section of the working class, once roused to action by Thatcher's provocations, proved to be well up to the task of fighting on despite the millstones that had been hung round their necks by the scabs and the trade union bureaucracy.

A curious thing began to happen, despite the bosses' propaganda about the miners' 'isolation' and supposedly inevitable defeat. In part one of this series I talked about the wave of reactionary chauvinism that overtook large sections of the population in the aftermath of the Falklands war (*Weekly Worker* March 11). That nationalist atmosphere in the British body politic was certainly a potent factor at the beginning of the strike. But the sheer intransigence of the miners, the earth-shaking and strategic nature of their struggle, began to

polarise society along class lines. There was a real, palpable, though diffuse and unorganised, popular sympathy with the miners emerging throughout society, among the oppressed, the downtrodden, those who had been on the receiving end of Thatcher's free market 'revolution' (as the bourgeoisie put it). As the strike wore on and the 'Falklands factor' began to drain away, this took some rather remarkable forms.

## Women Against Pit Closures

One early indication of the major *social* impact the miners' strike was to have was the emergence, rather early in the strike, of the women's support movement. In the late 1970s and early 1980s in particular, when organised strikebreaking became *de rigueur* for the bosses, one key propaganda weapon used against working class militancy was the appeal by the bosses' press to strikers' wives and girlfriends, as a conservative social pressure to force striking men back to work. On more than one occasion in the recent past, this had worked for the bosses. But not this time.

The first, hackneyed attempts to try to incite this kind of thing backfired spectacularly indeed, as literally thousands of miners' wives and girlfriends hit the streets - and the picket lines - in support of their menfolk. Mobilising under slogans such as 'Stand by your man', this was certainly not a feminist movement, as much of the British left would have expected from their understanding of the woman's question. It did not pose women's struggles as being in some way directed against men; it was a proudly working class movement fighting for the interests of both female and male workers. But, although many feminists - particularly of the middle class variety, typified by Bea Campbell of the Euro wing of the 'official' CPGB - lamented the

fact that this women's movement was militantly anti-separatist and thereby effectively anti-feminist, it was a key part of a revolutionary change of consciousness that took place in the coalfields.

The point being that the logic of the strike, and in particular of women participating as militants in their own right, had tremendous social implications. This was the starting point of something quite profound. Women in pit communities were traditionally forced into a pretty conservative role: as partners of men engaged in an extremely arduous, physically demanding occupation, their job was, arguably more so than in other sections of the class, to support their man and raise children.

Geographical factors also played a role, in that unlike many other sections of the working class, mainly located within the big cities, pit communities were usually in separate locations, outside the cities, and thereby tended to be much more self-contained. Alongside the fierce traditions of union militancy, there was much in the circumstances of the pit communities that made for a conservative ethos. They also tended, in large measure because of geographical factors like these, to be mainly white, relatively isolated from some of the changes in composition of the working class that had come about as a result of immigration since World War II in particular.

The eruption of Women against Pit Closures, then, had a major effect in terms of these communities. Women not only went about raising money and support for the strike; as their militancy grew, they demanded to be active on the picket lines alongside the men. They were thus subjected to police brutality on much the same scale as the men, and they came to hate and despise the forces of the state just as much as the men. It was the sheer impetus of the strike, the logic of such a life-and-death struggle for the pit communities, which brought into being such a wrench in social behaviour. Many men were initially taken aback by the change in the women, many at first were uneasy. One thing was clear: the women fighters were so transformed by this experience that it would be very difficult for them to go back to the old roles that they had been used to before the strike. This massive shake-up of traditional roles was probably the first ingredient in a much more profound change in miners' consciousness.

## Black and gay solidarity

Another major manifestation of the change in consciousness worked by the strike became obvious as the struggle went on. The Miners' Solidarity Fund - kept formally separate from the NUM in order to safeguard this lifeline for striking miners' subsistence from the clutches of the law - was set up. Rather wisely, as the later course of the strike was to reveal. It was the experience of miners who went to the big cities collecting money that really produced the change: the more white, middle class neighbourhoods were generally quite stony ground in terms of solidarity money - Thatcher's territory, in other words. But it was the working class areas, and particularly those working class areas with a high black and Asian population, which were the places where the miners' struggle inspired popular sympathy the most, and where consequently they raised much more money.

What cemented this particularly was the fact that this was not simply a one-way identification. The solidarity shown by oppressed communities for a major working class struggle was in many ways natural and not that unusual. What

was less usual and most gratifying about the miners' strike, however, was the fact that the identification went the other way just as much, and such empathy and solidarity between miners in struggle and the oppressed minorities grew more and more solid as the strike wore on. This was above all because of a similar experience of the police. In times of relative class peace, in an imperialist society like Britain, where racist and chauvinist discrimination against racial minorities is endemic and at times has amounted to open state policy, workers from the dominant national grouping tend to regard themselves as on better terms with and favoured by the police, and to look down on the minorities who do get systematically victimised as being troublemakers at best.

However, what you had in 1984-85 was a strategic section of the majority, mainly white, working class being subjected to systematic police harassment and terrorisation on a nationwide scale. In fact, when collecting money in the cities, the police were instructed to harass miners and did so, frequently arresting those collecting on spurious 'obstruction' charges and the like. On more than one occasion when this was attempted in the black community, ordinary people would in turn harangue and on some occasions themselves confront the cops for picking on miners. The tinkle of scales dropping from workers' eyes was on these occasions very audible indeed - it is arguable that this aspect of the miners' struggle had an effect that still persists to this day in the wider working class. This demonstrated - not as a matter of a theory in a Marxist textbook, but in life - the power of a hard class struggle and head-on confrontation with the forces of the state to break down divisions in the working class.

It was also quite extraordinary to see a similar identification come about between the most advanced sections of the miners and struggles for gay rights. The basis was more or less the same - a common experience of police harassment and oppression. It was quite normal to see 'Lesbians and gays support the miners' banners actively *welcomed* on solidarity marches and the like. Rather an unusual event by the standard of those times, where Tory politicians were openly homophobic, and the Labour Party leadership, notably Neil Kinnock, were often inclined to cringe before and echo such sentiments.

## Ireland

Then there was the interaction between the miners' strike and the question of Ireland. The progressive position of many in the NUM on this question had much to do with it, but it was also quite remarkable to see how the strike undermined not only the popular chauvinist wave that was created by the Falklands war, but also the gut level instinct of many workers to simply side with the British state against Irish republicans.

In August 1984 a delegation from the NUM that had been sent to the Six Counties attended a mass march in Belfast to commemorate the anniversary of the introduction of internment in 1971. Probably ordered to go in hard by the Thatcher government, the Royal Ulster Constabulary attacked the march, firing off plastic bullets indiscriminately at the demonstrators. A young catholic man, Sean Downes, was fatally wounded by a plastic bullet that hit him at close range; it was pure chance that there were not several more deaths. This generated worldwide publicity and condemnation of something that had more than a whiff of Bloody Sunday about it. But also the

presence of the miners' delegation received wide publicity, and once again real links were forged in struggle between this key section of the working class at home and those oppressed by British imperialism.

The other classic example of the political interaction between the miners' struggle and the Irish question was more famous still: the Brighton bombing of October 1984, when the IRA, having planted a sophisticated, delayed-action bomb (controlled by a video-recorder mechanism) in the Grand Hotel in Brighton weeks earlier, came within a whisker of wiping out Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet in the middle of the Tory conference. Such was the change between the Falklands war and this period, nearly halfway through the miners' strike, that the popular reaction from large sections of the working class ranged from indifference to mirth. Jokes circulated widely about how there were "50 million suspects" for the crime, and the laughter in the working class at television coverage of Tory hard-case Norman Tebbit being fished out of the wreckage in a wounded and dishevelled state was quite remarkable. There was no wave of popular anger over this highly spectacular terrorist 'outrage' - this above all testified to the change in the political climate that the miners' strike had wrought.

In stark contradiction to this semi-revolutionary aspect of the miners' strike, however, was the attitude of the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracy. The close association between the two means, of course, that they tend to have common political objectives. Under Kinnock, who had been elected to the Labour leadership in 1983 in succession to Michael Foot after the disastrous 'khaki election' of that year, the miners' strike was seen as an embarrassment and an obstacle to the ability of the Labour leadership to prove to the 'people' (in reality to the bosses) its 'responsibility', 'reliability', and 'fitness to govern'.

Thus, right from the start of the strike, Kinnock had been outspoken in his condemnation of the 'violence' of the striking miners. The 'violence' he was talking about was simply basic class self-defence, against brutal, highly tooled-up cops, who turned up at large numbers at picket lines seeking to crack heads, or occupied and terrorised entire neighbourhoods, often arresting or beating people who dared to step outside their front doors. Or perhaps retaliation against scab miners, who were themselves not averse to thuggery against strikers in alliance with the police, as shown by the first two deaths of strikers, that of David Jones, a Yorkshire miner who was killed with a brick in a battle with scabs and the police at a colliery in Nottinghamshire on March 15, or of Joe Green, also from Yorkshire, who was run down by a scab lorry while picketing a power station on June 15. These casualties of the Thatcher government's campaign against the NUM were not what the windbag was talking about, of course, when he issued his condemnations.

But much later in the strike, when a taxi driver, David Wilkie, was killed by a lump of concrete dropped off a bridge in south Wales, while he was ferrying scabs to work, then Kinnock was really in his element denouncing 'violence', while Thatcher also had a field day. This was the celebrated case of Dean Hancock and Russell Shankland, who had aimed to stop, not crush, the taxi. That was the one occasion when even Arthur Scargill fell into line, condemning violence "away from the picket lines". But the question of violence was of course ideo-





logical - the Labour leadership, for all its reliance on working class support, was terrified of working people taking matters into their own hands: violence against the working class by the state, however, was something Kinnock could only hypocritically wring his hands about. At bottom, committed to capitalist 'law' and 'order', his role as chief labour lieutenant of British capital meant he characteristically went along with it.

### Unions

As the strike wore on, the need to break the isolation of the NUM - on strike alone against the full might of the bosses and their state - grew more and more obvious to important sections of the working class. Right from the beginning, the miners had been very sceptical of any approach to the TUC for solidarity - the experience of the printworkers' dispute prior to the strike, when the TUC's finance and general purposes committee had felt itself unable even to pass an elementary statement of solidarity with the NGA print union, whose assets had been seized by the courts, meant that many miners understandably felt that asking for help from the TUC was asking to be stabbed in the back.

Major TUC components were openly hostile to the miners: most notable being the electricians (EETPU), led by Eric Hammond, the engineers (AUEW), led by Terry Duffy, and the steelworkers (ISTC), led by Bill Sirs. At the TUC congress before the strike, these types had made it very clear what they thought of Scargill, running their own mini-red-hunt against him for his opposition to Polish Solidarnosc and a speech he had given in Moscow denouncing the warmongering of Thatcher and Reagan ("the cowboy and the plutonium blonde").

The attitude of these people to the miners' strike was no secret. Then again, there were other unions affiliated to the TUC - the TGWU, the rail unions (Aslef and NUR), and the seamen's union, which verbally offered solidarity. The bureaucracy was 'supportive' of the miners' strike within the most minimal, mealy-mouthed framework - verbal support was in plentiful supply and financial support was also significant. But what the miners needed was not hot air, nor simply more money to sustain the strike for longer, albeit within the same limited sphere of only the miners (and not all of them) confronting the government and police. What the miners needed above all to win their strike was the opening of a second front against the government, by some other strategic section of the class, throwing their lot in with the NUM through coordinated action.

There was no shortage of sentiment in favour of this among those unions with at least a verbally supportive leadership. In the rail industry, for instance, there were instances of rank-and-file workers engaged in sustained, and quite illegal (under the Tory anti-union laws) blacking action against scab-produced coal. Coalville in Leicestershire comes to mind as an exemplary action. Around 60 railworkers kept up their blacking for months; the tactic of the nationalised British Rail bosses under government instructions was to play down the impact of this sympathy action and hope it would not spread. For months they did not discipline those workers carrying it out in case the issue blew up into a confrontation with the rail unions themselves.

Such a confrontation would have been more than the government was able to handle. It was of course the complete lack of direction from the Aslef and NUR leaders (Ray Buckton and Jimmy Knapp), and the absence of real rank-and-file organisation, that, fortunately for Thatcher, ensured the Coalville example did not spread across the rail network.

### Missed opportunities

But even more important than the evident potential that existed on the railways was what happened on the docks. Twice within just over a month, national dock strikes were called - only for the dockers



to be sent back to work by the national leaders of the TGWU, centred on Ron Todd, a classic middle-of-the-road bureaucrat.

The first dock strike in particular had the potential to cripple the government and British industry. It began as a result of a violation of the National Dock Labour Scheme - a major gain that dockers had fought for in the post-war era, involving a large degree of union control over working conditions and an end to casual labour. The attempt by the government to circumvent this scheme and use new, non-scheme ports such as Immingham to bring in coal supplies was what provoked the strike.

The first dock strike lasted 10 days, and Thatcher was driven to the point of desperation by it. Agreements were made to honour the NDLS and - lo and behold - the dockers were sent back to work by their leaders, once again leaving the miners to fight alone. As if this betrayal was not enough, further breaches then provoked another, more short-lived, reprise of the original strike; again Todd and co sent the dockers back to work. These strikes had originated at grassroots level in the union, and they were in reality the result of spontaneous working class aspirations to come to the aid of the miners. But it was an important, crucial lesson for militants when even the TGWU leaders, who claimed to support the NUM, in practice acted as saboteurs when joint strike action was posed in real life.

The two dock strikes were only the two most notable examples of missed opportunities for concrete solidarity. Others included Liverpool council, led by the Labour Party's then Militant Tendency. They were threatened with legal action for setting budgets that broke government spending limits, with councillors facing the possibility of surcharge, and with a militant and restive trade union base in a city that had really faced the brunt of Tory attacks for the whole period of Thatcher's rule - the once booming Liverpool of 1960s fame had become severely blighted by mass unemployment.

Thatcher, with transparent motives in terms of postponing a confrontation with Militant until after the miners had been dealt with, offered them a quite generous deal for that year. One would have expected a supposedly Trotskyist, revolutionary leadership to have refused to accept it, and to have told the working class why: ie, Thatcher is trying to

buy us off now, so she can defeat us later when the miners are out of the way. Unfortunately it was not to be: like the short-sighted left Labourites they were in practice, Militant accepted the settlement and Thatcher was indeed able to take them on and defeat them subsequently.

The final opportunity that came along to do something to break the miners' isolation was the Nacods dispute in the autumn of 1984. This really was a very slender reed to base hopes upon. The pit deputies/supervisors union had up to them remained aloof - in the strike-bound areas, the NUM had generally worked with them to maintain 'safety cover' (elementary maintenance of pits, so there would be a pit to go back to at the end of the strike). In the scab areas, Nacods members had worked and supervised the scabs. But the problem for the government was that it was not possible, legally at least, and practically with any elementary safety standard, to run pits without the presence of Nacods members. The pit-deputies, having been antagonised by the government over matters connected with pit closures, belatedly resisted, voting to strike. Again deals were done, and a hardly militant union leadership called off the projected strikes.

All these were spontaneous expressions of the organic, objective fact that such a strategic class confrontation as the miners' strike posed the objective necessity of a general strike. The big problem of course was how to get one, given that, as explained earlier, the bureaucracy of the trade unions feared a victory of the working class in struggle over the capitalist state even more than they feared a defeat for the miners. For the NUM and Scargill too, the whole purpose of the strike, at least officially, was to defend the 'British coal industry', which could 'remain competitive' in the international market, not to defend the interests of the working class *regardless* of the interests of capital and profit. The strike was certainly not conceived as a frontal attack on the prerogatives of capital. Yet that is what was necessary to win.

### Support groups

Ultimately, what was needed was for some means to be created for the rank and file of the trade unions, and indeed other sections of the working class outside the unions themselves, to assert themselves as politically independent of the bureaucracy. We in *The Leninist*

wing of the CPGB considered that the miners' support groups that had sprung up all over the country, organising partisans of the strike from the left groups, from the unemployed and from other trade unions, offered the beginning, though only the beginning, of what was needed.

The task was to both broaden the base and deepen the roots of these support groups, so that they and, just as importantly, a movement centred in the trade unions, politically led by the advanced militants involved in them, could begin to offer alternative leadership to that of the trade union bureaucracy. At the same time, it was necessary to maintain maximum rank-and-file pressure on the existing leaderships of the trade unions by ceaselessly demanding action from the TUC and individual trade union leaders (if nothing else than for educational purposes). It was necessary to prepare the means to take it out of their hands. "General strike - with or without the TUC": that was the perspective our comrades put forward in the crucial period of the miners' strike.

In hindsight, this still looks like the correct perspective - especially when you contrast it with some of the other responses on the left. The Socialist Workers Party, for the early period of the strike, mocked the miners' support groups as 'charity-mongering' organisations, whose sole purpose was apparently the collection of tins of baked beans. Notwithstanding the importance of collecting sustenance for strikers and their families, this was an insulting caricature.

About halfway through the strike, the SWP changed its mind about the support groups, entering them en masse and becoming the most ardent practitioners of just the kind of apolitical charity-type work for which it had previously been denouncing others. The SWP, of course, had no perspective of what to do with the support groups. Its theory of the 'downtum' meant that it could not even envisage calling for a general strike, let alone envisage the support groups having any role in providing the haven for the kind of councils of action that would be necessary to *run* a general strike. In fact that is one of the most notable things about this strategic confrontation - the failure of the SWP to call for a general strike when it was really desperately necessary: if a strategic defeat for the whole class was to be avoided.

Other odd examples of political failings of the left were the Spartacist League,

who characteristically refused to involve themselves in the miners' support groups - for them "playgrounds of the left", infected with reformism and fake revolutionism, and thereby to be avoided like the plague. The Sparts demanded a general strike: however, their version of this was simply a call on the 'left' unions to lead it over the heads of the TUC, combined with abstract propaganda for the spreading of the miners' strike on the ground - without an organisational locus with which to do so. Since in practice the lefts proved just as treacherous as the rights, this was not much of a perspective.

For similar reasons, the Workers Revolutionary Party also largely absented itself from the support committees. Though in its case this produced the beginnings of rank-and-file rebellion - the prelude to the splintering of that cultist organisation the following year. The WRP means of fighting for a general strike was through the monotonous repetition of the slogan, 'TUC, get off your knees: organise a general strike'. In that form, a hopeless and forlorn perspective.

It was only quite small groupings like *The Leninist*, and also other left-wing activist groups like Workers Power, who put forward a realistic and realisable perspective of how to get a general strike - combining unrelenting agitation from below for the union leaders to do what was necessary with real attempts to bring into being the kind of organisations that could take things out of their hands - rank and file organisations in the trade unions, miners' support groups as incipient councils of action for the wider labour movement.

Unfortunately, the odds were very much against all participants in that endeavour and, as everyone knows, after with great difficulty maintaining itself through a very tough winter of defensive struggle, and having had the union's assets seized by court sequestrators under the Tory anti-union laws in the autumn of 1984, the NUM was finally forced to order a return to work without an agreement in early March 1985.

In the final part of this series, I will deal with the aftermath of the defeat, the attempts that were made to maintain effective trade unionism among the miners, and some of the overall political lessons that can be drawn from this titanic struggle □

## DOCKERS

## Opening the second front

When the dockers walked out on unofficial strike in July 1984, for a time the miners seemed to have victory within their grasp. **Alan Stevens**, then a union militant in London docks, recalls the decisive moments

As Dave Douglass of Hatfield NUM points out, the Socialist Workers Party still does not have much of a clue about the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 (*Weekly Worker* March 11). The SWP does not really know what was going on in the two docks strikes during that epochal struggle either. It gives the appearance of some kind of detached commentator with a distinctly two-dimensional view. In this, though, it is not alone.

Like the miners, dockers had a long tradition of self-organising activity through unofficial committees that acted in parallel with the official structures of the union. To some extent, many of these once powerful unofficial bodies had, by the time of the strike, been incorporated into official union structures (under a plan devised by Lord Devlin to undermine Communist Party influence and rank and file activity). However, these incorporated shop stewards committees often operated both officially and unofficially and were organised in a single structure through the unofficial national port shop stewards committee.

Whilst TGWU leader Ron Todd made sympathetic speeches and organised support for the miners, it was within the very narrow restraints of legality and the trade union bureaucracy. The national port shop stewards were, on the other hand, desperate to find a way to bring about a strike in support of the miners. But several problems confronted them.

The docks were split nationally between older, run-down, registered ports and newer, more efficient, unregistered ports. Registered men, who had far more legal job protection, had substantially declined in numbers over the years through port closures and severance payments. They generally had a high age profile with a significant minority waiting for severance. Men in the unregistered ports, though having less legal job security, were thought to be relatively safe. The unregistered ports handled about 30% of traffic - mostly high value.

The union leadership was not about to defy anti-trade union laws and challenge the government head on. And despite massive sympathy with the miners there was not sufficient rank and file cohesion, organisation and support to successfully lead an unofficial national strike. So a way had to be found to get a national strike that side-stepped the anti-trade union laws - or, better still, get the employers to break the law so that we could legitimately react.

And so it came to pass that there occurred a *technical* breach of the Dock Labour Scheme. This was then used to invoke TGWU National Docks Group policy whereby any breach of the Dock Labour Scheme would result in an immediate national dock strike. We knew that it was going to kick off somewhere on the Humber and when the phone call came - in July 1984 - it was from Immingham. Without any warning we had an official national dock strike. On day one all the registered ports were out and the port shop stewards were arranging flying pickets. By day three - something of a pleasant surprise - all the non-registered ports were out too. As the vast majority of Britain's imports and exports were by sea, we had a stranglehold on a vital economic lifeline.

So, was it a strike in defence of the Dock Labour Scheme or a strike in support of the miners? This and the thorny question of a miners' ballot came up at a mass meeting of all London dockers in number one shed at Tilbury Docks. This

'shed' used to be the departure point for families migrating to Australia and was in reality a large hall with a platform, surrounded on three sides by a balcony. In the body of the hall stood the majority: the two-shift men who worked mainly conventional cargo. On the platform were the officials, while on the balcony were the three-shift men - they worked the container berths, were better paid and less inclined to strike. The atmosphere was electrifying.

The officials explained that there had been a breach of the scheme (shouts from the balcony: "This is nothing to do with the scheme - it's about the miners"). A three-shift man, waving his finger at the platform, declared that "the miners haven't even had a ballot" (shouts from below: "Fuck the ballot! We don't need a ballot to tell us what side we're on"). The three-shift man then waves his arm in our direction and pleads: "Are you really going to go on strike for the miners, a political strike against the government?" A single thunderous "Yes!" from below. And that was the end of questions.

For the government who had taken such great care to avoid opening up a second front it was a bolt out of the blue - totally unexpected and unprepared for. Just what we wanted. Our hope was that our strike would be the spark to ignite others - particularly railworkers. In any event London stewards estimated that, if we could last six to eight weeks, the miners could win.

I was told later by a Kent miner that their estimate was, had we lasted another two weeks, that would have been enough. When National Coal Board chairman Ian McGregor published his memoirs, he revealed that Margaret Thatcher was only two days away from giving in as a result of our action. Other Tories were also in a state of panic - Norman Tebbit begged Thatcher not to take the country to the brink.

So what went wrong? Many commentators, including the SWP, have said that the battle at Dover was decisive and that the TGWU leadership should have called for an extension of the Dock Labour Scheme to include non-registered ports. The problem was that the strike always had a contradiction at its heart - support for the miners but technically a response to a breach of the scheme. In effect the official union running a reactive dispute in defence of the status quo, and the unofficial committees trying to help the miners win.

Although there was talk of extending the scheme, there was just not sufficient grounds for a campaign at that time in such a contradictory situation - the work of winning the hearts and minds of non-registered men was not done (and would have been difficult anyway) and in the registered ports we had suffered decades of inexorable decline and had plenty of men waiting for severance. The TGWU national executive was not going to campaign for registration of all ports when it had union members and agreements in all the unregistered ports anyway.

Only through the kind of rank and file pressure that might have resulted from winning the strike was extension of the scheme going to be a realistic demand. The real, concrete question was how to maintain a strike long enough to help the miners or spark other sections into strike action. Our best hope was not an empty and premature call to extend the scheme to other ports, but a railway strike.

Of course, these things were discussed, but, as dockers might say, the

**"Something not appreciated by those who lack experience of such industrial battles is that they develop a momentum and a fighting camaraderie all of their own that drives the mass forward."**

dunnage hadn't been laid. A process of struggle that turned round decades of decline and division and threw up these questions concretely was needed. This was early days, full of contradictions and problems, and from the start we had been weaving in and out around anti-trade union laws, the union bureaucracy, and all the other weaknesses mentioned above.

In this contradictory situation the scope for a sell-out or breaking a weak link is easy to see - and we had both. Dover is significant for two reasons: Firstly, it was a non-registered port on strike ostensibly in support of a scheme of which it was not a part; and, more importantly, it was a large 'Ro-Ro' (fast, 'roll on, roll off' cargo handling) port close to Europe.

According to Nicholas Finney, head of the National Port Employers Association at the time, the government estimated that they could withstand a national dock strike for one to two months if they could maintain Ro-Ro traffic. That is, Dover was crucial to the government, because it might have bought enough time before economic collapse. A massive increase in air freight was also being organised at the same time, but that alone would not have been enough.

Dover was a weak link in the chain and the weapon employed to break it was a riot by lorry owners and drivers who, whilst the police looked on, forced their way into the dock and threatened to burn down the stewards' office unless the strike was lifted. Having withstood intimidation for three days, the dockers gave in. Finney, when relating this incident to Australian employers who were getting set to attack the wharves, advised them that it was important to "realise the strength of the transport drivers". So far as we were concerned in London, they should have let them burn the stewards' office.

Whilst this was a blow that dented morale, it was not decisive. What really stuffed us up, in what was to be round one of the battle, was the TUC and the national executive of the TGWU. It was not just the government that was in a state of panic: the TUC were shitting their pants. They intervened to get Acas, the official arbitration service, to mediate and, as the issue was *technically* a breach of the scheme, it did not take much to cobble up a deal with National Docks Group secretary John Connolly and have the strike called off. The collapse at Dover was just an added excuse. This retreat was to provide invaluable lessons for the government and employers that would cost us dearly later. However, pissed off but undaunted by this setback, the port shop stewards began to prepare for round two.

Our position was now certainly weaker. The hand we had at the government's throat was temporarily removed: momentum and initiative had been lost, officials frightened, morale dented, confidence (especially amongst unregistered dockers) damaged - it would take

time to build up the momentum again. Time that the government was to use stockpiling, creating divisions between registered and non-registered and preparing strike-breaking plans.

Things kicked off again in September. However, this time a breach of the scheme was contrived by the government to provoke a national strike when we were not ready. The government, so careful to avoid fighting on two fronts, now deliberately attacked the dockers - it was a risky, but well planned defensive move to *decisively* close down that second front before it could reopen.

The aim of the national officials, of course, was to resolve the breach of the scheme - something the government was always going to do. The port shop stewards and the majority of ordinary registered dockers were, despite the weaker position and bad timing, up for a fight. In view of previous events and efforts by government and employers, it was not surprising that the unregistered ports continued working. Even so, a large proportion of cargo was stopped and the potential of another flashpoint was always there (as was apparent with the later Nacods strike vote). However, it was going to take months this time and the government had only to resolve the technical breach and cobble up a deal that national officials would grab with both hands.

The calling off of this second official strike helped to seal the fate of the National Dock Labour Scheme. Not that the fighting resolve of dockers was crushed - in fact I was involved in far more disputes after the miners' strike than before it.

So what are the lessons to be learned?

Something not appreciated by those who lack experience of such industrial battles is that they develop a momentum, a spontaneity, an initiative and a fighting camaraderie all of their own that drives the mass forward. This or that missed tactical opportunity or mistake can be damaging, but so too can a loss of momentum and initiative. Then there is the whole historical background - the culture, customs and so on - that impact on the way workers see things.

In the case of the ballot question, for example, some militant, class-conscious dockers held the view that it would have been advantageous to have denied the class enemy the chance to use the lack of a ballot as a weapon. However, this was a secondary, tactical question. The docks culture was not ballots, but mass meetings - it was assumed that this was probably true in the case of miners. Added to this was the whole drive by the class enemy for ballots to shackle workers. This did not rule out using such a tactic, but really it was for the miners to decide.

Very quickly this became a purely academic point and, the die being cast, all calls for a ballot subsequently were just excuses for not fighting. This is why dockers in London who supported the miners, including those who thought a ballot should have been held (at the only

appropriate time, of course), said, "Fuck the ballot". A single, secondary, tactical option - perhaps useful only at an early stage - was nothing compared to class solidarity.

Although many had an inkling of the impact and potential of that first dock strike, it was seriously underestimated by all except the ruling class. A golden opportunity missed. Dave Douglass is right when he says: "It was Immingham, with the possibility of a rail and dock strike and the isolation of the steelworks, which was the vital flashpoint, not the Orgreave mass picket ... The docks were the place to do it, rather than fighting in a field every day, where we could only take a beating" (*Weekly Worker* March 18).

Miners joining dockers' picket lines would have built up a momentum and camaraderie and helped overcome some of the inherent weaknesses we faced. It would have helped solidify the dockers' own action, applied greater pressure to TGWU leaders and possibly prevented (or at least delayed) the collapse at Dover.

All of this is, of course, well within the limits of trade union politics. The government was fighting a class war, one union at a time. We, a section of one union, were trying to help our class comrades - it was all woefully inadequate. Even had we won, they would have been back for us, more ferociously than ever.

There was, above all, one overarching and, I think, fatal weakness: the lack of an independent political party of the working class, a Communist Party. I have many criticisms of the old 'official' CPGB, but as late as the 70s it was still a powerful fighting machine. The SWP's founder, Tony Cliff, wrote somewhere: "At the heart of the shop stewards' movement, the cement which held it together was the Communist Party." He was right.

I might add that probably the most concentrated and continuous industrial militancy in British history - in the London docks between 1960 and 1963 - was entirely the result of the communist-dominated unofficial rank and file committees. Even then the old CPGB was well on the reformist road, was bureaucratic and made lots of mistakes. In fact it was very economistic and mired in the narrow confines of trade union politics. Indeed criticisms can be made over the CPGB's entire history, but you get a glimmer of what is possible. And it could be done a lot better.

By 1984, of course, the 'official' CPGB was a hive of contending factions. The leadership, dominated by the pre-Blairite Eurocommunists, played a treacherous role during the miners' Great Strike. The membership in the main loyally supported the miners and were often the mainstay of collections and local meetings, arguing the miners' cause - important and necessary, but hopelessly inadequate: simply the sum of individual efforts. I was a CPGB member in the docks and was not organised by the party at all even during the docks strikes - just left to my own devices.

What was needed, then as now, was a party, armed with a revolutionary programme, that was capable of collecting and generalising the experience of struggle; acting as a national think tank, able to analyse developments and judge their significance; providing a means of debating political strategy and tactics; educating, agitating and organising; cohering battles and initiating actions - in short, leading the class struggle ☐

FREE SPEECH

Pursuing the truth

Just imagine, if you can, a world without the *Weekly Worker*. Say you wanted to know the political forces that make up the European Social Forum or Respect. How would you find out? Well, you could content yourself with the occasional titbits that appear in the mainstream press - not to mention internet tittle-tattle or, if you are a bit more low-tech, pub gossip. Perhaps you turn instead to *Socialist Worker*? No luck there, unless you enjoy living on a dull diet of skimpy reportage and uncritical cheerleading. What next?

Obviously, without the *Weekly Worker* you would not really have much of a clue as to what was going on, or why. Like Oliver Twist, you would just receive your allotted dollop of 'truth' from the patriarchs and why should you ask for more? After all, you are only a humble foot-soldier in a much grander battle.

This brings us to the ESF. According to some of its leading figures, the *Weekly Worker*'s coverage is full of (always unspecified) "inaccuracies". Indeed, we have even been told that the "misleading information" put out by the *Weekly Worker* has "threatened" and "endangered" the ESF project itself.

Of course, this is all a load of twaddle. What these critics are really objecting to is the painful *accuracies* of the *Weekly Worker*'s reporting. The manipulative and underhand behaviour of the furtive Socialist Action group, the control-freakery of the Socialist Workers Party, and all the rest of it, is meant to remain an official secret. Presumably, the danger that the ESF could be turned into a Ken Livingstone/Greater London Authority jamboree should be left unsaid. No doubt, to comrades trained in conspiracy school politics our *honest* style of journalism is a constant affront.

Unfortunately, this morbid aversion to openness is not confined to certain groups and individuals within the ESF. It is an unfortunate fact of our movement that the predominant culture on the left could be summed up by the old saying, 'Never wash your dirty linen in public'. However, such a sentiment is deeply antithetical to the values of Marxism and authentic communism. Though it might come as a shock to some comrades, the journalistic style of the *Weekly Worker* is not the result of an obsessive desire by its writers to embarrass or humiliate our comrades on the left, least of all by a prurient urge to expose their private lives to the full gaze of public scrutiny. Rather it springs from our understanding that a *real* communist newspaper is one that unflinchingly fights for extreme democracy - which in practice means the *open* circulation and clash of different and contending views.

By contrast, much of the Machiavellian wheeling and dealing that has surrounded the ESF - and Respect as well - makes clear that for some comrades their self-professed love for democracy and 'pluralism' is, when push comes to shove, quite Platonic. Annoyed at the *Weekly Worker* for supposedly scaring away NGOs, Maureen O'Mara of Natfhe told the February 29 ESF organising committee meeting: "It's not good enough to say, 'We can apologise later.' You shouldn't do it in the first place" (*Weekly Worker* March 4).

The *Weekly Worker* should not do *what* exactly? Fearlessly report the truth, as we see it?

It is instructive to briefly examine the general approach taken by Karl Marx to open reporting and the freedom of the press in general, as it reverberates with contemporary relevance. Of course, as Marx stressed, journalistic openness is "not a perfect thing itself" - it is not the "all-in-all" of the matter. In other words, the *Weekly Worker* cannot guarantee 'freedom' - ie, freedom from all inaccuracies, mistakes and distortions. But by dragging the political debates, arguments and in-fighting of the ESF into the limelight, the *Weekly Worker* is struggling to make democracy itself "a real, living spirit, as opposed to a ghostly presence", as Marx put it (H Draper *Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 1, New York 1977, p31).

Openness, and the fight for it, activates and enhances what Marx called the "public mind". The function of the *Weekly Worker*, and surely any socialist paper worthy of the name, is to hold a mirror up to the ESF, Socialist Alliance, Respect, etc - to make them accountable for



Wilhelm IV: jurisdiction of suspicion

their actions and words. No wonder the *Weekly Worker* is loathed in some quarters - and avidly read in others. In turn the *Weekly Worker* itself is open to scrutiny and criticism, and hence to correction or amendment. This is an inherently educative - and political - process.

Our open reporting is, of course, in stark contrast to the rest of the left press, with its anodyne formulations and ideological monolithicism, specifically designed to preclude an honest and frank political discussion. Have you read *Socialist Worker* or *The Socialist* recently? An unsettling fear of politics seems to permeate these dispiriting publications - and all those who take such umbrage at the *Weekly Worker*'s frank reporting of political meetings and debates. But, as Marx always emphasised, without a free, open and courageous press how can you ever know what is true and what is false? The Ministry of Truth in Orwell's *1984* was well aware of this. So too were the bureaucrats in Stalin's Soviet Union - and still are in Castro's Cuba or Kim Il-Jong's North Korea. The history of official or mainstream Trotskyism also demonstrates what the lack of an open press and democratic culture can do to a political movement.

It is a deeply regrettable but obvious fact that the majority of the left today is fixated on producing an 'authorised' version of the truth - whether it be that Respect is on the verge of making a major electoral breakthrough come 'super-Thursday', or that the ESF is just a 'natural' coming together of popular movements and individuals with no specific party/group affiliation. At times you cannot help but think that those who would like to stifle the *Weekly Worker* are hankering for the rules laid down by Wilhelm IV of 19th century Prussia which Marx so bitterly fought. The bureaucrats' regulations only allowed for what they considered a "serious and restrained pursuit of truth" - only opinions and views which were "well intentioned in tendency" were to be permitted. "The jurisdiction of suspicion" ruled supreme, as Marx said.

He pointed to how the Napoleonic Code in France also guaranteed freedom of speech ... but only for those printing the truth and not 'lies'. What *they* - the bureaucracy - decreed was the truth, that is. You can bet that many comrades in the ESF, and elsewhere, also long for a "restrained" and "well intentioned" *Weekly Worker*. We shall leave that role to *Socialist Worker*, seeing as it has excelled at it for so long.

Especially pertinent to our discussion, Marx regularly noted that the aristocratic and bourgeois deputies in the Prussian parliament, the *Diet*, strongly objected to the regular publishing of their proceedings. They obviously regarded the *Diet* as their own private property and not something which the common people should know anything about.

Given this, Marx would have been all too

familiar with the haughty attitude of the British war cabinet, which in 1944 argued against the radio broadcasting of parliamentary debates on the grounds that the "proceedings in parliament were *too technical* to be understood by the ordinary listener, who would be liable to get a quite false impression of the business transacted". Instead it favoured professional journalists as 'expert' mediators between public and politics - keep the plebs out. Winston Churchill regarded the very idea as "a red conspiracy", because it would allow "undifferentiated" mass access to parliamentary procedures. Parliament must remain a private club for the privileged. Similarly, the televising of parliament was bitterly opposed for decades.

Sadly this elitist spirit lives on within our movement. You sometimes get the impression that all too many comrades regard political polemic and theory as "too technical". God forbid that the working class should discover that there are different political groups, with different programmatic outlooks, with different tactics and strategy - it would only confuse the poor things.

Marx's comments on the Paris Commune therefore serve as an acute and very timely rejoinder to the left's phobia about openness: "The Commune did not pretend to infallibility, the invariable attribute of all governments of the old stamp. It published its doings and sayings, it initiated the public into all its shortcomings" (K Marx *The civil war in France* Peking 1966, p80). The role of a communist publication, and organisation, is not to "pretend to infallibility", but to highlight all the "shortcomings" of the workers' movement as best it can: the *Weekly Worker* ethos in a nutshell. (Yes, we admit it, the *Weekly Worker* is not infallible - well, not always).

This of course can be downright infuriating at times. Who positively wants to have their "shortcomings" paraded on the front, middle or back page of a left newspaper? But the long-term interests of the workers' movement demand it. As Marx rather floridly observed, "Keep in mind that you could not enjoy the advantages of a free press without tolerating its inconveniences. You could not pluck the rose without its thorns! And what do you lose in losing a free press? A free press is the omnipresent open eye of the popular spirit ... It is the merciless confessional that a people makes to itself, and it is well known that confession has the power to redeem. It is the intellectual mirror in which a people beholds itself, and self-examination is the first condition of wisdom" (K Marx CW Vol 1, p405, pp60-61).

The "merciless confessional" of an open communist press is the only means to build a healthy and strong workers' movement which can reflect upon itself, learn from its mistakes and *develop*. The ESF, Respect, SA, etc should not be treated as private forums for the enlightened few, but as the collective property of the working class

Eddie Ford

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 readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.

We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

Become a  
Communist Party  
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# weekly worker

Israeli state  
assassination  
of Sheikh  
Ahmed Yassin

## Sharon boosts islamists

**A**riel Sharon's assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the 'spiritual leader' and founder of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), is an incredible piece of provocation. Nothing could be more deliberately calculated to stir up more hatred than this action. Nothing could be more calculated to recruit more young Palestinians to sacrifice their lives with the suicide-belt, while taking with them a brace of Israelis. Nothing could be more calculated to humiliate and embitter those who aspire to Palestinian self-determination.

Indeed, this was the whole point of the assassination, which is only the latest in a whole series of so-called 'targeted killings' (political murders) by Israel of its opponents. Up to 200,000 Palestinians turned out to the sheikh's funeral, and many thousands also marched in protest in Arab capitals around the region. And rightly so! All democrats, socialists and defenders of the rights of the Palestinian people should make their voices heard in protest against this grotesque and murderous act of national oppression, which can only breed more bloodshed and destruction in the region.

In the midst of international condemnation of its actions, the Sharon government has now brazenly announced that it intends to wipe out the entire Hamas leadership - a promise that is virtually impossible to carry out, but will no doubt bring with it a further ratcheting up of the stakes of atrocity and counter-atrocity. If it was possible a few years ago to theorise that Hamas existed to aid the political career of Ariel Sharon, with its ubiquitous suicide bombings of Israeli civilians; many may now begin to think that Sharon may also be seeking to give the credibility and career of Osama bin Laden a new lease of life. From the standpoint of the current world situation, considered with any degree of rationality, this will obviously be the impact of the murder of a man who, after all, had an enormous following among Palestinians as a religious and political leader.

Yassin, a 66-year-old, semi-blind quadriplegic, unable to move around freely, was assassinated in his wheelchair while being pushed to the local mosque by bodyguards. He was killed by an unmanned Israeli drone, which fired three rockets; he died instantly, along with at least six others, while many more, including two of his sons, were injured. Hamas itself, which was founded by Sheikh Yassin in the 1980s, immediately threatened bloody revenge against the Israelis: "You have now opened the gates of hell," their statement taunts Sharon. Hamas reportedly is now threatening to take their attacks against Israelis and Israeli interests, as well as the citizens and interests of the United States which backs Israel to the hilt, around the world. This is something that it has eschewed until now, confining itself to armed struggle (and suicide bombings) within the theatre of the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The threat may appear unlikely - Hamas is not al Qa'eda and indeed had condemned the Madrid bombings earlier this month. Though if anything appears calculated to provoke some kind of meeting of minds between these very

different strands of political islam, the latest Israeli action could be it.

Coming such a short time after the trauma of the attacks in Madrid - which was followed by the collapse of the conservative Popular Party government in Spain and the election of a Socialist Party administration that has now announced its intentions to pull Spanish troops out of Iraq - Sharon's action hardly fits in with the sensibilities of European, and indeed American, capital. Not only will it act as a red rag to the Palestinian masses, but it will inevitably inflame sentiments among both sunni and shia Iraqis - the American, and in part the British, occupiers have been having a hard time holding back a nationalist insurgency that appears to owe much to some kind of islamist sentiments. Sharon tries to paint his action as part of the imperialist 'war on terrorism' and to paint Yassin as some sort of Osama bin Laden-type figure, but from the point of view of the western imperialists, this action can only politically strengthen the real bin Laden and al Qa'eda itself.

Knowing this very well, Jack Straw rushed to condemn the killing of Sheikh Yassin as "unnecessary" and "unlawful". Blair himself added his own voice to the condemnation. The French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, said pretty well the same thing, as did the EU foreign ministers jointly in a statement issued from Brussels. The Bush administration, however, was visibly in disarray over this: when the news broke, national security adviser Condoleeza Rice rushed out a statement that echoed Sharon: "Let's remember that Hamas is a terrorist organisation and that Sheikh Yassin has himself, personally, we believe, been involved in terrorist planning." However, within a few hours, the White House was "deeply concerned" and "deeply troubled" by this action, which "increases tension and doesn't help our efforts to resume progress towards peace", according to a state department spokesman acting on behalf of Colin Powell.

Sharon's government was itself split over the wisdom of this action, with at least two cabinet ministers voting against the decision to murder Yassin. Sharon seems to regard himself as a free agent these days - with the Bush administration, having originally set much store by its 'road map' for the Israel/Palestine question, in trouble over Iraq. The US originally, and fatuously, believed that subjugating Iraq would give it a unique opportunity to 'redraw the political map of the Middle East' and impose acceptance of a US puppet 'provisional' state on the Palestinians as a supposed solution to the national conflict.

But the quagmire in Iraq has upset all these calculations. Bush's favoured Palestinian stooge, Abu Mazen, was humiliated by Sharon and Hamas, as the US president's leverage on the situation grew weaker after the Iraq war - eventually he was forced out. And, in the absence of any coherent US initiative in the region, Sharon has moved to implement his 'solution', discarding some Gaza Strip settlements in favour of domination by remote-controlled firepower, presumably (Gaza being the least useful part of the occupied territories for the purposes of Israeli settlement). At the same time he has built a 'security wall' on the West Bank



More suicide bombers in waiting

as a means to annex, *de facto* if not *de jure*, large sections of the most valuable land to Israel, leaving the Palestinian authority with a shrunken, chopped up piece of territory that no-one can even pretend to be minimally viable.

Sharon's aim is the crushing of all Palestinian national aspirations, the breaking of Palestinian will. Failing that, he aims to keep the conflict going and exacerbate it so as to unite Israelis behind himself as the only leader who can run a country in a state of siege from 'terrorists'. Better to prepare in this way for a barbaric 'final solution' to the Palestin-

ian problem at some time in the future, which despite the ratcheting up of islamophobia in the west in recent years would still cause major political problems to Israel's imperialist allies, were it to be attempted at the moment. The casting of Hamas as akin to al Qa'eda, the brazenness of the killing of Sheikh Yassin in the aftermath of Madrid, may well be a means to an end to Sharon - to create conditions whereby Palestinians can be associated in the western popular mind with al Qa'eda, giving the opportunity to Sharon to do his very worst with impunity.

The international left must combat this, by seeking ways to demonstrate in practice the real solution to the national conflict in Palestine - a struggle, led by the working class, for consistent democracy: fighting from below for the right to self-determination of both peoples. This programme - two states for two peoples - is so powerful in its objective logic that it is more than capable of defeating the reactionary ideologies of both Zionism and islamism and thwarting all the imperialists' 'road map' scheming □

Ian Donovan

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