



**Anas Altikriti - former
president of MAB and now
Respect candidate - speaks**

- ▣ Debating Respect
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Towards a new workers' party

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From 15 to 25:



Now for a democratic Europe from below

LETTERS

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

George and abortion

Interesting to note your paper's coverage of George Galloway as a catholic, defender of the Cuban revolution and fervent anti-abortionist (April 22).

A few things spring to mind about this. Catholics (as I was raised as a child) were required to not delve too much into the history of their church. I am heartened to see that a fellow catholic (in the Irish sense) maintains a loyal ignorance to the history of Rome.

There has always been debate among the luminaries of the church on the matter of abortion. For instance St Thomas Aquinas (c1225-1274) did not believe life started at conception. Rather he stated that the foetus is first endowed with a "vegetative soul", then an "animal soul", and then - when its body is developed - a rational soul: this was termed hominisation. For much of the history of the church, hominisation occurred relatively close to birth. This was a common thread of catholic theology and one which had been grudgingly laid down by the founding theologian of the modern church, St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who asked: "But who is not rather disposed to think that unformed foetuses perish like seeds which have not fructified?"

Even more revealing: the penitential ascribed by Albers to The Venerable Bede (c672-735), the idea of delayed hominisation is again supported, and women's circumstances acknowledged: "A mother who kills her child before the 40th day shall do penance for one year. If it is after the child has become alive [she shall do penance] as a murderess. But it makes a great difference whether a poor woman does it on account of the difficulty of supporting [the child] or a harlot for the sake of concealing her wickedness."

It is important to recall that it was the second Vatican council in 1965 that declared 'protection' from the moment of conception. Up until that time it was not completely recognised church policy. Indeed, it should be understood that excommunications for abortions only came in 1869.

So, simply put, Galloway's position is in concert with Rome on the matter of the active subjugation of the right of women for the control of their destinies and bodies. A far cry from the reasonably 'enlightened' views of church thinkers from 300 to 1965. Verily, he is a modern man who has cast aside the shibboleths of old.

For the Great Defender of the Cuban revolution I would like to add the following quote from Dr Miguel Sosa Marín,

obstetrician-gynaecologist and president of the Cuban Society of Family Development: "The right to quality abortion services and to choose abortion based on the 'right of women and couples to decide on reproduction' is something Cuban women achieved in the early 60s, as part of their struggle for full gender equality. The legalisation of abortion in Cuba was also based on the need to reduce highly risky complications from the extensive and indiscriminate practice of illegal abortions, which was accepted and tolerated in the country, and which had resulted in elevated maternal mortality and a high incidence of mutilations."

And, no, I don't think either Dr Marín or I are part of a "claque of eastern European anti-communist émigrés".

Anthony McLaughlin
Sydney

Respect equality

I have just read Joe Wills's clarification of the South West Respect meeting and am not impressed in the slightest by what he has to say (Letters, April 22).

The fact that Majid Khan made comments in favour of gender segregation even in a "personal capacity" on the Respect platform is still worrying. Joe Wills also doesn't answer the question about whether anyone challenged him on these issues and if so, why was that? Something to do with the fact they were being said in a "personal capacity"?

C'mon, comrade, you can do better than that! The CPGB were happy to challenge Respect about voting against a republic at the founding conference, but still couldn't criticise Majid Khan's comments about gender segregation. This goes against the 'e' in Respect for equality, doesn't it? I mean, even comrade Wills eloquently quotes the Respect line on fighting discrimination later on in his letter.

Majid Khan used the Respect platform to air his 'personal views', but that still gives people the right to criticise. Comrade Wills then informs us that the CPGB would be "out like a shot" if Respect ditched lesbian, gay and women's rights. Don't you believe that they are being ditched already? Again, I would like to pose the question, which in my previous letter was chopped, about how many more concessions are the Socialist Workers Party *et al* willing to make in accommodating reactionary ideas?

And now we have Marcus Ström prepared to work with 'flawed people' ('Votes of conscience and women's rights', April 22). I am pro-choice and defend a woman's right to choose and unlike Marcus Ström I am unwilling to work with people like Galloway and Majid Khan who wish to attack women's rights.

Yes, by all means work with diverse groups when it comes to single-issue

campaigns, such as campaigning against war in Iraq, but, when it comes to having an electoral coalition with such groups, then I say, no way! I have sympathy with the sentiments made by Graham Bash ('Find answers in Labour, not Respect', April 22) and I believe that talents have been squandered and a real viable democratic socialist alternative to Labour has been lost to a ragbag of socialists and reactionaries. That's the real shame!

Louise Whittle
email

Respect democracy

There has been no reply from the Respect executive to letters asking for details of 'the deal' done by the Respect EC and the Socialist Party concerning Coventry (see *Weekly Worker* April 8). This deal apparently means that the Respect EC have decreed that there will be no Respect candidates in the June local elections in the city, giving the SP a free run, in return for the SP not standing in the European elections.

The local SP denies any knowledge of a deal and says it must be a national matter. The local Socialist Workers Party claims that the deal was done between Dave Nellist and George Galloway at a private meeting at Coventry railway station before George spoke at the first Coventry Respect meeting. It is not clear what happened because bureaucratic decisions have been made by both the SP and Respect national bodies without reference to their members on the ground. And apparently we are still not to be told on what basis and for what reason the decisions were made, let alone have a say in the matter.

Meanwhile letters have been sent to socialists in Coventry by both the local Socialist Party and by Respect appealing for election funds and giving details of canvassing and leafletting activities. Respect even invites us to a dinner with George Galloway in Birmingham at £30 a head. If only they could get Posh and Becks! There is surely an elementary bourgeois democratic principle here - no taxation without representation. Who decides on the candidates? Who decides what goes in the leaflets? Who decides on the programme of activities? No say in the running of the organisation must mean no money and no support. In the case of Respect we have been told by the SWP that there are no plans to set up a Coventry branch, so what is the point?

I think that the CPGB should take up the question of democracy within Respect and of course within the SWP as the key issue for building a workers' party, rather than items of policy. Marcus Ström mentions the experience with

Arthur Scargill and the Socialist Labour Party in 1997. He is right: there is a parallel. Arthur Scargill tried to kick-start the SLP using the 1997 general election campaign. George Galloway and the SWP are doing the same with the European elections and the GLA. Actually Scargill had bigger meetings and generated more enthusiasm than Respect. His downfall was his bureaucratic methods. I was at the SLP conference in 1998, as were CPGB members, when we discovered Arthur had 3,000 votes in his back pocket. There was spontaneous anger and a deep feeling of betrayal from the floor of the conference and that was the end of the SLP. Arthur seemed to have no understanding or sympathy for democratic processes.

For me George Galloway and the SWP are the same. I think that many radicals will not touch Respect with a bargepole for that reason: bureaucratic methods and lack of respect for the membership. When I have spoken to comrades in Coventry about 'the deal', they say, 'Why are you so surprised? You're talking about the SP and the SWP. That's the way they behave.' Like Peter Tatchell (Letters, April 8) they will be voting Green in the European elections. In the local elections they may be voting for two independent socialist candidates who have decided to stand in spite of 'the deal' - Paul Smith in Earlsdon Ward, a founder member of Coventry SWP who stood in the ward for the Socialist Alliance last year, and Christine Oddy in Lower Stoke Ward, a former Labour MEP who stood as an independent in the last European elections and got more votes in Coventry than any other party.

Dave Spencer
Coventry

Outstanding

I thought Ian Donovan's recent articles on the situation in Iraq to be simply outstanding. They contain a careful and sensitive analysis of the balance between the need to support the inherent right of ordinary Iraqi people to hit back and struggle against the vicious and murderous occupation of their country and the need to develop alternative political leaderships, which are much more about genuine liberation and for fundamental social emancipation.

I have to say, however, that your support for Respect is a complete and utter blind alley and really would suggest you have lost your bearings! The basic politics of the Socialist Workers Party, as expressed in their 'Where we stand' statement and current articles are really not too bad - if only they chose to fight

for these openly, rather than via reformist and diversionary fronts like the Socialist Alliance and Respect.

Nonetheless, I support what is good about your contribution.

Andrew Northall
Northants

Pit amnesia

I read with interest the article 'Forgive and forget?' (*Weekly Worker* April 8). On face value a decent, well-balanced narrative, even if it does draw heavily on the author's own experiences of the miners' strike.

However, it is the last column I take issue with. I have always had a lot of respect for Dave Douglass, even if he does 'gan his own gait' at times. When he stoops to underhand slugging of his own union and figures within it, he detracts from the article as a whole. No union can say it got things 100% right. Indeed, as the oft repeated slogan on union banners states, 'Let us not forget the lessons of the past'.

Dave is also getting to the age where selective amnesia is affecting his sage-like scribbles. For instance, he writes: "Suddenly, the new delegate was identified as a scab." He'd been one since early 1984, but Dave must have forgotten! The man got elected on a pie-in-the-sky 'pension at 50' promise for miners made redundant at Selby. No individual union man could achieve that - it's a question for both trustees and government. This is something David used to know about!

He writes that "this man was removed as a delegate and replaced". Again what he neglects to report or has forgotten about is actually that this man transferred to another colliery! Again, it's a terrible thing to have selective amnesia.

When a lad at one south Yorkshire pit refused to sign for flexible working, in the first instance he was made redundant. On appeal, he was allowed to transfer to a Union of Democratic Mineworkers pit over the border, but was then refused because as an NUM member the employer could not guarantee his safety (this followed alleged remarks made in the 1990s!). The point to this example is that the lad was asked to resign *his* position as a delegate because he had *left*. There is further mileage in this debate, but the point has been made and the record set straight. A final point. Despite the vagaries of the union rule book that Dave so dislikes, there is no mention anywhere that a "scab" cannot stand for office and subsequently be elected.

Chris Skidmore
Yorkshire NUM

Fighting fund

Well spent

With hours to spare before the end of our April fighting fund, we have beaten our £500 target. Thanks to a couple of healthy cheques from TR (£50) and AN (£30) - not to mention a good number of smaller contributions - our total has reached £517.

Well, that's a surplus, but it's a very small one. What we need are a few really hefty donations to give me a bit of breathing space. Especially as once again we badly need to start replacing our computers, but unfortunately the funds are just not there. An extra £1,000 over and above our monthly target between now and the end of July would do the trick, but who among our readers will come up with the goods?

Of course, we do have a good number of regular donors, quite a few paying by standing order, but what we

are still lacking is much by way of recognition from our web readers. Last week our numbers were slightly down at 8,131 hits, but for the third week in a row we received not a single donation via our online PayPal facility.

Disappointing, to say the least. We know we are appreciated, but we don't have much to show for it - not in terms of hard cash at any rate. Yet it's so easy. Just have your card ready, scroll down the home page and click on 'Make a donation'. Fill in the form and follow the instructions - it takes around three minutes, but it's time well spent, believe me ☐

Robbie Rix

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

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE EXECUTIVE

Dead in the water

Arump Socialist Alliance executive committee met on Saturday April 24 in Birmingham. There were just eight of the original 36 NEC members present - I myself decided my time would be better employed at the CPGB aggregate in London rather than spending a day travelling for a two-hour meeting. With the SWP-led majority effectively closing the alliance down at the March special conference, there was not a lot of business to attend to.

The meeting heard a report from Nick Wrack, chair of both the SA and Respect, on the election campaign. Following my resignation as nomi-

nations officer at the March conference, comrade Wrack was selected as my replacement. He will not be overly busy in that post, as the executive confirmed the decision of conference not to contest *any* elections on June 10 - or any by-elections in the run-up to 'super Thursday'.

The meeting heard that a number of branches had asked to stand Respect candidates in the local elections. Such requests have been passed on to the Respect office. Will McMahon, SA office worker, has been seconded to work for the Respect campaign for the duration of the election period.

A vote of thanks was given to Shelley

Margetson, who has resigned as treasurer to take up a job overseas. Heather Cox was elected to replace her. There was no other business.

In times past, I have prioritised attending the SA executive over CPGB internal meetings, where there was a clash. However, with the SA now effectively dead, my priorities have changed accordingly. Reflecting the fact that the focus for leftwing politics outside the Labour Party has moved to Respect, the CPGB will no longer maintain its monthly donation to the Socialist Alliance. We are paid up to the end of June ☐

Marcus Ström

RESPECT

It is a woman’s right to choose

The Muslim Association of Britain did not come into the unity coalition at its foundation. We were told by none other than Respect secretary John Rees of the Socialist Workers Party that MAB was unable to join because of our commitment to equality for gays and lesbians.

This was supposed to be evidence that Respect was not abandoning women’s and gay rights, despite Lindsey German’s comment at Marxism 2003 that they should not be regarded as “shibboleths”. Comrade Rees dismissed as rubbish the idea that the SWP was prepared to dump such principles in order to form a mooted Peace and Justice coalition with the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain and sections of the mosque.

Former president of MAB Anas Altikriti now joins other Respect candidates standing on a platform that is explicit in its “opposition to all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs (or lack of them), sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin or citizenship” and stands for “the right to self-determination of every individual in relation to their religious (or non-religious) beliefs, as well as sexual choices”.

Good, but it is of some concern that MAB should issue a public statement enthusing over George Galloway’s reactionary stance on abortion. Dated April 23, it “welcomes comments made by George Galloway MP on abortion in an interview published recently. Mr Galloway, who is currently leading the newly formed ‘Unity Coalition, Respect’ into the forthcoming European parliamentary elections on June 10, outlines his own conviction that abortion is morally and ethically wrong ...

“These comments, as well as his statements on faith and god in the same interview, will surely be welcomed by British muslims, who see Respect as a real alternative to the main political parties in the approaching European elections. They also affirm George Galloway’s standing as a man of principle who does not shy away from putting his own position on the line for his beliefs and convictions.”

Comrade Galloway was interviewed by *The Independent on Sunday*. And his anti-abortion position was not squeezed out of him. He volunteered it. “He put his own position,” as MAB points out, in the middle of an election campaign. In politics, timing is everything. Is it mere coincidence then that comrade Galloway’s publicly restated his stance and then duly got MAB’s backing for Respect? Or was the whole thing carefully choreographed? Frankly, I’m not sure.

Now that MAB has linked its own opposition to abortion with support for Respect, it is beholden on Respect’s ex-

ecutive to make matters absolutely clear. Does Respect support or oppose a women’s right to choose? Platitudes will not do. Respect’s founding declaration gives the impression of being in favour of a woman’s right to choose: “self-determination of every individual in relation to their religious or non-religious beliefs, as well as sexual choices”. Sounds good, but now we can see that it carefully skirts around the issue of abortion.

Socialist Party and Respect

Ian Page, councillor in the London borough of Lewisham, is the Socialist Party candidate in the Greater London Assembly constituency of Greenwich and Lewisham. There is no love lost between the SP and the main driving force in the unity coalition, the SWP. Yet peace and love was seen to break out between Respect and the SP in that corner of south-east London, after some gentle encouragement from comrade Galloway and others on the Respect executive.

Respect has indicated it would be happy to leave this constituency clear for comrade Page. Only a few details need clearing up. And therein lies the devil. Details. The political commissioner at the BBC has indicated that Respect must stand in *all* London GLA constituencies in order to qualify for a London regional election broadcast. He has admitted in writing that there may be exceptions to this - however, this occasion is not to be one of them. The commissioner has said that he would be happy if Ian Page appeared on the ballot as “Socialist Alternative - Respect”.

This ruling is being jointly challenged by Respect and the Socialist Party, with the latter obviously putting more energy into it than, say, John Rees.

It is a ludicrous and bureaucratic ruling if it stands. The SP and Respect have effectively agreed an unequal but principled deal. Respect would call for a vote for Ian Page in Greenwich and Lewisham and for its part the SP will call for a vote for Respect in the all-London list and Lindsey German for mayor. Let us hope that sense prevails. If it does not, then Respect will stand a candidate in Greenwich and Lewisham to gain a regional broadcast. However, we need not campaign for such a candidate and can still call on all Respect supporters to back Ian Page’s candidacy.

Of course, the SP could just join the unity coalition too. Remember, all nominations are due in by May 5.

Scotland for the Scots

Ever since Tommy Sheridan’s election to the Holyrood parliament in 1999, many socialists south of Hadrian’s wall have pointed to the SSP as the model to

aspire to. And in many ways justifiably so. However, this usually went too far, with an inverted English chauvinism declaring that anything the SSP did was beyond reproach, including their call for Scottish independence. Just let the Scots get on with it ... who are we to criticise?

Well, it now seems it is okay for the SSP to lay down the law to those of us flailing about elsewhere in Britain. SSP secretary Allan Green has written to Nick Wrack, Respect chair, with a wee bit of advice about Wales. Get out. The letter says: “Just as the SSP would urge socialists not to stand against Respect in the elections in England, we urge Respect not to stand against Forward Wales.” This despite the fact the SSP just voted at its annual conference to back Respect in England ... and Wales.

But the real cheek comes in a demand that Respect must never, ever, show its face in Scotland. Comrade Green says: “The SSP is seeking a formal response to our request that you make it explicit that you do not intend to organise in Scotland at any time in the future. The Socialist Alliance has always been clear that it only organises in England. There is, in our opinion, some public ambiguity with Respect. Your spokespersons continue to use the term ‘Britain’ when discussing the future of your organisation. It has also been registered with the electoral commission as intending to stand in elections in England, Scotland and Wales. John Rees has previously indicated to me that this entry was down to the electoral commission rather than Respect. However, the electoral commission website still has this claim. We would be grateful, if you do not intend to stand in Scotland, for you to arrange for your entry in the website to be quickly changed.”

Fancy using the word “Britain”. You’ll be telling me next that there is a British state and a British royal family and a British parliament and British civil service and a British army and a British secret service - not to mention a British working class.

Now comrade Green is a clever fellow. I am sure it has not passed him by that the leading spokesperson and political personality in Respect is a member of parliament for a place called Glasgow Kelvin. Yes, that’s right, Glasgow is in Scotland.

The demand that Respect *never* stands in Scotland is a demand that Respect MP George Galloway must not even contemplate seeking re-election to Westminster in Glasgow - unless he does so as an SSP member. Or else he can just bugger off and play with his mates in England. Either way, it is the high-handed arrogance that unfortunately comes when one replaces internationalism with nationalism □

Marcus Ström

ACTION

London Communist Forums

Sunday May 2, 5pm - ‘Birth of the First International’, using August Nimtz’s *Marx and Engels - their contribution to the democratic breakthrough* as a study guide. Diorama Arts Centre, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 (nearest tubes: Regents Park, Great Portland Street).

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.

Renewing dialogues

Fourth annual day seminar on Marxism and education: ‘Education and the labour process’ - Wednesday May 5, 10am to 5pm, Clarke Hall, School of Education Foundations and Policy Studies, University of London Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1.

Registration from 9.30am. Free, but places limited. To reserve a place, contact Glenn Rikowski: rikowski@tiscali.co.uk

Glasgow Marxist Forum

Public meeting - ‘Socialism and nationalism: allies or enemies?’ Wednesday May 5, 7.30pm, Partick Burgh Halls, Burgh Hall Street, off Dumbarton Road (near Partick rail and underground). Speaker: Hillel Ticktin, editor of *Critique*. marxistforum@hotmail.com

Labour’s radical third term

Meeting for members of Labour Party and affiliated organisations, Thursday May 6, 7.45pm, Clubland, 54 Camberwell Road, London SE5. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Spanish Socialist Party member (invited), John Maloney, PCS. Organised by Southwark Labour Left Network: Maria (07714 206404).

Labour CND

Conference, Saturday May 8, 10.30am to 4pm, Palm Room, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP; Kate Hudson, CND Chair; Carol Turner, Labour CND.

Individuals: Waged £8, concessions £4. Organisations £12 per delegate. info@labourcnd.org.uk

Stop deportations

Public meeting, Saturday May 8, 3pm, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Leicester Civil Rights Movement: 0116 253 1053; priya@hycc.ac.uk

NCADC

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns annual general meeting, Saturday June 5, 12 noon to 5pm, Cars Lane Church, Cars Lane, Birmingham. Lunch provided, crèche available. Reasonable transport costs for anti-deportation campaigns reimbursed.

To attend contact 0121-554 6947; ncadc@ncadc.org.uk

Labour Representation Committee

Founding conference, Saturday July 3, 9am to 4pm, TUC Congress House. LRC, PO Box 44178, London SW6 4DX; 020 7736 6297.

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 and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

Respect events

Wythenshawe: Public meeting - Tuesday May 4, 7pm, Wythenshawe library.

West Norwood: Meeting - Wednesday May 5, 7.30pm, Nettlefold Hall, library, Norwood High Street, London.

Aston-under-Lyne: Public meeting - Wednesday May 5, 7pm, Tawackly, Stanford Street.

Stretford: Public meeting - Wednesday May 5, 7pm, St Matthews church, Chapel Lane.

High Wycombe: Planning meeting, Wednesday May 5, 8pm, Reggie Groves Centre, near Swan theatre, town centre.

Crawley: Raising awareness - Wednesday May 5, 7.30pm, West Green Community Centre, West Green Drive.

Pendle: Launch meeting - Thursday May 6, 7.30pm, Nelson library.

Scarborough: Public meeting - Thursday May 6, 7.30pm, Unitarian church, Westborough.

Crawley: Fundraising stall - Saturday May 8, 10.30am to 4.30pm, the Bandstand, Queen’s Square.

Birmingham: Film showing - *Persons of interest*, Sunday May 9, 7pm, Norton Hall, Alum Rock.

Bridlington: FBU conference fringe - ‘The political fund and the alternative to New Labour’, Tuesday May 11, 5pm, Southcliff Hotel, South Marine Drive.

High Wycombe: Launch meeting, Wednesday May 12, 8pm, Reggie Groves Centre, near Swan theatre, town centre.

Halifax: Public meeting, Wednesday May 12, 7.30pm, YMCA.

Berwick-upon-Tweed: Public meeting, Saturday May 15, 1pm, Ravensholme Hotel, Ravensdowne.

Birmingham: Video showing - *Stop the war*, introduced by John Rees, Sunday May 16, 2pm, Midlands Arts Centre, Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston.

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_____

RESPECT

True Aslef - <http://trueaslef.com>

Serving notice

As we saw last week, the official Aslef website is a typical example of the boring sites common to the trade union movement. Hand in hand with the dull aesthetic and equally plodding content was the complete absence of any hint of the union's current civil war. That trade unionists and socialists have to rely on rumour and the bourgeois press for news about the problems facing a working class organisation is nothing short of a disgrace. But of course this is par the course for union bureaucrats of all stripes. Aslef is not the only union to have this 'not in front of the children' attitude, and it is doubly troubling that the majority of the left echo this approach to internal differences.

It may be a cliché, but the old phrase, 'Never judge a book by its cover', is especially pertinent in the case of the 'True Aslef' website. Its simplistic look suggests something built by someone with fairly rudimentary knowledge of HTML programming, reinforcing its claim that there is "no official sanction from any official of Aslef". This does not stop it attempting to seize the rank and file mantle, claiming the very name 'trueaslef' is about train drivers having a 'creative and positive' involvement in 'their' industry. This smacks of the discourse of partnership beloved of rightwing bureaucrats throughout the labour movement. On the positive side, it notes "differing views and strong arguments may take place and the airing of these must be a benefit". A pity that the Blairites unofficially responsible for this site only see fit to wear their democrat hats here. This apparent openness, however, comes with one important caveat: "Should any offensive, prejudiced or otherwise inappropriate material be posted on the forum we will aim to remove and block such material".

Clicking on the 'News' link allows the viewer to enter the site proper. This page is headed by four links: 'Home', 'News', 'Forum', and 'News archive'. Why they bother with the second link is beyond me, considering that this page is the news page. Anyway, the page scrolls down and down ... and down, being indicative of regular updates by the site's admin. At the time of writing, the first item comes from the curiously named 'Titan', who comments on the allegedly undemocratic practices of the so-called 'Footplate Campaign Group'. It would have been helpful if the website, even as an afterthought, told the general viewer what this 'footplate' campaign was about, because the official Aslef site is not forthcoming either. Still, this piece is instructive because it and the subsequent reply by the site's webmaster reveal a bureaucratic mindset. 'Titan' discusses the expulsion of five members for their involvement in trueaslef, and raises the claim that pro-Mick Rix leftwingers have a 'mole' on the website team. The webmaster pours scorn on this, and goes into a lengthy discourse about some of the factional moves around the London district secretary position. What comes out pretty clearly is a concern with capturing posts in the apparatus rather than a serious concern with union democracy.

The same is true of the next piece, a sneering item on the ongoing financial investigation and the announcement that the executive is no longer sitting in permanent session. Instead, this piece claims administrative power is now concentrated in the hands of the union's presidency and vice-presidency. Just slightly further down the page is a leaked email from Mick Rix that attacks the background of Paul Blagbrough, the author of a limited report sanctioned by general secretary Shaun Brady (without executive approval) into Aslef's murky finances. Our webmaster's reply passes over this, suggesting it is just an attempt to discredit Blagbrough, and therefore his report. He seems unconcerned that this document is by someone who acquired a less than spotless financial record when he was at the budgetary helm of New Labour. The full report is posted further down the page for those interested. The rest of the 'News' items are in much the same vein.

Sadly the site's much vaunted forum has been closed, and appears to have been so since April 2. Apparently, some people are alleged to have taken on multiple identities for the purpose of "swaying arguments". So clicking on the forum link takes the viewer to a bland "The forum is currently in maintenance mode" message.

In sum this site is useful for Aslef members and interested parties. Despite the rotten politics on offer, it serves notice to the Aslef rank and file of the urgent need for them to reclaim their union from the bureaucrats - whether of the right or left ☐

Phil Hamilton



For open borders and a worker's wage

Anas Altikriti stepped down as president of the Muslim Association of Britain in order to stand as a Respect candidate in Yorkshire and Humberside, where he tops the list for the unity coalition. He spoke to Peter Manson

Why did you feel it was necessary to resign the presidency of MAB?

Two main reasons. Firstly the improbability of combining the two duties. MAB has become a huge enterprise, and the responsibilities of gearing the organisation after the anti-war movement to face the rising problems and concerns of the muslim community in the light of the anti-terror laws and their targeting at home and abroad by right-wing extremists, fascists and even, unfortunately, official legislation was more than a full-time job. Normally my working day consists of 16-17 hours, seven days a week, and attempting to run an election campaign at the same time was impossible.

The second reason, which I also think is extremely important, is that MAB as an organisation needed to have the freedom to make its own choice. I made my choice as an individual - and most of the executive, I would say, have also declared their support for Respect. But there were talks to be had with the Liberal Democrats, with the Greens and possibly even with various Labour candidates and it would have been impossible for the president to have been standing for Respect while the organisation was talking to others.

MAB may still throw its weight officially behind Respect - the decision hasn't yet been made. A number of people within the leadership have certain concerns that, if we did do that, then in some areas - the North West, for example - we might be spreading ourselves too thinly and perhaps allow the likes of the BNP to make an impact. I personally do not agree, and neither do the majority of the MAB members and leadership, but they were the concerns of certain individuals on the left and they have to be respected. It was important to have contact and communications with other parties and see what kind of potential they have for serving the interests of the muslim community before an official announcement was made. But eventually I do think that MAB is heading towards full support for Respect.

What is it that attracted you to the coalition?

One of the major aspects was that Respect speaks a different language from the main parties. We have arrived at quite a bottleneck in the political scene, where Labour, the Tories and even the Lib Dems are saying the same thing. Differences over policies - at home as well as abroad - are artificial and superficial and have no profound implication on the way the country is heading. Respect is, I think, a way out of the bottleneck.

Also I do not hide my personal admiration for George Galloway. He is a man of principle and in today's politics, to be honest, we lack people of principle, people who would put their careers and personal welfare on the line for what they believe in. I'm not a professional politician, but for me at least he has restored a lot of hope that has been lost in the midst of what's been going on for the past two years.

What would you say is the strongest part of Respect's declaration?

No war, end of occupation, together with the rights of workers and people in the public sector. Apart from those paying



Joining hands with SWP

lip service, I don't see amongst the main parties any real stand for the pensioners, for the right of students to free education, for the restoration of some kind of dignified pay for people in the health service, education and transport.

I'm proud to have been one of the figures in the anti-war movement - MAB was one of the main pillars - and Respect's stand in favour of an ethical foreign policy and to fight for dialogue and peaceful negotiations with all those with whom we differ is something that is vital in a world that has been blighted by war and bloodshed.

Those elements are the strongest and the most appealing. I have been speaking with George at so many forums and at every single one people welcome those particular points. They do feel that, whilst the pay of nurses, doctors and railworkers has been plummeting, we continue to be able to spend billions and billions on killing elsewhere in the world. That's something which people just can't stomach any more.

One of the main driving forces in Respect is the Socialist Workers Party. What do say to those who might think it strange for a muslim organisation to be in an alliance with revolutionary Marxists?

That is a question that was first posed more than two and a half years ago, when we started off this movement in the aftermath of 9/11 and the escalation towards war in Afghanistan. Some even said that it would be an 'impossible alliance'.

The fact of the matter is that I act as a muslim. All these thoughts I'm giving you are not merely because I want to win an election or because I want to gain personally or promote my own particular agenda. It's something I deeply believe in as a muslim. We have a tenet in islam and that is to collaborate and co-ordinate with all human beings - whatever their race, religion, creed or background - in order to spread the realm of good, of justice, of truth, of freedom. Therefore it comes as no surprise at this particular moment - when the concerns of the majority of people around the world are focusing on the widening gap between rich and poor, the decline of the

status and standard of living for those who uphold society and keep it together through their work in the public sector, whilst wars continue to arise - that we, together with the socialists and, as you say, the revolutionary Marxists and others, join hands, simply because those notions are now paramount.

Of course that doesn't mean that we will agree on everything. We recognise in the anti-war movement that we will arrive at certain points where we will disagree, but at this time the most important thing - the highest of concerns, if you like - is over matters where we agree entirely.

Perhaps a section of MAB has reservations about working with 'godless communists'.

Not in MAB. There were reservations in certain corners of the muslim community - in terms, firstly, of whether this could be a successful venture and, secondly, obviously for religious reasons. These latter doubts were put to rest quite early on, simply because our consultation with clerics, with scholars - around the world and here in Britain - led us to the conclusion that it's obligatory to work with those who agree with us, whoever they might be, whatever their faith or lack thereof, in order to spread what is good and prevent what is evil. If this is the priority of the day, you collaborate with anyone.

As to whether it could be a success or not, this was found to be baseless during the two-year campaign and the manner in which we worked together in the anti-war movement. So within MAB there is now a clear conviction that this is the right way to go.

It's not in any way a Machiavellian approach of the end justifying the means. It's an approach that has been informed by our religion, our faith. People are free to believe as they wish and to live their lives as they deem fit. Our belief is that every single person will be held individually responsible for their own actions. It's none of my concern what anyone else believes or practises in their private lives. Generally and in public life we share a common interest, and that is sufficient for us to join hands. **Nevertheless you've joined hands**

within an organisation that has ‘socialism’ in its title. So would you describe yourself as a socialist of one kind or another?

I wouldn’t describe myself as a socialist, but as someone who believes entirely in social values and norms. I think there is a lot to be gained from the modern term of socialism and what it entails. Islam has a lot in common with it - equality, the dignity of people, rewarding their efforts and upholding society, performing well in public life and so on. We agree on many such terms, although, when it comes to the practice, we may differ. But that is to be expected and there shouldn’t be a problem with it.

Some say you might have a problem with the clause in Respect’s declaration that refers to self-determination regarding sexual choices.

As muslims we recognise the fact that we live in a secular society, where absolute freedoms are the norm. People have come to agree that there are freedoms in all spheres of life, including sexual liberty. I as an individual may have reservations in that regard, but I don’t hold this against anyone, nor do I have the right to do so, whatever their sexual orientation is.

I have no right as a muslim, nor is it my business, to interfere in anyone’s personal lifestyle - that is for every individual. I have my own views on homosexuality, etc, but I am practising a freedom that is also offered to others to do as *they* wish. We’ve agreed a common ground, we’ve agreed general terms and labels, but also to differ on how we practise and interpret certain things. That just shows once again the diversity not only of the anti-war movement, where we had people of all representations and manifestations, but also that it’s channelling through into Respect - it does reflect society in its wider context.

You said that Britain is secular society, but there is no separation of church and state, for example. Are you in favour of secularity?

I would disagree with your statement that we don’t live in a secular society - I think we do in reality. Whether we have a monarch that is the ‘defender of all faiths’ or a church that has certain public roles, they have little influence in general.

The law stipulates that there must be a religious assembly every morning in all state schools.

Yes, but in general that is on the decline and people are less and less inclined to involve religion in their public lives.

Do you think religion should be separate from the state in Britain?

To be honest, I haven’t given it much thought and I don’t think Respect has a particular policy on this. I think that religion is important and I personally was brought up in a religious household. There are certain things to be gained from religion, especially codes of morality and ethics and so on - which is not to say that people who do not practise religion are lacking in those things. Spirituality offers a certain element to the persona that is important in these times.

But we live in a society which allows people to exercise or not whatever religion they wish and that is something we recognise as muslims. We uphold our religion and reserve the right to offer what we see as solutions to today’s problems - whether they be relating to crime, family values or social life - but we also recognise the right of others to forego religion and to live their lives as they see fit.

In order to ensure equality between those who practise religion and those who don’t, we say that religion should be kept separate from official state structures.

I agree entirely that personal rights and freedoms have to come into this. For instance, there are muslim students who attend state schools and they ought to have the right not to attend prayers administered by the church, as would anyone of another religion or none.

They do have that right already, of

course, but should a religious service be required by the state in the first place?

I would disagree to some extent that it is a must to separate religion from our school system. It is important to have a spiritual or religious side to education and to leave it open to students to decide. The other side of the coin is that it is wrong to enforce the *lack* of religion. As I say, I haven’t given this matter much thought and I don’t think I can elaborate further.

You mentioned the role of the monarchy. The CPGB has proposed that the ‘R’ in Respect should stand for ‘republic’. What are your views on that?

Once again it’s a matter I haven’t actually given much thought to. I have to be honest and say that at this moment I don’t think it’s a major concern of the people. It often comes up in the sense of how much we’re spending to preserve the monarchy, but I don’t think that’s enough. There are a lot of arguments against having a monarchy but they aren’t being portrayed sufficiently.

But there are also arguments for the status quo. I look at examples around the world and I feel that maybe we wouldn’t actually be progressing if we were to follow their example. There are many arguments for and against.

Let me turn now to the question of migration. Our position is that people should have the right to live, work and settle anywhere in the world and there should be no restrictions on this. What is your opinion?

I agree. I personally am an immigrant, arriving on these shores when I was about three years old. Sometimes I am reminded by people who think I’ve forgotten my place that I’m an immigrant and it amuses me when people say, ‘Go home’, when my home is in Leeds.

We live in a world where borders are very superficial entities. It is a fallacy to regard immigrants as a burden, as the right do, without looking at the contribution that the mobile population has made to our country and to the world. Countries such as Canada and Germany are welcoming immigrants, albeit in a controlled manner. We do have an ageing society and a decline in the younger and more dynamic population. We do have problems in certain sectors of manufacturing industry and public services and therefore a mobile population - coming in or going out - is something that would assist that situation.

The argument is not being put forward in any kind of reasonable or proportionate manner - it comes from the far right with their false claims. It’s quite extraordinary that the term ‘immigrant’ is almost on a par with ‘terrorist’. Yet we have more than 18,000 doctors in the NHS who come from outside Europe. If the far right had their way and, as Mr Le Pen said at the weekend, these people were ‘resettled’ conveniently back in their homeland, the NHS would collapse. But when anyone speaks up for immigrants, they are almost seen as being unpatriotic.

There is another aspect as well, linked to the anti-war movement. When we meddle in other countries’ affairs, launch wars and ruin people’s futures and lives, they will seek to go and live in other lands safely and securely. So one way for the issue of immigration to be resolved is to bring about measures that help third world countries rather than assisting dictators and tyrannical regimes, to stop our funds going towards establishing a

weapons trade of incredible proportions. Then we would see people living happily and prosperously in their own lands.

I for one was born in Iraq and, all my life, my dream and that of my parents is to go back. I barely have any memories of Iraq, but I still feel an affinity towards it. But the way the right is using this issue borders on the fascist.

One more point on the commitment of candidates. We think elected representatives should only accept the equivalent of an average skilled workers’ wage. What is your view on this question?

Today I was reading about Mrs Kinnock and her expenses and I was shocked. My word, just think of it, if I got to Brussels! But I agree - politics is becoming a gravy train rather than a service to people, with the system being exploited by politicians who want to increase their bank accounts. This is something that mustn’t be accepted. I agree that we should try out a system where MPs or MEPs get salaries comparable to public sector workers, civil servants and the like and see how many people would then be fighting for office.

All Socialist Alliance candidates committed themselves to a worker’s wage and to handing over the rest of their salary to the movement. What do you think of such a commitment personally?

It’s an admirable one. If that was a policy in Respect, I wouldn’t say no to it - it would be helpful in a sense. At the same time, what we ought to establish - and this is something I take from being a muslim - is that there will always be rich and poor. Therefore there is an obligation on the wealthy - and those that have jobs, positions, talent or skills that allow them better financial rewards - to take a

bigger responsibility for community projects.

In islam we have what is called *zakat*, or alms, and so, the more you have in terms of wealth, the more you are liable to pay towards charitable and community projects. That way, the gap between rich and poor will remain proportionate, acceptable and reasonable and the affinity between all sectors of society will be valid, with no segregation between rich and poor.

But, as I say, the stance taken by the party you refer to is admirable - showing a commitment to serving, rather than seeking personal gain, and this is paramount.

What do you hope will come out of Respect? Should it become a party?

I think the potential for it developing into a party is quite considerable. The things I’ve seen over the past two weeks since I’ve started campaigning have been beyond what I had imagined. However, it’s important to see what happens in the European elections. The main objective is to send a very clear message or, as George Galloway often puts it, give Tony Blair a bloody nose. The Labour Party needs to be reshaped and basically put back together again - we must show that it can’t afford to take people’s votes for granted any longer.

Labour needs a change in leadership. We need to reclaim the notion of the party that caused us all to celebrate when it came back to power in 1997. If that happens, there may be room for the view that we’ve done what we aimed for - reclaim the Labour Party.

But if that doesn’t happen, then I think Respect does have the principles and the cornerstones to becoming a political party ☐

Beat the Tories

Camden Labour councillor **Lucy Anderson** will be contesting the Tory-held London assembly constituency of Camden and Barnet on June 10. Justifying Respect’s decision to stand against her, the SWP’s Rob Hoveman called comrade Anderson a “Blairite” (*Weekly Worker* February 26). Mark Fischer spoke to her



Why should Londoners vote for Labour as opposed to any other party?

If you look at the London assembly Labour group manifesto, it makes very clear the progressive policies we will be standing on. For example, we have pledged free childcare places for the under-fives within 10 years. That sort of thing is not being put forward by the other parties. We are committed to more improvements on the bus network and doing what we can to improve the tube. For Labour - as opposed to other major parties - public transport is always going to be a top priority.

You actually approached the RMT union for support, didn't you?

Yes, the RMT is officially backing me. I’m totally in support of the four key points it is trying to promote, including for example renationalisation of the rail network as an ultimate goal. Privatisation clearly has not worked and it’s time we reversed it.

But what about the alternatives on the left? These organisations also support policies like renationalisation of rail.

Yes, but the essential argument for voting Labour is that we can make a real difference in London and no one else can. Especially as in the next four years we will have a Labour mayor and a Labour assembly group working closely together.

Yes, but aren't you being a little

one-sided here? After all, in a way, Ken Livingstone himself is viewed as an opponent of New Labour? His readmittance to the party was widely seen as a blow against Blair. Isn't he an 'alternative on the left' as well?

Certainly, I think George Galloway’s comment that Ken has crawled back into the Labour Party on his belly makes no sense. When Ken was an independent, he basically carried forward what was a Labour agenda ...

An old Labour agenda ...?

Whatever - I know Frank Dobson talks of a ‘heritage’ Labour agenda. I am not really interested in those sorts of labels. I am interested in peoples’ specific positions on specific issues. It was not in Ken’s interests to be outside the party, it was not in the party’s interests to have him out there either. Talking about ‘New Labour’ or ‘old Labour’ is neither here nor there when we have the job of beating the Tories in front of us.

Are you a Blairite?

No, who on earth called me *that*? I think you should talk to some of my comrades on Camden council about me being a “Blairite”! I am just *not*, it’s as simple as that. Look at the current questions I have been campaigning about on the council - against the privatisation of our new sports centre, against changes to the funding of our community nurseries - and the war, of course. That assertion is simply not true.

Where did you actually stand on the Iraq war?

I am on record of having opposed the war. It was unlawful, it was counterproductive and I expressed those opinions openly at the time. Actually, I think that was a key factor in my selection. I made my anti-war position clear in my address to the 3,000 Labour Party members who were eligible to vote in the selection in Barnet and Camden.

Obviously, the war has been a huge problem for a lot of our traditional supporters. It has been a problem for a lot of ethnic minority voters - again traditional Labour supporters. I think we need to do everything we can, as Ken Livingstone has done, to move on from it and address the concrete needs of those communities, as well as the growth of the sense in security, the fear of terrorism, etc.

How is it possible to move on when British troops are still part of an occupying army in Iraq?

Of course, that’s a huge problem. But in terms of being a London assembly member, or even the mayor of London, other than making our opposition quite clear, there is not a great deal we can do. I will continue to support the mayor’s stance on this.

How do you view initiatives like Respect?

It’s a mistake, in my opinion. I believe people should work inside the Labour Party. Of course, I support people’s right to protest in this way, but they are clearly wrong. What are they hoping to achieve in terms of results?

They can’t win. In my constituency, they could possibly get Brian Coleman - the disgusting, rightwing local Tory - back in. That would be a disaster. This is one of the reasons why Ken Livingstone has been making so clear that he supports me all the way - for instance, in his recent articles in the *Morning Star* and the *Camden New Journal*. He underlined that everyone should vote for me ...

So you're actually on Ken's team?

Well, no. I’m part of the Labour team for Barnet and Camden. But I have very close links with Ken’s team and Nicky Gavron’s team. And I am very confident of winning. I would say to Respect that - with the prospect of their intervention allowing a particularly obnoxious Tory in - they should really have a serious think about what type of protest vote they are going for.

I have talked to Respect directly about this - they said they would ‘think about it’. I would challenge Respect to identify anything I stand for that most of their supporters would not support also. I’m doing a number of hustings in the next few weeks and no doubt Liz Wheatley [Respect’s local candidate] and other Respect supporters will be coming along to those meetings. If there are particular issues these people would like to bring up there for clarification, I would welcome the opportunity ☐

Fifteen to twenty-five

May 1 is undoubtedly a historic day for the European Union and its pampered bureaucracy and the managerial and political representatives of big capital. The EU is to gain 75 million new citizens and it will go from 15 to 25 member-states. With the inclusion of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the EU will have a combined population of around 450 million and constitute the world's largest economic bloc.

The EU has nowhere near China's 1.2 billion, or India's 1 billion people. However, in terms of productivity and living standards it is in a completely different, higher, league. The EU's GDP is marginally bigger than that of the United States (though the US has a much smaller population - 290 million). True, according to a recent World Economic Forum survey, the US remains "significantly more competitive"; nevertheless the EU is still committed to become the "most competitive and dynamic, knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010" (*Financial Times* April 27). Whether or not that particular target is met is a moot point, but palpably the EU constitutes the only serious *potential* challenger to US global hegemony. And although May 1 will boost the EU's GDP by a mere five percent - most of the accession countries are relatively poor, with rates of productivity between a half and a fifth less than the EU 15's average - there is no doubting the political and strategic importance of expansion.

The ghost of Yalta has finally been exorcised. Eight of the 10 were either once an integral part of the USSR or constituted its defensive shield against Nato and the capitalist west. Now Europe - a tidal continent of the mind - laps at Russia's flanks and borders the Ukraine and Belarus. Russia's front door, St Petersburg, its second city, is just a short hop away.

Last year George Bush put on a lavish White House banquet for Romano Prodi, the president of the European Commission. Keen to impress his host, Prodi reportedly boasted about imminent European expansion and how the EU was destined to become a key world player in its own right. "Sounds like the Roman empire, Romano," remarked a well briefed Bush (*The Economist* December 2003). Presumably a barbed put-down.

Opponents of "ever closer" European unity - whether American neocons, left reformists or xenophobic little Britishers - like to equate the EU with the Roman empire. A jaundiced comparison which implies fragility, hubris and the inevitability of ruin.

Memory of Roman glory has, though, inspired one imperial unifier after another. Charlemagne, king of the Franks, famously established an empire which stretched from the Pyrenees in the west to the Danube in the east and from Hamburg in the north to Sicily in the south. His *Renovatio Imperii Romani*, the Renewal of the Roman Empire, was formally inaugurated in December 800 AD and, though it quickly disintegrated following his death, the idea of *Pax Romana* continued to exert a powerful material influence.

In Charlemagne's footsteps there followed Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries, Napoleonic France and Hitler Germany. Succeeding generations donned the trappings of the past. Eg, to reward loyal minions, in 1802 Napoleon founded the Légion d'Honneur on the model of the Roman Legio Honoratorum, and he invoked Charlemagne during his 1804 coronation. Nazis gave the Roman stiff-arm salute and cried "Heil Hitler!" - a copy of "Hail Caesar!" And when a

new SS division for French volunteers was formed it was named the Charlemagne.

In actual fact, however, the foremost historic model informing the minds of the most far-seeing European federalists, is not imperial Rome nor its subsequent epigones - Charlemagne, Habsburg Spain, Napoleon and Hitler. Ironically it is America. In terms of method, scale, ambition and possible consequences the only parallel to the EU under capitalism is the formation of the USA in 1787 out of the loose confederation of 13 states which emerged victorious from the revolutionary war against the British crown (the US, of course, heavily borrowed Roman forms, symbols and styles - look at its mixed constitution, imperial eagles and the classic architecture of Washington's famous state buildings).

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing - chair of the EU's constitutional conference - has compared his own work to that of the founding fathers of the US. His draft constitution is designed to inspire supranational loyalty. The preamble is drawn in part from the French Revolution's 'Rights of man' and the US declaration of independence. There are plenty of fine words about "human dignity", "the rule of law", "tolerance" and "fundamental rights" (part II). The EU is described as a "union of European states which, while retaining their national identities, closely coordinate their policies at the European level, and administer certain common competencies on a federal basis" (title III, article 9). He proposes a system of dual citizenship - home country and EU (title II, article 8). The draft constitution also contains mention of the possibility of "voluntary withdrawal" from the EU (article 59). An innovation. Till now there have been no provisions for opting out.

Prior attempts to create European unity have relied on war and the brutal domination of one country over others. Europe may have been united in the past, but this was unity achieved only with the manacles of national oppression. That is no longer the case. Since the end of World War II the European bourgeoisie - particularly in France and Germany - have had to pursue their aim of integration through the market, without war and in a quasi-democratic fashion. With the huge and constantly renewed power of the modern working class and the horrors of fascism seared onto the collective consciousness, they have little choice in the matter. That is why in Europe the philosophy of Georg Hegel has been eclipsed by that of Emmanuel Kant.

Not that the working class is in the driving seat. Continental unity is being forged in the overarching interests of capital, which is organising Europe into a blood bank - a bigger and bigger source of surplus value, ever ready to meet its vampirish needs. Indeed Giscard d'Estaing's draft constitution contains a veritable peon of praise for the capitalist market and the virtues of competition (title VII, chapters I and II). However, capitalism is inherently fractured, not least along national lines, and is moreover in historic decline. With each year that passes it becomes ever more impossible and riven with contradictions. Hence European unity proceeds fitfully, through an endless series of tortured negotiations and backtracking national compromises.

Compared to the US in the 18th century, European unity has therefore evolved thus far at a much more cautious and protracted - and for our rulers an altogether safer - pace. There has been no great wave of liberation nor the voluntary coming together of risen peoples. Nevertheless, European integration, though piecemeal and only quasi-demo-

cratic, has gone a long way since 1957. The common market - born of the terrible slaughter and mutual destruction of World War II and then the cold war system which divided the continent - has become a 25-member giant.

By streamlining this huge political-economic bloc and putting it under centralised direction, leading federalists envisage steadily moving towards the day when the EU becomes the dominant imperialist power and thereby can reshape the entire world so as to accord to its interests. Meanwhile, in the here and now, militarily and politically the EU punches far below its economic weight. It resembles something like the 13 confederated American states before 1787 - the parts are still more important than the whole. The EU is a fractious amalgam of very unevenly developed states. But the grain of development is not hard to discern: wider, in the form of the 10 new members and in a few years maybe yet more; deeper, in the form of enhanced politico-legal institutions. The EU already has the European Central Bank and the euro, a council of ministers, the European Commission, an elected parliament and a European Court of Justice. But how deep? That essentially is the question Giscard d'Estaing's constitution sought to answer.

Since he delivered his draft on July 10 2003 the 15 member and 10 candidate governments have been locked in fraught negotiations. Spain - a middle-ranking EU state - strongly opposed a diminution of its powers. Poland - another middle-ranking state - raised similar objections. December's deadline for final negotiations came and went and for a while it appeared that the whole thing would end in hopeless stalemate. Over the next few weeks, however, under the Irish presidency, there will be another attempt to hammer out an agreement. Irish foreign minister Brian Cowen wants an intergovernmental conference on May 17 and a final deal struck by mid-June.

Even if an agreement is cobbled together, there are other hurdles to cross. Not only is it necessary to get the European and national parliaments to vote for it; many countries will have to submit the constitution to a referendum. That now includes the United Kingdom, of course. Having flatly rejected all such demands, Tony Blair performed his sudden and humiliating U-turn. Tarnished by the war and occupation of Iraq, under growing pressure from Michael Howard's reinvigorated Tories, hounded by the rightwing press and crucially threatened with a withdrawal of support by Rupert Murdoch and his media empire, he decided to go for the least worst option and kick the constitution into the long grass. There is unlikely to be a UK referendum till after the next general election - 2005 or 2006. Nevertheless a high-risk strategy - not least because of lurid xenophobic propaganda, the very idea of an EU constitution is at present deeply unpopular with a large swathe of the British electorate.

Naturally little Britain nationalists - of the left variety as well as the right - have objected to the draft constitution virtually as a matter of principle. They loath everything European, fear any further loss of sovereignty and want to keep the pound in perpetuity. Tony Benn and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain logically thus join together with the most obnoxious elements of the far right, including the UK Independence Party and the British National Party, in demanding a British withdrawal from the EU. A reactionary perspective which, it hardly needs saying, owes nothing whatsoever to internationalism.

Not that the Respect coalition and its leading component is noticeably better.

SWP leaders such as Chris Nineham dismiss the EU and the draft constitution as "boring" and a "non-issue" in Britain. An approach which combines economic, albeit surreal, self-delusion with the anarchist's contempt for politics. As to Respect's belated manifesto, it is bland, minimalist and essentially negative. Diplomatically it steers around the thorny question of withdrawal, seems to oppose a European constitution *per se*, nationalistically defends existing state rights and paints a woefully inaccurate picture of an EU run by the "unelected" bureaucracy, ignoring the *elected* council of ministers, which actually constitutes the EU's central executive.

It is vital to highlight what we are against - lack of democracy, the neoliberal agenda, the growth and stability pact, plans for a fortress Europe, etc. However, socialism requires a positive programme. We must say, even if it is in outline, what we are for.

The EU draft constitution should be carefully studied. It is an eminently worthwhile exercise to distinguish between what should be kept and what should be deleted. Drawing up an alternative draft on that basis *and deciding what should be added* obviously necessitates long and painstakingly detailed exchanges on the left. That comrades from Italy and France want a "line of discussion" at the London European Socialist Forum over October 15-17 wholly devoted to the EU constitution is therefore to be warmly welcomed.

For our part, we say that if the working class is ever to realise the goal of socialism in Europe, or anywhere else, it is essential to actively intervene and take a *lead* in the battle for democracy under capitalism. Without that socialism is impossible. Where the member-states are haggling over a cribbed and cramped, quasi-democratic EU, the left is duty-bound to develop an alternative vision of a united Europe in which democracy is greatly expanded and filled with a definite social content.

Whether European unity is to be federal or confederal, it is at present not being brought about under the direct or indirect impact of working class self-activity - as envisaged by Marxists such as Fredrick Engels, Karl Kautsky and Leon Trotsky. So the working class has no reason to endorse, applaud or join with either the EU federalists or the confederalists who stubbornly insist on maintaining existing state rights.

Communists wish in general to bring about the closest voluntary unity of peoples - and in the biggest state units at that. All the better to conduct the struggle of class against class and prepare the wide ground needed for socialism. Hence our formulation, "To the extent the EU becomes a state that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU" (*Weekly Worker* 'What we fight for').

That explains why we are far from indifferent about the EU draft constitution and the project of unifying Europe. Where they have made their bureaucratic Europe from above, we must make our democratic Europe from below. There should be no truck with calls to pull the UK out of the EU because it is a "bosses' club", or because it is not "socialist". A clear case of pandering to left nationalism. One might just as well suggest pulling the working class out of Britain.

Not that such a daft programme has not been tried. In the 18th and 19th century there were those utopians who argued that communists should have nothing to do with bourgeois society. It was by definition a capitalist or "bosses' club". They established colonies in the Americas, which would practise equality and fraternity. Suffice to say, they

were ill-fated. All failed. And not surprisingly Marxism has consistently criticised such schemas. The utopian communists' denunciation of capitalism provided wonderful ammunition for propaganda. However, opting out of the struggle within capitalism was attacked as tantamount to surrender.

Capitalism and the capitalist state, as it historically presents itself, is where the socialist-communist project starts. The journey begins not with the destination, but the first step. So begin with the capitalist EU. We therefore argue for a positive programme. A social Europe, within which the political power and economic interests of the broad masses - albeit initially under capitalism - are qualitatively advanced. To bring forward this immediate aim the following seven demands, specifically concerning the EU, are presented:

1. For a republican United States of Europe. No to Giscard d'Estaing's constitution. Abolish the council of ministers and sack the unelected commissioners. For a single-chamber, executive and legislative, continental congress of the peoples of Europe, elected by universal suffrage and proportional representation.
2. Nationalise all banks in the EU and put the ECB under the direct, democratic control of the European congress. No to the stability pact and spending limits. Stop privatisation and so-called private finance initiatives. End subsidies to, and tax breaks for, big business. Tax income and capital. Abolish VAT. Yes to workers' control over big business and the overall direction of the economy. Yes to a massive programme of house-building and public works.
3. For the levelling up of wages and social provisions. For a maximum 35-hour week and a common minimum income. End all anti-trade union laws. For the right to organise and the right to strike. For top-quality healthcare, housing and education, allocated according to need. Abolish all restrictions on abortion. Fight for substantive equality between men and women.
4. End the Common Agricultural Policy. Stop all subsidies for big farms and the ecological destruction of the countryside. Nationalise all land. Temporary relief for small farmers. Green the cities. Free urban public transport. Create extensive wilderness areas - forests, marshes, heath land - for the preservation and rehabilitation of animal and plant life and the enjoyment and fulfilment of the population.
5. No to the Rapid Reaction Force, Nato and all standing armies. Yes to a popular, democratic militia, equipped with the most advanced and destructive weaponry.
6. No to 'Fortress Europe'. Yes to the free movement of people into and out of the EU. For citizenship and voting rights for all who have been resident in the EU for longer than six months.
7. For the closest coordination of all working class forces in the EU. Promote EU-wide industrial unions - eg, railways, energy, communications, engineering, civil service, print and media. For a democratic and effective EU Trade Union Congress. For a single, centralised, revolutionary party: ie, the Communist Party of the European Union.

Armed with such a continental-wide programme, a social Europe, the United Socialist States of Europe, can be realised. By taking the lead over every democratic shortcoming, by coordinating our defensive and offensive activity, by building upon our strength and extending our room for manoeuvre through securing far-reaching economic and political gains, we can change the "bosses' club" into a workers' club □

Jack Conrad

ESF

Their Europe or ours

The 'Campaign for a European Constitutional Democracy' met publicly for the first time in Istanbul on April 17, at the latest assembly to prepare for the third European Social Forum. So far, mainly organisations from Italy and France have been involved in this campaign, which aims to develop a *European charter* as a counter-document to the European Union's draft constitution.

This good and somewhat overdue initiative was greeted with scepticism by Chris Nineham (Socialist Workers Party) and Redmond O'Neill (Ken Livingstone's adviser and a member of the underground sect, Socialist Action). They used the small meeting in Istanbul to declare how *unimportant* the issue of the EU and its constitution are to the British people - meanwhile in the real world Tony Blair buckled under massive pressure and announced his U-turn on a referendum. Although

comrade Nineham did not know of Blair's volte-face at the time, he has since repeated the absurd notion that the EU constitution is a non-issue in Britain. At the latest meeting of the British ESF coordinating committee on April 22, he ridiculed the French proposal that our London ESF in October 2004 should focus on the EU and its constitution. He insisted that the question of war would have to be the main topic throughout, because "we are living in the heartland of neoliberalism".

The notion that both issues are important and that both could prominently feature seems beyond the SWP. It is the war or nothing for our comrades, who still seem to be under the illusion that they can catapult a big section of the anti-war movement into SWP membership. It has not worked so far, but it looks like the comrades are still trying.

The SWP and their allies in Socialist

Action are of course very much mistaken if they believe the EU is a "non-issue". Quite the opposite: it is a highly controversial question and hotly debated by the labour movement. The TUC, for example, has backed not only the EU, but also its draft constitution. It believes that the introduction of some of its labour laws would actually lead to improved working conditions for many British workers. A number of big unions are less enthusiastic and reject the constitution - without, however, putting forward an alternative vision for a Europe from below.

Ditto in the Labour Party: the parliamentary Labour Party is of course in favour of the constitution - while the left and the majority of constituency activists are dead against it. The *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain is so concerned about the EU that it advocates British withdrawal.

Fortunately, our European comrades

tend to be more sophisticated. The meeting in Istanbul was presented with two documents: a short 'Declaration for a democratic and social Europe' and a four-page background paper, entitled 'Constituent movements'. Both will be further discussed at an assembly in June, called 'Proposals for another Europe'. We are hoping to make them available on our website.

Reading through them, I got the feeling that the comrades are desperately trying to straddle two different constituencies. On the one hand, a number of organisations involved in this campaign have representatives in the European parliament, not least Rifondazione Comunista (Italy) and the Communist Party of France. The 'Declaration' especially reads like a brief election manifesto. On the other hand, those same parties have been heavily involved - mostly through front organisations - in the so-called social movements in their respective

countries.

Both areas of work have been kept apart rather artificially in the last few years. For example, political parties are not allowed to openly participate in the European and World Social Forums. How the left should contest the European elections has not once been discussed at the ESF. Instead, the same people who go to the ESF have met separately to discuss joint election slates in either the 'European Left Party' (the gathering of mostly 'official' communist parties and Rifondazione) or the 'Anti-capitalist left' (Fourth Internationalist-led).

It says a lot about the state of the British left that, despite the wholly inadequate and hesitant moves of our European comrades on the EU and left unity, they are far in advance of anything on offer from the likes of the SWP □

Tina Becker

Common space

Franco Russo, a member of the national committee of Rifondazione Comunista, is active in the campaign for a democratic, alternative EU. Tina Becker spoke to him in Istanbul

For three years now, this working group has been meeting on and off to discuss the European constitution and the response the left should develop. Tell me about the work you have done so far.

The European question is about overcoming the national state in order to respond to the process of privatisation, the destruction of the welfare state and workers' rights. I understand very easily why people, especially in Sweden and many on the left in Britain, are very concerned about the European Union and the draft constitution. So am I, of course. But the problem is that today it is not just the nation-state which is carrying out neoliberal policies - it is increasingly the EU. It is the main driving force in destroying the conquests made by our social movements in the 20th century. I feel our common space is Europe.

On the other hand, we have to recognise that the bourgeois leaderships in the 1950s had a very impressive vision. They answered a crucial question: the question of war and peace in Europe. For centuries, their rivalries led to wars and mass destruction. Their method was unification through the market, which in their view was the best way to overcome the deadly conflicts between France and Germany, France and Britain, and so on. This was very imaginative, you know.

The forerunners of the EU also served as a bulwark against communism in Europe, didn't they?

The left and communist parties were not able to respond to this unification through the market - mainly because of the great barrier that used to divide Europe. The communist parties were concerned with support for the USSR and refused to engage in the new fight on the European

level. For decades, they simply did not take the question seriously. But now, the anti-globalisation movement has the intellectual capacity and the actual strength to take this task on. We have expanded a lot recently, bringing together social movements, unions, migrant organisations, political forces, etc.

The question that faces us today is this: are we happy to remain in the nation-state or do we attempt to overcome this by establishing what we in Italy call a supranational democracy? In the fight for this democracy we think it is possible to have a constituent movement that fights for a society built bottom-up, not top-down.

There are divisions between Blair, Schröder and Chirac on Iraq and other issues. But all of them want a strong fortress Europe, with a strong military wing that can play a leading role in the geopolitical global theatre.

Our view is different: we fight for the demilitarisation of Europe to establish peace. This is a key task for us. Another example: we have to cut the link between the nation-state and citizenship. All people of any colour and any background, migrants or not, who reside in Europe should be entitled to European citizenship and all the civil, political and social rights that come with it. This means building a new society. Up till now, the nation-state has stopped us acting together, so we need to overcome it to build a new social contract on our terms. It must be constructed around universal rights. Every person should have the right to dignity, education, health, free movement, sexual choice. This is the very real and daunting constitutional challenge that faces us.

You propose a great many detailed changes to the draft of the EU constitution. I could not help but get the impression that you put forward the view that the draft could be amended further and further until it has become ours.

I can see why you got this impression,

but it is not what we are trying to achieve. The document was discussed by a number of organisations and attempts to provide a firm base from which we can operate - in and out of parliament. For example, article IV-7 of the constitutional treaty stipulates that national governments make all decisions when it comes to the constitution. If this process is left in the hands of the governments, they can decide on the rights and the space that every individual in Europe can have. But if this were in the hands of the EU parliament, I think the grassroots movements could exercise a great deal of influence on MEPs in order to reform the constitution in the way we want.

For example, a few months ago, we in Italy launched a petition for European citizenship, aiming for one million signatures across the continent. We want to pressurise the EU commission and parliament in this way.

You seem to concentrate a lot on parliamentary change.

The most important thing is of course the movement from below - against privatisations, against the liberalisation of the job market and so on. Margaret Thatcher, too, was against the bureaucracy of Europe, but she wanted to exploit this slogan in order to implement the same neoliberal policies herself.

At the same time, if we can introduce some element of democratisation into the European constitution through the EU parliament, then that would be a good thing. We must overcome the artificial distinction between the institutional route and the grassroots movements. The movement is so large that we can embrace both elements. For example, in Italy, we have often used parliament to make propaganda against the war. At the same time, we have organised millions of people on demonstrations. There is no exclusive way to go about protesting. But we are also not the only ones who are radical. We sometimes need to form alliances with other political parties and unions. We have to be radical, but



"Revolution is a process"

we must also seek unity. This is not very easy.

Our movement is a constituent movement. I refer you to Bruce Ackerman's excellent book *We the people* about the revolutionary character of the American constitution. He argues that there is not one single point in history in which the whole constitutional structure is remodelled. It is part of a longer process - civil wars, popular movements and so forth.

How do you square that with being a member of a revolutionary party?

I believe that revolution is a process too. The sort of revolution that was made in Russia was of course - more or less - a single point in history. But it resulted in a very bad outcome, because they did not agree on the need for permanent revolution. I do not mean this in the Trotskyist sense, but the need for a continuous revolution: to build step by step the extension of democracy, the enlargement of rights.

Let me quote the last sentence of the document: "The EU must help to establish global centres of democracy to stop the world's most powerful countries and economies from destroying our planet." This could be interpreted as a plea to support the good European bourgeoisie against the bad American one.

Of course governments have different tactics, but I do not subscribe to a division between good government and bad government. We should not support one over the other.

But for the first time in our history we

have the chance to make a difference. We have failed in the last decades. Think about the Stalinist economy: this was exploitation of workers, peasants and nature. We are now able not only to modify, but radically change the social and economic order. Now we have different parameters: social rights for everybody - universal rights.

When enterprises invest they do it for profit. The Soviet Union was not able to substitute something else for this system. Now we can. The capabilities of human beings can be unleashed in this period. We all have different needs: disabled people have different needs from non-disabled people, young people from old people, etc. Society should respond to all those different needs. We need to plan how to spend our resources, how to produce for all those needs. But it is important that this plan is not imposed from above in a Stalinist way, but comes from the people below. Everybody must have the right to get involved in the decision-making process. Our democracy must be radical and all-encompassing □

Europe assembly

'Proposals for another Europe - towards the London European Social Forum', Saturday and Sunday, May 22-23, Rome.

ALTERNATIVES



“The new platform is, above all, a grouping of CPGB partisans. We are loyal members, accept the party’s rules, are committed to unity in action, and fully support the statement ‘What we fight for’, published in every issue of our paper, the *Weekly Worker*. We recommend you read that excellent summary, and (as it says) if you accept its principles, we urge you to join the CPGB.

The name of our platform is formed of initials standing for Republicanism, Equality and Democracy - a somewhat shorter acronym than *Respect*’s, but one which broadly encapsulates the principles it has rejected”

Red Platform founded

Regular readers of the *Weekly Worker* will know that there has been a serious debate in our party recently over the proper tactics to adopt towards *Respect*. Our March 21 aggregate passed a resolution requiring us to work for “the biggest possible vote for *Respect*”, and failing to make that electoral support conditional on the three issues we had previously been pressing on the coalition’s leadership: republicanism, open borders, and workers’ representation on a worker’s wage.

Some of us argued that this was a break with our original strategy. We engaged with *Respect* to highlight its opportunist nature, and its retreat from the politics of the Socialist Alliance. The *Weekly Worker* following the *Respect* launch carried the headline “A bonfire of principles: John Rees ditches the politics of the Socialist Alliance for the platitudes of *Respect*”. This set a tone we expected to maintain until either we had won *Respect* to socialism, or it had collapsed into irrelevance through the weight of its own contradictions. Six comrades signed an article calling for “No unconditional vote for *Respect*!”, and a resolution was proposed to overturn the decision of March 21 at the next aggregate.

That took place on April 24, and the debate there was far fuller and more evenly matched than the preceding one. We had clearly increased our support, but still failed to secure a majority. A move to overturn the previous resolution and decide our voting policy closer to the election was lost by less than two to one, and another to impose conditions on electoral support by a larger margin. An emergency motion to refuse to support *Respect* candidates who were members of the reactionary Muslim Association of Britain was closest of all, but was still defeated. A full report of the aggregate appears elsewhere in these pages [see opposite - ed]. Although at the time of writing we had not read this report, it doubtless gives a fuller description of the debates.

Two of us feel that not only must this debate go on, but that it has raised more general questions about our strategy and method. We have therefore decided to form a platform within the CPGB to argue our case. An outline of that case appears below, and we would urge comrades sympathetic to it to join us, and help shape the platform and, above all, our party.

**Manny Neira
Cameron Richards
CPGB Red Platform**

Founding statement

The Red Platform of the Communist Party of Great Britain is, above all, a grouping of CPGB partisans. We are loyal members, accept the party’s rules, are committed to unity in action, and fully support the statement ‘What we fight for’, published in every issue of our paper, the *Weekly Worker*. We recommend you read that excellent summary, and (as it says) if you accept its principles, we urge you to join the CPGB.

The name of our platform is formed of initials standing for Republicanism, Equality and Democracy - a somewhat shorter acronym than *Respect*’s, but one which broadly encapsulates the principles it has rejected.

Our aims are:

I. To promote socialist unity

The CPGB is distinctive on the left in demanding not agreement with, but

only acceptance of, its programme. Any real mass workers’ party will draw together thousands of comrades of different political backgrounds, and hundreds of thousands of workers, students, anti-capitalists, peace campaigners and others. The way to build a party from such forces is not, as *Respect* seeks to do, to lower its politics to a mere universally unexceptionable general beneficence, but to present a clear programme for a socialist future, actively work for its achievement and invite others to join that struggle - while, if necessary, debating the politics driving that action.

Note that we seek socialist unity and not merely unity. The class collaborationist appetites of *Respect* were starkly revealed at their founding conference, as they jettisoned every policy which would make unprincipled alliance possible. The absence of greater bourgeois forces in *Respect* is no credit to the coalition: merely the failure of any such forces to be tempted by the *Respect* leadership’s craven flirtation. This reaches perhaps its lowest point in its association with the reactionary Muslim Association of Britain.

Whatever our differences with them, we recognise comradeship with members of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, Workers Power and many other left groups. We believe that we should support progressive projects to cohere them into larger, democratic structures, and promote our partyist project in those structures.

We therefore call for:

1. Maintenance of critical engagement with *Respect* all the way to the ballot box. We must support only candidates who campaign for republicanism and open borders, and will accept a worker’s wage if elected: as by doing so they will be breaking with the populist *Respect* agenda. We must not support members of the Muslim Association of Britain.

We believe that *Respect*, as currently formed, is a blind alley for working class representation: an unprincipled, opportunist electoral project that stands no chance of winning power and will dull rather than raise political consciousness on the left and in the class. In the unlikely event that, say, John Rees wins election as an MEP, he will use this to reinforce the political thesis he spelled out at the *Respect* launch: that the SA failed through being socialist, that the working class is not ready to hear a socialist message, and that it can be tricked into voting for revolutionary change in society without realising it.

We agree with comrade Marcus Ström’s analysis that *Respect* candidates would only accept our conditions if there were a “political revolution” in *Respect*, and should therefore make our support contingent on precisely that revolution taking place. The fact that such conditions were not applied to the SA or the Socialist Labour Party reflects their objectively different nature: whatever their weaknesses, they were progressive and inherently partyist projects. *Respect* is the political negation of the SA, a regressive tactic employed by the leadership of the SWP to engage with the anti-war movement not as political leaders, but opportunist hangers-on.

2. Rejoining the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform. The SWP leadership behaved contemptibly in not leaving the SA once it had ceased to support it, but in remaining members simply to use its majority to attempt to crush it as a possible source of socialist opposition. The SADP, which the CPGB helped found, is right to oppose them. Its comrades are

our natural allies: it is barely more than a year since the CPGB was proposing to launch a joint SA minority paper with them. Though some resist engagement with *Respect*, they do not make this a condition of membership, and a minority believe, as we do, that *Respect* cannot simply be ‘worked round’. We should be still be part of that debate with them. We believe that comrade John Bridge was wrong to lead a walkout from the SADP, but argue that, even if he had been right, the grounds on which he did so are now irrelevant. Demanding that all members of the SADP retain paper membership of a defunct wider SA is now absurd.

3. Intervention into the Labour Party. Though hijacked by an overtly pro-bourgeois leadership in the form of ‘New Labour’, the Labour Party retains its historic importance as a mass bourgeois workers’ party. Vitrally, it retains the affiliation of most British trade unions, and we cannot call for their disaffiliation while there remains no alternative working class party: for that would be to call for them to drift into apoliticism, syndicalism and chaos. Neither do we believe that the Labour Party can be ‘reclaimed’, as some sincere socialists who are still in Labour believe. Our aim should be to develop contacts within the party, to intervene at the meetings of its left groupings, and ultimately to publish a journal specifically addressing its politics.

II. To defend party democracy

The remarkable and continued success of the *Weekly Worker* is a credit to the CPGB and represents our main political weapon. Attracting something like 10,000 readers a week to both print and electronic versions, it is the most widely read journal of the British left: politically relevant in a way that *Socialist Worker*, though supported by thousands of paper-sellers at every demonstration and left meeting, cannot hope to become.

The paper’s reputation and importance are built on its openness. It offers not only the politics of the CPGB leadership, but of those who disagree both inside the party and out. It reports both the party’s own debates, and the debates going on in other left organisations. Indeed, it is read not least by members of other groups wanting to find out what their own leadership are doing!

But the party’s democracy is not a device to keep the paper interesting. Lenin’s call for “freedom in discussion and criticism, unity in action” - democratic centralism - is a consciously theorised form of a method which is instinctive in working class organisations. Workers have power only by acting together. A single striker can be replaced: a whole shop floor on strike halts production. Once the majority have spoken, all must act: but the minority need not be silent.

This is because unity is not enough. How can we determine the best strategy, the most effective tactics? Only through debate. No leadership group, however experienced or theoretically advanced, can be relied upon to decide for any workers’ collective. Without democracy, they become myopic and intransigent, and the organisations they lead increasingly weak, distant, and irrelevant. The stories of a dozen left sects in living memory come vividly to mind: what happened to the high hopes which surrounded the formation of the SLP?

Democracy is not only right - it works. Nor is it sufficient to rely on a formal structure or democratic ‘tradition’. The

struggle to maintain democracy must be constant and fierce, and is never finally won. Complacency precedes bureaucracy. The CPGB has a strong, open culture: we must all actively defend it.

We therefore argue that:

1. The Provisional Central Committee must operate openly in front of the membership. To be able to hold the PCC to account, we must know what it is doing and why. The PCC must therefore distribute minutes of its meetings to all members. The minutes should omit only material which if published might harm the party or the legitimate personal interests of identifiable members.

2. The *Weekly Worker* must be open to the membership. The editor should begin from the position that articles submitted for publication by members should be carried: any decision to ‘spike’ is serious and should be open to question by our comrades. Such challenges are valid, and the assertion that the editor has the right to spike an article is not, in itself, sufficient response. There are legitimate grounds for denying publication, but they must be provided if such a decision is questioned.

3. We should cultivate criticism. Criticism is not a right: it is a duty; and comrades discharging that duty should be treated with respect. Naturally their criticisms may not be accepted, and be politically opposed, but accusations of disloyalty, indiscipline or dishonesty should only be made with the most serious justification. The leadership particularly should remember that it acts from an inherently stronger position than any rank and file critic, and the way in which their criticism is received creates the atmosphere which any other comrade, who might contemplate criticism in the future, breathes. It is true that we should help all comrades develop their political resilience for the struggle, but the attitude that comrades should simply be tough enough to cope with whatever is thrown at them is a macho pose which has no place in a communist organisation. Criticism should be treated as a principled activity unless there is the strongest reason to genuinely (and not merely rhetorically) doubt its motivation.

III. To build the CPGB

We believe that the CPGB pays inadequate attention to the simplest and most direct method of building a new Communist Party: recruitment. The reluctance to become a mere recruiting sect is understandable, and indeed commendable - we do not wish to see casual contacts signed up to some empty ‘membership’ without understanding, activity and commitment. However, we believe that it is possible to make the opposite mistake, and neglect the importance of winning politically conscious individuals to our banner. Further, merely ‘signing up’ a new comrade is not sufficient: it is merely the beginning of a process of learning and deepening which should continue throughout that new comrade’s political career, and not stop even on election to leadership!

This is what an American bourgeois politician might call ‘motherhood and apple pie’: a statement so obviously worthy that it is difficult to dispute. However, we believe that, in this case, political approval is stopping short of action, and wish to see a fresh initiative adopted to winning individual comrades to the CPGB’s banner.

Join us!

If you support the principles outlined above, join the Red Platform.

Workers of the world, unite!

CPGB Red Platform: email: red@cpgb.org.uk, web: www.cpgb.org.uk/red, tel: 0794 997 996 5.

AGGREGATE

Critical support for Respect confirmed by members

However, a minority think support should also be conditional and exclude MAB candidates

The April 24 members' aggregate of the CPGB voted to stand by its previous decision to "work to ensure the biggest possible vote for Respect on June 10" despite a move to overturn it by a significant minority.

The previous aggregate (on March 21) had passed the following resolution: "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." Many comrades thought the decision had been taken too hastily without enough debate, while others believed that the Party should have adopted such a position weeks earlier. The debate among comrades about Respect - what it is, whether to support it and if so in what way - has continued in the *Weekly Worker*, in Party meetings across the country, and via email. The Provisional Central Committee therefore arranged another aggregate on April 24 to give members an opportunity to continue the discussion collectively and to put forward and vote on alternatives.

Comrade Cameron Richards proposed the following: "This aggregate overturns the decision of the previous meeting to give blanket support to Respect in the June elections. Instead, the CPGB will advocate voting for Respect where individual candidates in single-member constituencies (GLA, mayor, council) announce their support and campaign for the following: open borders, republicanism and a worker's wage. Given the closed list nature of the multi-member constituencies for the European elections and the 'top-up' section for the GLA, it will be impermissible to vote for Respect in these elections except where the candidate at the top of a slate campaigns for open borders, republicanism, and a worker's wage."

Steve Cooke proposed the following alternative as an amendment at the start of the meeting: "The CPGB supports a policy of critical engagement with Respect, the unity coalition. The CPGB will advocate voting for Respect where candidates announce their support and campaign for the following: open borders, republicanism, and a worker's wage."

Comrade Marcus Ström opened the debate, saying that, although the *Weekly Worker* is not an open notice board and the editor must retain control of what is published, nevertheless the CPGB welcomes articles from members with different views on the question, and we can feel proud that we have open debate in our paper.

Openness has always been a strength of the CPGB - another is our understanding of the current historical period. The delabourisation of the Labour Party, the defeat of the left and the dominance of the bourgeois pole within the Labour Party, makes it likely that fragments will split away. Previous attempts to build an alternative, the Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Alliance, emerged at times of defeat for the left. Respect is different in that it came out of success - the 2003 anti-war movement.

All sides in the debate agree on this, and also agree that our objective is to build a Communist Party. Therefore differences in tactics must derive from different analyses of the political nature of Respect, comrade Ström acknowledged. Respect is a left populist coalition - it is

not socialist: in that it does not posit rebuilding society on a new basis. When they gain political power such coalitions can metamorphose into popular front governments. But in his view it is a mistake to dismiss such left populist coalitions as inevitable future popular fronts and refuse to support them. Respect may become a popular front, or it may be the embryo of a left party in Britain. We are entering Respect very critically: despite what some of our more stupid critics claim, we are hardly sucking up to the Socialist Workers Party.

Although we want a political revolution in Respect, it would be counterproductive to make our support conditional on such a revolution, concluded comrade Ström. It would enable the SWP to portray us as a group working within Respect but not wishing for it to perform well.

Comrade Richards spoke next, introducing his motion. He described the resolution passed on March 21 as a profound mistake. Implying both blanket and unconditional support for Respect, it commits us to voting for reactionaries who may stand on the Respect ticket, he said. The source of the mistake is the PCC, which has been zig-zagging on Respect and its predecessor, Peace and Justice, since last summer. Comrade Richards said he agreed with the analysis given in Jack Conrad's 'Party notes' column, headed 'The necessity of class' (*Weekly Worker* July 3 2003), which "gives a correct analysis" of the previous Peace and Justice initiative.

Comrade Richards rejected suggestions that Respect is fundamentally different from Peace and Justice. Its principles on the rights of women and minorities are vague enough to attract the mosque, and avoid confronting the question of the right to abortion. He said he does not analyse Respect on the basis of what George Galloway professes to believe, but on the basis of the behaviour of the SWP. The PCC now thinks Respect is a watered down version of the Socialist Alliance, but this is a mistake. Respect is "the negation of the Socialist Alliance". When the SWP joined the Socialist Alliance, they were forced to relate to the rest of the left, he said. In Respect, they ignore all on the left who are not toadies.

Supporters of the March 21 motion argue that there is no logical difference between calling for a vote for Respect and the for numerous candidates we have supported in the past. But, argued comrade Richards, these candidates have usually been left-moving breaks from Labour or have had an implied partyist logic. Respect is not about uniting socialist forces or moving towards a working class party: it is a completely degenerate organisation; as comrade Ström himself said, it would take the overthrow of the Respect leadership for it to acquire any socialist principles. "Do we want to follow the SWP down every blind alley?" asked comrade Richards rhetorically. Are we saying, as the SWP does, that we have to be seen to give support to things we don't agree with in order to get a hearing?

Our best tactic would be to call on SWP members to rebel against their leadership, as we did last summer. Our current position isolates us from principled people remaining in the Socialist Alliance. We have no new allies in Respect, and we have lost our old allies, comrade

Richards concluded.

During the long debate that followed, comrade Mike Macnair proposed an amendment to comrade Richards' motion, so that it would read: "This aggregate overturns the decision of the previous meeting to give blanket support to Respect in the June elections. The CPGB will make recommendations for voting in the week of the elections in the light of the character of the election campaign." He said it is impossible at this stage to predict what recommendation will best express our class and partyist political position. It will almost certainly be different in different regions. We were premature to decide to call for a vote for Respect so far in advance of the elections.

Comrade Tina Becker disagreed, saying the amendment suffers from failure to give a lead, especially as it is most unlikely there will be drastic changes between now and the beginning of June. Comrade Lee Rock also rejected the amendment, as we cannot intervene effectively in Respect if we refrain from deciding until June whether we will recommend voting for it. He said that if Respect consisted only of the SWP it would not be worth bothering with, but we are able to meet new people at Respect meetings. He would not rule out calling for a vote for others, not least the Socialist Party. As he did at the March aggregate, however, comrade Rock advised against "putting all our eggs in one basket" - that is, making Respect our only area of work. We were right to leave but we should have a positive engagement with the SA Democracy Platform, he said, and revive our longstanding policy of left rapprochement.

Comrade Peter Manson described Respect as a potential left break from Labour, which we want to encourage. There was no contradiction between, on the one hand, continuing to press Respect candidates, and the SWP in particular, on the principles of open borders, a worker's wage and republicanism and, on the other, voting for those candidates even if they declined to campaign for such principles. He pointed out that the left - apart from ourselves and a few other notable exceptions - has *never* campaigned for republicanism. To insist now that they must do so in order to earn our vote would be to mark us out as sectarians - the equivalent of saying we can only vote for ourselves.

Agreeing with comrade Richards that the unity coalition is a negation of the Socialist Alliance, comrade Manny Neira said the SWP created Respect to reflect the lowest-common-denominator politics of the anti-war movement, not to push that movement in a socialist direction. Comrade Ström agreed that Respect is a retreat from the Socialist Alliance, but it is also an attempt to politicise the anti-war movement (on an inadequate basis, admittedly) - something we called for throughout last year. Comrade Macnair thought it impossible to have coherent political representation of such a broad and diverse movement. He said that Respect was made up of George Galloway, who wants a route back into the Labour Party; the Muslim Association of Britain, which wants to cohere an organisation of political islam and whose approach is purely tactical; the SWP, which is moving to the right; and, by contrast, small but significant sections of the trade union movement and some Asian forces, which are moving to

the left.

The clearest disagreement between supporters of the March 21 resolution and supporters of the Richards motion was seen on the question of whether or not Respect is a continuation of Peace and Justice. Comrade Richards described Peace and Justice as the embryo of Respect. Comrade Ian Donovan said it was hard to analyse Peace and Justice, because it never actually happened - it was only a rumour. But if the SWP had dropped the "shibboleths" of gay and women's rights, and made a bloc with the mosque on the mosque's terms, it would not have been supportable. But this is not an accurate description of Respect. The Muslim Association of Britain refuses to join Respect precisely because of Respect's commitment to gay and women's rights. Muslims in Respect are being pulled away from reactionary views. Comrade Manson said it was clear at the January 25 launch conference that Respect is not the same as Peace and Justice.

Comrade Stan Keable made the point that our exposure of the opportunism of the SWP's plans for Peace and Justice helped to ensure that the MAB was not able to be part of Respect on its terms, an example of the good we can do by being involved. Comrade Phil Kent said that, as part of our fight to forge a Communist Party, our aim should be to split the SWP. In his view, the struggle for such a party must be waged inside Respect, just as in the 1980s it was fought in the old, Eurocommunist 'official' CPGB. He said this is not the first time we have been "jesuitical" in our support for candidates with rotten politics.

Comrade Neira recalled defending the CPGB against comrades in the AWL and SA Democracy Platform who accused us of selling out to the SWP, which had betrayed the Socialist Alliance. He explained to them that we went into Respect because that is where we can engage with sincere and hard-working socialists in the SWP. By criticising the basis of the project and its direction, we forced the SWP speakers at the January 25 founding convention to expose their lack of principle. John Rees made a "clear statement of opportunism". Comrade Neira said that, for weeks after, the *Weekly Worker* turned up the heat on the SWP and provided information on Respect to the left. He thought this effective line would be continued until the election. But the CPGB has "changed its position", he claimed. To call for the largest vote for Respect does not serve the end of winning the whole organisation for socialism or of breaking the best elements from it.

In response to claims that recent issues of the paper have been soft on Respect, comrade John Bridge said we are carrying on the same attacks on the SWP's opportunism. When people like Michael Lavalette and Ken Loach agree with us on a workers' wage and open borders against the SWP line, it exposes the contradictions within Respect. Michael Lavalette must have known when he agreed to be interviewed in the *Weekly Worker* that the SWP leadership would not condone this.

Comrade Anne Mc Shane was concerned that observers may think we are supporting Respect as it is now. We should do our best to make it clear that we are supporting it in an attempt to make it what we want it to be - exactly as we had done in the SLP and SA.

There was disagreement about the likely consequences of a high vote for Respect in the elections. For the working class, SWP members standing as Respect would obviously be better representatives than New Labour or the Liberal Democrats, said comrade Rock. Also if Respect candidates are elected, it will overcome the general feeling in society that there is no point in voting and specifically no point in voting for the left. Comrade Becker pointed out that the partyist logic of the project would be boosted, with the need for hard policies and for branches to become real.

Comrade Neira, in contrast, thought that if the SWP succeeds in getting people elected they will see it as a confirmation of their line that socialism does not work and must be jettisoned. It will lower the consciousness of those involved. Comrade Bridge said things have to be seen in the round: success would have its negative side, but this would be outweighed by the positive aspects (was the election of six Scottish Socialist Party MSPs to be regarded *simply* as confirmation that embracing nationalism pays?). But he thought that there was little possibility of Respect doing well, and nothing we can do could tip the balance. Comrade Becker said the worst outcome would be a failure of Respect: the SWP would retreat to sectism and there would be no left unity project anywhere.

After a long and comprehensive debate, the aggregate voted to reject comrade Macnair's amendment by a margin of just less than two to one, comrade Cooke's amendment by four to one, and comrade Richards' motion by a similar margin.

Comrade Richards then proposed an emergency motion: "Under no circumstances do we vote for a member of the MAB." The comrade said the MAB is an organisation of islamic reactionaries which is trying to infiltrate the left, as well as mainstream political parties. People are being hoodwinked. When the left plays games with the mosque, it is the left which ends up paying the price. In recent decades, the left has made several literally fatal errors in failing to recognise the true nature of political islam behind its anti-imperialist face.

Speaking against this, comrade Bridge insisted that you cannot prejudge what an individual thinks on the basis of what organisation they come from. You have to look at what they are actually saying. Comrades Mc Shane, Ström, Donovan and others supported comrade Bridge - MAB candidates would be standing on Respect's platform, which we had decided was worthy of critical support.

This emergency motion was also defeated, but much more narrowly. Therefore the resolution passed on March 21 remains CPGB policy. Comrade Ström explained, however, that in calling for the largest vote for Respect he does not rule out supporting other candidates in some circumstances - he mentioned Lucy Anderson, the Labour candidate for Barnet and Camden, who had endorsed the RMT's four points. Comrade Manson said if an individual Respect candidate started to campaign on a reactionary platform, then of course we would urge no support. Comrade Becker stressed that campaigning for Respect does not mean being uncritical.

As comrade Ström said, we must work within Respect understanding both its weaknesses and its potentialities □

Mary Godwin

DEBATE

Assessing Iraq and mapping out our tasks

Two sets of theses on Iraq were circulated prior to the CPGB's April 24 aggregate. The first, 'Theses on the Iraqi intifada', were drawn up by Ian Donovan, the second, and much longer, 'The occupation of Iraq, the struggle against it and the tasks of communists' is Mike Macnair's alternative. In the event time overran and neither were discussed. Nevertheless, the question of Iraq is highly topical and in certain respects controversial. In order for the left to orient itself properly in relation to these events there needs to be a full and open debate not least in the pages of this paper

Theses on the Iraqi intifada

1. There has been a qualitative change in the configuration of forces engaged in armed opposition to the imperialist occupation of Iraq since the United States, as chief component of the occupying coalition, declared war on Muqtada al-Sadr, his al-Mahdi militia and their followers in general.

2. In the year prior to this, there was a molecular growth of discontent, which tended in the direction of passively supporting resistance. Yet the forces resisting displayed contempt for the Iraqi masses, and willingness to kill many of them, as part of an adventurist and nihilistic campaign to make Iraq 'ungovernable'. These forces appeared to be

mainly from the sunni minority, who have been accustomed to ruling in despotic fashion over the shia majority, particularly during the Ba'ath regime. It appears likely that elements formerly of that regime made up a significant portion of this 'resistance', along with sectarian sunni islamist types. Thus they were incapable of sinking roots into the shia population.

3. This retrograde 'resistance' reached its nadir in the sectarian massacre of shia pilgrims in Karbala in early March 2004.

4. The entry of al-Sadr's shia islamist forces into the fray has transformed this 'resistance' into something that has the features of a national uprising.

Its mass support is shown by the mobilisations it has given rise to, the mass popular sentiment for national unity against the occupation, transcending the sunni-shia division in Arabic Iraq, and pressure from below that forced 'moderate' clerics and even leading collaborators to condemn US threats and atrocities against both sunni and shia insurgents, who now have control of several cities.

5. Communists stand with the Iraqi masses against the coalition occupiers, now that a considerable section of them have entered the struggle. We do so in the knowledge that there is a serious potential danger from the forces cur-

rently leading this mass movement. We do not hide our criticisms and our warnings of the danger of an Iran-type theocratic development. But we also warn the Iraqi working class and socialist movement that if it does not participate and attempt to bring its own insights and strategy to the masses participating in the struggle, it will be handing over a monopoly of this struggle to the radical clerics.

6. However difficult this may appear at this point in time, the Iraqi left must find a way to participate in this movement as an independent force, as openly as circumstances allow. To proclaim a plague on both houses, or to hide away

from the national struggle behind pretence of trade union purism, will not save the left from the possible consequences of a strengthened islamist movement. Only the growth of its own influence within the anti-imperialist movement can change this balance of forces.

7. The task of the left internationally is twofold: to generate genuine international solidarity with the Iraqi masses struggling against imperialism; and to find ways to assist the Iraqi left in shifting the balance of forces within the national uprising away from the various islamist currents that at the moment wield mass influence □

Ian Donovan

The occupation of Iraq, the struggle against it and the tasks of communists

1. Against the occupation and British participation in it

1.1. The primary task of communists in Britain is to fight against the British state and its imperialist operations. We are defeatist in relation to these operations: that is, we would be willing to see Britain defeated in a war with an imperialist rival, let alone a colonial war, even if the enemy is pre-capitalist or reactionary anti-capitalist.

1.2. We therefore fight for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Iraq and an end to all direct and indirect British support for the US war effort. To the extent that the movement of opposition to the war in Iraq attains a mass character, we would urge mass action (strikes, etc) to sabotage the British war effort.

1.3. We recognise the character of the United Nations as an imperialist instrumentality and therefore warn against any illusions in the UN. We would oppose any British participation in any UN 'peacekeeping' operation in Iraq, and fight for the anti-war movement as a whole to do so. We should point out that the history of such 'peacekeeping' operations is to create new colonial protectorates (Bosnia, Kosovo) and to promote communalism and the division of the working class.

1.4. Since our responsibilities as communists in Britain are primarily to fight the British state, the tasks outlined above are our primary tasks. In these tasks we can make temporary practical agreements with, in Bebel's phrase, "the devil and his grandmother"; certainly, so far as possible, with islamist tendencies in Britain.

2. For solidarity with the workers' organisations in Iraq

2.1. As communists we are proletarian internationalists; and this means that our tasks are not only to fight against our own imperialist state, but to give such support as may be possible to the proletarian movement in every country.

2.2. Given the concrete situation in occupied Iraq, this means developing work in the British workers' movement for solidarity with the workers' organisations in Iraq. The fact that these organisations may be, in our view, to some extent marked with sectarianism (Worker-communist Party of Iraq and organisations it leads) or have ambiguous relations with the occupying powers (Iraqi Communist Party and organisations it leads) or that we may have little knowledge of them (ICP central command, ICP cadre) does not alter this task.

2.3. At the same time, it is part of our duty as communists to develop our own analysis of the occupation of Iraq, the political situation in that country, and their strategic implications, and to discuss these as far as possible not only with wider forces in the British and international workers' movement but also with militants of the Iraqi workers' organisations. This flows from the sort of international proletarian movement we seek to create: one characterised by open, democratic collaboration in which there will be genuine differences of view. We should not give the impression of second-guessing the tactical judgments of comrades on the ground; but it is not genuine political solidarity to refuse to express differences, either with 'those who are fighting' (Socialist Workers Party on the 'Iraqi resistance'), or with 'our own comrades' (Communist Party of Britain on the ICP; Alliance for Workers' Liberty, albeit less clearly, on the

WCPI).

The following theses, under heads 3 and 4, should be understood in this framework. They are not intended to offer a global programme for an Iraqi party, which is not our business, but to address (a) the immediate catastrophe and how to fight it and (b) issues currently debated on the British left on this question. They are therefore silent on such issues as women's rights, constitutional design and labour law, which are prominent in, for example, the WCPI's programme.

3. Defeat the imperialists through the common action of the Iraqi and international working class

3.1. The US-UK invasion and occupation of Iraq has destroyed the Iraqi Ba'athist state, which was in origin a neo-colonial 'decolonised' state regime. In its place it has put a condition of state failure characterised by incipient warlordism (like Lebanon before the Syrian intervention, Somalia ... and so on) loosely presided over by coalition troops. The coalition cannot *build* a state because it has no legitimacy within Iraq, because it systematically excludes from power those forces which could, potentially, create a state, and because its preferred Iraqi politicians are merely kleptocrats. But it has sufficient military power to *prevent the construction* of an Iraqi state.

3.2. It follows that resolution of the immediate crisis in Iraq in the interests of the Iraqi population as a whole has two strategic elements: (1) It is necessary for the imperialist troops to be driven out. (2) There is a need to create a state which can overcome the condition of state failure - which implies addressing the class, national and religious contradictions

within Iraqi society that drive the incipient tendency towards warlordism.

3.3. Strategy for getting rid of the imperialist troops has to recognise the fact that a direct, head-to-head military defeat and expulsion or destruction of imperialist forces is impossible due to the imperialists' total air superiority and effective monopoly of armour. The simultaneous commitment of Iranian, Turkish, Saudi, Syrian and Jordanian military assets against the occupiers *might* alter this position, but in the light of the Yom Kippur war probably would not, and is in any case most unlikely. Even if it occurred and did alter the military relation of forces, it would be met by US use of nuclear weapons.

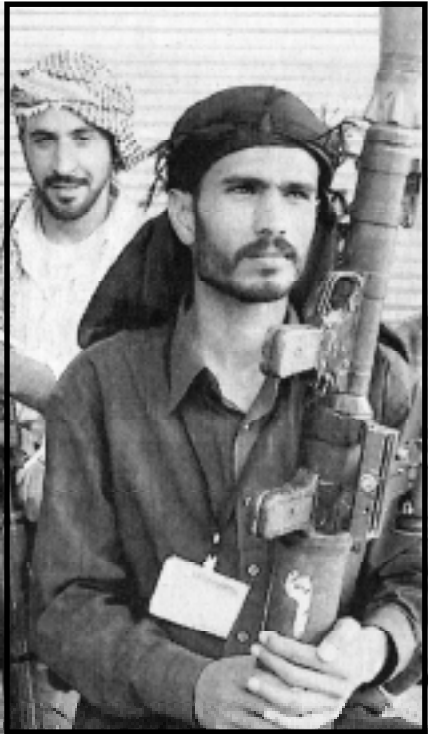
A strategy for getting rid of the imperialist troops would therefore have to be founded on either the overthrow of the imperialist states by their own populations (not at present posed), or persuading the imperialists that the political costs of staying in Iraq outweigh the combination of (a) the military-strategic and political advantages of staying in Iraq and (b) the political costs of withdrawing without achieving any part of Bush-Blair's ostensible goals.

3.4. US capital has no long-term strategic interest either in a permanent occupation of Iraq or in the exact character of an Iraqi state, provided that it is not a workers' state. However, the 'neoconservative' group which forms the core of the present US administration has essentially staked *its* strategy and political future on the ability to construct in Iraq a state committed to neoliberal economics and 'democracy' as an alternative to islamism and Arab nationalism. Iraq was to be a stepping stone to war or the threat of war against Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia to

force them to suppress the jihadis or go to open war with the US.

The neocons' policy was wholly illusory and was seen to be so within the first months of the occupation, as it became clear that Chalabi's INC and similar groups did not dispose of significant support within Iraq, with the result that Iraq cannot be a secure base for US operations against Iran, Syria or Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, the neocons remain committed to the project, though faced with stiff resistance from traditional 'realist' strategists within the US state. This contradiction has produced US attempts to generate an 'exit strategy' (November 2003); its failure and the US's inability to generate any sort of legitimacy for its Iraqi puppet; and the dependency on mercenary 'private security', etc, leading to attacks on foreign 'civilians' and so to the siege of Fallujah, and the provocations against al-Sadr, which have produced the April 2004 crisis. In the light of the last year strong factions of US capital and within the US state consider the Iraq policy of the Bush administration disastrous.

3.5. If the neocons' view of the advantages of invading and 'reconstructing' Iraq was illusory, once the US had started on this course, for it to withdraw without getting anything at all would be clearly seen as a serious US defeat. The US state has a clear interest in not being seen to be defeated. The US thus has a strong objective interest in developing an exit strategy which can deliver *some* sort of 'result' in Iraq - most probably by handing over power to the traditional shia leadership round Sistani, coupled with a US diplomatic rapprochement with Tehran. But to achieve even this would require a wholesale clear-out of



Al Sadr's shia fighters

the neocons from the administration. The alternative is to follow through on the neocons' project by raising the stakes (open war against Iraqi cities) until the neighbouring regimes either fall in the face of mass revulsion, leading to a more general war, or are forced to large-scale repression against islamists. US response to the April insurrection has vacillated between the two approaches.

3.6. There is thus a deep contradiction between the continuation of the neocons' role in the Bush administration and in particular in the formation of Iraq and Middle East policy, and the objective interests of US capital and the US state. Opening up this contradiction, together with continuing military and other resistance to the occupiers, can change the calculations of the imperialist centres and lead to the end of the occupation.

The problem with jihadi strategy in this context (leaving aside for the moment the reactionary character of the jihadis' general politics) is that it *cannot* take into account the military balance of forces (above 3.3) or exploit this contradiction. The more Iraqi resistance to the occupation becomes linked to the jihadi trend in islamism, the more the neocons will be able in the US to link it to 9/11, and thereby secure themselves electorally against the factions of US capital seeking their ouster. The drift towards jihadi politics thus makes getting imperialist troops out of Iraq *less* likely. The neocons and the jihadis are perfectly genuine mirror images of one another: both aim for a general war between the Middle Eastern muslim countries and the US, which, in the existing military relationship of forces, would be a bloodbath and an utter disaster for the working class of the Middle East.

3.7. In contrast, a leadership which opposed *both* the occupation *and* the jihadis - especially one which based itself on the interests of the working class, as opposed to the existing regimes in the Middle Eastern countries - could, like the Vietnamese Communist Party in the Vietnam war or the Chinese Communist Party in its response to the Japanese invasion, exploit the contradictions existing within the imperialist front. Such a leadership would threaten the US with a genuine repeat of Vietnam: with both a 'domino effect' spreading across the Middle East, and an inspiration (however deformed) to radicals around the world.

The present weakness of Iraqi communists and the Iraqi workers' movement and of the communist and workers' movement more generally through the Middle East is thus not a reason for succumbing to the lure of the apparent successes against the occupiers of the various forms of jihadi guerrillas. These remain, under present conditions, a dead end.

3.8. The present crisis has shown some tendencies (a) to increased mass support for the guerrillas fighting the US, (b) to cooperation across confessional lines (sunni and shia) and (c) to elements in Iraqi politics which have hitherto given support to, or tolerated, the occupation taking their distance from it (elements of the puppet 'governing council') or openly opposing it (elements of the traditional shia leadership). To break out of the dead end which jihadi politics currently represents in the

struggle to drive out the imperialist troops, it would be necessary for these tendencies to be realised more fully in the form of an *anti-occupation* coalition political centre capable of including both (some) islamist and secular (communist, Ba'athist, etc.) tendencies.

Such a political centre does not yet exist. We would argue that communists in Iraq should promote the formation of such a coalition, calling for:

- (1) the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of imperialist troops, and
- (2) elections to a constituent assembly.

The hesitations of the ICP and WCPI on early elections, on the ground that the islamists would get a false mandate, risk playing into the hands of the islamists.

4. For a proletarian solution to the crisis in Iraq

4.1. As is visible from theses 3.7 and 3.8, the struggle for a political centre of opposition to the imperialists is central to driving their troops out of Iraq. But both this, and the everyday problems of the Iraqi masses, pose the problem of overcoming the tendency towards fragmentation and warlordism in Iraq. This, in turn, requires addressing the contradictions which drive towards warlordism.

4.2. *Class contradictions.* Ba'athist Iraq was a sub-Stalinist nationalist regime which enacted very extensive nationalisations. The Iraqi bourgeoisie as such, as distinct from the state bureaucracy, was weak. An emergence of a strong native bourgeoisie from a collapsing bureaucracy in the style of former Stalinist states and other sub-Stalinist nationalist regimes has been precluded by the sanctions war from 1991-2003. Under the occupation regime the US has tried to carry through and entrench large-scale privatisations and has brought in US corporations and a variety of cowboy operations, in an attempt to subject Iraq directly to *US* capital. The primary class contradiction in its ordinary sense, between labour and capital, therefore takes three forms: (1) resistance to foreign capitals and the scab labour they have brought into Iraq, which is immediately linked to the question of resistance to the occupation; (2) the enormous level of mass unemployment in Iraqi society (which contributes more or less directly to the formation of proto-warlord militias); and (3) the direct struggle in a *lumpen* form (gangsterism, etc) against the middle class and the bureaucrats formed under Ba'athism. A provisional government formed in the struggle against the occupiers or after they have been driven out would be urgently faced with problems (2) and (3). The critical elements in the solution are:

- an end to the occupiers' privatisations and their reversal;
- *work for all* - ie, overcoming mass unemployment through a massive programme of reconstruction of Iraqi infrastructure using Iraqi labour; and
- for the short term, an effective system of *rationing* of basic goods in the cities.

4.3 A striking feature of the WCPI's programme is the absence of any mention of rural social relations. Though Iraq is highly urbanised for a 'third world' country, and though the Karim Qasim regime and the Ba'athists carried out an effective land reform which destroyed the power of the shia aristocracy in the south of Iraq, this is a striking omission. Warlordism takes its natural basis from traditional rural social relations, and the problems of combating it and of feeding the cities necessarily raise the question of the primary agricultural producers and their relations with the cities.

4.4. Islamist perspectives address *only* the first problem: resistance to foreign capital and scab labour. For the rest, islamism can only suggest charity, since it has no perspective for active intervention in the economy, which appears to it as 'natural'. The victory of any islamist trend would thus leave the disintegrative dynamics untouched, while providing palliatives to the believers.

4.5. *Confessional contradictions.* Iraq is very approximately between half and two-thirds shia and between one third and half sunni, with a small (2%) christian minority. The colonial and post-colonial puppet regimes rested to a considerable extent on the shia landlords, and the Karim Qasim and Ba'ath regimes, starting from a struggle against the landlords, were characterised by an increasing tendency to coercive domi-

nance by groups of sunni origin over the shia under the cloak of secularism. Soviet support for the Ba'ath regime weakened the communists, already subject to severe Ba'athist repression.

Under these conditions it was natural for shia religious identification to become a form of political resistance to the Ba'ath regime, like catholicism in Poland. Conversely, the fall of the regime gives other religious groups real and not merely illusory grounds to fear shia dominance. In addition, 'sunni' in religious terms include the large Kurdish national minority, whose politics are structured by competing secular nationalist perspectives. And both 'sunni' and to a lesser extent 'shia' include significant urban groups, mainly from the intelligentsia and the skilled workers, committed to secular perspectives.

These facts rule out an Iraqi solution on the Iranian model of entrenching the authority of a particular version of islamic law and particular group of islamic scholars, unless it took the form of partition and 'religious cleansing'. In practice, the underlying social conditions would drive even this solution towards warlordism and the creation of a large number of petty sheikhdoms.

4.6. Islamist perspectives are on their own impotent to deal with confessional diversity. If Iraq is not, in the end, to collapse into warlordism, some degree of separation of religion and state is unavoidable. But islamism, precisely because it makes a *version of islam* an immediate guide to political action, cannot from its own resources reach this result. It would be necessary to borrow from elsewhere, as the Mughals borrowed from Indian political thought, the Ottomans from Byzantine - and as the Iranian regime, since it took power, has borrowed silently but very extensively from the Pahlavi regime and from European constitutionalism.

4.7. The struggle for *separation of religion and state* is therefore essential both to creating a common front against the occupation and to combating the dynamic towards warlordism. This struggle has to begin, not from the 'resistance fighters', but from the secular parties. The ICP and WCPI (in their different ways) are therefore *correct* to view islamist 'resistance fighters' as an enemy as threatening as the imperialist occupiers. However, their policy towards them needs to be analogous to the Chinese Communist Party's policy towards the Kuomintang in the 1930s: with them as far as they fight the occupiers, against them as far they fight to assert their own control.

4.8. *National contradictions.* The most obvious national contradiction in today's Iraq is the occupation of the country by imperialist troops and the attempt to impose on it imperialist capital. However, even if immediate imperialist occupation is ended, two national questions remain pressing and form part of the dynamic towards warlordism. The first is the Kurdish question. WCPI comrades have correctly insisted that the Kurds must have the right to self-determination. The ICP, in contrast, subsumes the Kurdish question under general federalism.

4.9. Behind this question, however, is a larger one. The Kurds are split up between Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. The state borders of the Middle East were almost wholly imposed by imperialism in the aftermath of the fall of the Ottoman empire. The struggle for a united workers' federation of the *mashreq* (Arab Middle East from Egypt to Iraq) is the condition for providing self-determination to the oppressed nationalities *within* the existing states. It is only a proletarian 'pan-Arabism' which can really pose an alternative to the pan-islamism of the islamists, since this latter - like the old pan-Arabism of Nasser and the early Ba'athists - is grounded on and addresses this underlying body of national contradictions.

4.10. In this context, the pro-UN attitude of the ICP and the ambiguous formulae adopted by the WCPI fall into a trap of the imperialists. As was mentioned above, in thesis 1.3, the UN is an imperialist instrumentality (the present occupation of Iraq is UN-authorised!), and UN interventions elsewhere in practice have actually *promoted* religious and ethnic division. Further, the UN is committed to the sanctity of existing state borders. Within the framework of UN tutelage, therefore, the national contradictions of the Arab states *cannot* be resolved □

Mike Macnair

What we fight for

□ **Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, anti-capitalists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.**

□ **The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.**

□ **Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.**

□ **Communists oppose the neo-conservative war plans of the Project for the New American Century and all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.**

□ **Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.**

□ **The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.**

□ **Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.**

□ **Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.**

□ **The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Falling foul of institutional anti-racism

Give censorship the red card

We have often heard that Britain is an 'institutionally racist' society. Try telling that to footballing supremo 'Big' Ron Atkinson. In a fit of rage last week after watching Chelsea get mercilessly thrashed 3-1 by AS Monaco, Atkinson immediately offered a less than flattering view of the defender, Marcel Desailly: "I've always thought that he has no awareness of danger. He is what is known in some schools as a fucking lazy thick nigger. That is a fucking disgusting performance."

Unfortunately for Atkinson, and no doubt slightly distressingly for Desailly, this supposedly private post-match comment was inadvertently transmitted to parts of the Middle East. Quite predictably, the uproar from Egypt and Dubai quickly made its way to the UK. Within two days, Atkinson ("by mutual consent", apparently) had chucked in his weekly column for *The Guardian* and resigned from his role as ITV's premier football pundit - not to mention the fact that Big Ron claims to have already lost commercial contracts coming to some £1 million or so.

That is an expensive price to pay for uttering one word, and we are not talking about "fucking" here.

Nor does Atkinson's mortification end there. In what must be the final humiliation, he has been told that his services will no longer be required at this week-end's major Newton Abbot football competition, to be held in the Decoy Park recreational area. Now in its third year, this annual tournament runs over two dates - from May 1 to 2, and from May 29 to June 3 - and youngsters aged from the age of seven come from all over Britain to take part in the 100-team competition. Atkinson was due to be the tournament's celebrity compere. However, the organisers of the competition, R and T Tournaments, felt that they could not "be seen to condone what he said" and quickly arranged to ship in instead Sir Geoff Hurst, England's 1966 pin-up wonder boy. As the front page headline in the local newspaper put it, "Big Ron gets the red card" (*Herald Express* April 27).

From Dubai to Devon, Atkinson seems to have become a bit of a pariah.

Rather ironically, if it is true, Atkinson says he cannot even remember uttering these offending words, and has since offered a fulsome apology - repeatedly. In his defence, Atkinson pointed to his long footballing record of promoting and encouraging black players: "All I can say is that my actions over the years speak louder than my words - I'm an idiot, but I'm not a racist."

He might have a point. Atkinson has a fearsome reputation in the football world: first as a player (Aston Villa, Oxford United, Witney Town), then more successfully as a manager, where he has presided over an impressive roll-call of teams - Kettering Town, Cambridge United, Manchester United, West Bromwich Albion, Atletico Madrid, Sheffield Wednesday, Aston Villa, Coventry City. By all accounts, Atkinson favours the 'kick up the backside' style of management over the touchy-feely, therapeutic-driven approach.

More germanely, Atkinson "was at the vanguard of introducing brilliant black footballing talent into the British game" (*Herald Express* April 27). In particular,

when at West Bromwich Albion, he championed the "the Three Degrees" - Laurie Cunningham, Cyrille Regis and Brendon Batson (now secretary of the Professional Footballers' Association). He also attended this year the 10th anniversary lunch of Kick It Out - the well known football anti-racism campaign.

All in all, it hardly sounds like the profile of a racist. Having said that, it is hard to disagree with the sentiments expressed by Kick It Out's director, Piara Power: "What he said was unambiguous, non-negotiable and hugely offensive. You don't need to be engaged in sophisticated debates about race to realise those words are offensive."

Clearly, in historical terms football has been plagued by racism and extreme national chauvinism. Examples are legion. Over the years and decades though, racist attitudes in football - including, sometimes, sheer foul abuse - have become increasingly harder to find in the boardrooms and official-administrative structures of the beautiful game, but less so as you move amongst the terraces. Interestingly, what 'official' racism remains appears to be found in the lower league teams. In the views of the chief sports correspondent of *The Guardian*, Vivek Chaudhary: "While there is less racist abuse within the top end of the game - particularly that aimed at players - it still exists within the lower leagues, and players regularly complain of name-calling from opponents and spectators" (April 23).

In the same article, Chaudhary recounts - "it wasn't so long ago" - how one premiership manager told him that the reason there are so few Asian professional footballers is because they are too busy working in shops and eating curry. Additionally, Chaudhary mentions that only three of the 92 league managers, and only a handful of coaches, are black.

So the battle to drive racism out of football has yet to be won - but it is self-evident that racism has been progressively 'de-institutionalised', just like in post-World War II UK society as a whole. Indeed, as the opprobrium heaped so massively upon Atkinson's head manifestly shows, the footballing establishment is essentially no different from the police force, the home office or the NHS bureaucracy - that is, institutionally and ideologically *anti*-racist. Frankly, how could it be anything else?

Just to glimpse at the long list of Kick It Out's sponsors should tell you a lot - the League Managers Association, the Association of Premier League and Football League Match Officials, the Football Safety Officers Association, the Local Government Association, the Metropolitan Police ... It is no accident either that the chair of Kick It Out is no other than Lord Herman Ouseley, the former chair of the Commission for Racial Equality. There is no doubt that Kick It Out is essentially an *establishment* organisation, and hence promotes the establishment's *bourgeois* anti-racism.

Communists, obviously, find the language used by Atkinson reprehensible - and we would take the same view about a sports commentator who decided to mouth off, say, about a female tennis player being 'a stupid lazy bitch' or 'a fucking thick cunt', or described a gay boxer as 'a fucking limped-wrist faggot'. Such language resonates with bigotry and chau-



Ron Atkinson: "Hugely offensive"

vinism. At the very least, it causes offence. Communists aim to combat *all* forms of prejudice and backwardness - an aim which necessarily corresponds to the idea that language is neither a timeless nor a passive vehicle, but is itself a terrain of class struggle. To say that is not to fall victim to 'political correctness'.

However, nor do we approve of or seek to promote morbid sensitivity - which in its most extreme and irrational forms leads to a witch-hunting atmosphere, outright censorship and even prison sentences. Communists are democrats as well as anti-racists. To ban, or prohibit, words or terms, or certain *viewpoints*, is at best counter-productive and at worst establishes a ruling ideology which recruits the righteous, the gullible and even the oppressed themselves into a veritable crusade which permits no open questioning or deviant utterances.

Take the ruling bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. It 'officially' banned the promotion of racism and national chauvinism - in reality there was, of course, Russian domination, national oppression and the state-sponsored growth of anti-semitism. But to question

any of that was to automatically be found guilty of promoting nationalism - for Russian nationalism dressed itself up as internationalism.

In the US there is the constitutional right to free speech. However, the state and military bureaucracy and the top business management have hijacked anti-racism and turned defence of black rights and minority sensibilities into their opposites. Often with the support of a wide swathe of liberal and progressive opinion this leads to an oppressive top-down anti-racism and disastrous results. The case of David Howard is not untypical. A minor municipal official in Washington DC, he was forced to resign after he used the word 'niggardly' to describe a federal government budget squeeze. A word of Scandinavian origin, it was ignorantly deemed to be 'racist', 'offensive' and therefore beyond the pale.

Closer to home, was it such a victory for rational political debate that Kilroy-Silk got kicked out of the BBC for writing his daft article in the *Sunday Express* ruminating about the place, or not, of Arab civilisation in world history? Then there was liberalism's fa-

vourite punk-Stalinist, Julie Burchill, who in the pages of *The Guardian* wrote of "the Hitler-licking, altar-boy-molesting, abortion-banning Irish" (June 29 2002). A typically puerile journalistic rant, but we should not forget that at the time the Crown Prosecution Service considered taking legal action. John Twomey, a social worker at the London Irish Centre complained to police that her article contravened the Race Relations Act. Should we have supported such a prosecution - and demanded on the front page of our paper that Burchill be imprisoned?

No, communists and revolutionary socialists have every interest in free speech. Even if what is said or written is offensive - to small minorities or big majorities. The alternative is far worse. Censorship and handing what can or cannot be expressed over to the courts, government quangoes and local government bosses can only but weaken our struggle, which if it is to be successful needs the right to criticise all that is wrong, all that is backward, all that is mistaken □

Eddie Ford

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