

weekly **worker**



**What would it take to persuade
George Galloway to support a
woman's right to choose?**

- FBU conference
- Galloway's book
- Respect tactics
- ESF censorship

No 528

Thursday May 13 2004

Towards a new workers' party

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For the defeat of US-UK occupation forces

LETTERS



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

Vote Lucy

Sean Thompson's letter attacking Lucy Anderson, the Labour candidate for the London assembly seat of Barnet and Camden, only serves to underscore the brain-dead sectarianism that characterises the outlook of many Respect supporters.

Thompson says of Lucy that "no-one has heard a peep out of her" since she became a Camden councillor two years ago (*Weekly Worker* May 6). He obviously doesn't read his local paper, the *Camden New Journal*. If he did, even over the last couple of months he'd have found reports of Lucy clashing with the council leadership over nursery provision and speaking out against the privatisation of a local sports centre.

If he went back further, he'd find coverage of Lucy's participation in a delegation organised by Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights, which visited the occupied territories and issued a report condemning abuses by the Sharon government. This made the national press and was the main argument used against Lucy by the Labour Party right wing in opposing her selection as an assembly candidate.

But Thompson, like all sectarians, thinks the only campaigns and organisations that have any merit are the ones he and his friends are involved in. So he finds it reprehensible that Lucy Anderson didn't join the local Stop the War Coalition group. But the group was run by the Socialist Workers Party and its allies in the Socialist Alliance and reflected their politics. For that reason, very few Labour Party members did join. They felt that handing out leaflets demanding the TUC organise a one-hour general strike when war broke out, or standing outside Alastair Campbell's home banging on pots and pans and frightening his children, were not effective ways of opposing the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

With her support and involvement, Lucy's constituency party, Holborn and St Pancras, found other ways of opposing the war. They sent their banner and large delegations on all the main anti-war demonstrations, including the protest against Bush's state visit. They submitted a contemporary motion to the Labour Party's 2002 conference condemning plans for the attack on Iraq, and last year the Holborn and St Pancras delegates supported the RMT's attempt to get an emergency motion on Iraq onto the conference agenda.

The party organised a public debate on Iraq on the eve of the war, and immediately the invasion began they convened a mass meeting for party members at Camden town hall. This was addressed by local MPs Frank Dobson and Glenda Jackson, who roundly denounced the war. In response to members saying they felt like resigning in protest at Blair's actions, Dobbo declared: "Its not Tony Blair's party - it's our fucking party!"

This was splashed all over the front of the *Camden New Journal*, received national press coverage and made more impact on public opinion locally than any of the activities of Thompson and his friends.

To any Marxist, the fact that the local STWC group failed to attract many Labour Party members, despite their overwhelming opposition to the Iraq war, would be seen as a failure on the part of the group and its politics. According to the topsy-turvy logic of sectarians like Thompson, however, the refusal of Labour Party members like Lucy Anderson to follow his political lead is just proof of their political treachery.

I could go on at length demonstrating the ignorance of Thompson's charges against Lucy, but the real problem with his letter is what it leaves out. He doesn't mention that the Barnet and Camden

assembly seat is highly marginal - Labour lost it by a mere 551 votes four years ago - or that the present incumbent, Brian Coleman, is a paid up adherent of the Tory Party's loony right. A recent characteristic statement by Coleman was: "The influx of asylum-seekers from countries which have no connection with Britain, such as Somalia, must be halted." And he objected to plans to expand Middlesex University with the comment: "Why should the people of north London suffer in order to attract hundreds of foreign students?"

Lucy Anderson, by contrast, was selected as a Labour candidate in part because she condemned what she called "the illegal and shameful war on Iraq", and has received the backing of the RMT council of executives, having signed up to the union's four-point programme, which includes repeal of the anti-union laws and renationalisation of the rail network. Writing in the current issue of *Labour Left Briefing*, Lucy has stated that, if elected, she will "work closely with all the London trade unions to ensure that their concerns are raised on the London assembly" and "energetically support policies that promote the equality and diversity that my Tory opponent so provocatively rejects".

Lucy Anderson is the only candidate standing in Barnet and Camden who has a chance of beating Coleman. From whose election would the labour movement benefit more? As Ken Livingstone remarked in a recent letter to the *Camden New Journal* urging support for Lucy, it's a no-brainer. Yet Sean Thompson and his comrades have insisted on standing a Respect candidate despite the fact that they'll be lucky to get three or four percent of the vote, which in another close-run contest could be enough to let Coleman in again. Indeed, in response to Livingstone's article, Respect supporters have flooded the correspondence columns of the *New Journal* with letters fiercely opposing a vote for Lucy. It's the sort of ultra-left lunacy that split the German labour movement in the early 30s and allowed the Nazis to gain power.

As far as Labour Party members in Barnet and Camden are concerned, they regard Sean Thompson and his friends in Respect as the political equivalent of scabs. And you'd have to say they have a point.

Martin Sullivan
email

Vote Liz

Sean Thompson's timely warning against voting for candidates like Lucy Anderson, who stand on platforms that do not reflect their real political views, but are chosen principally to ensure their election, is to be welcomed (Letters, May 6).

To my mind the fact that Liz Wheatley is a member of the SWP is not a drawback, but a positive reason for supporting her. I would much sooner vote for a dedicated communist who can be relied upon to defend socialist principles than for a Labourite career politician. I, too, hope she will interview in the *Weekly Worker* soon.

Phil Kent
email

Abortion row

Weekly Worker readers will be interested in a recent exchange in the *Camden New Journal*, the widely-read local paper.

Following a day of high-profile campaigning by Respect and George Galloway in the borough on April 20, local Labour Party supporters felt the need to strike back. George's comments on abortion gave them the perfect opportunity.

In the April 29 issue, Camden Labour Party member Kate Purcell writes that Galloway was in truth just "passing him-

self off as a leftwing alternative to Labour". Actually, this just "doesn't exactly square" with his reactionary comments on abortion, she said, quoting the notorious comments he made to the *Independent on Sunday*.

Even more worrying for Respect members is the conclusion she draws about the coalition as a whole: "We can only assume that the people who selected Galloway to stand for the European parliament, despite his disgraceful stand on this issue, attach rather less importance to women's rights than Labour Party members do."

Back came a worryingly limp response in the May 6 issue from Una Doyle, a local Respect supporter. Una, ex-SWP and president of Camden National Union of Teachers, simply wheedles that "this issue is one where freedom of conscience is exercised by politicians of all political parties". Then - idiotically - the comrade tells us that Respect is a "broad coalition", which means that "George Galloway is one individual who has the right to his own opinion. However, his has no more importance than any other members."

Er, apart from the fact, Una, that George Galloway heads Respect's London list for the EU elections and - if enough people vote for him - he will be in a position to vote on issues affecting women's reproductive rights.

Michael Jeeves
London

CPGB opportunism

George Galloway has made his position quite clear in a recent press release and I cannot speak for him, but your use of this issue is downright offensive and should be disregarded as rank opportunism, by women especially ('Fight for abortion rights', May 6).

My personal view, for what it is worth, is that I detest abortion (but that does *not* mean I would support withdrawing it as an option for women). Abortion is a capitalist solution to getting rid of 'unwanted children' (what an obscene phrase that is) and free-market morality is just as bad as free-market economics. It amounts to the same disrespect for human life as is now being demonstrated in the emerging US-UK-run gulags in occupied Iraq.

Typical that you should side with imperialism once again, even at this moment, when the organised barbarism of the war against terrorism is at last emerging in full public view.

David Morgan
email

Responsible sex

Abortion is a messy issue - almost 180,000 were performed last year, whilst there are couples that want to adopt children. And it isn't an easy option - women are left scarred by the experience.

The problem is society and attitudes. Sex sells commodities. It is accepted as a recreational pursuit rather than something more profound. When people engage in relationships, without understanding what it involves, or what it means, than undoubtedly all sorts of problems are created. Casual sex is one of the worst things created by the west because it demeans women and leads to other nasty results, like child sex. Western societies, particularly Anglo-Saxon ones, have demeaned family relationships, women and sex.

The real problem is that childcare and raising children need to be socialised because the burden on parents - financially and in terms of time and other resources - is too onerous. Most get on with it because they have to. Families, by keeping the social requirements of society on a private basis, reinforce capitalism and its values. Moreover, the nuclear and west-

ernised families don't produce adults that are balanced, all-rounded and properly functioning individuals.

Socialised families and childcare - that is the solution for the 21st century. Unless you have buckets of money, the modern world causes too many problems for parents and children, who end up being victims at the mercy of anti-social governments. And no amount of charity-mongering can ever alleviate the social problems of capitalism - that's an obvious fact.

Women should be encouraged to give birth, and not feel guilty about handing the child over. But, more importantly, the culture of casual sex should be replaced with the culture of meaningful and truly adult relationships. If men and women don't know how to relate to each other and treat each other, than the fallout from that does have far-reaching consequences.

Lila Patel
email

Small-minded

It would seem that Anne Mc Shane, along with too many others on the small-minded British left, is more interested in seeking out and emphasising divisions within Respect than in building on, clarifying and developing the policies that already unite its members (Letters, May 6).

Why is this, I wonder? Respect does not hide the fact that it is trying to bring together a diverse spectrum of the highly successful anti-war movement. Mc Shane tries to make cheap political capital out of the fact that Respect has not yet been able to establish policy on some critical issues like abortion. Yet she knows that the coalition has, of necessity, been established on the hoof and thrown into an election campaign with little time to do so.

She also knows that many of the leading members of Respect (eg, the SWP and International Socialist Group) are long-standing and well known pro-choice advocates. She disingenuously attributes to their motivation cynical opportunism, instead of honestly recognising that the conservative prejudices of some religious-pacifist anti-war activists (both christian and muslim) will not be changed overnight. It requires a little more time than the few months that have elapsed since Respect was formed.

Mc Shane also mischievously speculates about the possibility that Galloway might be elected on a pro-abortion position. She glosses over the inconvenient fact that Galloway, and every other Respect candidate (including Muslim Association of Britain members), will be standing for election on the Respect founding statement which says: "The right to self-determination of every individual in relation to their religious (or non-religious) beliefs, as well as sexual choices." Cryptic and in need of clarification and elaboration? Of course. Anti-abortion? I think not.

Establishing a political organisation out of the huge anti-war movement requires time, patience, tact (shock, horror) and, yes, *sensitivity* to the conservative cultural prejudices of newly active anti-war militants, both christian and muslim. I am not talking about adapting politically to these prejudices, but of dealing with them with a degree of caution necessary to avoid the needless squandering of novice activists. The British left is well known for its arrogance: plenty of self-important, cultist organisational egoism. Lots of intellectual chiefs, but very few Indians.

Any fool can blurt out the blindingly obvious about Respect's political shortcomings which stem from its incipient stage of development. But, as one of your previous correspondents pointed out, political clarification not linked to the building of a political alternative is an unimportant exercise. Ensuring that Respect survives and develops is just as

important as developing its policies. Unfortunately, there is little sign that Mc Shane and her ilk understand that particular dialectical interrelationship.

C James
email

Undemocratic

You should know that:

1. National Respect (as in the policies decided by the majority of people at the launch of Respect) has no position on abortion. It is neither anti-abortion or pro-abortion.
2. Some members of Respect (such as George Galloway) have anti-abortion views, and some are likely to have pro-abortion views.
3. It is impossible for the Respect executive committee to take on a pro-abortion, pro-choice policy, as this would need to be decided at a national meeting, where all members of Respect would be invited. Otherwise known as democracy. It is also impossible to change every leaflet, where the programme of Respect is visible before the European elections. The CPGB's demand to the national executive to suddenly change its position is simply undemocratic.
4. The Guildford branch should understand that Respect has no national position on abortion, and should wait until a national meeting, where such a motion may be voted on by the mass of members. If Respect was to adopt what the Guildford branch calls for, then I'm sure every branch would be willing to campaign on this issue. What we don't want is a small, rogue branch campaigning in contradiction to the national campaign, as it is more effective for us to have a single, unified campaign around the entire country.

It seems that, if CPGB members can't get what they want on a national level, they resort to anarchist-style decentralism.

John Kay
email

Extremely rightwing

John Davis argues that the CPGB's Red Platform is racist for opposing a vote for Anas Altikriti and other members of the Muslim Association of Britain standing as Respect coalition candidates (Letters, May 6). But what Manny Neira *et al* seem to be opposing is *not* a vote for candidates of muslim background or even religion, but a vote for supporters of a specific, extremely rightwing political organisation. If the BJP had a British section and its supporters were part of Respect - unlikely, I admit - would it be anti-hindu racism to oppose voting for them?

The real issue is the inconsistency of the Red Platform comrades. How can an organisation which includes such rightwing reactionaries on its electoral lists be worthy of support? The presence of MAB members at the heart of the Respect coalition is simply another reason why socialists should not support it.

Sacha Ismail
Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Build CPGB

Firstly, once again, an excellent *Weekly Worker* (April 29). The level of intelligent, open debate one can find inside is to be commended.

I found the article 'Red Platform founded' of particular interest. Now the initial excitement regarding the founding of the Respect coalition has died down, the challenges ahead seem huge. Having attended a local area meeting of Respect recently, I left feeling, well, almost fooled. What this appears to be is basically a well-meaning, centre-left vehicle for the next generation of careerist politicians. There was no mention at all of how genuine leftist politics could address problems both nationally and internationally. Instead, all

that was heard was basically a small group of SWP people promoting Gorgeous George as the champion in the red corner.

I cannot support this movement. Engage with it? Yes. Vote for it? No. Point 3 ('To build the CPGB') in the Neira/Richards article was spot on. Not only is it heartening to hear comrades speak of republicanism being absolutely necessary, but I am utterly convinced that the CPGB could and should be "winning individual comrades to the CPGB banner" and be the main party of the left in Wales, Scotland, Ireland and England. Recruiting individuals to become politically conscious members of the CPGB and building a solid, electable party seems to make nothing but sense.

Matthew Hutchinson
email

Bread and butter

We would like to thank Pete McLaren, convener of the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform, for his comradely letter inviting the CPGB to rejoin, and express our disappointment that the invitation was not accepted ('Damaged credibility' *Weekly Worker* May 6).

In declining it, comrade Peter Manson wrote that "the *main* site for ... struggle is at present within Respect" ('Sectarian delusions', same issue). We agree entirely: but *main* is not the same as *only*. As comrade McLaren made clear, there is no conflict between membership of the SADP and engagement with Respect. It is worth noting that comrade Dave Landau, who contributed his report of his work to raise the issue of abortion in Islington Respect, is also in the SADP ('SWP vote down women's rights', same issue).

Comrade Manson emphasises the differences between the partyist perspectives of the CPGB and that of some members of the SADP: "For some, the SA was an end in itself - a loose network was all that was needed. For others a federal structure ... was sufficient". But at Respect's founding conference, Paul Holborow of the SWP, urging members to vote down the principle of workers' representation on a worker's wage, announced: "Respect is not a socialist organisation". We agree that we should be engaging with Respect, but if we can engage (and even recommend

unconditional electoral support for) Respect despite such statements, what holds us back from simple membership the SADP, and support for its more modest campaign?

Ultimately, what it is seems to boil down to is that the SADP is rather *smaller* than Respect, and simply not worth the trouble. But this is a risky rationale. In quite properly attempting to engage with the central movements of the moment, we should be cautious of simply dropping, and needlessly alienating, those comrades we have cooperated with along the way. Rejoining the SADP is not a central plank of our position, but it is perhaps indicative of a greater emphasis we would like to see on the longer-term, gradual accumulation of respect and cooperation between socialist groups and comrades. A little bread and butter solidarity with an organisation which we helped to found, and which is also standing socialist candidates on June 10, whom even comrade Manson "wishes well", should not be left entirely neglected, as we chase the 'bigger fish' - particularly when it zigzags the way this particular fish does.

Red Platform
CPGB

US left

As an American, I have two comments on Manny Neira's otherwise depressingly accurate take on the presidential election here ('God, Mammon, and the American way' *Weekly Worker* May 6).

First of all, our peculiar local superstitions are somewhat mischaracterised. As I understand it, come the rapture, the born-again are not supposed to float bodily up to heaven *naked*. Rather, happily for the aesthetic sensibilities of those of us who will be left behind, they will simply dematerialise *à la Star trek*, leaving their clothes, watches and possible false teeth and the like behind. Such scenes have been a staple of evangelical trash like the wildly popular Left behind novels.

Secondly, it's worth noting that it is not entirely accurate to lump together the various socialists Neira parenthetically mentions. There are important quantitative and qualitative differences that affect how seriously their electoral efforts are to be taken. The Socialist Workers Party and

Socialist Equality Party are basically confessional micro-sects that demand adherence to their precise ideological 'lines' by members. They have little interest in working with other sects who don't share their precisely correct views. The SEP in particular is notorious for conspiracy-theorising that other left groups (especially the SWP) are secretly controlled by intelligence services as a method of breaking the real revolutionary left. Their voluminous pronouncements on 'Security and the Fourth International' make British equivalents like Healy seem like paragons of sanity by comparison.

Given their happy embrace of the constraints of life as micro-sects, the SWP and SEP don't take their electoral campaigns terribly seriously. The SEP is headquartered in Michigan, but is not even bothering to make the attempt to gather signatures to appear on the ballot here. The SWP is notorious for not bothering to 'campaign' outside of the occasional 'campaign meeting' at the book stores they run.

By contrast, the Socialist Party, while still microscopic in a country of 280 million people, is, at over a thousand members, gigantic by comparison to the other groups. Not surprisingly, it differs from the others in being an inclusive, multi-tendency party that doesn't require members to sign on to any precise 'line' or pretend to agree with the party's decisions in all areas, although people do generally agree with the consensus reflected in the party's solidly revolutionary statement of principles, 'Socialism as radical democracy'. Similarly, the SPUSA differs from the other groups in its willingness to cooperate with others, reflected in its outreach to other groups to form a 'United Left Front', a proposal explicitly modelled on Socialist Alliances in the UK and Australia.

Ben Burgis
Michigan

Editorial cuts

I think that in cases where letters or articles are published in the *Weekly Worker* in an edited/censored form, the CPGB editor should indicate that this is so at the end of the particular piece. You should also publish the unedited text elsewhere on the website, so that people can judge for themselves if the editor's decisions were appropriate. The web page for unedited originals could also be printed at the end of every letters column in the hard copy version.

There is also a strong case for arguing that heavily edited letters/articles should not be attributed to their authors, since alterations and omissions may significantly, and sometimes mischievously, distort the original viewpoint. There is always a case for editing articles, especially long ones, on grounds of lack of space. But the case for editing *letters*, which are almost always short, on these grounds is not obvious to me. This exceeds the editor's brief and amounts to tampering with a correspondent's expression of their opinion. An example was the unnecessary truncation of my quote from Trotsky in last week's edition, which undermined the full sense of what was being argued (May 6).

A little more transparency in the way you publish submissions is in order, I believe.

Gary Williams
email

Fighting fund

Web donors

Last week 8,820 visitors to the CPGB website read us on the internet. A few of them commented on our articles and other features, but three comrades left something else as well: a donation via our PayPal facility. AJ and FS both contributed a tenner, while WS left a splendid £50. Gratefully received, comrades.

And there was another £50 to match - this time arriving in my mailbox - from LP, a longstanding supporter from the Midlands, who writes: "I can't say I agree with the line on Respect, but I'm still glad

you're there to report it! Keep up the good work." There's nothing like a good sized cheque to help us do just that.

Together with a £20 postal order from NC, these gifts - £140 in all - have pushed our May total up to £193. But, now more than ever - bearing in mind our ambitious plans in the coming period, not least for the European Social Forum - we need the full £500 each and every month. We have two and a half weeks to raise another £257 ●

Robbie Rix

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

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 the **Unity Political Fund**.

I wish to join the Respect Unity Coalition

Name

Address 1

Address 2

Town/city **Postcode**

Phone **Email**



London Communist Forum

Sunday May 7, 5pm - 'Birth of the First International', part two, 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).

Emergency anti-war demonstration

Saturday, May 22, 11am, central London - End the torture, bring the troops home now. Called by Stop the War Coalition, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Muslim Association of Britain.

Respect events

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

Bermondsey: Car cavalcade, Saturday May 15, 10am. Assemble The Blue.

Ealing and Hillingdon: Mass leafleting and stall, Saturday May 15, 1pm, Ealing Broadway station.

Newcastle upon Tyne: Leafleting, Saturday May 15, 2pm, Northumberland Street.

Fratton: Spanish evening fundraiser, Saturday May 15, 8pm, 48 Sandringham Road.

Ealing and Hillingdon: Mass leafleting and stall, Sunday May 16, 12 noon, Uxbridge station.

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

West Hampstead: Amenities and transport hustings, Monday May 17, 7pm, West Hampstead Community Centre.

Camberwell: Open meeting, Monday May 17, 7.30pm, pensioners centre, Camberwell Green.

Middlesbrough: Rally, Tuesday May 18, 7.30pm, St Mary's Centre, near UGC cinema.

Camden: Cycling campaign hustings, Wednesday May 19, 7pm, council chamber, town hall.

Newcastle upon Tyne: Leafleting, Thursday May 20, 5pm, Regent Centre metro station, Gosforth.

Darlington: Rally, Thursday May 20, 7.30pm, Dolphin Centre.

Reading: Meeting, Thursday May 20, 7.30pm, RISC (above Global Café), London Street.

Stafford: Public meeting, Thursday May 20, 7.30pm, Gate House theatre, East Gate Street.

Balham: Public meeting, Friday May 21, 7pm, Balham library.

Berwick upon Tweed: Fundraising social, Friday May 21, 7.30pm, Ravensholme Hotel, Ravensdowne.

Brighton: Introducing Respect, Friday May 21, 7.30pm, Phoenix Brewery Community Centre, Phoenix Place (next to Free Butt).

Bermondsey: Car cavalcade, Saturday May 22, 10am. Assemble The Blue.

Huddersfield: Public meeting, Sunday May 23, 7.30pm, Birkby and Fartown Community Centre, Wasp Nest Road.

Solidarity with Palestine

National day of action, Saturday May 15: 'The wall must fall'.

1.30pm: Speakers and music in Trafalgar Square.

3.30pm: Demonstration to Downing Street.

Speakers include: Jamal Jumaa, director Stop the Wall, Palestine; Afif Safieh, PLO; Jeremy Corbyn MP, Richard Burden MP, Jenny Tonge MP, Caroline Lucas MEP, Keith Sonnet, Unison, Jeremy Hardy.

Called by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: 020 7700 6192

Proxy wars in Africa

Day school, Saturday May 15, 2pm to 6pm, Dalston Methodist Centre, Richmond Road, London E8 (Dalston Kingsland, North London line). Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP.

Organised by African Liberation Support Campaign Network and Hackney Stop the War Coalition.

George Galloway

In conversation with Yvonne Ridley, Monday May 17, 6.30pm, Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1. Launch of new book, *I'm not the only one*. Questions from the audience. Tickets £3: 020-7637 1848; galloway@bookmarks.uk.com

Carnival against racism

Sunday May 23, 1pm to 6pm, Ponders End recreation ground, Southbury (five minutes from M25). Bus routes: 149, 279. Music, poets' corner, dancing, speakers, stalls, children's activities.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism.

NCADC

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns annual general meeting, Saturday June 5, 12 noon to 5pm, Carrs Lane Church, Carrs 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.

ABORTION

Anti-abortion websites

Wilful misunderstanding

It seems the good ship Respect cannot but keep running aground. The latest *faux pas* to hit the project is comrade Galloway's foolish comments concerning abortion. Apparently, as a believer in god, "I believe life begins at conception and therefore unborn babies have rights" (*Independent on Sunday* April 4). This is bad enough, but shockingly for a 'progressive' organisation there has not been a peep of criticism from the Respect executive. So not for the first time, the silence of the Socialist Workers Party has led them to become attorneys for the most backward elements in the coalition, and I doubt it will be the last time either.

Political cowardice, however, might not be the only reason for the SWP's silence on this issue. Tucked away on the Muslim Association of Britain website, we find Respect's 'external faction' heaping praise on Galloway's comments, and a call to back him and the coalition as a "real alternative" (www.mabonline.net). No mention of Respect's anti-war, anti-racist credentials - here is an explicit call to vote Respect on a reactionary basis. Now the SWP has never been noted for choosing socialist principles over meagre short-term advantage, but surely even they would balk at allowing this to be used for political capital?

In addition to MAB, Galloway has the charming Society for the Protection of Unborn Children as bedfellows on this issue (www.spuc.org.uk). The main feature on this small and imperfectly formed website is the latest edition of the *Evangelicals news and prayer letter*, which is useful for providing a snapshot of fundamentalist anti-choice thinking. The first item introduces George and Jan Bell, two upstanding citizens who have now joined the SPUC national council, and ask that our prayers go with them. Moving swiftly on, we have concerns voiced around euthanasia, pro-choice moves at the United Nations, and bizarrely the opportunity to obtain an anti-EU constitution paper (!)

What is not said is quite significant. Where we have moralising around unborn "innocent human beings", there is nothing on the millions of lives destroyed by 'our' inhuman system every day. The rest of the site is a hodgepodge of basic reproductive biology, based on the quasi-theological notion that human individuality is present from conception. Strangely they do not make much of this in their piece on the 'morning after pill'. Preferring to dwell on the medical consequences of imbibing this pill, it has to rely on a 40-year-old US health department leaflet to make the spurious claim that this constitutes abortion, rather than emergency contraception.

The other feature that caught my eye is SPUC's attempt to rope in young people by offering "cash prizes" in an essay-writing competition on the "sanctity of life". Perhaps younger comrades with time on their hands might want to take this up in relation to the Iraq war.

The gently-worded SPUC website seems quite fluffy compared to the National Right to Life Convention, one of the main anti-choice lobbyists in the USA (www.nrlc.org). I knew straightaway what kind of site I was looking at. Ridiculous buzzwords such as "foetal homicide" are used, and that poster boy of the anti-abortionists, George W Bush, is pictured happily signing the NRLC-backed 'unborn victims of violence' legislation into law. The irony of him being responsible for the deaths of thousands of once very-alive Iraqis and Afghans seems to be lost on the smiling faces surrounding Bush.

The drop-down menus at the head of the site provide the navigation. The first, 'Issue info', lists abortion, euthanasia, medicare, cloning and 'fact' sheets. The 'Abortion' option takes the viewer to a page of selective information, but interestingly opposition is couched in medical language. All the way through, they stress "the physiological and psychological consequences" of having a termination, and use such positions to 'rebut' pro-choice arguments.

For example, their response to a 'woman's right to choose' is that no woman has the right to kill her "baby" (as with SPUC, for the NRLC life begins at conception), and we are told that it is advances in antibiotics, not legalisation, that deserves credit for safeguarding women's lives. Needless to say, socialists should have no problems defeating these arguments - based as they are on wilful misunderstanding.

Back at the home page, viewers are treated to a typical shock-tactic: the diagrammatic rendering of a partial birth abortion. However, that is not half as shocking as the thousands of women maimed and killed by back-street abortionists, with or without antibiotics •

Phil Hamilton

George and the right to choose

With apologies to the Twilight Zone, **Manny Neira** invites you to take a journey into the imagination: what if...?

You may be familiar with the theory, beloved of a thousand science fiction writers, that we live not in a universe, but a multiverse. At every decision point, where events could have gone one way or the other, each universe has split into two. Therefore, throughout history, every conceivable possibility has been realised in a universe somewhere. There is a universe in which Trotsky won the battle for power against Stalin in the Soviet Union. There is another in which Marx was killed in a freak beard-trimming accident early in life, and leftists have had to learn to pronounce the word 'Engelsism'. And there are some even stranger. With apologies to the *Twilight Zone*, let me take you to just one.

Somewhere in this universe, the small hours of the morning find Mrs Galloway yawning as she drives, with an overcoat pulled over her pyjamas, to an all-night garage. She is on an errand to buy a dozen *Marathon* bars and a jar of peanut butter. Once home, she will watch George dip each chocolate bar into the light-brown spread and eat them, one after the other, without stopping. The cravings were preferable, she supposed, to the morning sickness: but how could it have happened at all when they had been so careful?

Gorgeous George was pregnant.

The famous Armani suit has already been let out twice. They could not afford a new one, thanks to the Red Platform: an organisation she could not name without cursing.

It ceased to exist over a year ago, having won a majority within the Communist Party of Great Britain to impose political conditions before calling for electoral support for her husband. The CPGB itself had grown dramatically, apparently as a result of some new recruitment strategy, and relentless pressure by the *Daily Worker* had finally won a majority in Respect ("The 'R' is for republicanism," she muttered under her breath, repeating its famous slogan) to demand all its candidates accept only a worker's wage for representing workers - and some other trifling changes to do with socialism or something. George's journalistic income had largely dried up (employers' prejudices against expectant fathers were simply *criminal*) and their income had dropped by about 80%.

They simply couldn't afford another child. There was nothing for it: he'd just have to have an abortion.

She pulls into the drive, and carefully checks the door of her home for booby traps. The 'Real AWL' had been particularly active recently, and security measures had been stepped up around the Galloway household. No trip wires in evidence, she lets herself back into the house, and calls a slightly weary "Home, pet", as she tramps up the stairs. George puts down his copy of *Men are from Venus, women are from Mars*, and grabs the bag of goodies as she enters the room.

She watches in a kind of shocked fascination as he eats bar after bar of chocolate. No matter how many wives experienced the cravings of their pregnant husbands, they still found them weird. And with peanut butter? She'd smoked a little blow in her time, but the munchies had nothing on this.

"Darling," she ventures gently. "You know we can't have this child. You're just being stubborn."

George speaks between mouthfuls. "I



And they had been so careful

will not have an abortion. Who speaks for the child?"

She admonishes him gently. "But you voted just last week in the European parliament to make free abortions available on demand across all EU member-states."

He dips his last stub of chocolate into the peanut butter. "I had to. People voted Respect because that's what they believed we stood for. We are a leftwing coalition: the majority of our members support the right to abortion, the majority we received from the electorate expect to get it. That's democracy. I'm there to represent *them*."

She looks sadly at him. "So you won't take advantage of your own law?"

He looks at her evenly and speaks with a quiet dignity, fiddling with the cord of his Fathercare nightie: "It's a man's right to choose."

Quiz

Did you notice the differences between that universe and this one?

1. In that universe, George Galloway knew the difference between his individual right to act according to his conscience, and the right of citizens to be democratically represented.
2. In that universe, *Snickers* are still called *Marathons*.

Everything else was the same - or may be, one day ... •



REVIEWS

Strengths, flaws, contradictions

George Galloway's book is somewhat unusual. Part autobiography, part political exposition, its title is based on a line from John Lennon's *Imagine*, which of course was also the inspiration for (and title of) Tommy Sheridan's and Alan McCombes's credo promoting their Scottish Socialist Party version of nationalist socialism.

Galloway's work, despite its title, does not really make for the wilder reaches of utopian rhetoric, though such rhetoric is not entirely absent, as you would expect. But for the most part the book is an explanation of his own rather unusual political career as a left-reformist Labour politician whose main activity has been - unlike many of his contemporaries, who have focused more on domestic matters - the raising of opposition to some of the most oppressive manifestations of imperialist rule in the Middle East.

The book has been released as the campaign for the Euro elections really gets underway - obviously it is intended to be a major contribution in getting Respect's name known and the last two chapters are devoted to the unity coalition and its political rationale in Galloway's eyes. Indeed it might sell well: comrade Galloway is a figure of notoriety in some circles and, as many have observed, shares with Arthur Scargill the knack of polarising opinion about himself - there are those who loathe him and those who admire him; but there are not that many in no-man's land.

As someone who does not wholly trust any left reformist, I would personally observe that Galloway is as principled, in his own terms, as any of them, and is

George Galloway I'm not the only one
Penguin Books, 2004, pp185, £10

someone who has been demonised not only by the bourgeoisie and the tabloid press, but also by sections of the left. While he has on occasion been taken to task deservedly, such as for his unreconstructed catholic opposition to abortion, some of the most bitter attacks on him have been for his strengths, not his weaknesses. In particular, his evident gut-level opposition to imperialism in the Middle East - something that comes with a passion that is quite unusual for a social-democratic career politician.

Galloway is evidently strongly influenced by a Stalinised form of Marxism, even though his entire career has been spent in Labour. In fact, at times his framework of analysis goes beyond social democratic reformism; he occasionally appears to distance himself programmatically from social democracy entirely, defining it as a means of staving off socialism, particularly in the aftermath of World War II. He also narrates at length his development as something that sounds rather like a far-left radical in the late 60s and early 70s - he boasts of friendly relations with Fidel Castro.

Galloway talks up a sentimental 'left' British patriotism of a kind associated with both left reformism and 'official communism', lamenting Britain's and Europe's subordination to the United States in the international order, and there are numerous other things that mark out the fact that, despite occasional flashes of neo-Marxist

insight, Galloway remains firmly in the mould of a very left form of social democracy. Indeed, this is shown by his espousal of republicanism - a not insignificant inclusion in the book, given the voting down of our call for the 'R' in Respect to stand for 'republicanism' at its founding convention by the assembled SWP ranks.

Galloway is certainly a republican, albeit a liberal one, as evidenced by his rather tepid form of exposition: "The queen will not be with us forever and even if she lives as long as her mother we should make plans now for a referendum on her successor as the British head of state. Democrats should begin to make the case for a republican future" (p23). This only begs the question: why wait? Surely the case for democracy has more urgency than that, and cannot depend on the rhythms of generational succession, when one of the most blatantly undemocratic features of the monarchical system is precisely the issue of generational succession to the office of head of state. While he mentions the royal prerogative, with its powers to "declare the country to be at war, to command the House of Commons ..., to create general elections or deny them to the government of the day", he does not appear to see the ending of this situation as particularly urgent either.

Galloway's view of democracy oscillates between the vague and the techno-

cratic: he lays out a whole programme for the democratisation of the United Nations, election of a reformed security council, etc, as a dubious alternative to the current "den of thieves and beggars". His recipe for democracy in Britain involves abolishing the monarchy and the House of Lords, but also much fewer, *more highly paid* MPs - presumably with the model of himself in mind, having the means to travel round the world campaigning against imperialism to one's heart's content.

There is not really much of a hint of any real understanding of the need for democracy from below - that is, substantive democracy, which obviously includes the payment of those elected no more than the average of a skilled worker, and the power of those below to recall their representatives. Instead, we get a conception of democracy that appears somewhat elitist, and no doubt owes much both to 'official communist' and Labourite bureaucratic practice. It is a bad conception, and a bad practice.

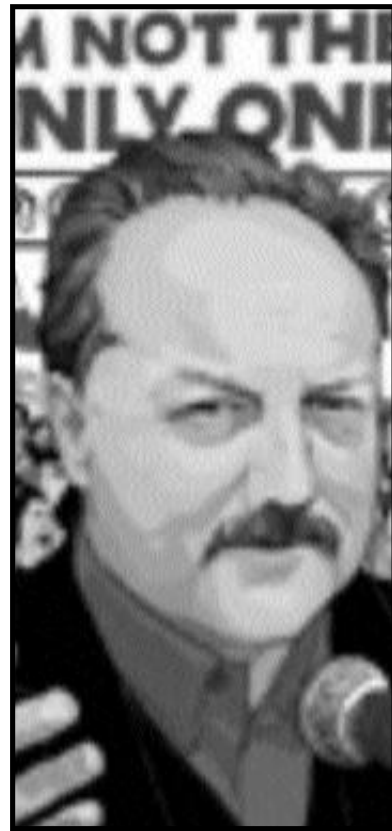
The real meat of the book, of course, is the material about his involvement in the Middle East, and Iraq in particular. Galloway tells the story of how, after meeting a Palestinian exile militant in his days as a youthful Labour Party member, he was converted to being a lifelong advocate of the Palestinian cause. He was instrumental in the 'twinning' of Dundee with Nablus in the 1970s, a gesture that became legion in the heyday of the Labour left in the 1980s. At the time, however, being seen to ally with the PLO brought almost as much opprobrium as if today links with al Qa'eda were being promoted.

Galloway then gives a prolonged account of the various phases of his relations with movements and regimes in the Middle East, and in particular the focus of his activities since 1991, Iraq. He is able to point convincingly to his own role as a vocal public opponent of Saddam Hussein's regime right from the very beginning. His account of demonstrators, himself among them, being denounced by Tory Douglas Hurd as "communist troublemakers" for getting in the way while the Tories were parleying with Saddam's regime in the 1980s is certainly worth remembering.

He makes an important point about an event that may come to be seen as a turning point by historians, in explaining the sudden shift of Iraq from favoured ally of imperialism in the 1980s (against the Iranian revolution) to pariah status in a relatively short period of time. He quotes a speech by Saddam Hussein at an Arab League summit in 1989, where the latter warned that "if Israel attacks any Arab country ... we have the means to burn half of Israel" (p41). Despite the usefulness of Saddam's regime to imperialism in the war with Iran, Iraq was becoming just too developed, too close to parity with US imperialism's most trusted regional gendarme for comfort, and had to be cut down to size.

There is some evidence that Hussein was encouraged to invade Kuwait in 1990 by the United States, which then, once the deed was done, emulated perfidious Albion of old in seizing on the event to justify what in effect became a prolonged war of destruction against Iraq - both its regime and people. Galloway points also to the gross manipulation of the issue of the gassing of the Kurdish village of Halabja in 1988. At the time, the imperialists tried to blame *Iran* for this atrocity; it was only later, after they had decided to make Iraq the next target, that the story was changed and history was rewritten. Of course, the culprit was indeed the Iraqi regime, but as long as Saddam was a US ally a whole different story was told.

Two of the three major issues that have been used to demonise Galloway over recent years, accompanying his expulsion from Labour, obviously constitute major themes. The first is his famous speech in front of Saddam Hussein in 1994 and the second is the Mariam Hamza campaign in 1998, which was at the time a major political blow against the murderous sanctions regime imposed by



Youse and yours

the US and the UN against the Iraqi people. Galloway is still being witch-hunted for this successful campaign, described at some length here, both of aid to a sick child who would otherwise have certainly died, and equally importantly publicising what was happening to many more in Iraq due to the sanctions. The third issue - the planting of forged documents in Iraq in 2003, purporting to show that Galloway was in the pay of Saddam Hussein - is not dealt with, probably for legal reasons (the libel case against *The Daily Telegraph* is due to come to court in November this year).

"Sir, I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability," he concluded his televised speech in Saddam's presence in 1994. How does Galloway explain this apparently incongruous and sycophantic turn of phrase? "The 'your' in question in those remarks is not a singular possessive pronoun, but a plural. Those being praised for their courage, strength and indefatigability ... are the 23 million Iraqis, not their president ... if I'd used the good old Scottish word 'youse' instead of 'your', the ruthlessly exploited misinterpretation of my comments would have been disabled."

Whatever you think of this explanation, it is beyond doubt that without the albatross of that speech hanging round his neck he would be a good deal more effective today. It has indeed been "ruthlessly exploited" - not only as a weapon with which to beat the man who uttered the words, but as a means of undermining the anti-war movement itself.

However, the demonisation of George Galloway - unfortunately echoed by politically disarmed sections of the left - is part and parcel of the wave of chauvinist hysteria currently being directed against Arabs and those with an Islamic culture. They are being used as a substitute 'enemy' for the now vanished Soviet bloc in order to justify the militarism that imperialism - particularly in its most powerful US manifestation - needs in order to hold its system together politically and economically. In that sense, the attacks on Galloway recall the similar treatment of the pro-Soviet Labour MP, Konni Zilliacus, in the early phases of the cold war in the 1940s and 50s.

All in all, *I'm not the only one* is an interesting, illuminating and at times surprising read. Some of the material within it will be of considerable importance when historians come to write the history of the Iraq debacle - for that is what it is turning into, in some ways considerably more quickly than Vietnam did. It reveals much about the strengths, flaws and contradictions of its author, and provides important documentation on recent events that are still shaking the world. ●

Ian Donovan

Fears of middle America

Channel 4, Tuesday May 11 *Aileen: the life and death of a serial killer*

Pick up any newspaper, watch any talk show, listen to any politician and, too often you see the world being painted in black and white. There is clearly something reassuring about being told that great lie: that somehow everything makes sense.

The documentary *Aileen: the life and death of a serial killer* made for compelling and uncomfortable viewing because it rejects that. It depicted the final months of Aileen Wuornos in 2002, as she awaited her death by lethal injection for murder. The documentary follows writer and director Nick Broomfield as he interviews Aileen in prison and charts her tragic life leading up to the murders, her trial and conviction, her inhumanly long time on death row and ultimately her execution. It makes no attempt to deny her guilt or the horror of the crimes she committed, but it portrays Aileen not as an evil and calculating fiend, but as a tragic figure, abused, betrayed and exploited throughout her life and tormented by paranoid delusions and personality disorder. A woman who should have received sympathy and support, but who instead was vilified, exploited and sentenced to death.

Aileen gained notoriety as America's first woman serial killer when she was convicted in 1991 for the first-degree murders of seven men in Florida. In recent months she has once again become the focus of media attention because of the Hollywood movie, *Monster*, which

dramatised her life. Actress Charlize Theron won an Oscar for her portrayal of Wuornos, and no doubt everyone involved received substantial amounts of money, while congratulating themselves on tackling such a controversial and hard-hitting story.

Aileen had led a traumatic life. Her mother abandoned her when she was six months old, her father committed suicide after being convicted of raping and murdering a young boy. Aileen was raised by her grandparents in a small town in Michigan, where she was sexually abused by family members and by boys in her neighbourhood, took drugs and became pregnant at 13. After her baby was taken from her, she was not allowed to go home and lived rough in the woods. She later left her home town and travelled to Florida, where she made a living as a prostitute hitchhiking around the state, while living in a caravan with her girlfriend. It was here that she committed the murders and was arrested. Aileen at first alleged that she killed each man in self-defence, protecting herself from rape and murder. She later changed her plea, declaring that the murders were premeditated. The documentary's inference was that after 12 years on death row Aileen just wanted to die. Aileen received no treatment in prison and had very little human contact.

Aileen's arrest and trial were a tragic farce. The police, her girlfriend and her mother cashed in by making deals with

filmmakers. Her inexperienced lawyer simply got her to plead guilty, without any pleas for mitigation. Politicians, notably Florida governor Jeb Bush, standing on a law and order ticket, exploited her case for electoral gain. Prior to her execution Jeb Bush had three psychiatrists declare Aileen mentally sound after a 15-minute interview. The Christian right vilified her for being a man-hating, murdering, lesbian prostitute, clamouring for her execution. Aileen fitted the mould of the dangerous outsider perfectly: she represented the fears of middle America.

Watching the documentary, you got the impression that almost everyone treated Aileen as a thing, not as a human being: something to be exploited and abused. To the men who wanted her only for sex and the people for whom she was simply a pawn, to be used for financial gain or to further their moralistic crusade, Aileen was merely a commodity. Nor is Nick Broomfield, the documentary-maker entirely innocent of this. He too has an agenda, albeit a laudable one - to demonstrate the injustices of the American legal system that sentenced a mentally ill woman to death and the failure of the society that turned her into a monster. Ultimately the viewer is also complicit in the voyeuristic tragedy of it all.

In the midst of it all is the figure of Aileen Wuornos herself. In the interviews with her, Aileen is confused and angry. She talks about radio waves and sonic pressure influencing her thoughts, of the police allowing her to kill so they could get more money by selling her story. To look into her eyes is to see someone who is lost. ●

Jem Jones

ABORTION

Battling for control

Over recent years 'pro-lifers' have not so much attacked a woman's right to choose directly: they have adopted salami tactics. **Eddie Ford** revisits the fight for safe abortions, the history of counterattacks, and questions Respect's significant silence on this vital issue

In this week's *Socialist Worker* a relatively long letter appears under the title, 'Bush has no right to control our bodies'. Writing from Canada, the joint authors tell us: "Over one million people came out for a historic march on April 25 in Washington DC to demonstrate for abortion rights. The National Mall, which has been the site of large mobilisations for decades, was teeming with women from all manner of backgrounds, taking nearly two hours to pass a single point on the 2.5-mile march. The Bush administration is attacking women and their reproductive freedoms. The passage of partial birth legislation and anti-choice Supreme Court appointments have women fearing for the fragile gains they have won Hundreds of thousands chanted passionately: 'My body, my choice', 'Pro-sex, pro-gay, pro-choice all the way' and 'Get your rosaries off my ovaries'" (May 8).

Stirring stuff. If born-again Bush had been under the illusion that his attempts to impose a fundamentalist 'pro-life' agenda upon American society would prove to be something of a cake-walk, he will now have to think again. Undoubtedly our Socialist Workers Party comrades will continue to cover, and cheer on, the democratic struggle of pro-choice forces in the US and elsewhere for that matter. However, now it only serves to draw attention to the comrades' squalid manoeuvrings on this issue within Respect, which has actually led them to oppose - as in Islington - a straightforward motion which supported abortion rights. The word 'hypocrisy' instantly comes to mind. They loudly condemn George Bush. Yet they keep deadly quiet about the other George here in Britain: George Galloway, who heads Respect's London list for the June 10 European elections.

The battle for safe abortions is far from over. Every year across the world about 50 million women have a termination. Around half of these are carried out illegally. The World Health Organisation estimates that somewhere in the region of 200,000 women die annually from the effects of unsafe abortion. In Latin America they are the second most common cause of death among women of childbearing age. These facts alone starkly demonstrate how poverty and ignorance combine with catholic moralism and state reaction to produce a staggering loss of life.

Reforms under capitalism should always be viewed as temporary, never as permanent gains. That is certainly true of abortion rights. The US may be the rich-



One pregnancy after another

est and most powerful country on the planet, but when it comes to women's rights the 'pro-lifers' are increasingly setting the agenda. For anti-abortionist crusaders the golden age began in 1873 and lasted till 1973 and the Roe v Wade test case in Texas. The federal government passed the Comstock Act in 1873, which prohibited all devices and information pertaining to "preventing conception and producing abortion". State after state quickly followed suit.

For 100 years abortion remained effectively illegal. Of course, that did not mean that desperate women did not seek ways of ending unwanted pregnancies. Some authorities estimate that during this dark period of prohibition as many as 1.2 million illegal abortions happened each year, with many thousands dying or getting horribly injured in the process. Yet the 'pro-lifers' look back with fondness to this time - and want to bring it back.

Over recent years anti-abortionists have had increasing success in the US - but not through a direct assault on abortion rights. Rather they have adopted salami tactics - both at a state and a federal level - whereby the grounds of having an abortion are whittled away to the point of effectively disappearing. Not content with that 'slowly does it' approach, an ugly coalition of bigoted catholics, born-again protestants, ultra-rightists and survivalist nutters have

been on the rampage attacking clinics which offer abortion services: there have been shootings, bombings and acid attacks. During the 1990s 'wanted' signs giving the names, addresses and phone numbers of abortion providers were distributed across America. Two featured doctors were murdered in Florida. Simultaneously organisations like the Army of God have published step-by-step instructions on how to make bombs. In the war for 'life' there have been many casualties.

When it comes to Britain we may not - yet - have to contend with baying mobs or a growing fundamentalist bloc in parliament, but we must never forget the ferocious struggle that was fought to legalise abortion on this side of the Atlantic, nor the succession of battles that have been waged since the 1967 Abortion Act to defend and extend the rights won by women and the working class.

Prior to World War II arguments in favour of birth control were taken up by both eugenicists/Malthusians and communists - but obviously from somewhat different standpoints. One of the great campaigners was Stella Browne. She openly argued for sexual freedom for women and men, and also for contraception and particularly abortion rights. Browne was a leading activist in the CPGB of the 1920s-30s and later on in the Labour Party. She challenged the idea that unmarried female comrades should "always practise abstinence", and passionately argued that women should have the right to live as they wanted and should be encouraged to fully express themselves.

Browne reports a remark from a male comrade at a Communist Party meeting: "On the subject of sex equality, the majority of my women comrades are as unsound as their capitalist-minded sisters. It is time that some of our sex-obsessed comrades realised that woman's so-called slavery to man is solely owing to her economic dependence on him and can only end when the capitalist regime ends." This summed up the dismissive, economic attitude of many - though by no means all - male CPGB comrades at the time.

Browne advocated both birth control and abortion on demand, and held many

public meetings about the work of Alexandra Kollontai in the Soviet Union, and on the agitation for birth control in Germany and Austria, led by leftwing socialists and communists. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, for example, contraception, abortion and divorce were made available on demand. However, the CPGB did not have anything like a clear position on such vital questions until the mid-1920s, when the leadership came round to the idea that women, in order to fully participate in the struggle, had to be free from constant pregnancy. The CPGB subsequently began to agitate for birth control. Meetings were held which were packed by women desperate to find out about accessible birth control that did not make them ill. During the 1926 General Strike CPGB members, amongst others, distributed leaflets to women concerning contraception. The catholic church counterattacked, stating that they were "the kind of women who visit matinees and sit with cigarettes between their painted lips". There were even claims that communists were using working class women in sinister, Dr Frankenstein-type experiments!

The Workers' Birth Control Group was formed in 1934, arguing for safe contraception but also for safe, legal and free abortion. It campaigned not only for the right to abortion, but for amnesties for women who were imprisoned for having undergone them. At the 1935 Labour Party conference, the Labour women's motion in favour of birth control was narrowly defeated with 1,850,000 votes against and 1,530,000 for. But the battle continued. Women were still being criminalised and were dying from illegal abortions. The issue would not go away.

It was important for campaigners to highlight the tragedies caused by illegal abortion. Although many such operations were successful, there was no doubting the real risk of death or serious illness. Statistics from this time are difficult to obtain, as most abortions were recorded as miscarriages. However, we do know of the practices resorted to by desperate, mainly working class, women.

Not all terminations were performed by sinister operatives up dark back streets. Most were induced by drugs obtained from herbalists, chemists or stalls in mar-

ket places. Women heard of them by word of mouth or through well-thumbed tracts, such as the 1930s booklet *The shadow of the stork*. From generation to generation methods to 'bring on menstruation' were handed down. Women passed enema syringes round their communities and workplaces or resorted to lying in a scalding bath. Others took large doses of Beechams Powders, castor oil or washing powder in gin.

Some of these abortifacients actually produced results, but of course at great risk. They did not usually have a specific effect on the uterus, but were more often than not general poisons, one of whose side effects was to bring on a miscarriage. Such poisoning caused vomiting and convulsions which could not but seriously damage those in already poor health.

Along with taking poisons, women often attempted to self-abort using knitting needles, hairpins, crotchet hooks or skewers. Can you imagine the effect such implements had on women, who used no antibiotics or anaesthetics? Between 1926 and 1935 around 500 died every year from such abortions. Yet, despite the known dangers, women often had no choice.

The birth control clinics that existed were usually based on the principles of the eugenics movement and were paid for by charitable donations from bourgeois women. However, communists and socialists began to become involved and in Glasgow a clinic was set up by Labour and Cooperative women, who received financial help from the trade unions. Those campaigning for birth control were regularly charged under obscenity laws - pamphlets were seized and destroyed. One with the title, *Family limitation*, was described as a "dirty book", as it argued that women should have pleasure from sexual intercourse - obviously a deeply subversive idea. *Family limitation* contained instructions on how to insert a diaphragm, illustrated with a finger inserted in a vagina. This caused outrage in polite society. However, contraception slowly gained respectability, though abortion remained a taboo subject.

Stella Browne continued to campaign. She openly admitted to having had an illegal abortion - a scandalous confession in the 1930s. For Browne birth con-



American pro-choice protestors: no cake-walk for Bush

Hundreds of thousands chanted passionately: "My body, my choice", "Pro-sex, pro-gay, pro-choice all the way" and "Get your rosaries off my ovaries". Stirring stuff. If born-again Bush had been under the illusion that his attempts to impose a fundamentalist 'pro-life' agenda upon American society would prove to be something of a cake-walk, he will now have to think again.



Stella Browne: pioneer

trol and abortion were part of a wider transformation in the material circumstances and social relationships between men and women. The ending of capitalism *alone* could not liberate women.

Every now and then throughout the 30s headlines would appear about a tragic death brought on by a back-street or self-abortion. Yet it was openly acknowledged that 'women of substance' could pay for a safe, 'therapeutic' termination. Working class women, on the other hand, not only took their life in their hands, but were criminalised into the bargain.

In 1938 there was a landmark trial, when a leading gynaecologist was acquitted of performing an abortion on a 14-year-old girl, who was a victim of multiple rape. The rapists were officers of the Royal Horse Guards who not only made her pregnant but inflicted serious physical injuries and left her traumatised. One doctor refused to perform a therapeutic abortion, stating: "As she was raped by officers, she might be carrying a future prime minister of England".

However, the gynaecologist, Dr Alec Bourne, who agreed to perform an abortion insisted that it was the only option. He had acted in "good faith of the patient's welfare". From 1938 until 1967 it was up to the prosecution to prove that a doctor had *not* acted in "good faith", but this obviously only covered medical practitioners and not the unofficial network.

Despite this case abortion was the main cause of maternal death in Britain until the 1967 Abortion Act. It is estimated that between 20,000 and 100,000 abortions were performed every year - the higher figure seems more likely. In the early 60s Holloway prison alone held 44 women who had been sentenced for performing illegal abortions. One said, "I knew it was against the law, but I didn't feel it was wrong. Women have to help each other." Before the 1967 act, the law did allow abortions in very limited circumstances, when a woman's life was deemed to be in imminent danger - in 1966, for example, 9,700 abortions were performed by the NHS and an estimated 10,000 were carried out in private clinics. But for the vast majority of working class women the only option was back-street abortions, which caused unimaginable trauma, pain, as well as sterility and sometimes death - then there was the fear of discovery and prosecution.

During the 1960s, pressure from below, not least from the new women's movement, was making itself felt, resulting in the introduction of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill in 1966. This was introduced by Liberal MP David Steel (now of course Sir David Steel, speaker of the Scottish parliament). The bill took 18 months to get from its committee stage to what became the 1967 Abortion Act - which was in parliamentary terms quick.

There can be little doubt that high-profile media coverage had a big impact -

every opinion poll showed that there was mass support for abortion reform. In turn, of course, this heavily influenced MPs, who were acutely aware of where mass sentiment stood on this issue - so, if you wanted to keep your parliamentary seat... However, as we know, the act that was eventually passed did not enshrine the *legal right* for women to have an abortion on demand - two medical practitioners needed to be of "good faith" that a termination was in the interest and welfare of the woman. Nevertheless, it represented a tremendous step forward.

The 1967 Abortion Act was one of several progressive changes to the law in post-war economic boom Britain: the ending of capital punishment (1965), the semi-decriminalisation of homosexual relationships (1967), major reform of divorce (1969), relaxation of censorship, etc. The Sex Discrimination Act and Equal Pay Act followed. Women were entitled to pensions in their own right and paid maternity leave.

These legal changes were accompanied by a vast expansion in work for women, better access to higher education and the mass availability of the contraceptive pill on the NHS, first introduced on a limited, trial basis in 1961. Yes, these gains were partial and stunted and all managed carefully *from above* - the Abortion Act certainly being no exception. However, they were gains nevertheless and reflected - albeit indirectly - the influence of the working class and, it almost goes without saying, were enough to enrage and antagonise reactionary opinion in Britain.

Then came the 1970s, which saw the women's movement mushroom, with its militant demands for equal pay, education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries, free contraception and of course free abortion on demand - not the pinched version offered up by the 1967 act. The fight for women's rights had become re-energised and re-radicalised - fully so when the official trade union movement, after a sluggish, even hostile initial beginning, threw its still substantial weight behind some key demands.

The words of Stella Browne, uttered in 1931, were starting to resonate again: "Abortion must be the key to a new world for women, not a bulwark for things as they are, economically or biologically. Abortion should not be either a prerequisite of the legal wife only, nor merely a last remedy against illegitimacy. It should be available for any woman, without insolent inquisitions, nor ruinous financial charges,

There can be little doubt that high-profile media coverage had a big impact - every opinion poll showed that there was mass support for abortion reform. In turn, of course, this heavily influenced MPs, who were acutely aware of where mass sentiment stood on this issue - so if you wanted to keep your parliamentary seat...

nor tangles of red tape. For our bodies are our own." This was as clear a statement for the women of the 1970s as it had been 40 years previously.

Naturally, the new act had its opponents. Shocked by the published figures, which showed the number of abortions rising steadily each year (50,000 in 1969, 100,000 in 1975), a powerful alliance emerged between sections of old, traditional Labour - which often depended on catholic votes - the catholic church itself and pretty much the whole of the Conservative Party. In 1975 James White, the rightwing Labour MP for Glasgow Pollok, introduced a private member's bill, restricting the criteria for an abortion and narrowing time limits. Had his bill been adopted, it would have undermined the 1967 Act and knocked women's rights back a generation.

However, times had changed. Parliamentary lobbying may have brought about the change in the law in 1967 - but now mass demonstrations come to the fore. 1975 was not 1967.

While James White MP had probably anticipated a rather tame affair, argued out on the floor of the House of Commons, he and his supporters found themselves the target of a concerted campaign fought out in public and on the streets. The fight against White was tough - and liberating. Women were becoming empowered and self-activating. Many thousands of women, in the organisations on the left and many not in anything, found a voice and were not prepared to be dictated to by some wretchedly reactionary Labour MP.

The campaign itself grew out of a relatively small meeting which agreed to set up the National Abortion Campaign - and throughout the rest of the 1970s it battled on, against onslaught after onslaught on the 1967 legislation. The International Marxist Group undoubtedly played a leading role, but others were prominent too, including the SWP, the 'official' CPGB, various Maoists and a growing array of socialist and radical feminists, loosely grouped around this or that journal.

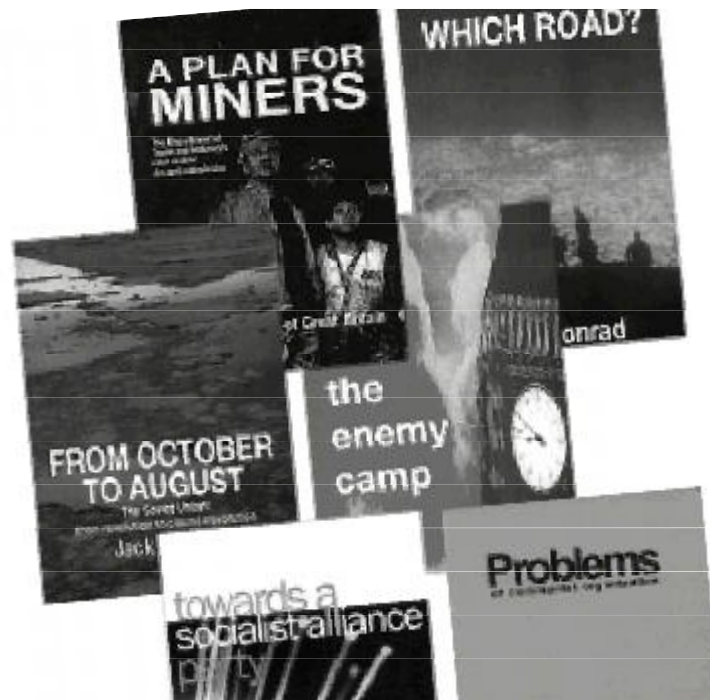
Every time an anti-abortion MP won a place in the ballot there was a new private member's bill - after White there was William Benyon and John Corrie and finally the infamous David Alton. Within weeks of that first NAC meeting an impressively big demonstration was organised, where 40,000 marched. Petitions, pickets, occupations followed. NAC members and supporters systematically disrupted the activities of the then arch-enemy, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child. Women chained themselves to the railings at the House of Commons and protested in cathedrals and churches.

That was not all. Despite the economic recession, the Wilson government's 'social contract' and the disappointment which had replaced the euphoria following the defeat of the Ted Heath government in 1974, the trade union movement was still fit and strong. Women were joining in large numbers and many of the conventional barriers were being dismantled. On the first, huge, pro-abortion demonstration in London there were trade union banners from all the white collar unions, trades councils, post office workers and engineers. Then in 1979 there was a massive demonstration called by the TUC (yes, *by the TUC*), when wave after wave of banners from every trade union and every part of the country swept into Hyde Park, TUC general secretary Len Murray at its head.

Looking back, it might seem strange that we should have to revisit the argument for free and safe abortions again. Stranger still the fact that opposition to abortion has become an issue again due to public courtship of the Muslim Association of Britain by Respect's leading spokesperson and the fact that the leaders of Britain's largest leftwing organisation, who once took a lead fighting reactionaries such as White, Benyon, Corrie, etc, now claim that abortion is a matter of private conscience.

But it is not. It is deeply political. Women should, as a basic democratic right, have control over their own bodies •

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How to build the CPGB - and how not to

Certain books, shall we say, tend to fall open at certain pages. A second-hand copy of the original Penguin edition of *Lady Chatterley's lover*, for instance, will tend to volunteer pages 177 to 185. To the surprise of nobody who knows me, I discover that my *Yellow pages* (somewhat wooden in style, but not without its moments) has a distinct crease along its spine outside p1381: Indian restaurants. My favourite book of all, Jorge Luis Borges's extraordinary *Labyrinths*, opens at p78: a story called 'The library of Babel', which may haunt you for the rest of your life.

Were the founding statement of the Red Platform to be turned into a pamphlet, it would undoubtedly fall open at the section on Respect. Every CPGB comrade, whether supportive, hostile or wavering, is aware that we oppose the CPGB policy of unconditional electoral support for Respect. A quick word count demonstrated, though, that this takes up only about a quarter of our statement. This week, I hope to turn to a so far neglected area of discussion: party-building.

Our statement on this subject begins: "We believe that the CPGB pays inadequate attention to the simplest and most method of building a new Communist Party: recruitment."

I can feel the frisson running through the *Weekly Worker's* famously large readership, as I write. How many of you do not have stories, I wonder, of the commando-like tactics and determination of members of the Socialist Workers Party on a recruitment drive? These guys are *serious*. Serious, that is, about getting you to join. Once you've signed your application slip, however, you are no longer a recruitable prospect, and may require counselling to cope with the transition from object of all interest to cruel neglect.

So no, we do not wish to become a recruiting sect. It is possible, though, to go too far the other way. I had to mount a campaign with all the tenacity of a *Reader's Digest* mail shot simply to join the CPGB. I filled in an online membership application, and received no response. I sent an email. I sent another. I called the national office, though whether my message was mislaid, or simply ignored as a crank call because of its somewhat desperate, plaintive quality, I shall never know. Finally, I spoke to someone, and was pointed in the direction of a local supporters' group. Having attended a few London events, I explained that before I joined I wished to discuss a few concerns. They were discussed with coolness but perfect openness: and the refreshingly frank conclusion that if I wished to join some other organisation then that was fine.

During my train journey home that evening, I reflected that the CPGB ran what was clearly the most open and readable paper on the left, had a sound analysis of most of the issues which concerned me most, and were right to focus on what they called (and now I call) *partyism* over the building of absolute ideological conformity. On the other hand, they might have a thing or two to learn about contact work.

The strengths of our party are also its weaknesses. Our comrades are almost all experienced revolutionaries who have served long apprenticeships - some in other organisations: but this can cause us to neglect those who are younger, or simply newer to the movement. Our paper has always been our central weapon of political intervention, but our focus on producing it removes us from the building of

cells and membership. Our work is highly centralised in London, multiplying the effectiveness of our central office, but this has led us to seriously underestimate the importance of work outside the capital. We are extremely efficient in the raising and use of funds, but this has simply allowed us to maintain a very high level of political campaigning without addressing the issue of increasing our membership. We often play a pivotal part in the major political projects of the left, such as the Socialist Alliance, and Respect. However, this leads us to neglect important smaller-scale tasks - from local meetings outside London to the issue I began with: the recruitment of individuals.

Since forming the Red Platform, we have been particularly aware of the need to apply the principles we have outlined, and with a little effort have grown more by winning new members to both party and platform than by recruiting internally. We wish to see a new emphasis placed on organic growth *throughout* the party. We believe that the Provisional Central Committee should coordinate an initiative to expand our organisation. We have the following suggestions to offer, but they are merely designed to seed a discussion. The plan is a matter for the whole party: our simple contention is that *we should have one*.

- At any given time, every comrade should be responsible for talking to at least one named contact, and report back to their cell their progress in political discussion. *No one* is exempt from the work of party-building.
- Once recruited, new members should be supported by 'mentoring' (usually by the comrade originally responsible for recruiting them) and an induction course in our politics and methods.
- Much as we run a Summer Offensive, during which comrades commit themselves to individual fundraising targets, we should run a Winter Offensive, during which we focus instead on winning new subscriptions to the paper, new supporters and new members.
- All leading comrades should support initiatives outside London by visiting cells and speaking at open meetings. The peculiar emphasis put on the organisation in London should be curtailed in recognition of the need to build a national party for a national struggle.
- At least one aggregate should be scheduled in Wales and one in the north of England each year, with pooled fares being introduced for all.

This is not, as they say, rocket science. It is not even domestic science. Those who were part of Militant in the 80s, as I was, should find it familiar: the essential principles were those that built an organisation of perhaps some 8,000 comrades. Socialist Workers Party members may be put in mind of Cliff's "primitive accumulation of cadre" - though that approach embodied a level of persistence which, paradoxically, undermined the acuteness of the political decision a new comrade made on joining the SWP and therefore often blunted their understanding and shortened their political career in the organisation. We have an awful long way to go, however, before we begin making those mistakes - the opposite mistakes to the ones we are making now.

A final thought on the power of organic growth. Albert Einstein was once asked to name the most powerful force in the universe. His answer?

Compound interest ● **Manny Neira**

Imperialism out of Iraq!



Part of the "setting up of a viable democratic Iraqi government"?

The graphic exposure of the real practice and programme of the US-UK coalition that invaded Iraq in March 2004, together with the growth of genuinely mass opposition, has brought about probably the biggest crisis for US imperialism since the late 1960s.

Following on the Tet (New Year) Offensive of January 1968 was the massacre of hundreds of men, women and children in the Vietnamese village of My Lai, a name which now lives in infamy. Though it was not fully exposed till the following year, it played a major role in tearing through the hypocritical claims of US imperialism to be fighting a 'war for freedom and democracy'. Now a similar exposure of imperialist savagery is taking place. In the post-cold war world, the sickening doubletalk, the canting claims of moral superiority over supposedly barbaric terrorists and dictators, this time in the Arab world, is once again exposed as what it really always was. Lies in the service of *world barbarism*.

And it certainly is something that is spreading worldwide, thanks to the Bush doctrine. From Guantanamo Bay to Belmarsh, from Baghran Airport in

Afghanistan to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, 'detainees' are being held by the British and Americans. It is virtually certain that many of them are also being tortured, as in Iraq. Indeed the whole demeanour of those troops photographed torturing showed their confidence and openness - they knew full well they had the approval of their superiors. After all, these are the same superiors who regularly threaten, and not merely threaten, to hand over detainees to regimes in places like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen or Jordan, whose governments make no pretence that they do anything other than torture 'suspects'.

But the exposures - a product of modern digital and internet technology, together with the fact that even brutal occupying forces often have individuals in them who are repulsed by such activities and will sometimes blow the whistle if they get the chance - is now a major problem for the Bush and Blair administrations. Bush is in the middle of an election year; Blair has been in deep trouble over Iraq since even before the invasion.

The parallels between the current torture exposures and My Lai are so startling that even Colin Powell has been

forced to acknowledge the comparison. The truth is that every disgusting technique employed by the little gangsters of the region, the worst torturers and killers like Saddam, the Saudi monarchy, the Taliban, etc, was only derivative. The CIA has been using, and teaching, such techniques for many decades: one recalls that in counterrevolutionary Chile, under CIA supervision dogs were specially trained to rape women as a particularly savage means of torture and degradation. All such regimes are in the end only pupils of imperialism. Saddam's torturers were trained by the CIA, and the nerve gas he once possessed was supplied to him by 'democratic' American and its cold war ally, West Germany, in order to wage proxy war on behalf of western interests, against 'revolutionary' Iran in the 1980s.

Given that the imperialists armed Saddam to massacre Iranian shia muslims at that time, their claim that they were invading in order to supposedly 'liberate' Arabic shia was always utterly fantastic. In reality, the essential purpose of imperialism's war in 2003, and indeed in 1991, was the same as when it armed Saddam in the 1980s - to enslave, to humiliate, to destroy any minimally independent state in the region with some real means of standing up to the US and its regional gendarmes, most notably, of course, Israel.

So now we see the savagery and barbarism of the United States, and its British junior partner, in glorious digital colour on the front pages of our newspapers and on television screens. We see naked men being tormented with dogs, we see men forced to engage in simulated sexual actions with each other in front of laughing and leering male and female US service personnel. We see piles of naked people being forced at gunpoint to simulate the kinds of activities one would expect to see in more extreme pornographic movies: group sex involving several men, carried out by hooded, terrified people afraid of being killed on the spot, or possibly being taken away and tortured to death. According to Rumsfeld, there is much more of this material around, including photographs and videos of savage beatings, of Iraqi men, women and children being raped by troops, and even of outright acts of murder of detainees.

Then there are the British. The authorities claim that pictures of an Iraqi detainee being beaten with a gun and then urinated on, published by the *Daily Mirror*, are



Sexual degradation: "relatively progressive"?

fakes. The *Mirror* is sticking firmly to what its sources, two serving soldiers in the Royal Lancashire Regiment, have told them: that these pictures are just a sample of many more circulating through both the British and American contingents in Iraq. The pictures are said to be of an Iraqi detainee who was arrested for theft, savagely beaten and abused, and then thrown back on the streets in a severely injured and traumatised state so that the people who did it have no idea if he lived or died. Nor of course could they care less.

The *Mirror* then produced two more soldiers who were prepared to break their anonymity to the military authorities at least and tell of more beatings, torture and murders at the hands of British troops. It has now emerged that the Red Cross and Amnesty International had informed the British and American government that these kinds of systematic abuses have been going on up to a year ago: ie, going back to the very beginning of the occupation. Thus the government of Tony Blair is just as deeply implicated in this barbarity as is the Bush administration.

The British military and its apologists incredibly cite the experience of supposedly fighting a 'clean' war in Ireland as a model for how to conduct the occupation of Iraq. Indeed, the British contingent in Iraq is behaving in exactly the manner it behaved in the north of Ireland; brutalising, torturing and terrorising the population that increasingly it regards as the enemy, just as the catholic-nationalist population of the Six Counties came to be regarded in the same way.

The difference in Iraq, of course, is that the 'enemy' population comprises the majority, whereas in the north of Ireland the British had a mass ally in the protestant British-Irish population that acted as a counterweight to the forces fighting imperialism. No such counterweight exists in Iraq, and for all the propaganda bullshit about the Brits' supposedly good relationships with the people of Basra province - the British zone of occupied Iraq - there is in fact no buffer at all between the masses and the British. Thus when, more than if, the generalised uprising that has already taken Fallujah and Najaf gets fully underway in the south, the British could face a very torrid time indeed. In fact they could face military disaster - which would be fully deserved and welcomed by all opponents of imperialism. Either that or they should simply leave Iraq - now!

The demand for troops out now is an important test of any socialist or communist tendency, particularly now that the resistance has broken out of the murky 'phony war' phase that existed in the early stages. No more does it primarily consist of shadowy forces engaging in scattergun, spectacular actions that as often as not targeted not merely the impe-

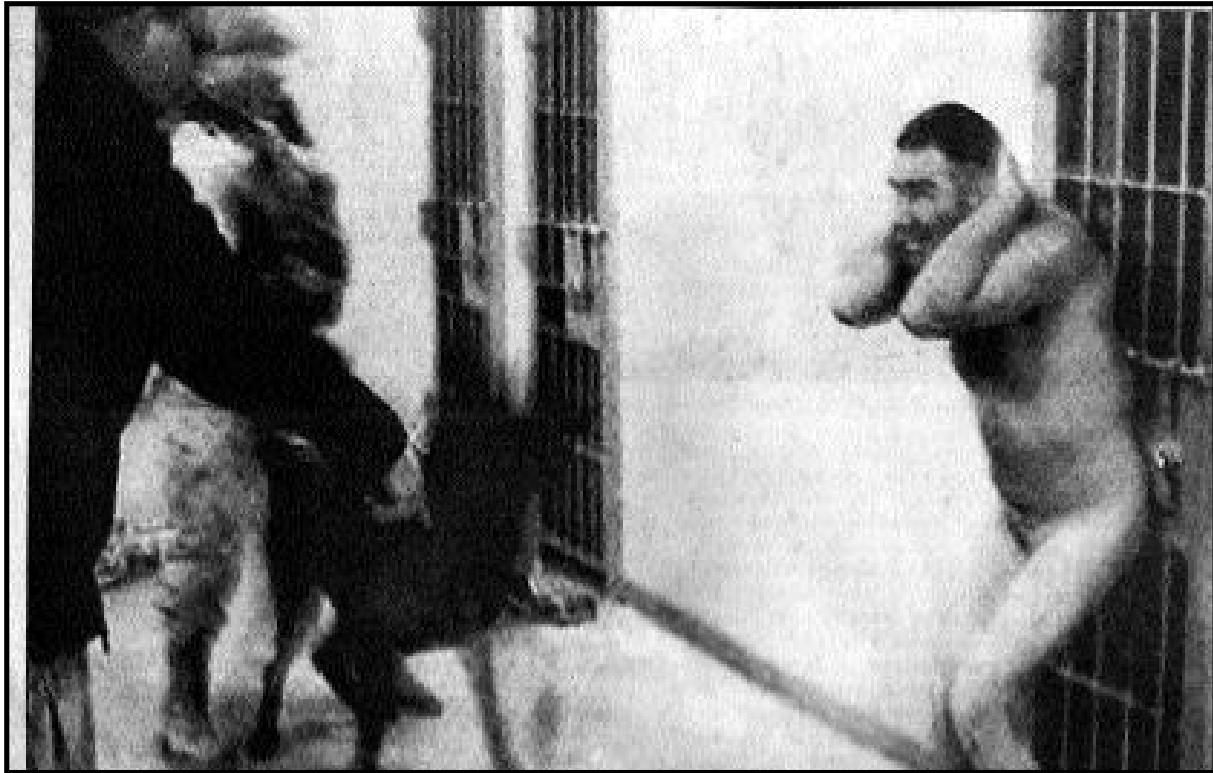
rialist occupiers, but also the Iraq people themselves, or institutions like the Red Cross that really are not legitimate or even intelligent targets. Now that substantial sections of the masses have become embroiled in a national revolt, it is absolutely obligatory for socialists and democrats in the west to call for the defeat of their 'own' side.

The Iraqi left, which has unfortunately been reduced to a fairly pitiful state politically by the meltdown of Stalinism, faces real problems of how to orient in the new situation that has come about as a result of the outbreak of a fully-fledged Iraqi intifada. The forces of shia islam are becoming a real power. Muqtada al-Sadr is acquiring the stature of a national leader who shows signs of being able to appeal across the confessional divide to at least part of the sunni population on a basis that is partly national, partly pan-islamist. A mass national liberation movement has already been born, has already seized important centres, and is growing and spreading across the country.

Now the British are coming under real pressure in Basra from al-Mahdi, Sadr's openly organised militia formation. The US has been forced to retreat from mainly sunni Fallujah, simply because retaking it would require a bloody confrontation that would be rather difficult for the Bush-Bremer crew to carry out at the moment, and might in any case be difficult to win even in a military sense. And Najaf is proving hard to retake also - in large measure because of the fear of the political consequences of a full-scale assault on the city that contains one of shiism's holiest sites.

It is perfectly obvious that for the Iraqi left to sit this one out and take no side, proclaiming 'a plague on both your houses' between the al-Sadr-led mass opposition and the imperialist forces, is a recipe for complete marginalisation, and hence political suicide. To declare this confrontation 'a war of terrorists', as does the Worker-communist Party of Iraq (WCPI) is simply to retreat into a private world, away from the passions that animate the mass of the people against the rapacious occupier. Fearful of the eruption of any movement that could enhance the mass influence of islamists, the WCPI has over the past period been calling for UN 'peacekeepers' to intervene in Iraq to 'stabilise' it, as an 'alternative' to the coalition occupation, and supposedly lay the basis for working class power. A dangerous illusion. Despite the opposition mounted by France and Germany to the Bush-Blair adventure, in practice the UN acts as an extension of international imperialism - above all its dominant power, the US. There is nothing benign or neutral about it.

Worse still is the rump of the Iraqi Communist Party, whose leaders have joined Bremer's governing council. In



US troops out: "inappropriate"?

response to some fairly tame criticism of this 'tactic' in the *Morning Star*, the ICP recently rather plaintively complained that it could do without 'lectures'. But of course, both of these stances, completely at variance with reality, simply ensure that the followers of Al-Mahdi will have a complete monopoly over the national liberation movement. Large numbers of Iraqis at this point, according to all accounts, do not want a clerical state. But, given the horrors of occupation, they could easily become reconciled to such a thing as a lesser evil to the imperialists - and if the Iraqi left washes its hands of the national struggle due to the prominence of the *ulama* in it, then such an outcome becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

This in some ways is the mirror image of the illusions that led much of the Iranian left to support Khomeini in 1978-79, in the Iranian revolution that brought the *ulama* to power. Then the Stalinist and Stalinist-influenced left claimed to believe that Khomeini was some kind of progressive, leading the first, democratic 'stage' of a revolution that would, after a whole period of 'non-capitalist' development, proceed through subsequent stages to some kind of socialism.

They were wrong. Khomeini's islamic radicalism was in reality a mutant form of Iranian nationalism. A novel way to create a strong national state, in circumstances where the more traditional, secular Arab and related nationalisms (Persian-speaking Iran exists in an overlapping cultural environment with the Arab world) had been reduced to utter humili-

ation by the overwhelming imperative of US imperialism to keep a tight hold on a region containing the world's most important strategic oil reserves.

When Khomeini emulated his more conventional and secular counterpart, Chiang Kai-Shek, and massacred the Iranian left in 1980-81, just as Chiang had butchered the equally subservient and illusion-ridden Chinese communists in 1926-27, he exploded these illusions. But what has grown up on the left in the region since, particularly in the form of 'worker-communism' in Iran and Iraq, is an inverted, sectarian, almost child-like mirror-image of this opportunism. Sectarianism is after all merely inverted opportunism in fear of itself.

We see, for example, a tendency by 'worker-communists' to simply equate nationalist and islamist currents with imperialism. But this simply fails to take account of the fact that the 'radical' sentiments demagogically espoused by these forces are in fact an adaptation to deep-rooted popular discontent with imperialist domination. A sectarian, abstentionist stance when such forces lead the masses into conflict with imperialism, indeed equating them with the imperialists themselves, simply again hands over to these forces a monopoly of leadership and the means to direct this discontent, uncontested, into the dead end of renewed strongman regimes and/or theocracy.

Unfortunately in Britain we have an even worse expression of this kind of method in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Unlike the WCPI, the AWL does not even have the excuse of understandable reaction to the opportunism of 'third world' Stalinism, of having to face the pressures of exile at best or bloody repression at worst. The AWL's rightwing Shachtmanite evolution and background - together with its craven adaptation to the sentiments of liberals in and around the labour movement who believe in 'humanitarian' armed intervention by imperialism - leads it to bluntly express what are at bottom simply pro-imperialist prejudices. It is worth remembering, when looking at the material it produces on Iraq, that this organisation is so protective of the right of *Israel* to self-determination that it opposes the right of return of Palestinian refugees to Israel proper, while AWL leaders, in terms of historical analysis, regard the drive by Jewish settlers to expel Palestinians, leading to the creation of Israel in 1948, as a historically progressive war of national consolidation.

The AWL view of the current situation in Iraq is laid out starkly as follows: "No socialist or consistent democrat who knows the history of US and British imperialism will trust Bush or Blair, or rely on them to do anything positive, in Iraq or anywhere else. That is why we opposed

their war. But right now, the proclaimed programme of the US-UK in Iraq and their Iraqi clients and allies - the setting-up of a viable democratic Iraqi government, and ultimate US withdrawal - is relatively progressive, and that of their armed opponents is reactionary by any measure you choose to use. Certainly the intentions of people such as al-Sadr cut radically against the interests of the Iraqi working class and the nascent Iraqi labour movement" (*Solidarity* April 20).

Thus the editorial concludes: "For all these reasons we condemn slogans like 'troops out now' as inappropriate to the situation in Iraq ... In real politics, slogans like 'troops out now' signify support for forces like al-Sadr's in a long and very bloody war. At the very best they are grossly premature."

Meanwhile, one of the group's more vocal sympathisers, one Alan Johnson, has taken this approach a stage further. Near the end of a remarkable exposition of his own political evolution towards the politics of David Aaronovitch and other Stealth-bomber liberals, he spells out the logic of this kind of thinking - probably a bit more clearly than the AWL would like:

"A legitimate and necessary opposition to US foreign policy is being misused to minimise or deny or even to indulge the terrorist threat posed by al-Qa'eda and it is a bloody disgrace. I agree with Jean Bethke Elshstain's view that 'Organised killers with global reach now threaten all of us. In the name of universal human morality, and fully conscious of the restrictions and requirements of a just war, we support our government's and our society's decision to use force of arms against them'" (*Solidarity* March 18).

Johnson is not actually a member of the AWL, but is apparently something of a guru for its more rightwing elements. Thus he has some value in drawing out the logical conclusions of the AWL's political method. Unfortunately, whereas in Iraq itself this kind of logic can only lead to the left being marginalised and reduced to irrelevance, in a country like Britain it produces actual complicity in the crimes of imperialism.

It may be that, given the disgusting practices now being exposed in terms of the torture of detainees not just in Iraq, but around the world - a "new gulag", as one US politician put it - the AWL may begin to reconsider its preposterous belief in the "relatively progressive" nature of the imperialist teachers, compared to their pupils like Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, etc. But that is not the only possible outcome - what is also posed is the possibility of the organisation being drawn completely into the imperialist camp.

After all, one cannot continue walking in the middle of the road forever: those that do tend eventually to get run over from one direction or the other •

Ian Donovan



Al-Sadr's shia militia: leadership unchallenged by the left

FBU

Conference shambles

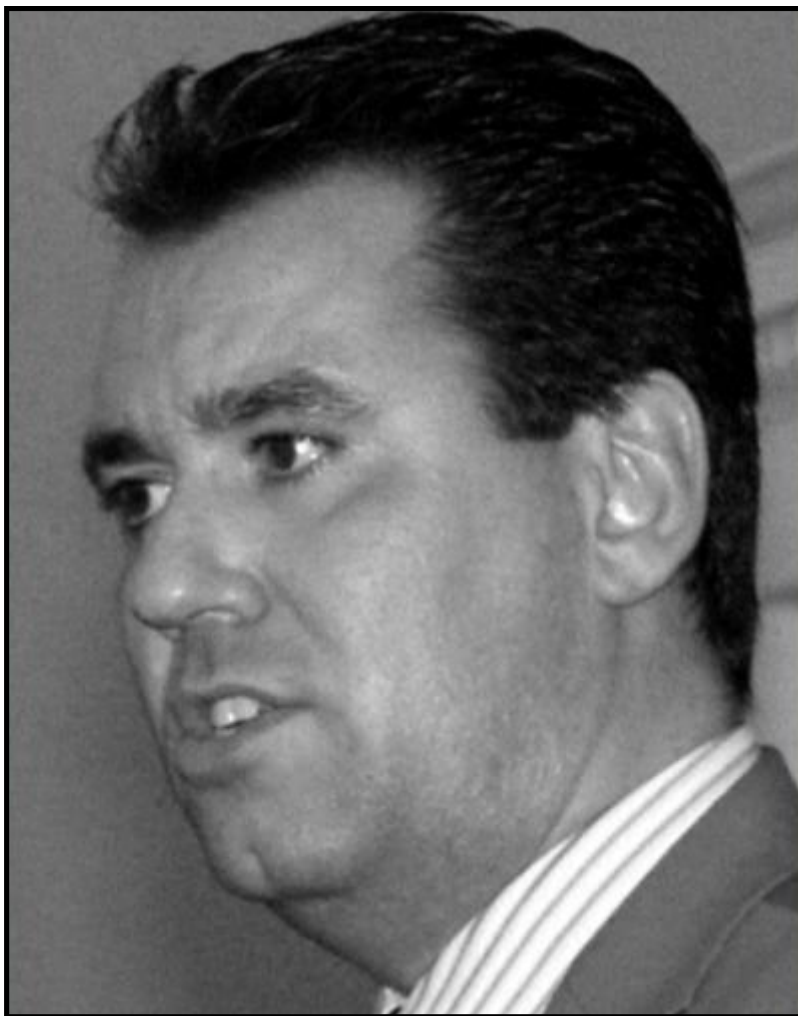
Fire Brigades Union delegates, having turned up in Bridlington for their four-day annual conference on May 11, voted to pack up and go home on the first day.

The decision to "suspend" conference was taken after delegates accepted an executive council emergency resolution on the settlement terms of the 2002-03 dispute. The resolution recommended "a ballot for industrial action to be decided by recall conference in June 2004 following a full consultation with the members". The sting in the tail was that "to allow this" consultation it was apparently necessary that this "parliament of the union", as one dissenting delegate put it, adjourn immediately. The flimsy argument offered by the leadership for this was that delegates needed "to get back to their members", as Kevin Brown of the general management committee said in seconding the resolution.

This is a victory for the leadership. Potentially, it was going to be an uncomfortable four days by the seaside for the Labour left general secretary, Andy Gilchrist. A potentially historic debate on the relationship with Labour was scheduled for the second day and now has to wait for a June recall conference - after the 'super Thursday' elections. There was a real chance that delegates would have voted for disaffiliation from Blair's party - a big embarrassment in the run-up to June 10. It was also more than possible that conference would have taken steps to call a halt to the EC's new witch-hunting move against the left, announced early in the month (see *Weekly Worker* May 6).

At the same time, the whole shambles underlines the scale of the political problems the union has inherited from the inconclusive and demoralising settlement to its 18-month pay dispute last year. After a drawn out campaign of partial action, Gilchrist recommended that delegates to the June 2003 conference sign up to a deal that had not even been finalised at that stage. A promised 16% pay increase was to be introduced in stages up to July 2004.

But, as Matt Wrack, London regional FBU officer, noted at the time, these



Andy Gilchrist: cynical ruse

were "dependent upon 'savings' being made - the audit commission will check that all the other conditions have been met before the increases are paid out. The negotiations and consultations on all the other aspects must also be completed. If anything breaks down, management could renege on the whole deal" (*Weekly Worker* June 19 2003).

And - predictably - "renege" is precisely what it has done. The national employers' organisation refused to honour

the increase due to firefighters in November last year, despite the fact that the union has met all its obligations under the June 2003 agreement. However, given that this agreement actually represented a defeat of the union, it was inevitable that the management would return to the fight sooner rather than later to press home its advantage. The local authority employers have raised problems with the duties of crews on stand-down time between midnight and 7am, demanding greater 'flexibility' to meet "the needs of the 24-hour society".

Stand-down time represents an element of workers' control, so it is hardly surprising that Christina Jebb, Lib Dem chairwoman of the employers' association, comments that the bosses "cannot condone the retention of this as a national condition". Instead, "reasonable working patterns" should be "determined locally" with firefighters (*The Guardian* May 12). The stage is set for a confrontation, then. But how ready is the union for a fight? Politically, organisationally and in terms of morale, there are clearly huge problems.

The EC's emergency resolution was opposed by an alternative from London region. This was identically worded, but with the recommendation to suspend conference removed. The debate was instructive. It quickly became clear that a majority of delegates, from across the political spectrum, supported the EC recommendation to close business, accepting the justification it offered. FBU militants told each other how desperately urgent it was that - having adopted a resolution recommending industrial action - delegates return to their stations to begin the process of winning the rank and file to take action.

Several opponents of the EC proposal pointed out how unconvincing this was - politically and logistically. However, it did vividly underline the lack of confidence among conference participants that the membership - deeply demoralised by the squandered opportunities of the 18-month pay campaign - could be won to support further action. Delegate after delegate got to their feet with variations on the theme that the members "just won't strike

again at the moment", as a delegate from Hampshire bluntly put it.

No doubt this is true - it was not disputed by the opponents of the EC resolution. Moving the London motion, ex-Socialist Party member Matt Wrack agreed that the union was "not in a brilliant position", that there was widespread "demoralisation" and a "lot of work" needed to be put in to "rewind the hearts and minds" of the membership.

However, by suspending its deliberations, conference would actually be dodging issues that were key to winning the rank and file. First, "the question of the Labour Party needs addressing," said comrade Wrack. "We've been pussy-footing around for too long" on an issue that was actually "central to winning hearts and minds".

Second, there were "grave concerns" over the witch-hunting investigation launched by the EC into the "serious misconduct" of a "hard left faction" - the rank and file Grassroots FBU, which stands accused of organising a "union within a union". Despite the pleas for "unity" from the EC, would the closure of conference be immediately followed by "dozens of union members and officials" being "taken out"?

Replying to the debate, Gilchrist promised there were "no tricks" here: the genuine motivation for the EC's proposal was to be "back with the members", to get a head start on the job of winning them for strike action. Just before the vote, London withdrew its motion, recognising that the overwhelming sentiment of conference was with the EC - presumably a dignified retreat was judged more tactically astute than a heavy defeat.

The closing of conference is a mistake, more likely to deepen demoralisation

than boost fighting spirits. Apart from the apparatchiks, there was little actual enthusiasm for the EC's proposal to pack up and go home, but most delegates justified it to themselves using two equally flawed arguments.

First, that the union needed to "put internal battles aside" in order to take on the employers, as a Notts delegate put it. Second, "to stay here", said a Scottish comrade, and "discuss peripheral issues", while the rank and file were waiting for a lead would be "ludicrous".

It is important to emphasise again that these sort of arguments came from delegates from a range of political viewpoints. For example, it seemed pretty clear that had the Wednesday debate on relations with Labour actually happened, the mood was for disaffiliation. However, as one delegate from Strathclyde said, he would be "back in June" to support his region's motion to disaffiliate - but today he was going to support the EC's move to close business.

If there had been confidence amongst those assembled in Bridlington, reflecting a real fighting determination of the rank and file, Gilchrist's cynical bureaucratic ruse would have been brushed aside in the eagerness to get on with the battle. Given the absence of that confidence, delegates were certainly right to be cautious and to recognise the scale of the task they are facing.

But they were wrong to vote for a suspension. Issues such as the relationship with Labour or the democratic right to agitate and organise against the leadership's disastrous tactics are *not* "peripheral".

Indeed, as the 2002-2003 pay debacle proves, they could prove key to victory at the end of the day ●

Mark Fischer

Stay or go?

Judging by the way delegates cheered attacks on Tony Blair and New Labour, it is quite possible that conference would have voted, albeit narrowly, to disaffiliate, as argued by three different regions. The FBU executive now has another month to manoeuvre, counterattack and turn that mood around.

The EC's 'Statement on restructuring the political work of the union' attempted to bridge the gap between staying affiliated to the Labour Party and taking account of the anger and mistrust of the FBU membership. The statement seems to open the door for supporting candidates outside the Labour Party - and could be interpreted as a way to democratise the political fund: "Many within the Labour Party, not only other unions, are deeply unhappy with this government. However, disillusion and anger at a Labour government is not the same as anger with the Labour Party ... We wish to ensure disillusion should not lead to disengagement from the political process ..."

Amongst other things, the leadership is recommending the union should:

- reduce its affiliation to £20,000, using the money freed up "for wider political education, campaigns and

political work";

- allow members "more flexibility nationally and regionally to use the political fund in pursuit of the union's objectives";

- allow the political fund to be used to support "organisations whose policies and principles are supportive of this union". This may include organisations who stand in opposition to New Labour, "so long as they uphold policies and principles in line with those of the FBU".

However, the devil lies in the detail. All proposals to financially support non-Labour organisations or candidates would have to be presented to the EC to take a final decision. Of course, the rules of the Labour Party do not allow affiliates to financially support candidates other than its own. The RMT's expulsion for exactly this reason would undoubtedly serve as a useful precedent for the EC to deny any such requests.

Having foreseen this problem, the London region FBU put forward an amendment: "Regional committees shall not be required to refer such decisions to the EC before implementation." Only with this amendment accepted would the EC's statement make any sense in the real world - and come pretty close to a real democratisation of its political fund ●

Fringe speeches

Disaffiliation loomed large in a Respect fringe meeting on the Tuesday night, which was attended by 50 or so people, even though most delegates were already on their way home. Introductions by George Galloway, John Rees (Socialist Workers Party and national secretary of Respect), Tommy Sheridan (Scottish Socialist Party convenor) and Linda Smith (London FBU regional treasurer and Respect candidate) were followed by a lively question and answer session from the floor.

Tommy Sheridan:

Regardless of what you would have decided in this conference, regardless of which resolution you would have voted through - it would have been a move to the left. In reality, this decision will probably be made for you: I think it is inconceivable that an executive would stand by and watch how the employers and the government is determined to go after the blood of the union and the working conditions of its members. It seems inconceivable to me that the executive would actually attempt to remain affiliated to the Labour Party.

This is the way forward for the union and I hope that in Scotland it will lead to a more formalised relationship between the SSP and your union. Until now we had tremendously strong, but informal relations. I hope the union will open up the debate about which political party best represents the aims and objectives of your organisation - and not stay stuck in a time warp, which was determined when the constitutions of the unions were formed and there was only one party of the working class. That party of the working class is no longer. It has changed beyond all

recognition.

I hope the battle ahead of you will be fought on the basis of no longer being affiliated to a party that is kicking you in the teeth.

George Galloway:

I am sure there was a perfectly good reason to postpone the FBU conference until June 11, which just happens to be the day after the European, GLA and mayoral elections. I would of course not dream of questioning the motives of the union's leadership ...

Under the current rules, you may not give money to Tommy Sheridan, who fights for everything the FBU believes in, but you must give money to Dr Richard Simpson MP, who called you "fascist bastards". That is simply wrong.

However, it is not true that there are no decent people left in the Labour Party. There are thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of good Labour Party members who fought against the war. We just have not persuaded them yet that the hope of reclaiming the Labour Party is almost certainly a forlorn one. But we must approach those people with the tools of solidarity. We need to win people like the leadership of the FBU. Branch after branch of the RMT are supporting Respect. I had hoped that we could have looked forward to a similar situation in the FBU after this conference.

There is a risk, however, of being left without a political fund at all, with no political structure at all if you follow the strategy of straight disaffiliation from the Labour Party. That is why I prefer the democratisation of the political fund ●

DEBATE

Fighting capacity

The editors of the *Weekly Worker* are pleased to carry a regular column from the Red Platform, a group of CPGB comrades who take a minority view on a number of issues: not least our attitude to the Respect unity coalition. Clearly our commitment to open polemic and minority rights is no empty boast.

While just about everyone in our organisation is agreed on the need for critical engagement with Respect, the Red Platform comrades, along with some others, believe that such engagement should stop short of calling for a vote for Respect candidates. They do not actually make the blunt demand, ‘Don’t vote Respect’, but the conditions they wish to impose are so restrictive that in effect that is what they are saying, for it is highly unlikely that any coalition candidate would pass the test they set. Indeed, if we were to place the same conditions on all other left candidates standing in the June 10 European Union, Greater London Authority or local elections, in all likelihood not one of them would be deemed worthy of support.

According to the defeated motion moved by the comrades at our April aggregate, Respect candidates must “announce their support *and campaign*” for the three principles of open borders, republicanism and a worker’s wage in order to earn our backing. There is, of course, a logic of a kind in wanting to impose such conditions, since the CPGB was instrumental in highlighting the abandonment of these principles before, during and after the founding of Respect. All featured in the Socialist Alliance’s programme, *People before profit*, drawn up for the 2001 general election, and were consciously rejected by the Socialist Workers Party in the transition to Respect.

However, they were supported by most SA candidates only in a very formal sense. The SWP, with its disdain for programme, took little interest in the drafting of *People before profit* and was quite happy to let others take the lead - not least the CPGB. But the SWP saw to it that the SA campaigned exclusively around the so-called ‘priority pledges’ - an economic wish list that downplayed or ignored the key question of democracy, including the demands for a republic and the free movement of people. While the commitment of SA candidates to accept only the average wage of a skilled worker was sometimes referred to, it was hardly the cutting edge. Only the two CPGB Socialist Alliance candidates *campaign*ed for all three principles.

In other words, while our aim in championing these principles within Respect was to strengthen the coalition, it had the effect of bringing to the fore the SWP’s shift to the right. We had no intention whatsoever of wielding them as ultimatums. After all, a failure by Respect to accept the three principles would mark no *practical* change from the situation in the alliance. In fact we specifically stated that we would not withdraw support if the founding convention voted against our proposals - although we would, of course, continue to fight against the unprincipled retreat led by the SWP.

In response to our charge of inconsistency, the Red Platform comrades argue: “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” (*Weekly Worker* April 29). Let us not dwell too long on *how* “progressive” (a relative concept) and “inherently partyist” they were (while the CPGB recognises that Respect represents a retrograde step compared to the SA and even the SLP, all three were or are a site for the struggle for a single, revolutionary workers’ party - despite the opposition to that struggle from the majority in each formation).

However, the main point concerns the

effect of applying such conditions today. While it is quite correct to state that different circumstances call for different tactics, the fact that the left, mired as it is in economism, has *never* campaigned for a republic and consistently played down demands like open borders ought to tell us something. Are we to insist upon a *more* principled approach from Respect candidates?

Yet Red Platform comrades seem to be advocating an *unconditional* vote for other left forces on June 10 - the Scottish Socialist Party in the EU elections, the Socialist Party in local elections and perhaps one GLA constituency, and at least some SA Democracy Platform candidates (also in local elections). I am uncertain as to whether this support will also be extended to the SLP (comrade Cameron Richards has stated that he personally does not favour voting for Arthur Scargill’s “degenerate” party) and the Communist Party of Britain.

Such a pick ‘n’ mix approach betrays a certain incoherence. SP election material will not mention, let alone highlight, the demand for either open borders or a republic. Neither will the propaganda of the SLP or CPB, who will also steer well clear of a worker’s wage. SADP comrades will stand on a variety of localist and economic platforms and will almost certainly not focus on the constitutional monarchy. Yet the Red Platform comrades would apparently have us recommend that workers should vote for, say, an SP candidate who accepts only one of the three principles, while - perhaps in the same polling booth - they should refuse to vote for a Respect candidate who might accept two of them. What lesson can possibly be learnt from such an approach?

Even if it were correct to impose special conditions on Respect - which it is not - clearly the three that have been chosen do not fit the bill. Our Red Platform comrades *especially* do not want to vote for anybody from the Muslim Association of Britain (though they are standing as individuals and accept exactly the same manifesto as the other candidates). Its members are deemed irredeemably reactionary, almost akin to fascists, and are therefore totally beyond the pale. Yet, when I spoke to Anas Altikriti, who heads the Respect EU list in Yorkshire and Humberside, he enthusiastically agreed with open borders and a worker’s wage (albeit ideologically filtered through his muslim prism). As to abolishing the monarchy, he was open to persuasion, although on balance he tended to favour the status quo (*Weekly Worker* April 29). In terms of historical parallels he brought to my mind the turbulent Russian priest, father Gapon, of 1905. Altikriti’s ideas were incredibly fluid: an eclectic mix of old Labour welfarism, militant anti-imperialism, internationalism and traditional islam.

So the three chosen conditions could on their own quite conceivably lead to urging a vote for a leading member of MAB but not socialists such as John Rees, Linda Smith, Lindsey German, Ken Loach, Michael Lavalette and Greg Tucker. And, because they are applied *only* to Respect, they do nothing to distinguish it either from Labour Party candidates or the rest of the left. If we wanted, for whatever strange reason, to demonstrate that Respect is completely unworthy, as compared to other, supportable, parties and candidates, we would have to find other criteria.

A difficult, if not impossible, task. Take a look at Respect’s founding declaration and compare it to the election pledges of the SP, SLP, SSP and CPB. You will not find much difference, I assure you. Anti-war, anti-privatisation, equal education, a totally free NHS, pensions linked to earnings, EU ‘decency level’ minimum wage, tax the rich, repeal the anti-union laws, defend asylum-seekers, end discrimination, protect the environment ...

The SWP is now hurtling down the populist path of elections for their own sake. The fight for party has also been set back and must be conducted on less fertile ground. Nevertheless there has been no qualitative break

True, the others might give more prominence to the words ‘socialism’ or ‘socialist’ and might even mention the workers once or twice, but the actual policies are very similar indeed. And the Respect declaration is virtually identical to the SA’s 2001 ‘priority pledges’, as the SWP’s John Rees delights in pointing out.

It is not that such demands are not supportable - they certainly are. In fact they, or something like them, must be considered essential parts of a revolutionary programme. The problem is that, taken as a whole, the various manifestos of the left - Respect included - do not highlight democracy, but instead concentrate on improving the lot of workers as a slave class. They carry nothing, or next to nothing, about how the proletariat can achieve self-emancipation. Demands that actually challenge the way we are ruled, demands that answer the democratic deficit inherent in the UK state’s constitutional monarchy system, demands that prepare the workers to become a ruling class are totally lacking. Nor do they have any understanding of the main weapon our class needs: a democratic centralist Communist Party.

Yes, the SWP is now hurtling down the populist path of elections for their own sake. In the process they have decided that principles such as republicanism, open borders and a worker’s wage are inconvenient. Perhaps a woman’s right to choose could suffer the same fate. The fight for party has also been set back - despite the backing of a number of RMT branches, etc - and must now be conducted on less immediately fertile ground. Nevertheless these setbacks must not blind us to the reality: there has been no *qualitative* break. The Socialist Alliance did not represent some golden era of partyism and principle.

So we must begin from where we are, not from where we would like to be - which means with the left as it is, in its present dire state. In order to create the space for partyism, we need to seek out anti-Blair Labour Party candidates where possible. But we also have every interest in working for the success of left-of-Labour candidates - above all those of Respect, which is the only half-serious force. If George Galloway or John Rees were elected on June 10, that might infuriate some morbid sectarians. However, whatever else it did by way of inflating already inflated egos, it would certainly boost the morale, and hence the fighting capacity, of the anti-war movement and crucially the militant working class. Tommy Sheridan did that in Scotland.

And that, not artificial check-lists, is the alpha and omega of communist electoral tactics ●

Peter Manson

What we fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists, anti-capitalists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose the neo-conservative war plans of the Project for the New American Century and all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.
- All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

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**SWP-SA clique
treat ESF as
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Privileged information

There is at last some progress to report in the preparations for the European Social Forum, to be held in London from October 14-17. In a few days time, the ESF website will be able to accept proposals for the hundreds of seminars and workshops that will take place during our forum.

Organisations from across Europe will finally be able to start networking with other groups working on similar issues. And, thanks to our European comrades, each individual organisation will be able to submit a proposal. The main groups involved in the British ESF organisation, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Action, wanted only pre-existing networks, with groups from at least two or three different countries, to be allowed to make suggestions. Luckily, as with a range of other issues, the SWP-SA were overruled by our European comrades at the last ESF assembly in Istanbul on April 17-18 (see *Weekly Worker* April 22).

Seminar proposals will have to be merged because of space restrictions - but at least this will happen through a process of open and transparent networking: everything that comes in will be put up on the website and sorted according to subject. Groups interested in organising a seminar on a similar subject can simply get in touch with the original proposers - and start trying to arrange a joint meeting.

Another advance is the fact that we will finally have a proper office space from next week. This is long overdue. Until now employees of Ken Livingstone's Greater London Assembly were the only ones, for example, to have access to the official email address - with the predictable out-



Chris Nineham: ammunition to enemies

come that many emails were not answered and vanished down a deep black hole. The office, which will be staffed by four people, will hopefully bring with it a degree of accountability.

The way in which the four staff have been chosen, however, leaves a lot to be desired. When members of the 'democratic opposition' previously enquired how we would arrange the staffing situation and if those working there would be paid, the SWP-SA majority on the coordinating committee always made sure this question was never really discussed. The issue was time and again referred to "the next meeting", where it always fell off the agenda.

At the last meeting of the coordinating committee on May 6, it finally became

clear that the two main organisations in the ESF process had been engaged in yet more secret negotiations. It was simply announced that "four organisations would second one person each" to work in the office "for the time being". The lucky four are: Louise Hutchins from the National Union of Students (and Socialist Action), Chris Nineham and another comrade from Globalise Resistance (ie, the SWP), who will share one position, an intern from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and a GLA employee. Others interested in the 'position' did not even have a chance to discuss this in their organisations, as it was never announced we were looking for seconded staff. Any proposals for other staff will now have to be presented as a hostile alternative to the four.

The plan is that "at some stage", staff will be paid by the ESF - undoubtedly, the four already in situ will have a very good chance of getting the job. When and how much they will be paid is anyone's guess, as finance (or rather the lack of it) is still a rather tricky issue. Many months ago, when Redmond O'Neill (Ken Livingstone's transport adviser and leading SA member) presented the only draft budget we have ever seen, he suggested that office staff should be paid for six months at the GLA going rate.

This now seems a little tricky, considering that London Unison's £50,000 is still the only 'official' donation to the ESF. The GLA will give a six-figure sum and there might be other donations from trade unions. However, the main bulk of our

estimated expenditure of £1.5 million will have to come from individual registration - and the vast majority of that money will not start to come in for a good few months. In fact, most people will not pay for their attendance until a week or two before they make their way to London.

Instead of addressing this problem seriously and discussing openly within our movement how it could be resolved, the SWP-SA have even attempted to prevent any reporting. On a number of occasions CPGB members have been thrown out of meetings of the coordinating committee whenever the subject of finance is discussed (including registration and affiliation fees). Our crime: we openly report developments in the ESF - good and bad. Our exclusion was only reversed thanks once again to the intervention of our European comrades (see *Weekly Worker* March 11).

However, attacks on the *Weekly Worker* (and, more recently, on *Indymedia*) have not stopped - and we are still being used as an excuse to keep details of finance under wraps. The focus of the attacks has shifted, though. It is no longer those never specified but often-quoted "lies" and "inaccuracies" the *Weekly Worker* is supposed to have published about the ESF. In recent weeks, the censorship has been extended to all those who "report negatively about the ESF".

At the ESF coordinating committee meeting on April 29, Rahul Patel (London Unison and SWP) was about to give a report on how many organisations had affiliated. He began with the remark that "none of this can be reported in any shape or form". When a number of people simply wanted to know why this would have to be kept secret, members of the SWP and Socialist Action started to attack the *Weekly Worker* and *Indymedia*: "It is very bad for the ESF if these issues are reported in a negative way", said comrade Patel. Chris Nineham (SWP) thought that "it limits our ability to act if we publish details about our finances. It gives ammunition to our enemies and is very damaging to the ESF." Sarah Colborne (Palestine Solidarity Campaign and SA) thought that it was quite right "not to discuss these issues openly in front of people who want to destroy the ESF".

Oscar Reyes (*Red Pepper*) remarked that in Istanbul, a number of comrades from around Europe requested details of

the financial situation. Why could we not simply openly report on how we are planning to pay for our event? The SWP's Jonathan Neale, however, thought that "the Europeans do not really need to know any details. We were never presented with a budget before the first ESF in Florence. And the French showed 10 people in a room a mini-budget a month before the ESF in Paris."

This is, of course, total claptrap. I remember various meetings of the European practicalities group in which the Italian comrades presented quite detailed figures about the cost of translations, etc. But for the likes of the SWP and SA, all such details are considered privileged information - only suitable for the eyes of the select few.

The meeting came to a close - without any meaningful report on affiliations. All we were told is that about 40 organisations have between them paid "several thousand pounds" in affiliation fees. •

Tina Becker

ESF diary

Every Thursday, 10am - coordinating committee, City Hall, Greater London Authority.

Sunday May 16, 1pm - organising committee, London School of Economics, Aldwych, London.

Monday May 17, 6pm - ESF info meeting for groups working on the issue of Palestine, 6pm, All Hallows Church.

Wednesday May 19, 6pm - outreach group, UCL.

Thursday May 20, 6.30pm - ESF info meeting for anti-racist organisations, City Hall, Greater London Authority.

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

Saturday and Sunday, May 29-30, Paris - international programme working group. Details to be confirmed.

Saturday and Sunday, June 19-20, Berlin - next European ESF assembly. Friday reserved for meetings of smaller working groups.

Relaunch appeal

Our paper will go daily during the ESF. We will put out four issues of the *Daily Worker* to coincide with the four days of the forum - October 14-17.

We shall combine up-to-the-minute reports of all the main plenaries, seminars and workshops with current news items and features along the theme of European and working class unity. While this is an ambitious undertaking for our organisation, we are confident in being able to provide an invaluable service to the many thousands of participants in the ESF, who will be looking for information, debate and perhaps even communist answers.

The original *Daily Worker*, first launched by the CPGB in 1930, was distributed nationwide by a tireless army of volunteers. It recorded all the highs of working class struggle, as well as the lows of the popular front and class collaboration. The liquidation of the *Daily Worker*, in favour of the 'broad labour movement' *Morning Star*, in 1966, was bound up with, and reflected, the long drawn out death of the CPGB under one set of opportunists leaders after another. The final blow was struck by the *Marxism Today* Eurocommunist faction in 1991. However the Leninists of the

CPGB never accepted the right of opportunists to close down the party or to deprive us of our rights and duties as party members. Indeed after 1991 our duties as party members necessarily increased dramatically. We did everything we could to rebuild the party organisationally, but this time from firm programmatic foundations.

During the 1994 general election campaign the *Daily Worker* hit the streets once again - under the control of the Provisional Central Committee of CPGB. These 1994 editions, which supported our four candidates, consisted of just a single, double-sided A3 sheet. Ten years later, however, the *Daily Worker* will be rather bigger at eight full pages.

Clearly this undertaking will demand organisation, planning, initiative and hard work - and not only from our usual *Weekly Worker* team, but from all CPGB members and supporters. They must perform miracles as reporters, distributors and sellers. But there is another vital ingredient: finance. Even if you cannot be in London for the ESF, you can still help by giving our finances a boost.

Send donations, made payable to 'Weekly Worker' and marked 'Daily Worker appeal', to the usual address. •

Peter Manson

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