

Workers ***ACTION***

No.16

June 2002

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Racist agenda sweeps Europe

- **French elections**
- **Trade unions and the left**
- **Refugee week of action**
- **No to post deregulation!**
- **Sharon strikes again**
- **Venezuela – the coup that came and went**
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Workers Action – what we stand for

Workers Action is a Marxist tendency in the labour movement.

In the present situation, after two decades of defeats, with strike action at a very low level and a leadership all too happy to accommodate to the pro-free market climate, Workers Action believes that the most important task is a struggle to renovate the existing labour movement, politically and industrially, so that it can fight effectively in its own interests.

This means a struggle in the labour movement as it is, with all its problems and weaknesses. Most workers continue to support the Labour Party in elections or by union affiliation. At present, attempts to get round this political fact by mounting electoral challenges to Labour are, in most cases, futile and sectarian, and are likely to lead to greater demoralisation. Most importantly, they represent an abandonment of any serious political struggle against the Labour leadership. Workers Action supporters are therefore active in the Labour Party as well as the trade unions and political campaigns.

Capitalism condemns millions to exploitation, poverty, disease and war, so that when its leading international bodies meet, they have to do so behind lines of police. However, Workers Action believes that the relative importance of the anti-capitalist movement over the last few years is a sign not of the strength of the left, but of its weakness and marginalisation. The new free market world order is based on 20 years of defeats for the international working class. Protests outside the conferences of organisations such as the WTO are important, but must not be a substitute for building a socialist leadership in the working class.

Workers Action supports all progressive national struggles against imperialism, without placing any confidence in the leaders of such movements. Neither bourgeois nationalism, nor petty-bourgeois guerrillism, nor religious fundamentalism can advance the interests of the oppressed workers and peasants. We are for the building of a socialist leadership on an international scale.

The collapse of Stalinism in 1989, compounded by the move to the right of the Labour Party and the European Socialist parties, has resulted in an ideological crisis for the left. Some, like the SWP, deny that such a crisis exists – indeed, they claim that this is the best period for a generation in which to fight for socialism. Others question whether the socialist project, fought for by the working class and its allies, is still viable. Workers Action believes that it is, but that to rebuild a fighting left relevant to the concerns of workers means rejecting the methods of sect-building and self-proclaimed vanguardism.

However, Workers Action has a non-dogmatic approach to this crisis of the left. We see it as an opportunity to evaluate critically many of our previously held conceptions in the light of experience. Marxism is a critical ideology or it is nothing. Socialists cannot march into the 21st century with their programme frozen in the 1920s.

If you are interested in joining us or discussing further, write to us at PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX or e-mail us at workers.action@btinternet.com

Editorial

The resistible rise of Le Pen

The two rounds of the presidential election saw France on a political rollercoaster – the shock of Le Pen and the Front National getting through the first round; the passionate anti-Le Pen mobilisations of the next fortnight; and the anti-climax of Chirac's overwhelming victory in the second round. Now that the dust has settled a bit, it's possible to analyse the significance of these events – do they represent a blip or an earthquake?

What was widely seen as a breakthrough for the FN in the first round was the result of a combination of several factors. First among these was the steep decline of the vote for Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party, down from just over 7 million in 1995 to 4.6 million this time. Over the past few years, Jospin has managed to alienate both workers and bosses. Not as right wing as Blair, he presided over a fairly stable economy with falling unemployment, governed in a coalition with the Greens and Communists and cut the working week. But he was also the chief architect of privatisation, selling off far more state assets than any of his predecessors. To the ruling class, however, he represented timid half measures and an unwillingness to tackle France's over-regulated labour market. As the *Economist* commented: 'Mr Jospin destroyed himself. He could not decide whether to run as a social democrat or socialist. In the event, he wobbled grimly back and forth, losing votes to both sides of the fence . . . Though his heart is on the old left . . . his head took him stealthily towards the right.' The consequence was a lacklustre campaign – trying to be all things to all people, Jospin ended up being nothing to anyone.

Most of the other candidates associated with Jospin's coalition government during the five years of its 'cohabitation' with Chirac also did badly. Robert Hue of the Communist Party, which in the late 1970s was still neck and neck with the Socialist Party, collapsed from 2.6 million votes in 1995 to 960,000 this time – the worst result in the party's history. From jointly representing 40 per cent of the electorate a generation ago, the two traditional workers' parties now barely command the support of 20 per cent. The only party associated with the government to improve its position was the Greens, up from 1 million in 1995 to nearly 1.5 million this time, and on a lower turnout. (On the other hand, in percentage terms, it was barely half the 9.7 per cent the Greens won in the 1999 European elections.)

The other most significant feature of the first round was the strength of support for the 'far left'. Arlette Laguiller of Lutte Ouvrière (5.7 per cent), Olivier Besancenot of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (4.25 per cent) and Daniel Gluckstein of the Parti des Travailleurs (0.5 per cent) succeeded in winning nearly 3 million votes between them – nearly double the 1.6 million Laguiller won in 1995 when she was the only far left candidate.

Some commentators, both in the media and within the left, have drawn the conclusion that the far left holds the responsibility for letting in Le Pen. Quite apart from the fact that such an analysis fails to examine the political reasons behind the drastic decline in

Jospin and the SP's support, it is in any case highly unconvincing. It is far more likely that, in addition to the significant section of Jospin's support that stayed at home, he lost votes to other candidates seen as belonging to the centre left. These included former Socialist Party minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, campaigning on a populist, nationalist and law and order platform, who won 5.3 per cent, and Christiane Taubira of the Left Radical Party, who scored 2.3 per cent, as well as Green candidate Noël Mamère, whose 5.25 per cent clearly included some disenchanted Socialist Party voters.

In contrast, the Trotskyist left has taken over a significant part of the CP's old constituency, although it lacks both the implantation and authority that French Stalinism had. For the Communist Party this was indeed a very bad result – 'The death certificate of the Communist Party', ran one article in *Le Monde*. In most of its traditional strongholds like Saint-Denis and Le Havre it polled less than 10 per cent, and was outpolled by the Front National. Indeed, a part of the CP's working class base, particularly in the former industrial towns and cities of eastern France, has gone directly over to the FN.

All of which may seem a lengthy preamble to analysing the significance of Le Pen's vote and the nature of the threat posed by the FN – but it is necessary to place it in the context of numerous other shifts within the highly fragmented French political scene. Le Pen's vote in the first round in fact rose modestly compared to 1995, up 234,000 to 4.8 million, albeit on a lower turnout. Clearly, 16.9 per cent was a good result for the FN – its best in a presidential election – and a further 2.3 per cent went to former FN deputy leader, Bruno Mégret, whose breakaway MNR is even more right wing than Le Pen.

Nevertheless, the FN has come close to this level of support before. In the European elections in 1984 its 11 per cent was regarded as a breakthrough. In the presidential election of 1988, Le Pen won 14.4 per cent, which had risen to 15 per cent in the presidential election of 1995. It hasn't been all plain sailing – the FN has suffered a number of crises within this period. Nevertheless the 15 per cent of the electorate that votes FN looks an increasingly consolidated 15 per cent, and its strength now lies in a broad crescent around eastern and southern France. Worryingly, the FN's support is no longer centred on a few strongholds like Marseille, where its racist demagoguery can be directed against readily identifiable ethnic minorities, but extends to rural areas of France where scarcely any black or Arab people live. Moreover, its vote has a significant working class component.

Some commentators on the left have seen the vote for the FN as in part a confused plebeian reaction to European integration. While it is true that the FN, as part of its ultra-nationalist appeal, campaigns against European integration, most reports agree that the FN didn't place this in the front rank of its agitation, and that instead it concentrated on two themes: law and order, and racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric. The growing disenchantment with

the EU on the right of French politics reflects not so much outright anti-EU sentiment as resentment at the fact that in an expanded EU France is no longer the dominant player that it was in the past.

Is the FN a fascist party? There is little doubt that Le Pen and a core of leading figures within the FN are subjectively fascists, exemplified in Le Pen's infamous statement that the gas chambers were a 'mere detail' of the history of the Second World War. FN leaders look back fondly to French Algeria and to Vichy, and Le Pen has made numerous anti-semitic statements. As if to mock its demagogic attacks on European integration, it supports broadly similar neo-liberal economic policies as the hard-line proponents of integration. It aims to remove statutory conditions governing redundancies, reintroduce the death penalty and opposes abortion.

But the centre of the FN's appeal is racism and xenophobia, which it maliciously links to the issue of crime. It wants to restrict further immigration, prioritise jobs for people born in France, and expel immigrants found guilty of criminal offences and those without citizenship. The resonance for FN's targeting of Muslims and Arabs has grown in the aftermath of September 11 and Bush and Blair's 'war against terrorism'.

These are certainly the politics of the far right, but the FN's methods are not those of classical fascism, which built its power above all on the streets, and through violent assaults on workers' organisations. Although FN supporters have beaten up and on occasion murdered opponents, it remains a 'constitutional' party of the far right, rather than one openly proclaiming the aim of overthrowing democracy. And although the FN's electoral base is thick-skinned enough not to be at all put off by the international chorus of disapproval, paradoxically much of it doesn't consider that it is voting for a fascist party.

Clearly then France wasn't facing a re-run of 1933 in May. But the result of the first round sent a shock wave of alarm and anger through workers, ethnic minorities, students and youth that translated itself into a series of massive mobilisations against Le Pen. On April 25, over 300,000 people, including 100,000 school students, demonstrated throughout the country. May Day saw 400,000 march in Paris, while another 900,000 took part in other regional protests, in scenes that recalled 1936 and 1968.

With not even a reformist candidate to vote for in the second round, the left was faced with an invidious choice – either vote for Chirac and run the risk of being seen to endorse a right wing, anti-working class candidate, or abstain and be accused of being indifferent to the prospect of Le Pen winning or polling heavily. While the latter was consistent with all the traditions of the left, it faced grave practical problems of relating to a mass movement in which the anti-Le Pen aspect was linked directly to the need to stop the FN at the ballot box. This was not only the message coming from the platforms at rallies, but more importantly, it was the overwhelming spontaneous message coming from the streets.

Arlette Laguiller for Lutte Ouvrière initially responded to the first round result by claiming she was neither calling for an abstention, nor for a vote for Chirac – confusing advice indeed! – but LO resolved the contradiction by coming down on the side of spoiling ballot papers. Daniel Gluckstein of the Lambertist PT also called for an abstention, striking a high moralistic note in claiming that: 'All those parties and organisations that called for a vote for Chirac on May 5 bear – and will continue to bear – the responsibility for the anti-worker policies that the government will put into place as of tomorrow morning.' (The logic of Gluckstein's position – that by calling for a vote for a given candidate or party you are taking responsibility for its actions – would of course have precluded a vote even for Jospin.) The LCR, meanwhile, issued a statement which spoke of 'the necessity to block

the road of the extreme right in the streets and in the ballot boxes. We will do this by voting against Le Pen on Sunday May 5, and on Monday May 6 prepare the conditions for "all out" against the politics of Chirac.'

Much of the debate within the left centred on whether a vote for Chirac amounted to a Union Sacrée ('Sacred Union', after the First World War coalition) between the workers' parties and the bourgeoisie. From the Elysée Palace to the leaders of the main parties, there was talk of a 'Republican Front' stretching from Chirac's RPR to the Communist Party. Wrapped in the tricolour, its task was to safeguard Republican values, tolerance and parliamentary democracy. Those on the left who argued that such a 'front' is incapable of waging any serious struggle against fascism were correct, as the Weimar Republic proved.

But the accusation that a vote for Chirac necessarily meant building illusions in Chirac were belied by the evidence of the mass demonstrations themselves. Among the most popular slogans seen on banners and voiced by youth and workers was 'Vote for the crook against the fascist!' – hardly a ringing endorsement of Chirac, and an assessment that demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the nature of the choice on offer, even among school-age youth.

The second round result – 82 per cent to Chirac and 18 per cent to Le Pen – was on the face of it an anti-climax after the impassioned two weeks that preceded it. In one sense it underlined that the immediate threat from the FN was less grave than some overheated commentators had suggested.

But it was also a tribute to the workers' and students' mobilisations that the far right vote in the first round (Le Pen and Mègret) was not able to make inroads into the support of any of the other 14 candidates. Indeed, although Le Pen's total vote was up half a million from the first round, overall turnout leapt almost 10 per cent to 81 per cent, and the far right's share of the vote actually declined by about 1 per cent. In a bad situation it was the best result that could have been hoped for. The voting figures strongly suggest that the bulk of the far left's 10 per cent transferred to Chirac. Detailed analysis of LO's vote suggests that at least 70 per cent of it transferred to Chirac, in spite of LO's advice. Whatever the merits of the abstentionist line, it was clearly not followed by the far left's own voter base, and still less by the supporters of other parties.

The French left has a platform on which it can build in the forthcoming Legislative Assembly elections in June. The almost 3 million votes cast for avowedly revolutionary socialist candidates reflect a deep disillusion, not only with the failed policies of Jospin, but with the entire 'political class' of France. The willingness of hundreds of thousands to take to the streets against Le Pen is also a welcome sign of combativity. In spite of its leadership, the Socialist Party may benefit in the Legislative elections from the strength of anti-Le Pen feeling, and the key to the situation is the correct application of united front policy towards it – something the far left has traditionally disdained.

WA

Trade unions

Will the left leaders fight?

by Neil Murray

Recent months have seen a welcome increase in strike action by several sections of workers, mainly, though not wholly, around pay. After several years in which the level of strikes never rose much above historical lows, this shows a renewed willingness for workers to act in their own interests. While, contrary to the impression given by sections of the media (and, indeed, the left), this is still only a tiny proportion of the days lost to strike action in earlier periods like the 70s, this gives socialists increased opportunity to put forward a perspective for developing these struggles. An important aspect of this is an understanding of the shortcomings of the union leaders and their unwillingness to prosecute these struggles seriously.

At the heart of the socialist critique of the unions is the argument that the leaders are a bureaucratic caste, developed because of their pay levels and privileges which separate them from the experiences of their members, their divorce from the day-to-day confrontation with the employers that ordinary workers face, and their experience of negotiation with the bosses with whom they appear to have more in common than with their members. Lack of control by, and accountability to, the rank and file of the unions exacerbates this problem, as does the constant expansion of a union machinery answerable only to the bureaucrats who appoint them.

This leads to a mentality that sees the preservation of the unions' 'assets' – finance, buildings, etc. but most importantly the perks of the leaders – as more important than the furtherance of the interests of the members. A common interest develops with the employers in ensuring 'social peace'; for the employers because it allows them to continue the exploitation of the workforce unhindered, for the bureaucracy because it allows them the continued enjoyment of their privileges. The employers recognise and fully exploit this weakness of the unions.

None of this means that all bureaucrats

always 'sell out'. To maintain their position they need at least to appear to be protecting the interests of their members. Thus there is often a conflict between conserving their easy life and pressure from the membership to act in their interests. This leads to the bureaucracy acting as a pressure valve, letting the members off the leash sufficiently to appease them, while not upsetting the applecart too much. Under extreme pressure (either from the members or a threat to their position from a section of the employers, governments, fascists, etc) bureaucrats can seem to give a lead to struggles, but ultimately their interest is the preservation of their own position.

Union leaders can also be various gradations of 'left' and 'right', and even metamorphose themselves, chameleon-like, between the two to suit a change in circumstances. Thus, in a period following defeats and of 'social peace', most union leaders will have an easy time just 'going through the motions' of defending the members. Such a period, like the one we have been passing through, leads to an ossification of the bureaucracy, with the withering of systems of accountability and a turn to alternative ways of 'protecting the members' interests', such as union credit cards, travel discounts, etc. etc. This in turn leads to ideas of 'social partnership' – that the interests of union members and employers are inseparable.

Ultimately, the only way to keep the union bureaucracy in check is to build a movement among the members which, informed by an understanding of the bureaucracy's role and the pressures on it, not only attempts to put in place structures which can make it accountable, and replace it with representatives willing to fight with and for the workers, but also create the conditions for the membership to take action without the bureaucracy when possible.

Clearly it is not possible to build such a movement at all times under all conditions, but it has to be an avowed aspiration of socialists at all times, against which they measure what currently exists. 'Left' organisations often (and presently) exist in

the unions of many different kinds, from secret caucuses to open campaigning bodies, from those solely concerned with electing 'more left' people to positions, to those that scorn such concerns. Witch-hunts by the bureaucracy are also a limitation on what can be done. While some of these may be the best that can be achieved in current circumstances, socialists should always be striving to go beyond them to build organisations that better meet the needs of the members.

Reasons for the turn around

Frustration has been building up for some time in the working class, both with many policies of the government 'they' elected, and with the performance of the unions in defending them against these policies. By and large, these frustrations have expressed themselves more in negative ways (abstention from union membership and activity, from voting in parliamentary and local elections, etc) than positive ones. While these have been an expression of disillusionment, opinion polls (within their limitations) have shown a rejection of policies such as privatisation.

This is a long way from the picture portrayed by some on the left of a working class straining at the leash, held back only by the duplicity of union bureaucrats and Labour politicians. Nevertheless, it was a situation that couldn't last as long as the government continued to pursue neo-liberal policies.

Outside of post and rail, the two sectors which have dominated the statistics for years, strikes have been few and far between, apart from some brave, long-running but isolated disputes, such as that of the Liverpool dockers.

Signs of a shift within the unions came when union leaders began to change their tune towards the government between the 1997 and 2001 general elections. Recognising the mood of the membership, many moved from uncritical approval of the government to an approach which argued that pressure needed to be kept up to improve these policies. In the run up to, and especially immediately after, the 2001 general

election, they became more and more openly critical of the government, particularly over privatisation.

Left general secretaries elected

The big shock for the bureaucracy came with the election of a left candidate, Mick Rix, as general secretary of Aslef in 2000. This came pretty much out of the blue (even for the left), following discontent with the deals done with the rail companies over the heads of the membership by the previous general secretary. Rix, formerly a member of the Socialist Labour Party, rejoined the Labour Party after his election. It is extremely rare for the incumbent to be beaten for such a post; change usually happens on retirement.

Subsequent general secretary elections have seen Mark Serwotka elected in PCS, Dave Prentiss in Unison, Billy Hayes in the CWU, Andy Gilchrist in the FBU and Bob Crow in the RMT. Only Serwotka beat the incumbent; Gilchrist replaced an equally left post-holder, and it is debatable as to whether Prentiss represents any left advance over Bickerstaff.

These elections have set alarm bells ringing both among the bureaucracy and the Labour leadership. During the election for the replacement of Jimmy Knapp as general secretary of the RMT, an internal TUC document was leaked which showed the level of concern at the prospect of Crow being elected. TUC general secretary John Monks had to issue a disclaimer saying that the TUC did not interfere in the internal elections of individual affiliates.

Blair has described the new generation of union leaders as 'wreckers' for their defence of their members' interests and of public services against privatisation. While Labour Party officials got their hands burnt a few years ago when they tried to get Jack Dromey elected general secretary of the TGWU against Bill Morris, they are no doubt attempting to influence the outcome of union elections, if more covertly for fear of a backlash.

Three of the biggest prizes in the union movement are up for election now or in the near future – the general secretaries of the GMB and the AEEU sections of the merged (AEEU-MSF) union, Amicus, and the deputy general secretary of the TGWU.

In the AEEU, Jackson was forced into an election by the threat of court action over his announcement that he would continue in office. The extent to which the bureaucracy will go to maintain their positions (and Jackson is always described as 'Tony Blair's favourite union leader') is shown by the fact that regional officials transferred their membership from branch

to branch in order to vote for the nomination of Jackson over his challenger, Derek Simpson. While the guilty officials were rapped over the knuckles after this was exposed in the media, no further action has been taken, and no doubt this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the work being done by the union machinery for Jackson. While Simpson cannot be classed as of the far left, clearly a (albeit unlikely) defeat for Jackson would be a real blow to the right of the trade union movement.

The contest to be Morris's deputy in the TGWU shows the limitations of politics on offer among the higher ranks of that union. The candidates are Peter Booth, presently the union's national organiser in the manufacturing sector, and Tony Woodley, the union's national automotive officer. While Woodley is the candidate of the TGWU's extremely secretive 'broad left', neither can be said to have exactly led a fight for jobs, with the manufacturing sector disappearing and the car industry not far behind. Woodley's speciality has been sacrificing jobs and conditions in the hope that the bosses then keep their factories open.

The limitations in the changes that have taken place in the upper echelons of some unions have to be recognised. While Serwotka is clearly of the far left, and Crow and Rix are a break from the politics of their predecessors, Prentiss is pretty much in the mould of Bickerstaff, able to put on a left face when it suits, and the extent to which Hayes has been willing to lead a fight is shown by the fact that he has left most negotiations in the postal sector (over both pay and deregulation) to the person he defeated in the election, John Keggie.

That has not stopped the far left going overboard in hailing these new leaders. One SWP Unison branch secretary came back from the 2001 Unison conference (Prentiss's first as general secretary) talking as if Prentiss had become a revolutionary overnight (despite the fact that he had defeated a left candidate), and sections of the CWU Broad Left wanted to give Hayes the BL's endorsement when he stood. This was defeated, but many refused to see the distinction between supporting Hayes as the lesser of two evils and giving him some kind of stamp of approval as a great advance.

The other factor limiting how much of a change this represents in the unions is the fact that in almost no cases was there a well organised left not only campaigning for the election, but also able to call the winner to account. Rix's election was more chance than design, and the main left force in the PCS initially actually *opposed* Serwotka standing. While Crow won the post of gen-

eral secretary easily, two other national positions elected shortly afterwards went to the right, indicating that the elections were as much about personalities as political differences. Recent NEC elections in PCS have shown the collapse of the middle ground, but with the right much more successful than the left, leaving Serwotka as a 'prisoner' of a hostile NEC (which has, for instance, banned him from speaking in opposition to the 'war against terror'). The strongest broad left, in the CWU, while regularly able to win the majority of seats on the telecoms side of the NEC, has been unable (some might say unwilling) to break into the postal sector, leaving it with little influence in the current situation.

The current struggles

None of this means we don't welcome the changes at the top of the unions. But we also have to recognise that real change will not come about solely by changing a few faces. Some of the recent disputes illustrate the shortcomings of these new leaderships.

The failings of the CWU leadership are dealt with elsewhere in this issue of Workers Action. While Unison and the NUT have sanctioned one-day strikes by their London memberships over London weighting, the NUT leadership felt confident enough to let the ballot lapse without calling further action, and it is quite likely that Unison will do the same. PCS had a long strike over screens in Jobcentres, ultimately winning concessions, but the left was unable to convince the membership to make this a sustained *national* strike, and it was left to a few areas to take action.

While rail strikes over pay have been frequent in recent months, clearly with the endorsement and support of Rix and Crow, they have not been able to stop the Public Private Partnership for the London Underground, or win the full reinstatement of victimised (and demoted) union activists.

It is clear that most union leaderships, including many of the new 'left' ones, are no more willing to lead a serious fight against government policy than those they replaced. While they are more willing to openly criticise the government, and to occasionally let the members off the leash, they place strict limits on this.

The fight on the political front

It is when we look at the willingness of the union leaderships to lead a political fight against the government's policies that their limitations become even more obvious, and the failure of most of the far left to come up with a coherent alternative becomes

most glaring.

While most union leaders (Jackson and his co-general secretary, Roger Lyons, being the most obvious exceptions) have become more and more openly critical of much government policy, when it comes down to what they propose to *do* about it we get only bravado and confusion.

Among the unions affiliated to the Labour Party, several leaders have spoken of the possibility of withdrawing support from the Labour Party and supporting other parties. Several have addressed gatherings of

the Greens, Liberal Democrats, and even, in Monks's case, the Conservatives (although given the flak he got from other union leaders, he is unlikely to repeat the exercise). Serwotka is the only one to align himself fully with the Socialist Alliance, but then he doesn't have the question of being the leader of an affiliated union, or even one with any kind of political fund, to deal with. Crow has occasionally supported the Socialist Alliance, but in an interview with *Tribune* he toyed with the idea of linking up with the Liberal Democrats.

The most explicit statement was that by Edmonds of the GMB, who said his union would only support those Labour candidates in the May local elections who agreed with its policies on issues like the privatisation of local services. Yet no more was heard of this by the members, and when we look at the problems associated with it, it becomes obvious why. It would have required the union to write to every Labour candidate, but what would have been the question? Would it have been simply 'Do you agree with the GMB's policy on

No blank cheque for New Labour – make the link work!

The following statement is being circulated to bring together those who want to make the case for critical Labour Party affiliation. To add your name to the statement, or for more information, contact petefirmin@gn.apc.org or write to PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

The Labour Party was formed by the trade unions, and those trade unions remain an integral, though autonomous, part of the Labour Party at every level.

The sight of a Labour Government acting against the interests of trade unionists – privatising public services and attacking us when we take industrial action – makes us believe it is time for affiliated trade unions to act collectively and assert our voice within the Labour Party.

Too often our representatives on Labour Party bodies (National Executive Committee, National and Regional Policy Forums, Regional Boards, etc) fail to reflect trade union policy in motions and votes. Significant financial contributions in addition to affiliation fees are given to the Party, especially at national level, regardless of whether the campaign or candidates oppose key union policies. MPs promoting policies in conflict with those of the sponsoring union are given support.

We call for a campaign to give trade unions an effective voice for our policies in the Labour Party, based on the dual principle of maintaining affiliation fees in full and renewing trade union participation at every level of the Labour Party with representatives who are accountable to their trade union members, who promote policies in the interests of trade unionists and who refuse to subsidise the anti-union policies of an unaccountable Government.

Initial signatories (*all in a personal capacity*):

Fire Brigades Union

Mick Shaw, *National Executive member*,

UNISON

Andrew Berry, *Deputy Branch Secretary, Islington UNISON, London Region, Local Government Executive*; Jacqui Brown, *UNISON Housing Association Branch Political Officer, member London Region Political Committee*; Mike Calvert, *Assistant Secretary, Islington branch. Convenor. Social Services Shop Stewards Committee, Islington UNISON*; Gwen Cook, *Political Officer Hammersmith & Fulham UNISON, member London Regional Political Committee and Hammersmith & Fulham CLP*; Dorothy Macedo, *UNISON representative, London Region Board, Labour Party*; Jon Rogers, *Secretary, Lambeth UNISON*; Peter Woodward, *Branch Chair, Lambeth UNISON*; Ian Griffiths, *Education Convenor, Lambeth UNISON*; Luci Davin, *Publicity Officer, Camden UNISON*; Simon Deville,

Secretary, UNISON Voluntary Organisations Branch; Valerie Graham, *UNISON, Chesterfield Borough Councillor*; Patrick Hall, *UNISON, vice-chair Leeds Central CLP*; Philip Lewis, *Shop Steward, Camden Transport Services, Depot Staff Section; Camden UNISON APF Officer*; Terry Luke, *Islington UNISON retired members secretary*; Richard Forth, *APF Officer, Birmingham branch*; John Stewart, *Publicity Officer, UNISON Voluntary Organisations branch*; Bob Wood, *UNISON, Secretary, Leeds Central CLP.*

CWU

Pete Firmin, *Political Officer, West End Amal branch, Chair, Brent Trades Union Council*; Bryan Harrod, *Political Officer, South & East Thames Amal branch*; Mick Houghton, *Branch Officer, CWU West London branch, President Ealing Trades Council*; Linda Kietz, *Chair & Political Officer, CWU West London Branch*; Mick Kyriazopoulos, *Political officer, N/NW London branch*; Sam Neave, *Political Officer, Mount Pleasant branch*; Gerry Ryan, *Branch officer, London City West branch*; Paul Stygal, *Secretary and Political Officer, London East branch*; Alan Tate, *Secretary, London Region Political Committee*; Archie Taylor, *Political Officer, South & East Thames Amal branch*; Colin Tull, *Eastern Region Political Officer, Political Officer, Northern Home Counties branch*; Lee Waker, *Political Officer, East London Postal branch*; Tom Walker, *Branch Secretary, Northern Home Counties Postal branch.*

RMT

Jeff Slee, *President, South East Regional Council*; Diana Udall, *RMT representative, London Region Board, Labour Party.*

GMB

Dave Statham, *President, GMB Holborn Branch; Trade Union Liaison Officer, Brent East CLP*; Pete Turner, *Secretary Hammersmith & Fulham Trades Union Council, and President GMB Fulham 1st branch.*

TGWU

Danny Considine, *prospective shop steward, Leighton Hospital, Crewe and Nantwich CLP*; David Harris, *committee member 1/1347 branch, Brighton*; Kevin Flack, *Secretary 1/427 Branch*; Richard Hughes, *Branch Secretary, 5 / 610 ACTS (North Staffs Voluntary Sector) branch.*

USDAW Andy Walker, *USDAW, prospective Labour candidate, Redbridge Council.*

AMICUS Ian Malcolm-Walker, *Secretary MSF-amicus Derby General Branch.*

UCATT Sean Cullen, *Secretary, Harlesden branch.*

This statement is also supported by Labour Party NEC members Mark Seddon (editor, *Tribune*) and Christine Shawcroft.

x?', or would it have been the more explicit (and meaningful) 'Are you prepared to vote in full council for these policies?'. But this would have been asking councillors to commit themselves to breaking the whip in many cases. Was the GMB then willing to mount a campaign in their defence? No wonder no more was heard of the proposal.

The RMT has finally acted on its policy (voted for several years ago by its Annual General Meeting, but sat on by Knapp) of cutting funding to MPs who oppose union policy, and has gone one stage further in establishing a new group of RMT-supported MPs willing to campaign for such policies.

Several unions are in the process of cutting their funding to the Labour Party, mainly their donations, but in some cases the level of affiliation as well. While the former is more than justified, the latter is mistaken because it actually reduces what say the unions have in determining Labour Party policy, and increases the proportion of the right-wing AEEU-MSF votes among the affiliated unions.

Yet the one path the bureaucrats choose to avoid is to directly challenge the Labour leadership at Labour conference, on its NEC, Policy Forums etc. At the 2001 Labour conference, the promised fight over privatisation never happened, because the main union leaders said the international situation (soon after September 11) meant it was 'inappropriate'. But nor have they performed better before or since. At National Policy Forums, union delegations consistently fail to push their own policies. At the NEC, union representatives almost invariably back the leadership against the criticism of the centre left Grassroots Alliance-supported constituency representatives.

The most glaring example of this was at the NEC meeting in March this year, when Constituency representative Mark Seddon and Mary Turner of the GMB moved a resolution that there be no further privatisations. The chair and leadership manoeuvred to have this referred to the Policy Commission (i.e., to bin it), and none of the union representatives present, bar the two from the GMB and Vernon Hince of the RMT, was prepared to oppose. Prentiss showed his real credentials when the behaviour of the Unison representatives at that NEC meeting was raised at a subsequent meeting of his union's affiliated political fund, when he defended their behaviour. The CWU's representative John Keggie has not even been present at the last two meetings of the NEC, at both of which the issue of Post Office deregulation has come up.

Far left up a cul-de-sac

All this is of little concern to supporters of the Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Party in the unions, who are much more intent on getting union funding for their election candidates than holding leaders to account for their failure to pursue union policy. Happy to denounce the Labour government at every opportunity, they seem almost blind to the failings of the union leaderships who let them get away with it.

The Socialist Alliance has been hailing its recent trade union conference as a great success, because about 1,000 people attended it. But for those looking a bit deeper, there were real problems. Billed as a 'debate' about the future of the political funds, it was no such thing, with all the platform speakers committed to winning union funding for alternative candidates, and little time for discussion from the floor. No attempt was made to have a speaker putting forward an alternative point of view, with the result that it was more of a revivalist rally than a conference. Despite the claim that a united anti-privatisation campaign would come out of the conference, no such thing emerged, possibly because the most coherent platform speaker, Mark Serwotka, argued for a strategy involving those who do not support the Socialist Alliance, and they, of course, were largely absent. All the model resolutions in the conference pack were about winning branch funding for left candidates. Clearly the political direction of the unions as *national* bodies is of far less concern.

The pamphlet produced by the Socialist Alliance for the conference 'Whose money is it anyway?', is more of the same, barely mentioning accountability. But in its most remarkable section, on whether leaving the disposal of political funds in the hands of branches could lead to the funding of Tories and Liberals, it merely asserts that this could not happen, because they 'are the traditional parties of the employers and should have no claim on our funds'. True, but that doesn't answer the problem that for many (including some left union leaders) the Liberal Democrats appear to be to the left of the Labour Party. You don't prevent something happening by simply saying it won't.

To listen to some on the left, the reason many union leaders sell out their members is almost solely down to their affiliation to the Labour Party. This rather conveniently ignores the failure of large non-affiliated unions, like the PCS and the teaching unions, to conduct any kind of fight. While affiliation obviously plays a role, this view plays down the fact that the tendency of

all union bureaucracies is to compromise

Walking on two feet

A coherent strategy for the unions has to link a fight for industrial action to defend jobs, conditions, etc, to a political fight to take up these issues inside and outside the Labour Party. For this reason the recent article by Rix and Crow in the *Guardian* was welcome, where they took up the question of the performance of union representatives on Labour's NEC, as are the advertisements from Aslef in *Tribune* which call on trade unionists to act on the behaviour of their representatives.

Both these are couched in similar terms to the statement being circulated among trade unionists (see box) calling for trade union leaders to be held accountable for their failure to fight for union policy in the Labour Party. This provides a serious alternative to the strategy of the Socialist Alliance, which amounts to leaving the field clear for the bureaucrats to continue their cosy relationship with the Labour bureaucracy. **WA**

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English local elections – the abstentions have it

by Simon Deville

You could have been forgiven for not noticing the English local elections on May 2. On an overall national scale there was little change of any great significance – of 170 councils, Labour lost control of 12 and won 4, and the Tories gained control of 15. With the average turnout at 35 per cent, it's clear that most people either didn't know or didn't care that elections were taking place.

It's not that people lack an interest in politics, rather that they have become alienated from their local authorities and political parties more generally for sound, rational reasons. Both Tory and Labour governments have stripped local authorities of much of the power they might have used to affect the local community. The role of councils is increasingly to oversee central government initiatives, tendering processes and so on, with less and less room to implement progressive policies. It's hardly surprising, then, that the people of Hartlepool elected a man in a monkey suit as their new mayor.

The problem is that many Labour councillors and party activists have come to accept, however grudgingly, this reduced role for local authorities. Trade unions and affiliated organisations take up fewer of the places they are entitled to on Labour Party bodies because they see little opportunity of shaping council policy. Until there is a concerted effort at a national level to demand greater funding for local authorities and new legislation to allow them to implement wide-scale programmes that can transform local communities, many people will see little point in voting.

One of the surprising things about the elections was the extent to which people have been prepared to continue voting Labour, even in boroughs like Hackney where the Labour administration has led the local authority to the point of bankruptcy through years of corruption and mismanagement. In general, Labour did better than might have been expected in a local election, traditionally an opportunity

to punish the government and reward the opposition parties.

The Socialist Alliance

The Socialist Alliance stood just over 200 candidates across the country. The statement on their web-site claims they trebled their share of the vote since the general election last year, though a more realistic assessment would recognise that it is easier to get a reasonable percentage of the vote in a small local council ward on a low turnout than in a parliamentary constituency in a general election. That said, the Alliance won up to 20 per cent of the vote in several wards around the country, generally scoring higher inside rather than outside London, though nationally their average was 5.8 per cent.

Unfortunately this is likely to re-enforce the sectarianism of the Alliance towards the rest of the labour movement and encourage their members in the belief that they are a credible national electoral force. Many of those who were originally more sceptical of the Alliance's electoralism are increasingly being drawn into the endless cycle of standing in elections for the sake of it, with work in the broader mass movements becoming more and more subservient to the needs of promoting the Alliance.

The Socialist Alliance and the BNP

The Socialist Alliance clearly haven't had a detailed discussion about standing in areas where fascists stand a good chance of getting elected. Their decision to stand in a number of wards in Burnley, for example (including in Gannow ward where Terry Grogan was elected for the BNP by just four votes), seems to cut across the advice that was being given by the SWP-dominated Anti-Nazi League to vote for anyone except the fascists. There were several other wards where the BNP came a fairly close second and the Socialist Alliance stood.

For those Alliance supporters who still see standing in elections as a tactic, serious questions need to be raised about handing the BNP propaganda victories such as

this. Clearly the blame for the growth of the BNP and the low turnout in the elections lies squarely with Labour. Furthermore, the Labour leadership's response to the growth of the far right – adopting more right-wing and racist policies – simply fuels the conditions in which fascism will grow. However, the Alliance 'planting the red flag' in these wards has done absolutely nothing to stop the right, and will leave the left open to the accusation of splitting the vote for the workers' parties and letting the fascists in.

Of course, the left should be building broad anti-fascist campaigns in areas where the fascists have even a small base of support. But at the same time, the left can and should be challenging Labour's policies that leave working class communities to rot. None of this necessitates standing in elections as a matter of principle. Electoral challenges to Labour may well have some advantages for the left in some circumstances, providing the left with a broad platform for its ideas that it might not otherwise get. For an increasing number of Alliance supporters, however, standing in elections wherever they can scrape together the deposit is a matter of principle, even if this does mean the BNP winning more seats.

WA

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Defend asylum seekers – build the week of action

by Pete Firmin, Secretary, Brent Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

Le Pen's success in the first round of the French presidential election is only the latest manifestation of the racism spreading across Europe. Several countries of the European Union have strong racist parties, some of which are in government.

The main victims of this racist assault are asylum seekers, pilloried for wanting to escape persecution in their home countries, or for wanting to better their lives like many migrants over the centuries. Despite the fact that Europe takes a tiny proportion of those seeking asylum compared with neighbouring countries in Africa and Asia, the response of 'mainstream' parties and governments has been to crack down on the right of asylum.

In Britain, the response of the government to events in France has been to assert that 'it couldn't happen here' because the government is tough on asylum seekers. This toughness consists of building new detention centres, continuing forced dispersal and a bureaucratic system giving little chance to the individual to put their case before deportation. As in France, the government refuses to recognise that it is this pandering to racism which fuels support for the far right.

Home Secretary Blunkett has vividly shown the crassness of the government's approach with his statement that the children of asylum seekers are 'swamping' schools to back up his insistence that they should be educated in classes in the detention centre. Yet there is plenty of evidence that, given the resources, schools benefit from the diversity which such children bring, and the children of asylum seekers benefit from interaction with other children. It also rather contradicts Blunkett's insistence elsewhere that immigrants have to integrate.

In the face of this onslaught, anti-racists have to stand up for the rights of asylum seekers, and, indeed, for the right to asylum. The recent conference in Manchester to defend asylum seekers was a welcome step forward. Jointly called by several organisations, it was attended by around 400 people – a mixture of campaigners, members of voluntary organisations and asylum seekers themselves.

The chief outcome of this conference, beyond lively and fruitful discussions on campaigning in the unions, preventing deportations and much else, was the decision to call a

week of action from June 15-22. This coincides with the second anniversary of the death of 58 Chinese people in a lorry at Dover. The week of action will start with demonstrations at Harmondsworth (near Heathrow airport) and Dungavel (outside Glasgow) detention centres, and culminate in demonstrations in Scotland and central London, with local meetings, protests, etc., during the week.

Readers of Workers Action should help to build the week of action, using the model resolution to win support from trade unions, Labour Parties and other organisations. Brent East CLP has already agreed support. We need the biggest possible turn out on the 15th and 22nd as part of a campaign to show that racism, whether from the government or the far right, will be vigorously opposed.

REFUGEE WEEK OF ACTION

Say no to:

DEPORTATION

DETENTION

DISPERSAL

**Stop attacks on
asylum seekers
DEMONSTRATE**

**Refugees are
welcome here**

**SAT 22 JUNE. ASSEMBLE MIDDAY,
MALET STREET, LONDON, W1**

CALLLED BY • Barbed Wire Britain • Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers
• National Civil Rights Movement • National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns

Refugee Week of Action

Model Motion

This branch notes:

- 1) The devastating fire at the privately-run Yarl's Wood detention centre in February, and the subsequent refusal of the Home Office to grant a full, independent public inquiry.
- 2) The Home Secretary's 2001 White Paper, Secure Borders, Safe Haven, which paves the way for:
 - a) A doubling in the number of asylum seekers, including infants and children, to be detained to 4,000;
 - b) a quadrupling in the number to be deported to more than 30,000 a year, disregarding the validity of their asylum claims;
 - c) accommodation centres housing hundreds in isolated rural areas, segregated from mainstream society and a potential target for racist attacks;
 - d) continuation of forced dispersal;
 - e) and the scrapping of the humiliating voucher scheme, but benefits still limited to 70% of basic Income Support.

- 3) The annual refugee week, from 15-22 June, offers an opportunity to show solidarity with refugees and to protest against draconian government policy.
- 4) The call from the 23 March conference in Manchester for a national demonstration on 22 June in central London and national demonstrations outside detention centres on 15 June.

This branch believes:

- 1) Government policy on and media scapegoating of asylum seekers are fuelling an atmosphere where racist violence is increasing along with support for fascist parties such as the BNP.
- 2) The Home Secretary's proposals amount to the biggest attack on civil liberties since the Second World War.
- 3) Refugees and immigrants have, for generations, made a positive contribution to UK society both economically and culturally.

This branch resolves:

To back the national demonstration on 22 June and protests outside detention centres on 15 June by:

- a) circulating stewards with leaflets publicising the protests
- b) encouraging members to attend;
- c) sending the branch banner;
- d) donating £ . . . toward the cost of the demonstration and transport;
- e) and sending this motion to the appropriate regional and national bodies of the union (as well as Trades Councils, Constituency Labour Parties and other relevant organisations).

Donations to Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, BCM Box 4289, London, WC1X 3XX

Refugee week of action

Saturday 15 June, 1.00pm

**Demonstrate against imprisoning innocent people
Harmondsworth Detention Centre,
Heathrow**

Saturday 22 June, Midday

National demonstration against attacks on asylum seekers

**Assemble Midday, Malet Street, London, W1
for march to Waterloo detention centre**

Plus local actions, street parties, socials, rallies, workshops, picnics.

Immigration is good for Britain. Everything we have, and everything we are, is the result of centuries of immigration. Immigrants bring much-needed skills as well as cultural diversity

DETAILS FROM

Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers: www.defend-asylum.org

Barbed Wire Britain: www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk

National Civil Rights Movement: www.ncrm.org.uk

National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns: www.ncadc.org.uk

Carefully chosen words

Home Secretary David Blunkett's use of the word 'swamping' to describe the impact of asylum seekers' children on schools and doctors' surgeries was no accident. 'Accommodation centres are commonplace in many parts of the world and will enable people to receive education and health care on the premises,' he said on Radio 4's Today programme on April 24. 'While they're going through the process, the children will be educated on the site, which will be open. People will be able to come and go, but importantly not swamping the local school.'

Responding to criticism the following day, Blunkett defended his use of that particular word. 'Yes, I did mean to say it. I could have used "overwhelmed" or "overburdened" because the dictionary definition is exactly the same,' he said. 'I'm not withdrawing, by the way, the language that I used because it was intended . . . to indicate that there is a major problem for some schools and some GP practices in some limited parts of our country.'

The future of the postal service at stake

No to deregulation!

by a London postal worker

The cancellation of the one-day postal strike scheduled for May 8 came as no great surprise to postal workers, who have come to expect anything in the long-running saga of a pay claim which was supposed to be settled in October 2001.

The latest twist in the 'on again, off again' dispute came when Consignia/Royal Mail attempted to make any offer contingent on the Communication Workers Union accepting trials on a four-hour delivery span. While the union's negotiators were prepared to accept trials of different delivery spans, accepting only one option was a string too far even for them and they called the strike. Management then withdrew this condition and the strike was called off. But that only brings us back to square one, or rather, in this Byzantine game, to square x, where x is some unknown.

A couple of months ago the union negotiators thought they had a deal. In response to the union's 5 per cent claim, Royal Mail initially offered a miserable 2.2 per cent, but then raised this (after the successful strike ballot) to 6.9 per cent over two years, through consolidation of productivity bonuses and acceptance of new plans for delivery schedules. The sticking point was that while the CWU thought Royal Mail had agreed to straight increases where postal workers had no (or insufficient) bonus to consolidate, the employer said it had agreed no such thing – not surprising, since this might mean a substantial increase for some workers not tied to productivity. Back to arbitration they went, and that's where they remain after the latest set-to.

In all this, the members have had no opportunity to express their views on the various offers or the terms on which the union is negotiating. The danger is that if the national negotiators finally come up with an agreement, the members will passively accept it (and any offer has to be put to a national ballot) for no other reason than that they are fed up with the whole charade and would welcome the back pay ending. But such a deal should be rejected – two-year deals are unacceptable because the economic situation can change considerably in that time and tying pay increases to the introduction

of new work plans (in effect, paying for our own wage increase) means accepting that we have a responsibility towards the employer's profitability.

The plans for new delivery spans (meaning one post a day, delivered at any time up until 1.00pm) are part of Consignia's proposals for getting out of its current financial difficulties, where it is said to be losing £1.5 million a day. This is closely tied to the fact that, at the same time as pay negotiations have been running into the sand, the government and the government-appointed regulator, postcom, have been pushing ahead with their plans for the deregulation of the postal system.

While some licences have already been granted to run niche services (one licensee already boasts it could run a service from day one of a postal strike), the proposals on deregulation mean that over the next few years much of the post currently handled by the Post Office/Consignia will be opened up to competition, starting with bulk business mail. It is also proposed that the Post Office be a 'Railtrack'-type operation, providing the infrastructure for the private sector. Thus, the private companies would be able to bring mail to a sorting office for final delivery and postcom would decide how much the Post Office could charge for going the final mile.

One of the many farcical aspects of postcom's proposals is that deregulation of the postal service would happen much quicker in Britain than the rest of the European Union, thus opening the Post Office up to competition from the Dutch, German, etc., postal services at the same time as they continue to be protected from such competition on their home territory.

Ultimately, deregulation would result in the Post Office being left with the 'unprofitable' bits of the service – deliveries to country areas, inner city estates, etc., which do not appeal to those out solely for profit. In all probability this will result in different postage rates within Britain, with much higher rates being charged for delivery to outlying areas than within cities. Whether the government would sell off the rest – and whether anyone would want it – remains open to speculation.

The consultation period on the proposals from postcom ended on April 12. At the time of writing it is not known whether it will al-

ter its proposals and whether the government will accept them. Even if it softens its proposals under pressure (and Early Day Motions in parliament critical of the proposals have had more signatures than any other), this will only mean a more drawn-out death of the postal service as we know it.

However, it seems likely that the CWU leadership would proclaim a slower death to be a great victory, despite the fact that the outcome would ultimately be the same. Not surprisingly, given the way it has pursued the pay claim (and it has repeatedly said strike action over the claim 'would not be appropriate' at a time when the regulator is considering the future of the postal system), the CWU leadership has no strategy for dealing with either the current financial crisis or the future of the service.

While the employer's proposals for the current situation are for 30,000 plus redundancies, the closure of post offices and depots, and the selling off of Parcelforce's entire fleet of vehicles, the CWU leaders seem at best reluctant to invoke conference decisions for strike action. Instead, they have fallen in behind the employer's demand to the regulator for the right to increase postage rates. While this might solve Royal Mail's immediate financial problems, it is certainly no long-term answer and it would not prevent most of the job losses.

The CWU seems only concerned with negotiating a 'no compulsory redundancies' agreement, rather than opposing all job losses, recognising that this would only be the first wave, and that union organisation would be significantly weakened in fighting later losses due to deregulation. It has restricted itself to lobbying against deregulation – through promotion of the Early Day Motions, postcard campaigns, motions to the Welsh Assembly, etc. The one attempt at mobilising the membership, a 'national' demonstration on March 16, was called at extremely short notice and at a time when most postal workers are at work.

If this situation is to be turned around and a real fight conducted to save jobs, maintain a public-sector postal service and give postal workers a decent wage, there needs to be a campaign at the coming CWU conference and beyond, not just to commit the union to action, but to build the kind of leadership which can ensure that it happens.

Council workers strike for London allowance

Andrew Berry of Unison's London Region Local Government Executive and **Mike Calvert**, assistant secretary of Islington Unison, report on the recent one-day strike for an increase in London Weighting

Council workers across London took strike action on May 14 in support of a claim for a London Weighting allowance for all local government staff which reflects the real cost of living and working in the capital. This was the first day – further action is planned for June.

The strike took place against the background of rises in extra payments to other 'key workers' in London – such as teachers, nurses and Audit Commission employees – and, more controversially, a substantial rise for the police.

Building support for the action has rested on several issues of inequality in local government. The claim for £4,000 London Weighting London-wide is a joint claim with other unions in local government – the GMB and the TGWU, though these were less keen to join in the action. The current rate varies from £1,404 to £2,674, depending on whether you live in inner or outer London. It is clearly ludicrous that Islington workers get as much as £1,270 more London Weighting than those in the neighbouring authority of Haringey.

Other unions claimed that they were waiting for the outcome of a negotiating meeting on May 16, two days after the strike, and that they thought Unison should have waited too. Actually, this was at least the sixth such meeting with very little progress, and the employers' representatives couldn't even get their act together to turn up on the 16th – several London councils had changed their political composition. Now the GMB and TGWU say they are going to ballot their members, but many Unison activists aren't holding their breath, or their fire, for this to occur.

Unison members in all 32 local government branches took action on May 14. The Regional Local Government Committee voted for the first strike day to be May 1 – not only International Workers' Day but

also the eve of the local government elections – to put political pressure on our employers. Unfortunately this was blocked at a national level – could this be linked to the fact that some Unison officials were candidates?

Local government staff are always the poor relations in the public sector family. Our pay does not make headline news like teachers, nurses and police, yet we are as essential as those workers. Currently teachers get £3,105 and went on strike for £4,000 on March 13. Despite not getting an offer from the employers they are now putting in a claim for £6,000 from September. Nurses living in inner London get an additional payment, ranging from just over £3,000 up to a maximum of £4,115. Employees of the Audit Commission, which Unison has pointed out monitors profligate local authorities, get £4,492 and a travelcard from their home. But by far the biggest insult to local government workers is the Metropolitan Police London Weighting. Police officers can receive allowances of just over £6,000 and free travel within a 70-mile radius of the centre of London.

Unison has done considerable research on the subject of London Weighting and the claim, backdated to April 2001, was put to the employers over a year ago. There are several factors contributing to the long delay, including the other unions dragging their feet and the employers' reluctance to respond at all. Finally, the region forced the branches to carry out a consultative ballot, which produced an 85 per cent vote for strike action, as most activists expected. It has now been estimated that it costs nearly £6,000 more a year to live in London, showing Unison's claim to be a very modest one.

The turnout in the ballot was low, but all the activists on the ground believe that most

members are keen to strike for this claim. One group of workers that have shown particular enthusiasm are non-teaching staff in schools. They have been inspired by the teachers' strike. Many classroom assistants earn as little as £11,500.

The Regional Local Government Executive is to meet again on May 21 to discuss future action. We are confident that the other two unions will join us soon, unless of course we win by then. It is, however, disappointing that the leaderships of the teaching unions ruled out a strike on the same day as they did not want to interrupt the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), even though they are against them.

Local government in London is faced with massive recruitment and retention problems. Currently these are addressed by employing large numbers of agency staff at considerable expense. The employers have said that they will attempt to resolve certain recruitment problems with targeted pay rises or additional payments. Apart from flying in the face of the agreed job evaluation scheme, this is divisive and unlikely to help – staff shortages across London go much wider than the groups likely to be offered these payments.

Workers Action supporters in Unison have been working within the United Left, an alliance between the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison (CFDU), the SWP and some independents. Supporters of the United Left have been prominent in pushing forward the London Weighting campaign in branches and regional lay activist bodies. The outcome of this dispute depends on whether or not the successful start made on May 14 can be developed and taken forward, and whether the pressure exerted by lay activists and the rank and file on the trade union bureaucracy can be sustained.

An open letter from Unison to Islington councillors

Tuesday May 14 was a huge success across London. Thousands of local government workers all over London were on strike, many of them for the first time in their lives. All of us were out to win our just claim for £4,000 London Weighting. In Islington, two ballots of our members gave us a resounding mandate for our action and our members have given us a larger mandate than most of the members of the council enjoy.

As the democratically elected representatives of thousands of Islington Unison members we are writing to you to explain our case. Two hundred of our members protested outside Islington town hall and others picketed work sites on Tuesday, gaining massive support from the public as they passed. The statements of your leading officers to the press are thoroughly disingenuous in this regard. Our action was large, good humoured and entirely successful. We enjoyed the support of our local MP, Jeremy Corbyn.

We demand that Islington councillors recognise the views of our members, a huge and growing proportion of your workforce, as the largest trade union in Islington. It is within the remit of this body to settle this dispute and that is what we all want: you can influence that decision by persuading your Liberal Democrat and Labour colleagues of the justice of our case. We are in no doubt that if the dispute is not settled at the next meeting of the Greater London Provincial Council, then the next phase of our industrial action will be even more successful than the first phase.

From a few days before the strike, the council has been putting out deliberate disinformation. The council sent various letters to members of staff with incorrect statistics just a couple of days before our strike. The letter sent by Leisha Fullick, the outgoing chief executive, states that Unison's position was unreasonable as together with the national pay claim we would be getting a 22 per cent increase in our pay. The chief executive got her figures wrong. If both claims were fully met it would have come to 12 per cent – on the middle pay rate of scale five! Local gov-

ernment workers in London are paid much less than many other public sector staff and members of the council are fully aware of that fact.

Unfortunately, recent statements to the press do not inspire us with confidence: let us examine what you told the *Highbury and Islington Express* on Friday May 17! The paper reports the following:

'Cllr Steve Hitchens, leader of Islington Council, said he was unconvinced the strikers would achieve their objective. "This is a national strike about national pay negotiations, so we haven't any input – it is literally out of the council's hands."'

These type of remarks are inaccurate and disingenuous. The strike was a huge success across the whole of London. *Community Care* magazine reported on the dispute as did the *Guardian* and their observations were much more accurate than the council's figures to the local press in Islington.

For the leader of Islington Council to be unaware of the difference between a strike over London Weighting and Unison's national pay claim, which is still under negotiation, is extremely worrying not just for Unison members and council employees! But the electorate of the London Borough of Islington must be extremely worried that their council leader can't tell the difference between the two!

Councillor Hitchens must surely be aware of the fact that he sits as an employer side rep on the Greater London Provincial Council (whom we are attempting to negotiate the claim with) as Islington's representative – or has he forgotten? Maybe Councillor Hitchens should speak with members of the Liberal Democrat group on the council before making inaccurate and misleading statements to the local press. We know of at least one member of his own group who works in another London borough who was on strike on Tuesday: perhaps Councillor Hitchens should have sought his advice? We have asked for a meeting with Councillor Hitchens in order to discuss the points that we have raised above.

It is not the desire of anybody in Isling-

ton Unison to have to resort to more days of action, but with our colleagues from all over London we are prepared to do whatever is necessary to win our more than just claim. Islington Council is prepared to pay millions to consultancy companies, private companies such as CEA, ITnet and employment agencies who get ridiculous amounts of money in order to employ people on peanuts. As a council you pay vast sums of money to huge layers of senior management whose prime role is to attack your own employees! You employ enormous numbers of staff, especially in social services and housing, on temporary contracts and then you have the nerve to plead poverty! Is it any wonder that some electoral turnouts were as low as 17 per cent?

The cost of living in London escalates year on year. House prices are out of reach of the vast majority of our members. Rent, childcare provision and travel all cost considerably above the national average. The police have been awarded London Weighting of £6,000. Comparing that to what local government workers get is a national scandal and you are as culpable in this as are the other London local authorities – you cannot escape your part in it. As our presentation to the employers states:

'There are very real problems in the recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified staff at all levels which ranges from those on a professional basis in social care, environmental health and finance, to those on a lower paid basis in homecare, kitchen assistants, cleaners and leisure staff.'

Islington and the other councils clearly can afford to settle this dispute. We call on you to support this and urge all your colleagues to do so.

Jane Doolan, Branch Secretary
Andrew Berry, Deputy Branch Secretary
Mike Calvert, Assistant Branch Secretary
 May 17, 2002

Charlie van Gelderen (1913-2001)

On January 5, 150 comrades, friends and family of Charlie van Gelderen gathered in London's Conway Hall to celebrate the life of a Trotskyist militant, active in eight decades, who died on October 26 last year.

Charlie first came into contact with Trotskyist ideas in South Africa in 1932, at a meeting of the International Socialist club in Cape Town, where the *Militant*, paper of the US Trotskyists, was being sold by individual supporters of the International Left Opposition. He became a member of the Lenin Club, founded by the Trotskyists in July 1933. South African Trotskyism was beset by divisions from its birth. It was divided on a number of national issues and two groups emerged. The majority formed the Workers Party of South Africa and held that the land question was central to the South African revolution. The minority Communist League of South Africa, to which Charlie belonged, opposed this position and held out the prospect that the Malanite Afrikaner nationalists could be won to anti-imperialist struggle.

Charlie left South Africa and arrived in Britain in December 1935. He contacted the Marxist Group, then active in the ILP but on the point of turning its work towards the Labour Party. He joined the Stepney Labour League of Youth and inside the LLoY fought its increasingly Stalinised leadership under Ted Willis. Together with other Trotskyist militants he was witch-hunted for defending the Barcelona workers, suppressed after the May Days in 1937.

Charlie was responsible for circulating the Stalinist slander that another South African Trotskyist, Ralph Lee, had misled a strike of black laundry workers and had taken off with the strike funds. This was the catalyst which led to the walkout of Lee and his supporters and the formation of the Workers International League in late 1937 – a mistake for which Charlie was subsequently censured by the International Secretariat of the Movement for the Fourth International.

Although a member of the newly-formed Revolutionary Socialist League in Britain, he attended the founding conference of the

Fourth International, in Paris in September 1938, as an observer on behalf of South African Trotskyists. Within the RSL he was a supporter of entry work in the Labour Party although with much Labour Party activity closed down during the war opportunities within it were slight.

Conscripted into the British Army Medical Corps, he arrived in Italy just after the fall of Mussolini, by which time a very militant atmosphere was developing. He contacted the Trotskyist leader Nicola Di Bartolomeo and had discussions with Amadeo Bordiga, the leader of the Left Communists. He also established contact with Romeo Mangano, the leader of the Apulian Federation of the Italian Communist Party, which had remained close to the positions of Bordiga and had produced a poster calling for a Fourth International to be founded. As a result of these discussions Bartolomeo's group and Mangano's comrades refounded an Italian section of the Fourth International.

Back in Britain, the RSL and the WIL had fused in 1944, to form the Revolutionary Communist Party. By 1946 the RCP was becoming rapidly consumed by factional struggle; the majority led by Jock Haston and Ted Grant incorrectly opposed entry into the Labour Party but had a realistic appraisal of the emerging economic boom. The Healy-led minority advocated Labour Party entry but underpinned this correct tactic with a catastrophic economic perspective. Charlie was almost alone in supporting entry but rejecting the minority's economic perspectives. In the event he joined Healy's minority inside the Labour Party, where he was active within the Socialist Fellowship and was a contributor to *Socialist Outlook* and *Labour Review*. Never an uncritical follower of Healy, he parted company with the Socialist Labour League in the early 1960s, by which time Healy had abandoned the Labour Party in favour of open party building.

He subsequently contacted the supporters of *The Week* and became a founder member of the International Marxist Group, the British section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. He

remained active in its successor organisations – the Socialist League and Socialist Outlook – until his illness a few months before his death.

He was a regular contributor to the press of the groups of which he was a member and was active for many years in the Labour Party and the Anti-Apartheid Movement, on whose National Committee he served. The picture that emerged from the tributes made at his memorial meeting was of an enthusiastic, optimistic, congenial comrade, interested especially in the development of young people and in international politics.

Richard Price

Book Bargains

A few copies of the following books are available at bargain prices:

Year One of the Russian revolution, Victor Serge, 456pp, Pluto Press £6.50

Britain, World War 2 and the Samasamajists: The Secret Files. Ed. W Muthiah and S Wanasinghe, 259pp, Young Socialist Pub, £6.00

The early homosexual rights movement (1864-1935) J Lauritsen & D Thorstad, 121pp, Times Change Press, £5.95

Prices include post and packing to mainland UK destinations

Workers Action, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX

Leonora Lloyd (1940-2002)

A mere three months after the death of her father, Charlie van Gelderen, Workers Action records the death of Leonora Lloyd on January 23 at the age of 61.

Leonora was born in November 1940 in Cape Town, but after the end of the Second World War her family came back to England and she grew up in Richmond, where she joined the Labour League of Youth at 14 and the Labour Party at 16. She was on the Aldermaston marches in the 1950s, and she was arrested in 1960 outside the South African embassy, protesting against the Sharpeville massacre.

She was deeply involved in the Labour movement. She was vice-president of the London region of her union – Manufacturing, Science and Finance (MSF) – for the period 1993 to 1997 and was also a Labour parliamentary candidate in 1992 in the then safe Tory seat of Hendon South. She was a member of the London Region Executive of the Labour Party, and at the time of her death she was a co-chair of Labour Left Briefing.

But her main work was in the women's liberation movement, where she was a stalwart of the socialist feminist current. Her particular strength was her understanding of the need to win support from the trade union movement. In 1968 this was a very radical idea; trade unions were then very focussed on pay and conditions, on the concept of the 'family wage' earned by a working man and delivered to a housewife and children. Women worked for 'pin money', low pay that gave them a small measure of independence, but which was looked upon with suspicion by a union movement that saw women as 'taking men's jobs'.

But this view was coming under increasing challenge, and in 1968 women machinists at Ford went on the 'equal pay' strike. The strike demand was not directly for equal pay, because in accordance with the management strategy of the time and specifically to avoid an equal pay dispute, Ford had sexually segregated its workforce and there were no male machinists. Rather, the strike sought equal pay for work of equal value – which was the formulation

that came into law in the Equal Pay Act of 1970.

The 1968 strike was part of the process that led to the setting up of NJACCWER – the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights – in which Leonora was involved. She was also at the time editor of *Socialist Woman*, a magazine set up by the International Marxist Group, of which she was a member from the late 1960s until the early 1980s. In February 1970, at the founding conference of the women's liberation movement, Leonora spoke on the new Equal Pay Act.

Leonora's most remembered role, though, has to be her work with the National Abortion Campaign. After the limited reform of the abortion law in 1967, the 1970s saw a concentrated campaign, funded by the Roman Catholic church, to roll that gain back through the White, Corrie and Benyon bills. In 1975, anti-abortionists were planning a public meeting near Leonora's home in Harrow in support of James White's bill, and her women's group linked up with others to organise a picket of the meeting. From the discussions about continuing that campaign NAC was born.

She was central to NAC from the start, fighting not just against the various restrictive bills but also for positive legislation that would establish in law a 'woman's right to choose'. She was NAC's full-time co-ordinator from 1983 to 1993. She played a leadership role, and it is to a great extent due to her conviction of the importance of the role of the working class in progressive social change that NAC orientated so strongly to women trade unionists. And it was women trade unionists, whose jobs were often at risk if they became pregnant, who supported NAC and played a huge role in making trade unions extend their remit from pay and conditions to all issues that affect working people.

By the 1990s, attempts in Britain to reverse the 1967 abortion legislation had ground to a halt and NAC was winding down. Leonora worked for a time for the Fawcett Society. She was also a Trade

Union Congress tutor and, as already mentioned, active in MSF and as a Labour parliamentary candidate.

The battle for the rights of women, to which Leonora devoted her life, is still not won. The fundamental right, to be free to choose whether to have a child or not, is still under attack. In Britain, anti-abortionists are trying to prevent the legal sale of the 'morning after' pill. In Portugal, 16 women have been freed after being charged with having abortions – but there is still no legal access to abortion clinics. In Ireland, the ruling parties – Fianna Fáil and the Progressive (sic) Democrats – have just lost a referendum where they wanted to incorporate a ban on abortion in the case of suicidal women. Meanwhile the right wing in the US continue to carry out a terrorist campaign against pro-choice doctors, and President Bush has stopped the financing of foreign aid organisations that do not oppose abortion. There is still a long way to go.

Charli Langford

SPECIAL OFFER

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PCS conference

Left rules conference, right strengthens grip on NEC

by Richard Price

The biennial conference of the 270,000-strong Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) held in Brighton in mid-May saw the left win a series of important victories. These, however, were tempered by election results which saw the right-wing 'Moderate' group strengthen its control of the NEC.

In his opening address, general secretary-elect Mark Serwotka's call for PCS to go forward 'not as a building society but as a trade union' was loudly applauded by delegates. On the conference floor, motions proposed by members of Left Unity and Socialist Caucus were carried by large majorities throughout the week. These called for:

- Opposition to US foreign policy and solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- The right of union officials to free speech (following the attempt by the NEC to prevent Mark Serwotka speaking out against the war in Afghanistan).
- The establishment of a political fund.
- The restoration within PCS of annual conference and annual NEC elections.
- The restoration within the Civil Service of national pay bargaining, after six years of delegated pay which have seen big differences in pay rates develop between government departments.
- Opposition to punitive sick absence policies being introduced in many departments.
- Affiliation to the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti Trade Union Laws and the Colombia Solidarity Campaign.
- Opposition to racism and the defence of asylum seekers.

Outgoing general secretary Barry Reamsbottom skulked around conference, spending most of the week in contact with his lawyers, who bombarded the standing orders committee with a barrage of legal threats. Their aim was to bully its members into preventing a motion calling for Reamsbottom's removal as PCS representative on the TUC general council after his retirement on May 31 from being

heard. To their great credit, the SOC members refused to be intimidated, and the motion was passed overwhelmingly.

On the minus side, a motion calling for 20 per cent of subscription income to be paid into the union's campaign fund – an attempt to rebuild the fund after the long health and safety dispute in the Department of Work and Pensions – was narrowly defeated.

The results of the NEC elections, however, showed the gap between conference rhetoric and the reality of the union on the ground. If the 12 per cent turnout is anything to go by, much of the left consists of generals without troops. In a union in which the left dominates conference by at least a 4:1 ratio, and there are several hundred Left Unity activists, it is surely a commentary on the state of the left's organisation in the branches that it couldn't scrape together an average of 7,000 votes for its slate – the number needed on this turnout to win a majority of the NEC.

While Janice Godrich, a member of Left Unity and the Scottish Socialist Party, was elected as president, and Left Unity increased its NEC seats to 12, the Moderate group now has a bigger majority, having won seats at the expense of the centre Membership First group.

This failure to sufficiently capitalise on Mark Serwotka's victory in 2000 is not only the result of lack of organisation but reflects the politics of the main groups within Left Unity – the Socialist Party and the SWP. Again and again in debates, supporters of the Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Party implied New Labour is an undifferentiated reactionary mass, making no distinction between the leadership and the membership. The mover of the motion to ballot for the establishment of a political fund managed to make an uncontroversial move to enable running campaigns and lobbying MPs sound like a referendum on the politics of the Socialist Alliance. This can only alienate the significant strand of Old Labour opinion within the membership upon which key campaigns such as opposition to privatisation, and the fight for national pay bargaining can be

built. If enough Left Unity activists repeat this performance in the campaign around the ballot there is a danger it can be lost, as it was on a previous occasion.

Worse still was the performance of Socialist Alliance supporters on the issue of the BNP. On the one hand, speaker after speaker at the rostrum went in for moral breast-beating about the rise of the far right, and the need to combat it both on the streets and in the ballot box. In fringe meetings, however, they defended the policy of Socialist Alliance candidates standing in council seats where the BNP stood a realistic chance of winning. Liz Davies, national chair of the Socialist Alliance, not only argued that their priority was 'building a base' in Burnley – from which you can only conclude that who actually won seats was a secondary issue – but that the Alliance's intervention had somehow lowered the BNP's vote, since had the Alliance not stood then a section of its vote would have gone to the BNP!

The left faces a tough fight ahead against an NEC that will do everything to prevent the policies adopted at conference from being implemented – particularly those relating to annual conferences and elections. It is also likely that Reamsbottom will attempt further legal challenges. **WA**

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Labour Party NEC elections

Vote Grassroots for the NEC!

The ballot papers for the Labour Party national executive committee elections will be distributed with *Inside Labour* magazine in May and June. The closing date for voting is June 21. The left has united behind the six candidates of the Grassroots Alliance for the constituency section and Workers Action calls for a vote for them. Here are their election statements:

Ann Black

Labour has just three years to renew public services and restore trust in politics. Openness and democracy must prevail over stitch-ups and spin. From the NEC I report directly to members, and their feedback sets my priorities: for comprehensive education, better student funding, working railways, environmental sustainability, international co-operation, strong union links, valuing local councillors and fair candidate selection procedures; against fox-hunting, privatisation and National Missile Defense.

For personal accounts by e-mail, please contact ann.black@unisonfree.net or ring 01865-722230 with your views.

Experience: Joined Labour and Unison in 1982. Secretary, Oxford East CLP. Member of Unison's National Political Committee, the National Policy Forum and the NEC. Member of Oxford East CLP.

Rozanne Foyer

I'm standing because I want Labour to overcome fully the inequalities dividing Britain. I'm 29 and as a party activist and senior official with the Scottish TUC, I have a proven track record in campaigning for equality and social justice. I believe I can effectively promote policies reflecting the aspirations of party members to the NEC. I think it is important that the NEC has strong representation from constituency members in Scotland and Wales so that we can maintain our strong links in the context of devolution and continue to learn from one another. I'm a Campaign for Socialism (Scotland) executive member, and support the renationalisation of our railways; a £5 minimum wage regardless of age; redistribution of wealth through

progressive taxation; increased public sector funding; and a 50/50 gender balance in public life.

Experience: Party member since 1995, holding a range of branch and constituency positions. Assistant General Secretary of Scottish TUC. Member of Glasgow Maryhill CLP.

Kumar Murshid

I believe the NEC must lead the party by promoting a vision of social transformation which allows for the full inclusion of significant communities that remain marginalised within the party and society. A more humane and acceptable policy on asylum and immigration must be adopted.

Labour needs to reassert the primacy of democratic and accountable mechanisms in the running of our public services. Local authorities must retain their responsibility for housing. The NEC must restore a sense of idealism which goes beyond simply managing capitalism and promote Labour's commitment to the values of equality and justice.

Experience: Party member since the early 1980s. Constituency Chair, currently councillor in Tower Hamlets, Cabinet Adviser to London Mayor, Chair of the National Assembly Against Racism, member of London Development Agency, Co-operative Party, Union and Labour Black Representation Committee. Member of Poplar and Canning Town CLP.

Mark Seddon

Labour Party membership and grassroots activism is in sharp decline. That decline must be reversed. Only when Labour is seen to be democratic, accountable and progressive, and not increasingly distant from many communities it has historically sought to represent, will people seek to join it and vote for it. Top-down autocracy must be replaced by grassroots democracy. As a member of the NEC I will continue to stand up for democratic socialism and the rights of ordinary members. The NEC's priorities must be the interests of the Labour Party even when these sometimes override demands from government.

Experience: Member since 1977. Editor of *Tribune* and member of Labour Party NEC, 1998-2000, 2001. Parliamentary candidate for Buckingham 2001. Telephone 020-7433-6410. Member of Buckingham CLP.

Christine Shawcroft

I have been a Labour, Co-operative and trade union activist for 25 years. I am a member of the NUT, and of Meriden in the West Midlands. In my three years on the NEC I have tried to raise grassroots concerns about party democracy, organisation, and candidate selection. To stem the loss of disillusioned members and supporters we need a more radical second term. I support public ownership, council housing, an end to Private Finance Initiative schemes, and index-linking pensions to average earnings. I am secretary of Labour Against the War and I am campaigning for a real ethical foreign policy.

I try to be accountable and to report back. To contact me, e-mail cshawcroft@cs.com, or write c/o Millbank. Member of Nottingham South CLP.

Pete Willsman

My motivation for standing again is to give members and constituencies an experienced representative, dedicated to defending their interests. I have represented constituencies on Labour's national committees since 1981 and am always available to give information and advice - telephone 020-8854 7326. In recent years, the party's internal democracy has been eroded and members feel their views are often ignored by our government. Consequently party activists are becoming less committed. These trends must be reversed.

Experience: NEC 1998-99; Conference Arrangements Committee 1981-94; National Constitutional Committee 1995-98; National Policy Forum 1998-99; Constituency GC/EC 1975-2002; Research Officer Nupe/Unison 1979-94, Branch Secretary Apex/GMB 1980-98. CWS SE Political Committee/Area Committee/Party Council 1998-2002. Member of Erith and Thamesmead CLP.

Twenty years after the invasion of Lebanon . . .

The butcher returns to his trade

by Simon Deville

Since the end of February, the so-called 'Israeli Defence Forces' have been engaged in an offensive aimed at destroying the infrastructure of Palestinian society within the West Bank. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International amongst many others have attested to gross violations of human rights and war crimes: unlawful killings; using Palestinians as human shields; torture; the destruction of electricity and water supplies; and whole areas of Jenin raised to the ground for no military purpose.

Whilst these human rights violations were continuing, George Bush was describing Sharon as a 'man of peace'. Having proposed that a UN fact-finding mission be allowed into Jenin, Sharon then refused it entry. Although the focus has been on Jenin, similar atrocities have occurred and continue to occur across towns

and cities throughout the West Bank. The military may have pulled their tanks and helicopters out of many towns, but they still surround them in a stranglehold.

On April 11, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had set up a public relations committee with the specific task of damage limitation since, as one Israeli officer put it, 'when the world sees the pictures of what we have done [in Jenin], it will do us immense damage'. In almost every TV and radio interview with Israeli spokespersons, any questions relating to war crimes or atrocities are met with the standard 'why don't you ask Arafat to condemn the suicide bombers?'. Britain and the USA in particular have tail-ended this line almost uncritically.

The real purpose of the offensive is not so much a military objective as a political one. Sharon's Likud Party does not accept any difference between the territories occupied in 1948 and those occupied after the 1967 war. As far as Sharon is concerned the exclusively Jewish illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza are as much part of Israel as Tel Aviv. Sharon may not publicly go as far as some Israeli right-wingers (and US Republicans) in calling for all Palestinians to be expelled from the occupied territories, but for the Palestinians to have even the slightest degree of autonomy or civilian infrastructure is anathema for him. If Palestinians are to remain in what Sharon sees as the historical land of Israel, they must do so utterly dependent on, and subservient to, the Jewish state.

The occasional request from George Bush for Sharon to end the IDF's rampage is purely for public consumption – the US had clearly given Sharon the go-ahead. Throughout the offensive the Israeli tail has wagged the US dog. Time and again the US has tried to pose as an honest broker, but has been unable to resist the urge to side with Israel and demand ever more humiliating 'renunciations of violence' from the main victims of violence in the conflict. Never once has Bush threatened any kind of sanction against Israel, for ex-

ample to limit the \$3 billion in aid given to Israel each year. In fact the US senate has declared that the US and Israel are engaged in a common struggle against terrorism.

It is clear that the US intends to use its influence to ensure that yet again the UN turns a blind eye to atrocities carried out by Israel. Indeed, it was widely reported (though denied by the US) that there was a deal to release Arafat and resolve the siege of the church in Bethlehem as a trade-off in which the UN is supposed to drop any demands for an investigation into war crimes or human rights abuses. Colin Powell's doomed mission started with calls from Bush for Israel to withdraw its tanks 'now', but by the time Powell's long meander brought him to Jerusalem, 'now' had become 'as soon as the IDF has finished its operations' – in other words, whenever Sharon saw fit.

Twenty years ago, in June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. Thousands of innocent civilians were killed in the indiscriminate bombing of heavily populated city areas, which destroyed tower blocks, schools and hospitals. Israeli spokespersons vehemently denied the numbers of casualties. As Robert Fisk puts it: 'Israeli attempts to deny [the] casualty figures varied according to the degree of international criticism Israel received. It quickly became evident that Israel's own figures for civilian casualties – a total of 460 in all of Lebanon between 4 and 21 June – were so preposterous as to be counter-productive.'

From then on the Israelis only reported the number of their own dead, and claimed that any other figures were released by 'terrorists'. Throughout the invasion, the Israelis tried to prevent journalists from finding out what was happening at first hand, and insisted that the invasion was necessary in order to root out the 'nests of terrorists'.

Following the massacres in the refugee camps of Sabra and Chatilla three months later, the Israeli government's own inquiry found Ariel Sharon personally responsible and said that he had, as Defence Minister, lied to the government about what was

Anti-war contacts

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going on in the camps and about the overall war aims. Whilst it is probably true that Sharon lied to the government, it was a lie they were all too happy to hear.

The main differences between war crimes in Lebanon and the current ones in the occupied territories are that in Lebanon at least the UN did conduct an investigation, though its findings were dramatically watered down after the US threatened to force the removal of the UN secretary general. The prospects of an investigation into the current onslaught becomes less likely by the day. Likewise, with Sharon as the Israeli Prime Minister there seems little chance of his indictment. Sharon came to power promising peace and security, but has brought nothing but death and destruction, yet his popularity amongst Israeli Jews has grown considerably.

The US is currently attempting to broker yet another peace deal, this time involving Europe and Russia, but as with all previous peace deals it will be doomed to failure. The Palestinian Authority and the PLO have for some time demanded an autonomous Palestinian state consisting of the West Bank and Gaza. This demand is almost certainly widely supported amongst those Palestinians living in the 1967 occupied territories, though with so little democracy within Palestinian society it would be difficult to quantify this. Even if these limited demands were met, however, there would still remain Palestinians living as third class citizens inside a Jewish state, and a large Palestinian diaspora spread across the Middle East and the rest of the world. It is not at all clear that any of these Palestinians would be satisfied with a state made up of just 22 per cent of historic Palestine, even if it were on offer. There is also a strong possibility that such an agreement would encourage the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the Israeli state.

Throughout all the various peace deals since 1992, the building of illegal settlements within the West Bank and Gaza has continued apace, doubling the settler population. Sharon has throughout his political career been a staunch supporter of the settlements, and it is hard to see how he can change now. Just as he will not relinquish his control over the West Bank and other resources that he can exploit at will, he will not relinquish his control over the settlements. The balance of power is tipped against the Palestinians. The PLO's general secretary Yasser Arafat has shown a willingness to negotiate, but Sharon cannot afford to. He was elected in a time of crisis and knows that his rule is sustainable only in a time of crisis. For his own political survival, he will do whatever it takes to stoke the flames of unrest and avoid a return to peace negotiations.'

Within Israel, Sharon's strategy is paying off in terms of bolstering his own support amongst the Jewish population, just as within the USA, Israel's main backer, there is little pressure for a just settlement. In fact, many see Israel's offensive as part of the 'war on terrorism'.

If the situation is bleak for Palestinians, the possibility of peace under Israeli occupation is even less likely. Whilst the Palestinians have demonstrated that they will not be crushed, they have not been able to demonstrate convincingly that they can win. This is not a question of political will but one of strategy. The problem is that Palestinians have an over-reliance on their own military struggle, and at the same time have either underestimated or completely ignored the need to build alliances with the Israeli Jewish working class, and internationally.

Israeli workers must be convinced that their interests lie outside of a Zionist frame-

work, which must mean being able to offer them a better society than at present. At the same time, an international solidarity movement must be developed that increasingly isolates Israel on an international plane as a pariah state. Most importantly, within the United States a movement must be developed to demand an end to the US bankrolling of the Zionist state. Contrary to popular mythology, the US doesn't spend \$3 billion a year because it is naturally more pre-disposed to Jewish people than to Arabs, be they Christians or Muslims, or even primarily because of the 'Jewish lobby'. Its main motivation is financial, and for control of the Middle East's oil resources. A solidarity movement within the US will challenge the very heart of imperialism. None of this will be an easy task, but it will be far easier when the Palestinian leadership starts questioning how it can develop a strategy that can take the struggle forward.

WA

Revolutionary History

Current issue

The Comintern and Its Critics

The Communist International was formed in 1919 to provide a revolutionary leadership for the world's working class, to help the workers seize power, and to overcome the isolation of the Soviet Republic. Within a decade, however, Stalin's counter-revolutionary clique was in charge in Moscow, and the Comintern had become a mere tool in his diplomatic manoeuvring.

This edition of Revolutionary History focuses upon the degeneration of the Comintern, and upon those who tried to pull it back onto a revolutionary course, and, when this proved impossible, to develop new organisations that could carry out the tasks that it had abandoned.

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- Fritz Keller introduces the early years of Trotskyism in Austria
- Charles Wesley Ervin investigates how Philip Gunawardena broke from Stalinism
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- Jean-Jacques Marie assesses Georgi Dimitrov's diary
- Ante Ciliga shows how Tito took control of the Yugoslav Communist Party
- John McIlroy takes issue with the historians who are trying to rehabilitate the reputation of Stalin's men in Britain

This edition of Revolutionary History also pays homage to John Archer, who died in December 2000 after nearly seven decades of activity in the Trotskyist movement, with an article that he wrote on Trotskyism in Britain in the 1930s, and an appreciation by John McIlroy.

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Venezuela

Masses repel coup-plotters . . . for now!

by Nick Davies

September 11 is a date that holds bitter memories for millions of people. September 11, 1973, was the date on which a US-backed coup drowned Chile and its elected government in blood. The coup in Chile was, of course, only the most well-known, and most blatant, episode in the USA's 50-year rampage across Latin America which has involved, at some time or other, every country in the continent.

After September 11, 2001, Bush and Blair launched a 'war against terror' with the scarcely veiled threat of 'you're either with us or against us'. If Iraq or Iran is considered fair game, then governments in those countries in what the USA regards as its backyard have to knuckle down or face the consequences. Writing in the *New Statesman* (March 11, 2002), John Pilger felt confident enough to refer to Venezuela as 'the next Chile', and the biggest surprise about the attempted coup in Venezuela on April 11 (apart, of course, from the fact that it failed) was that it did not happen sooner.

So what did Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez do to annoy the United States, and what actually happened in the two-day coup? Unlike Bush, Chavez has actually won an election: two in fact, in 1998 and again in 2000. Unlike Blair, he took office with 60 per cent of the vote. Chavez has used his popularity among Venezuela's poor, 80 per cent of the population, to implement land reform, whereby the state can now expropriate and redistribute idle land. Chavez has used increased revenue from oil sales and got the rich to actually pay some tax, in order to increase spending on education and healthcare for the poor, introducing free education up to university level and reducing infant mortality. Official unemployment has declined from 18 per cent to 13 per cent. There have been attempts to regulate the huge

informal economy, reducing insecurity for the poor and for women, who have also benefited from a large-scale programme of micro-credit.

Obviously this was too much for the well-heeled oligarchy, the Catholic Church, the media, and the trade union leadership, which is under right-wing control. What really put the fat in the fire was the sale of oil to Cuba and the refusal of overflying rights to US military aircraft supplying 'Plan Colombia', the campaign of state terror carried out by the US and Colombian governments. (See Workers Action No.12). So, on November 5-7, 2001, the State Department, the Pentagon and the National Security Agency held a two-day meeting to discuss the 'problem of Venezuela'. The USA threatened to put Venezuela in 'diplomatic isolation' and Colin Powell warned Chavez to 'correct his understanding of what a democracy is all about'.

What appears to have happened is that an anti-Chavez demonstration was fired upon by unidentified gunmen. In the ensuing atmosphere of crisis, Chavez was said to have 'resigned', an extreme right-wing government was formed by Pedro Carmona Estanga, head of the Venezuelan chamber of commerce, who, faced with a loss of support in the middle ranks of the military, stepped down after no more than a day in favour of the Vice-President, Diosdado Cabello, who the following day resigned in favour of Chavez, who had never, in fact, 'resigned' at all. The plotters appear to have believed too much of their own propaganda, losing their nerve at the sheer size of the demonstrations in support of Chavez.

Was the USA involved? One might just as well question the religious persuasion of John Paul II. In every failed criminal conspiracy, there's always an unlucky fall guy that protests that he acted on his own, and Carmona is that fall guy. Despite the USA's claim that it was not in-

involved in the coup attempt, its grubby fingerprints are all over this botched little operation. The tactics are familiar: a torrent of negative propaganda is fed by CIA spooks to the world's media, the financial institutions fabricate economic problems, an atmosphere of crisis is created, and the coup-mongers step in to save the country from chaos. The Bush administration admits talking to a number of participants in the months leading up to the coup, including General Lucas Romero Rincon, head of the military, who had also met Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, a Pentagon official who had close ties with the US Contras in Nicaragua.

One of the USA's key players in the coup attempt has been widely identified as Otto Reich, an extreme right-wing Cuban-American, a supporter of Florida Governor Jeb Bush, who is looking for support from Cubans in Florida if he is to be re-elected this year, and a former US ambassador to Venezuela. According to the *New York Times*, Reich had been putting it about that Cuban paramilitaries had fired on the anti-Chavez demonstrators, but has offered no evidence for this. He specialises in propaganda of this kind. He was responsible for the story, attributed to 'intelligence sources' in 1984, that Soviet Mig fighters were arriving in Nicaragua, justifying further the attempts of the USA to destroy the Sandinista government.

On the subject of Nicaragua, Bush has brought into his administration Elliot Abrams, convicted in the 1980s of lying to Congress about the Iran-Contra scandal, making him head of the Office of Democracy and Human Rights (whoever said that Americans had no sense of irony?). He also appears to have been in communication with the coup leaders. Another relic of the Reagan years, John Negroponte, former US ambassador to Honduras and friend of the death-squads there, is now US ambassador to the United Nations. As Larry Birns, Di-

rector of the Council for Hemispheric Affairs, pointed out: 'those responsible for Latin America in the state department are the most extremist, off-the-wall team ...' (*Guardian*, April 22, 2002).

The coup might have failed this time, but one thing its orchestrators and paymasters got sorted was the press and media. The *New York Times* and, less predictably, the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, all queued up to describe Chavez as 'dictatorial' and 'unpopular' (with whom?) in their coverage of the Venezuelan events. There's been next to no coverage of any of the progressive and popular measures carried out by Chavez. When foreign office minister Dennis McShane undiplomatically referred to Chavez as a 'ranting demagogue', the British government clearly thought it had seen the last of Chavez, preferring the judgement of the White House to the people on the streets of Caracas. The US government, clearly rattled that the people of Venezuela had preferred the leader they had voted in to the military coup which had been prepared for them, gave Chavez the sort of warning to be more careful in future that small shopkeepers get from protection racketeers.

Chavez is not a socialist. Socialists might not support all of his policies, although clearly some are supportable. Chavez does not base himself on the labour movement but on the urban and rural poor. This is possibly understandable in view of the right-wing positions of the leadership of the principal trade union, which organises oil workers, although the mass of oil workers cannot share the policies of the union bureaucracy. We cannot say how those putting revolutionary socialist positions might fare in the Bolivarian circles – support committees for Chavez which draw their inspiration from Simon Bolivar, the country's founder. But in the New World Order, a government need not be socialist to find itself staring down the barrel of the USA's gun. It need only wish to impose a progressive taxation system, decide its own foreign policy, and, contrary to the WTO 'free trade' regime and the IMF's 'structural adjustment' offensive, try to invest in universal health and education systems. The response of the Venezuelan poor to the attempt to remove Chavez tells us that the struggle against US domination of the planet is the struggle for survival itself.

WA

Pim Fortuyn – racism gets a makeover

by Nick Davies

As his political career was being abruptly cut short on May 6, many socialists and anti-racists in the Netherlands and beyond were still trying to work Pim Fortuyn out. His anti-immigrant position put him on the hard right, yet this former Marxist, who welcomed black people into his organisation, was also openly gay and indeed castigated Islam not because it was un-Christian, but because of its reactionary attitude towards gays and women.

Shortly before his death he announced that had he been French, he would 'probably' have voted for Chirac. The manner of his death was similarly enigmatic. The man suspected of Fortuyn's murder is an animal rights activist, yet so far as anyone can tell, Fortuyn's views on such matters were uncontroversial, hardly differing from the Dutch mainstream.

Fortuyn owed his meteoric rise to the sudden confluence of a number of factors, some specific to the Netherlands, some part of a pattern emerging across Europe. Firstly, there was a protest vote against the suffocating 'whoever you vote for, the government always gets in' set-up, common in western European states which use a form of proportional representation, in which the result of every election is a coalition differing only subtly from the last one.

Secondly, the support for Fortuyn reflected a growing unease across Europe about the effects of 'globalisation', the overweening might of corporations, and the decline in importance of the nation state. This unease can find expression in reactionary as well as progressive movements, and in fact, given the defeats suffered by the working class over the past 20 years, this should not come as a surprise. Indeed, the entire 'free trade' regime owes its existence to those defeats.

Thirdly, Fortuyn benefited from the resurgence of the hard right all across Europe, reflected in electoral successes in Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Portugal and, most recently, France, in which voters' feelings of economic insecurity are exploited to whip up racism towards refugees, or towards long-standing ethnic minority communities.

Fourthly, Fortuyn's campaign shows how much the far right has learned in the past 20 years or so: it knows that there aren't many votes in goose-stepping and Hitler worship. 'Quality of life' issues and environmental-

ism are being appropriated by the far-right right across Europe (in the West Midlands the BNP has muscled in on a campaign to keep a swimming pool open). Indeed, Fortuyn denied he was a racist at all. Shortly before his death, in an interview with the BBC, he insisted that he could not be a racist as he was specifically against Islam, and Islam is a religion, and to think otherwise would be 'stupid'.

And there's the rub. Fortuyn was surfing on a Europe-wide tide of Islamophobia, more intense after September 11. It is no surprise that the BNP was most active in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford, with their large Muslim populations, and has even approached Sikh organisations with a view to collaborating against Muslims. Although France has a number of ethnic minorities, it was the North African Muslims that were in Le Pen's line of fire. In the Netherlands, Fortuyn didn't seem that interested in the country's black population, of Surinam and Dutch Antilles descent, and his number two was Joao Varela, from Cape Verde. It seems that many of Fortuyn's supporters try to rationalise their position by denying that they are racist, saying that they accept black people because they speak Dutch, are Christian, wear the same clothes, play football, drink beer, etc., while (they say) Muslims are or do none of these. Therefore, to some extent, Fortuyn's support comes from intolerance towards those whom they see as incapable of fitting into 'tolerant' Dutch society.

Of course, the fact that racism takes on specific forms, against particular targets, does not stop it being racism. However nuanced Fortuyn's message may have been, it was still a clear legitimisation of discrimination against and possibly violence towards a section of Dutch society. Apologists for Enoch Powell ('the great parliamentarian') would invoke his supposed admiration for Indian culture and his courtesy towards any Asian constituent with whom he had contact. This detail was rather lost, however, in the big picture, when Powell's name was being chanted on National Front marches in the 1960s and 70s.

So, if Fortuyn was a racist, should socialists rejoice at his passing? We shouldn't mourn him, but the bumping off of individuals by lone gunmen is a poor political substitute for mobilising support in the working class and in the ethnic minority communities across Europe for a struggle against racism and fascism.

WA

Introduction

Bunting, Trotsky and the South African revolution

by Richard Price

The following extract represents the bulk of chapter 12 of Edward Roux's *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*¹. Published privately by the author – a long-time comrade of Bunting's – in a small edition almost 60 years ago, it became a rarity, little known even to students of the South African left.² Bunting's expulsion from the Communist Party of South Africa was a crucial episode in the Stalinisation of the party. The background to his expulsion – the imposition of the 'native republic' slogan onto the CPSA – was connected by the warped logic of the Comintern's 'Third Period' to factional struggles within the American Communist Party, and would have echoes subsequently within the Trotskyist movement.

Sidney Percival Bunting was a remarkable figure. Born in London in 1873 to a privileged Methodist family, his mother supported progressive Liberal causes. He attended Oxford and in 1900 went to South Africa on military service. After the Boer War, he entered legal practice, and by 1910 had joined the white-only South African Labour Party. In 1913 he supported the first of a series of bitterly fought strikes by white miners, and won a seat in the Transvaal provincial elections the following year.

Shortly after the First World War broke out Bunting decided to oppose it, and after the Labour Party reversed its initial opposition, the anti-war elements either resigned or were expelled and formed the International Socialist League of South Africa. The South African Labour Party had been entirely the preserve of a white labour aristocracy. Under the leadership of David Ivon Jones and Bunting, the ISL began its first tentative steps in turning to the oppressed black masses, steadily gravitated towards revolutionary Marxism, and greeted the Russian Revolution enthusiastically. However, there was also resistance to taking up the 'native question' within the ISL, and when it became the nucleus of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921, it too was almost entirely a white party.

In early 1922, the position of the CP – the

notional champion of all the oppressed – was further exposed when white miners fought pitched battles, which at times verged on the insurrectionary, against the mine employers, the police and the army to defend the colour bar in mining. On one demonstration in Johannesburg, strikers carried a banner proclaiming 'Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White South Africa', although in fairness this was never a CP slogan and the party distanced itself from it.³ Attempting to balance between defending the strikers from the government and bosses and opposing the demand to exclude black labour from the mines almost shipwrecked the young party.

Bunting travelled via London and Berlin to attend the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922 as the delegate of the South African party, and returned enthused by what he had seen, and the speeches he had heard delivered by Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Radek and others. The Fourth Congress took a firm stand in support of black liberation,⁴ and although there seems to be no record of Bunting's reaction to the *Theses on the Negro Question* passed by the congress, it is likely that as a prominent 'nigrophilist' Bunting would have gained strength from its stand.

Shortly after Bunting's return to South Africa, he took over as secretary of the party from Bill Andrews, who became the South African section's representative on the Executive Committee of the Communist International. Andrews's background in the white trade union movement led him to believe the main potential for socialism lay in the white working class. But the CPSA's 1924 congress saw the victory of the 'nigrophilist' faction, and the party began steadily recruiting black workers, and moving in the orbit of organisations such as the ANC – at that time a fairly conservative expression of African nationalism.

The transition from an almost entirely white party to a predominantly black one was not accomplished easily. But by the time of the fateful Sixth Congress of the Comintern, the CPSA, despite remaining a small party, had 1,600 black members out of a total of 1,750⁵ – an achievement due in no small part to Bunting's leadership. It was in this context that the Comintern's draft resolution on South

Africa calling for an abrupt change of orientation in favour of a 'native republic' was received in the CPSA like 'a bolt from the blue'. The party sent Bunting, his wife and Eddie Roux as its delegates to the congress.

Bunting's contributions to the Sixth Congress⁶ are ably summarised in Roux's account. Bunting rebutted the charges of 'white chauvinism' spread by his factional opponent La Guma point by point. He based his position on previous resolutions of the Comintern, stressing the specific weight of the black working class in a manner that recalls Trotsky's polemics on China. At the same time, he argued against driving the white working class – which at this point still played an important role in industry – into the arms of the white employers, and in favour of attempting to win over, or at least to neutralise, sections of it. Bunting, as Roux observes, was not a confident theoretician, and made no attempt at the congress to develop a more rounded critique of the strange combination of ultra-leftism and 'stagism' that was beginning to emerge.

Privately, however, Bunting wrote to Roux in December 1928 that 'no black republic in SA could be achieved without overthrowing capitalist rule. And I think the "stage" part of the formula [of the 'native republic'] is verbiage.'⁷ Whether Bunting read the Left Opposition's criticisms of the line of the Comintern that circulated clandestinely at the Congress is doubtful. However, in his posthumously published memoirs, Roux recalled intriguingly: 'Two American delegates,⁸ with whom I shared a room at the hotel, confided to me their Trotskyist sympathies but only when they were slightly drunk. Otherwise they kept quiet.'⁹

The South African delegates can also only have been dimly aware that the struggle over the 'native republic' slogan was a sub-plot of a struggle to change the line of the American Communist Party, both issues coming under the remit of the Anglo-American and Negro Commissions.¹⁰ American Communists had until this point always understood black oppression in the US as racial, rather than national, in character, and that the fundamental struggle of black people was for equality. Some time in 1925, Stalin decided that black people constituted an oppressed

nation within the USA, to whom the struggle for self-determination was applicable. Working through Harry Haywood, a black American Communist, who had spent most of his party life in Moscow, Stalin promoted the idea of a Black Belt republic in the South as the expression of this national self-determination.

But as was the case with the 'Native Republic' in South Africa, the Black Belt republic in the southern United States was rejected by most of the party's black cadre. While a number of the party's white leaders hastily adopted the self-determination line, three of its leading black members spoke against it at the Sixth Congress. One of the sharpest critics was Haywood's brother, Otto Hall, who argued: 'The historical development of the American Negro has tended to create in him the desire to be considered a part of the American nation. There are no tendencies to become a separate national minority.'¹¹ Nevertheless, the new line was imposed by the Congress. Despite the fact that it had absolutely no resonance outside the party and its immediate periphery, the CP persevered with the slogan on and off until 1958, when it was finally buried.

In both cases, policies dogmatically arrived at in Moscow were imposed on local Communist parties without any adequate discussion, and with disorienting results. After the Sixth Congress, Bunting attempted loyally to carry out the new 'native republic' line. Through vigorous election campaigns and agitation carried into rural areas such as the Transkei, the party's membership rose to 3,000 by 1929. But the Third Period mania unleashed by Moscow demanded ironclad loyalty, the removal of any leader capable of independent thought, and the creation of scapegoats. Cast in the role of the Right Danger, Bunting was disgracefully framed up on charges of 'white chauvinism' and 'right opportunism'. He was removed from the leadership of the party he had played a major role in founding at its ninth congress in December 1930, and expelled in September 1931. There followed a wave of expulsions, conducted by Comintern loyalists Lazar Bach, and Douglas and Molly Wolton.

In spite of the abuse heaped upon him by his former comrades, Bunting – by now in poor health – does not seem to have drawn any wider conclusions on the Stalinist source of the infection in the South African party. He declined to attack the CPSA publicly, and although he spoke at the Lenin Club in Cape Town (which would become one of the seedbeds of South African Trotskyism) it was to oppose the founding of a new revolutionary grouping outside the CP.¹² Among Bunting's supporters were a number of black comrades, one of whom, T.W. Thibedi, appears to have been the first South African to contact Trotsky.¹³ Bunting seems to have on the one hand retained his faith in the Soviet Union, while hoping for a reorientation in its inter-

national policy. He died in 1936.

Little more than four years after Bunting's expulsion, the slogan of the 'native republic' had been quietly buried, as the Popular Front required the creation of broad alliances with white Labourites, liberals, bishops and others who would be frightened by the spectre of majority rule. But by 1935, the CPSA had been reduced to a rump of 150 members.¹⁴ Bach, who went to Moscow in 1935, along with his supporters Maurice and Paul Richter, had by now become surplus to requirements and all three died in Soviet camps.¹⁵ Albert Nzula, the first black secretary of the CPSA, whom Bach had promoted as a rival to Bunting, also died in the Soviet Union in 1934 in suspicious circumstances.¹⁶

While the Comintern unceremoniously ditched the 'Native Republic' slogan, echoes of the debate it engendered could be found many decades later. While the adoption by the ANC/SACP of the policy of non-racialism tended to underplay the weight of oppression carried by 'African' workers, other traditions including the Pan Africanist Congress and AZAPO emphasised specifically 'black' demands. These in turn influenced some groupings on the left internationally, who raised demands such as 'Black workers to power'.

Such demands raised two related issues. Firstly, how did they relate to other groups within South Africa? While the white working class ceased to be a significant focus – by the end of apartheid it was largely confined to supervisory jobs – the question of how such slogans related to mixed race ('coloured') and Indian workers was altogether trickier. In the upsurge around 1984-6, such workers readily identified themselves as 'black'; at other points they have tended to view themselves as distinct groups.

The second issue is a broader one of the appropriateness of giving a racial connotation to socialist slogans. A workers' state is by definition a state for all workers regardless of race; one which aims to build a truly classless society. What does the adjective 'black' add to such a definition? The experience tends to suggest that mixing racial and socialist slogans is fraught with problems.

Among Trotskyists, further confusion was created by the fact that Trotsky himself appeared to support – albeit very conditionally – both the 'native republic' slogan in South Africa and the demand for black self-determination in the US, despite their dubious provenance. The Workers Party of South Africa – one of two Trotskyist groups born in the early 1930s – wrote in its 'Draft Thesis on the Native Question': 'If the white chauvinist policy of the SALP [South African Labour Party] flows from the assumption that South Africa is a "white man's country", the main and central slogan of the CPSA, the slogan of "Native Republics", flows from the equally false assumption that South Africa is exclusively a "black man's

country"'. This antithesis, which entirely ignores the white population, is equally harmful, because it is bound to antagonise one section of the working class against another.'¹⁷

Trotsky responded in the following terms: 'When the theses say that the slogan of a "black republic" is *equally* harmful for the revolutionary cause as is the slogan of a "South Africa for the whites", then we cannot agree with the form of the statement. Whereas in the latter there is the case of supporting complete oppression, in the former there is the case of taking the first steps towards liberation.

'We must accept decisively and without any reservations the complete and unconditional right of the blacks to independence. Only on the basis of a mutual struggle against the domination of the white exploiters can the solidarity of black and white toilers be cultivated and strengthened.

'It is possible that *after victory* the blacks will find it unnecessary to form a separate black state in South Africa. Certainly we will not *force them* to establish a separate state. But let them make this decision freely, on the basis of their own experience, and not forced by the *sjambok* of the white oppressors.'¹⁸

The WPSA defended its detailed criticism of the 'Native Republic' slogan, but added: 'No doubt this formulation, "equally harmful", was the worst instance of exaggeration in our theses, and we agree with your criticism of it and sincerely regret this "equally", as well as other less serious expressions of an exaggerated kind.'¹⁹

In this exchange we can see Trotsky's sharp reaction to any phrase that appeared to put the potential oppression of whites on a par with the actual oppression of blacks in South Africa. But his emphasis on the issue of 'self-determination' was heading down a blind alley, since, for reasons Bunting had outlined in 1928, the dynamic of class struggle in South Africa meant that a primarily national struggle with the aim of establishing a separate black state was never likely – as history would subsequently confirm. Moreover, although Trotsky gave only hypothetical support to a black republic, this could give rise to an uncharacteristically 'stagist' conception of the South African revolution.

There is a close link in Trotsky's thinking on South Africa to the points he had made on the black struggle in the US in discussion with American Trotskyists two years earlier. Where Arne Swaback emphasised that black struggle was directed towards fighting for full equality, Trotsky had again seen a self-determination dimension: 'What can we lose in this question when we go further with our demands than the Negroes themselves do at present? We do not compel them to separate from the state, but they have the full right to self-determination when they so desire and we will support and defend them with all the

means at our disposal in the winning of their right, the same as we defend all oppressed peoples. . . . If the Negroes do not at present demand self-determination it is of course for the same reason that the white workers do not yet advance the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat.²⁰

These two linked positions advanced by Trotsky were in all likelihood the product of insufficient information. (In his first discussion on the American South, he appears to believe that black people spoke a separate language.) Unfortunately, among Trotsky's would-be followers many of his conditional statements acquired the status of holy writ.

Notes

¹ E. Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*, The African Bookman, 1944; Frank Cass, 1970.

² It has recently been republished in South Africa by Mayibuye Books.

³ S. Ellis and T. Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid*, James Currey, 1992, p.14.

⁴ See 'Black liberation and the Fourth Congress of the Comintern', *Workers Action*, No. 3, June-July 1998.

⁵ Ellis and Sechaba, op. cit., p.15.

⁶ Reproduced in full in 'S.P. Bunting at the 6th Congress of the Comintern, 1928', *Searchlight South Africa*, No. 3, July 1989. See also B. Hirson, 'Bukharin, Bunting and the "Native Republic" Slogan' in the same issue.

⁷ Quoted in Hirson, *ibid*.

⁸ Presumably the 'American delegates' were James P. Cannon and the Canadian Maurice Spector.

⁹ E. and W. Roux, *Rebel Pity*, Penguin, 1972, p.75.

¹⁰ What follows is based on the account in T. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, Vintage, 1986, pp.315-356.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.348.

¹² Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, p.146.

¹³ *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Spring 1993, pp.98-103.

¹⁴ Hirson, op. cit.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.20. See also 'Three Members Reinstated', *The African Communist*, No. 119, Fourth Quarter 1989.

¹⁶ See P. Trehwela, 'The Death of Albert Nzula and the Silence of George Padmore', *Searchlight South Africa*, No. 1, September 1988.

¹⁷ *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Spring 1993, p.109.

¹⁸ L. Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1934-35*, Pathfinder, 1971, pp.250-51.

¹⁹ *Revolutionary History*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Spring 1993, p.126.

²⁰ L. Trotsky, *On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, Pathfinder, 1978, pp.26-9.

S.P. Bunting and the 'Native Republic' in South Africa

By Edward Roux

... It was now seven years since the formation of the South African Communist Party and its affiliation to the Moscow Comintern. Hitherto the Comintern had taken no very active interest in its tiny branch in South Africa. The local communists had tried to follow the 'general line' of the Comintern. I have already referred to the discussions on the 'united front' and 'immediate demands' where Bunting had appeared as the exponent of the 'correct line' in opposition to the 'left deviations' of certain Cape Town members. But these polemics had been exceptional. In general the South African revolutionaries had got along with the minimum of Comintern theory and in any case had been left largely to work out their own salvation. During the dispute over the 'Native question' in 1924 there had been no guidance from Moscow, except what had come indirectly through the Young Communist International to the youth section in South Africa.

But from 1927 onwards for a number of years Comintern 'directives' became a very real thing in this country. This was primarily due to an increased interest by Moscow in the colonial countries. At this time the Bolsheviks regarded British capitalism as the main enemy. British diplomacy was trying to build a White wall round Red Russia: Poland, the Baltic states, Rumania, were in the British sphere of influence; their armies were being subsidised with British capital. The Soviet [Union] had made a treaty with Versailles-ridden Germany. And now the Soviet [Union], through the Comintern, was trying to hamstring the British Empire by organising liberation movements in the British colonies, of which South Africa was one.

Apart from these special circumstances which called forth an interest in South Africa, there had been a general growth in the organisational apparatus of the Comintern. The various manoeuvres of the Comintern, determined primarily by the situation in the Soviet Union and the relations between that country and the capital-

ist powers, were reflected more strongly in the individual communist parties throughout the world. Hitherto any swings to right or left in the South African movement had been determined by local conditions. But from now on the South African communists were expected to fall into line with 'the world revolutionary movement', which meant in practice that they had to repeat the 'guiding slogans' which at any particular time were 'correct' in the Russian party. Of course, such general slogans were always supposed to be adapted to the local conditions in any particular country. But these 'adaptations' did not save the individual parties from violent changes of policy, which, on looking back on events, seem to me now to have been misguided in the extreme. They had disastrous results for the individual parties and in the long run they did not help the world revolutionary movement or even the progress of the Soviet Union itself.

The spate of Comintern directives, theses, and criticisms to which the South African communists now became subjected, nonplussed Bunting, dazed and finally overwhelmed him. For one thing, he was a slow thinker. Every step in his advance from a non-conformist liberal to a revolutionary socialist had meant a mental struggle. Slowly he had advanced, clinging tenaciously to one set of ideas, giving them up with difficulty and then, when he had made the transition, adhering to the new ideas with equal tenacity. And because policies meant so much to him, because he held views so strongly, he could not be a facile manoeuvrer. He was no Machiavelli: the end did not justify the means. He could not easily advocate one thing today and another to-morrow with his tongue in his cheek, and justify his behaviour by appealing to some ultimate abstraction. Also, ever since his 'come down' in philosophy at Oxford, he had been annoyed with hair-splitting dogma and formal theory.

Now suddenly the South African communists, with Bunting at their head, found themselves caught in a whirlwind of theory. The Comintern had decided to 'Bolshevise' its affiliated sections, the CPSA among them. Theoretical clarity became the or-

der of the day. Directions from Moscow based on 'Leninist' principles must replace empirical methods of trial and error. The various stages of the revolution must be grasped. Appropriate slogans corresponding to the main tasks of the period must be enumerated. Campaigns must be waged against various 'dangers' real or hypothetical. Above all a 'Bolshevist leadership' must be created, social-democratic forms of organisation abolished, and the Party purged of 'opportunist, vacillating and non-proletarian elements'.

The storm which was approaching, a storm which ultimately was to wreck the Party (at least for a period) and destroy its influence over the Bantu masses much more effectively than ever the police of the South African Government could have done, appeared at first as a little cloud on the horizon, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. La Guma, when he had visited Rus-

sia in 1927, had had a discussion with Bukharin (then a leading figure in the Comintern) on the situation in South Africa. It was agreed that the struggle in this country was primarily an anti-imperialist one. The country was a colony or semi-colony of British imperialism. The Bantu, like the Indians and Chinese and other colonial peoples, were suffering national oppression. They were being deliberately kept in a backward condition by British finance capital and its South African ally (Boer imperialism), in order that super profits might be extracted from them. Most of these super-profits were then exported to Britain, though part was distributed among the South African capitalists and landowners as a bribe to induce them to help in keeping the Natives in subjection. It was clear therefore that the main task of the revolution in South Africa was to overthrow the rule of the British and Boer im-

perialists, to set up a democratic independent Native republic (which would give the white workers and other non-exploiting whites certain 'minority rights') as a stage towards the final overthrow of capitalism in South Africa.

Accordingly, a 'draft resolution on South Africa' was drawn up by the Comintern and sent for discussion to this country early in 1928. The main slogan of the Party was to be 'an independent Native republic, as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' government'. The draft resolution was to be discussed and finally adopted by the sixth world congress of the Communist International, due in Moscow by the middle of the year.

To Bunting and the great majority of fellow Party members the new slogan came like a bolt from the blue. And to me when I received the news in England, it was equally startling. Was it not similar, we said, to Marcus Garvey's slogan 'Africa for the Africans' which the CP had always opposed as the exact opposite of internationalism? How could we reconcile such a cry with our steadfast aim and slogan: 'Workers of the world, unite!' We, as South African communists, had claimed to represent the aspirations of all workers, black and white; and now we were being asked to go before the masses as a purely black, even, as we saw it, as an anti-white Party. Almost all the white communists were indignant and black communists like Thibedi, who had been trained in the old tradition, equally so. True, we had left the white workers' trades hall, we had fought to make the CP a predominantly black party; but we had always advocated the unity of the workers. We did not want to put the black man on top and the white man underneath. We wanted them to be equal.

Though the majority reacted in this way, there was a minority which welcomed the slogan. These were led by the Woltons and La Guma. Bunting and his wife were sent to the Sixth Congress to put forward the views of the majority. The Woltons sent a minority report.

* * *

The South African Party was entitled to three delegates at the Sixth Congress. As I was in England and almost on the spot as it were, I was invited by the Party to be the third delegate. I met the Buntings in London in July 1928.

On our way across Europe to the Soviet capital we had plenty of time to discuss the slogan. The Buntings were inclined to regard it as all due to La Guma. It had all started with his discussion with Bukharin a year before. La Guma was a bit of a racialist. One gathered that if La Guma had never visited Moscow the slogan would

Stalinism rehabilitates S.P. Bunting

The Case of S.P. Bunting

The 7th Congress of the South African Communist Party held earlier this year instructed its Political Bureau to 're-examine the cases of S.P. Bunting and others expelled from the CPSA in the early 1930s as representatives of an alleged "right-wing danger" with a view to the annulment of the expulsion orders issued against them'.

In the case of S.P. Bunting, the Political Bureau has issued the following statement:

Sidney Percival Bunting, 1873-1936

Hero of the South African Revolution

This tribute to the memory and achievements of a great hero of the liberation movement is long overdue. It is indeed more than high time for the Party and its allies to restore SPB to the role of honour where he rightly belongs.

He was unjustly expelled from the Party, together with other leading militants, in 1931 during the great 'purge' carried out by international communists of alleged 'right-wing deviationists'.

The reasons given for his expulsion were flimsy to the point of being ridiculous. He was accused of appealing for leniency when defending political prisoners in court, and of speaking from the same platform as members of the ANC and ICU. What a travesty of justice it was to condemn him for having the courage and foresight to initiate what would in time become the settled policy of the entire mass democratic movement!

A founding member of the Party, he edited its paper *The International*, was elected chairman in 1924, and turned the party away from its traditional concentration on white working class politics towards the country's first non-racial party with a mainly black leadership.

Although he had doubts about certain aspects of the 'Black republic' policy adopted by the 6th Congress of the Comintern in 1928, it was left to him to explain and win support for the policy on his return to South Africa from Moscow. He represented the Party in the Tembuland constituency during the 1929 general election on the platform of majority African rule, and met with great hostility from white lumpen hooligans, police and officials. He and Gana Makabeni, his election agent, had to stand trial in more than a dozen prosecutions at the height of the campaign.

Two years later a misguided clique of Party members who had gained control of the Central Committee had him expelled, an act of betrayal from which he never recovered. *Umsebenzi* (the weekly Party paper at that time) acknowledged that under his leadership the Party began to organise African workers in the struggle against racism and imperialist oppression.

The African Communist, Fourth Quarter, 1989

never have been born. With this interpretation I found it hard to agree. I felt that the slogan was derived from Comintern theory, but that it was a false interpretation of such theory. I said that we South African communists were very backward with regard to theory and that we should realise our shortcomings in this respect. I harped on this matter a lot during our journey, but agreed with the others that the slogan was incorrect.

We spent a few days in Berlin, where the Reds had fought on barricades on May Day a few weeks before. The German CP was still powerful and growing in strength and was fighting the Social Democrats for the leadership of the working class. But there was another party in the field which had not been there on Bunting's last visit to Germany in 1922. Hitler and his Nazis were becoming a power in the land. We did not see any brown shirts or red-front fighters – we were unlucky in not seeing any big meetings during the few days we were there – but we saw posters everywhere, chiefly Nazi and Communist.

Bunting and I wandered through the streets eating cherries – the red-fleshed sort, at a few pfennigs a kilogram. I recalled walking through the streets of Jeppe eating buns with Bunting while we canvassed for C.F. Glass in a provincial council election campaign – it must have been in 1924. Bunting's difficulty about making up his mind appeared in small things as well as great. One morning on a street corner we three discussed whether we should go to Potsdam or the Tiergarten. Somehow it finally rested with Bunting to make the decision and we wasted minutes while he tried to make up his mind. Finally, after some false starts, we decided to go to the Tiergarten and rushed off only to see our bus disappearing round a corner!

We took the train through Warsaw to Moscow where we and crowds of delegates from all over the world were welcomed with bands and banners. Our main occupation in Moscow was not seeing the sights but attending innumerable meetings and discussing the slogan. Mrs Bunting found the social atmosphere at the Sixth very different from that of the Fourth Congress in 1922. Then there had been a spirit of comradeship; comrades had exchanged news about conditions in their different countries. They had all been friends together, members of one big revolutionary movement. But now there were numerous factions and cliques, each trying to curry favour with the powers at the top, each with its own axe to grind. Comrades were afraid to discuss things openly for fear of being accused of political 'deviations'. Perhaps we South Africans were particularly sen-

sitive to the absence of a spirit of fraternity, for we were deliberately cold-shouldered by some of the delegates, and the American Negro delegate, Ford, refused to speak to us. The story had gone round that the South African delegates were 'white chauvinists'.

We had come to Moscow bursting with a desire to state our case. But we could not find anyone in authority who was prepared to listen to us. We were told by 'Comrade Bennett' that the South African question would be decided by the Anglo-American Secretariat, which included Negro Africa within its scope, and of which Bennett was Secretary. This body would meet the South African delegates later. In the meantime we attended the general meetings of the Congress, listened to the big speakers and put our names on the speakers' list, so that we too should have our say in due course.

Bunting soon took a violent dislike to Bennett, whose other name, we understood, was Petrovsky. Most of the Comintern functionaries had strings of aliases and one never knew for certain what their real names were. Bennett was a blond with a thin face, long nose and protruding eyes. 'A slimy fellow', Bunting commented. But we had to put up with Bennett. He was the official channel through which all matters relating to the South African party must go.

Bunting's first chance to speak to the assembled delegates occurred on July 23. In this, his first speech, he did not make any direct reference to the slogan controversy, though he tried to prepare the ground for the coming fight by giving the congress

an account of conditions in the colonies. He emphasised the proletarian character of the Native movement, pointing out that the greatest militancy had been shown in the industrial field and that the 'peasants' in South Africa were tied to the mines and other industries, returning periodically to the land.

Bunting criticised Bennett's speech, which had referred to the 'masses' in the colonies and had said nothing of the colonial proletariat as such. The draft programme of the Communist International says that there are two main revolutionary forces: the "proletariat" in the countries at home, and the "masses" in the colonies. I beg to protest against this bald distinction ... Is not that distinction between European "proletariat" and colonial "masses" exactly the way our "aristocracy of labour" treats the black workers? The "prejudice" of the white worker is not that he wants to kill the black worker, but that he looks upon him not as a fellow-worker but as Native "masses". The Communist Party has declared and proved that he is a working man as well, like anyone else, and I want to bring that experience to the notice of the Communist International.'

Bunting's fight for thirteen years had been to bring the black worker into the South African labour movement, to get the white 'socialist' to recognise the black man as a fellow worker. All this emphasis on the non-proletarian character of the black masses – the need for a slogan based on the anti-imperialist national 'agrarian' revolution – seemed to him to belittle the work of the South African Communists. A

South African Trotskyists pay tribute to S.P. Bunting

The revolutionary movement has lost a valuable member. But in Bunting South Africa has lost something more than a valuable member, something more than an honest revolutionary. It has lost a leader, a pioneer, a Bolshevik. And the revolutionary movement in South Africa, so poor both in quality and quantity, will find it difficult to replace a man of Bunting's calibre. Such men are rare.

He was one of the first to break not only with the Labour Party, but with Social Democracy; one of the first to hail the October Revolution in Russia, one of the first to form the Communist Party. And as an ardent Communist he had to fight, and did fight, enemies of every possible kind – imperialism and capitalism and their lackeys; the Labour Party; anarchists of various brands inside the Communist Party, and last, but not least, white chauvinism. When, moreover, he had succeeded in building up a Communist Party, he was deposed and expelled...for opposing as unsuitable the slogan of 'Native Republic'.

Bunting will always remain a living symbol in the South African revolutionary movement. For none in South Africa was so beloved as Bunting by the Bantu workers and peasants, who, thanks to him were drawn into the movement. It was they who most fully appreciated his great loving heart, the true qualities of his character, his crystal-clear honesty as a man and as a revolutionary. This is not the time to recall his faults and mistakes. Who among us is faultless and which of us does not make mistakes?

The memory of Bunting will remain with us.

From Spark, organ of the Workers Party of South Africa, on the death of S.P. Bunting, 1936

close study of the colonial policy of the Comintern would have shown him that the colonial proletariat was not ignored by the followers of Lenin and that a leading role was assigned to it in *the national revolution*. Here, as in many other cases, Bunting's almost complete lack of doctrinal knowledge made him appear a blundering novice among the hard-bitten functionaries like Petrovsky, who had probably burned the midnight oil while they pored over the works of Lenin and Stalin and the voluminous theses of the Comintern.

The trouble was really the uncomradely atmosphere at Moscow. Bunting, though slow, was capable of learning. If he had been taken in hand by sincere revolutionaries who were willing to recognise him for what he was, a courageous and honest fighter, and who were prepared to bear with him, it would have been a different story. There really was a very bad spirit in Moscow. Bunting protested, but without any visible effect.

'The Communist International is a chain, and the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link. Little parties like ours are links in the chain. We are not strengthened but belittled in the way I have mentioned. If our parties are weak, then they should be strengthened. Better communication is required. It will perhaps surprise you to know that until about six months ago we have not had a letter (except for circulars) from the Communist International for five or six years. That is a thing which has to be attended to immediately. At any rate, we ask to be considered a little more as representing equally masses of workers, and not treated with, shall I say, a sort of step-motherly or scholastic contempt as representing mere shapeless masses. When I came here an official of the Communist International [it must have been Petrovsky] said, "We are going to attack you". That is rather a poor sort of reception to give to representatives elected by the vote of the Party, in which there is a huge preponderance of Natives. It is rather a poor reception to give to their representatives before anything has been discussed to say, "We are going to attack you". We came here to take counsel together as to how we could strengthen each other. Certainly in our own party, whatever the difference between us, we do not treat each other like that.'

The promised attack came a few days later in speeches by Dunne (an American delegate) and Bennett-Petrovsky. They declared that the South African delegate had made a 'social democratic' speech. In the course of his speech Bunting had described conditions in the African continent as a whole, pointing out how different were

the conditions in the eastern, western and southern parts, and he had said: 'Conditions in South Africa are quite different from any other part of that continent. South Africa is, owing to its climate, what is called a "white man's country" where whites can and do live not merely as planters and officials, but as a whole nation of all classes, established there for centuries, of Dutch and English composition.' Part of this statement, entirely removed from its context, was quoted by Dunne to prove that Bunting was a 'white chauvinist'.

Bunting replied to this distortion with an official statement, suggesting that perhaps he had been wrongly heard, as he was not a clear speaker. But it is more than likely that his traducers had deliberately distorted his remarks in order to discredit him. It was fortunate perhaps that official stenographic records were made of all speeches.

* * *

In the meantime we were trying hard to get past the facade of bureaucrats, jacks-in-office, and time-servers, which seemed to constitute the 'Comintern', as we found it, to those real Bolsheviks whom we believed were somewhere in Moscow – those real Leninists who would listen and understand and appreciate, who would not be out to attack us but to give us their comradely advice. Mrs Bunting, in particular, was certain that inner core was somewhere to be found and she persuaded Bunting to write articles which she translated into Russian for *Pravda*. I also was drawn in to writing descriptive articles showing the complexity of South African conditions. One, I remember, I gave as a speech to the Congress. It dealt with the revolutionary movement of the white miners on the Rand, 1913, 1914, and 1922 strikes, etc. Whatever effect these efforts may have had on the 'real Bolsheviks' they did not alter the attitude of the bureaucrats.

Bunting's speech on the slogan question was delivered on August 20. I do not propose to quote the whole of this speech, which occupied fourteen pages in the stenographic report. It was a much more sophisticated speech than any of his previous efforts. At least it referred frequently to Comintern theses and resolutions, particularly to the Colonial Thesis of the Second Congress. He emphasised that the 'Native bourgeoisie' in South Africa was to all intents and purposes non-existent. The national revolutionary movement could be regarded in the main an anti-imperialist movement in which national and class interests tended to coincide.

Bunting maintained that the work in South Africa had shown that the slogans of the Party were adequate. 'We have 1,750 members,' he said, 'of whom 1,600 are

Natives, as against 200 a year ago, and we are adding to that and also organising militant Native trade unions which have learnt to conduct strikes. We are also combating and slowly overcoming white labour chauvinism, which we found yields when confronted with organised masses of Native fellow workers face to face. We put through joint strikes of white and black which were victorious, also an amalgamation of white and black unions into one, an unprecedented thing in South Africa ... Such are the surrounding circumstances in which a Native republic slogan would be launched, and we consider it would, not in theory perhaps, but certainly in practice, arouse white workers' opposition as unfair to the minority, and would thereby not only emphasise the contradiction between national and class movements, but put the whole Native movement at a great disadvantage unnecessarily and without compensating advantage. It will not avail, when such suspicions are aroused to put them off with smooth "empty liberal phrases", to the effect that "national minorities" will be safeguarded, especially when no definition of these safeguards is given – for that matter no definition is given of the precise meaning of "Native Republic" itself. But expressions like "South Africa is a black country", "the return of the country and land back to the black population", "South Africa belongs to the Native population", etc., though correct as general statements, do invite criticism by the white working and peasant minority who will have to fight with the black workers and peasants if the bourgeoisie is to be overthrown ...

'As the slogan will certainly be interpreted by the exploited whites, as it has indeed been interpreted by ourselves (so much so that its defenders [in South Africa] have defended just that interpretation of it), it means that the exploited whites are to become in their turn a subject race, that the Native republic in spirit if not in letter will exclude all whites, and that the land without exception will belong to the Natives – not as a matter of the verbal drafting of a resolution but as a matter of fact. The slogan will have to be re-drafted on less nationalist lines if it is to avoid giving that impression.

'Of course, no one denies that *the immense majority must and will exercise its powers as such*, from which it follows that a minority of the exploited is also entitled to its proportionate voice and share in power and land. The "Native republic" is defended, indeed, as a mere expression of majority rule, but it obviously goes beyond that, and the little difference makes all the difference when it comes to combating white chauvinism; it handicaps propaganda

to that effect.

'It may be asked, why are we so concerned about the fate of a comparative handful of whites? It is certainly strange that we of the CPSA, who are accustomed at home to work almost exclusively among and for the Native masses, and who are always attacking white chauvinism, should find ourselves obliged here in Moscow to take up unwonted cudgels for the white minority. But the reason is not any special love for the aristocrats of labour, or any chauvinist preference for the whites as is superficially and malignantly suggested in the draft resolution, but first the need for labour solidarity and second a true valuation of the forces at our disposal. Our infant Native movement, any revolutionary Native movement, lives and moves in a perpetual state bordering on illegality; on the slightest pretext it can be suppressed either by prosecution or legislation or by massacre or pogrom. We are therefore always looking for allies, or rather for shields and protections behind which to carry on; and even the *bare neutrality*, much more the occasional support of the white trade unions, etc., is of incalculable value to us.

'We have always instinctively felt this need of white labour support, but it is only when threatened by this slogan with the loss of it, that we realise how very useful it is to us, and how impossible it is to agree with the defenders of the slogan who say "To hell with white labour support, damn the white workers!"¹ It is easy to sit here and, on limited experience of our local atmosphere, to lay down a policy and say "It will be all right; you don't understand; this slogan will not alienate, it will attract the white workers!" We who would have to go back and preach it, we who have had all these years to drive a composite team, to work in both camps, black and white, who have learned the art of doing it on uncompromising Marxian lines by long and hard experience of the enormous difficulties arising out of this very race question, the crucial question of South African labour – on a matter like this we must be heard with respect. We say that the white workers are unquestionably going to be alienated by the present slogan and that instead of support from white labour we are thus quite likely going to get its hostility and Fascist alliance with the bourgeoisie.'

It is now fifteen years since Bunting made this speech and it is probable that any communist or other labour radical in South Africa would today endorse every word of it. But in Moscow in 1928 it was considered rank heresy. The left extremists in the Comintern who, under the slogan of 'Down with social fascism', were busy making any

sort of working class unity in Germany impossible and preparing the way for Hitler's seizure of power, were not likely to adopt a more reasonable attitude towards Bunting and the little band of communists in South Africa.

A week or so later the 'South African question' at last came up for discussion before the Anglo-American committee. We were invited to be present. The meeting was held round a table in a large room. Petrovsky was chairman and there were some half-dozen others, including a Russian or two and representatives of the American and British parties. Petrovsky opened the proceedings and called on Bunting, who spoke at length, very much on the lines of the speech he had made before the open congress and from which I have quoted. Two of the American delegates (Lovestone and Pepper) were apparently more interested in some affair of their own (there was the usual crisis in the American party and the rival factions were fighting for Comintern support) and while Bunting was only half-way through his speech they left the table and retired to a corner where they carried on a whispered conversation. Petrovsky sat with an indulgent smile on his face. It was clear that nobody was really interested in what Bunting was saying. In fact we had been told confidentially that whatever we might say the slogan would not be altered. But I was annoyed with the blatant indifference of the Americans; I interrupted the proceedings and demanded that the pair in the corner should return to their seats at the table. And so they had to sit and hear Bunting to the end. It was our only victory in Moscow and a hollow one at that. Nor could we take much comfort later when we heard that the Lovestone-Pepper faction had lost the day and the Foster faction had triumphed.

A few days after this I had to return to England. The Congress was almost over, but we were told there would be another meeting of the Anglo-American Secretariat, and that the final instructions to the South African party would then be given. The Buntings stayed on, hoping for some last minute change of heart by Petrovsky, or rather by those higher up who decided these things.

On September 11 Bunting was back in London. He wrote to me from there. He was evidently very tired and suffering from nervous strain. He had taken the discussions on the slogan, and our failure to get it altered, very much to heart. 'As I still want a holiday,' he wrote, 'I am disposed to put in time here till October 18 [when the P & O boat was due to sail] in search of health and good sleep, but the Party wants

us back at once. Still, our party life and work is going to be a desperate business from now on, the "slogan" is now "law" (all my latest efforts were treated with exactly the same contempt as when you protested at their not listening) and we are in for a hell of a time, however much we "make the best of it", in fact I can't see the future at all clearly; so it seems better to go back fit than early.'

At this time I must have been trying to convince myself that the slogan was theoretically correct, that our failure to understand it was due to lack of theoretical knowledge. I wrote a letter to the Party in South Africa in which I said something to this effect, and I sent a copy to Bunting. He wrote me again on September 14: 'I did not write to SA re slogan or anything else (because the absorbing topics are away from the slogan) until yesterday when I just gave the result and said I had not changed my views much but thought we might be able to make the best of it. I can't say I share your "*Mea Culpa*" view re lack of theory ... there is no great question of theory behind the advocacy of the slogan, nor of lack of theory behind our objections to it; and I still think the switching off from class struggle to race struggle an exaggeration, and a departure from Lenin, quite apart from what you call expediency (as if "theory" were something above expediency or expediency below theory). I asked Petrovsky to draw an election manifesto for Harrison [who had been suggested as a communist candidate for Cape Flats in the coming parliamentary elections] but he declined.'

There was a lot more in this letter in reply to various things I had said in my letter to the CPSA. Bunting concluded: 'Well, the question will resolve itself into a different one in South Africa, we shall have to get our speeches written out and passed by Counsel before delivering them, or else go wholesale to gaol, which would be "inexpedient"! See you soon.'

I was staying for another year at Cambridge but I met the Buntings again in London before they sailed for South Africa. He was full of apprehension for the future, but, as he said, 'determined to make the best of it'. There was never any question of his loyalty to the demands of the Comintern even when he did not agree at all.

Note

¹ By 'defenders of the slogan' Bunting refers here to the South African supporters of the slogan, the Woltons, La Guma and others – not, I think, to the Moscow communists. [author's note]

Stone Age psychology

Alas Poor Darwin: Arguments against Evolutionary Psychology
Hilary Rose, Steven Rose (Editors)
Jonathan Cape, 2000, 292pp,
£8.99

Reviewed by Charli Langford

The publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's theory of the origin of species by descent with modification ushered in probably the greatest change in patterns of human thought throughout history. It asserted first that all species that have ever existed are related to each other and somewhere back in time have a common ancestor and second that the sole determinant of how species appear, change and become extinct is their ability to survive in their environment.

Prior to Darwin, species were seen as immutable. The huge number of species and the optimisation of design of each of them suggested powerfully the existence of a designer/creator. Darwin's idea was revolutionary; it denied the immutability of species and it proposed a natural means for the optimisation of design. It even suggested – through timescales of millennia – why species should appear unchangeable over the period of a human life. It set a materialist basis for the study of life, rendering unnecessary any idea of divine creation.

Science in society

From the mid-eighteenth century until very recent times, science has enjoyed a very influential role in mainstream society. This was a major social advance, infinitely better than giving the influence to astrologers¹ or yogic flyers², but it can be dangerous, giving credibility to purveyors of outdated theories and also to outright liars. Biology has suffered more from this than most. To take a mere three from many hundreds of possible examples: pre-Darwinian scientific beliefs about 'inferior races' buttressed colonialism and slavery and continue today in the literature of the far right. Paul Broca (1824-1880) measured human brains and discovered women's brains were on average 181 grams lighter than men's – a fact which found favour among those who would deny women education or the vote. Cyril Burt's data in-

dicated that intelligence was hereditary and that blacks were inherently of lower IQ than whites³.

What these have in common is that the scientific conclusion upholds the social prejudice of the day. Broca never checked for a correlation between brain size and intelligence, he simply assumed it. Burt's actions were far more reprehensible – statistical analysis indicated that his data were invented, and it subsequently turned out that his research assistant was invented as well.

Stone age mores

Which leads us to the subject of this review. Evolutionary psychology (EP) has emerged over the last 30 years and now, according to *Alas Poor Darwin*, claims that every facet of human behaviour can be explained as a result of the process of evolution of our brain/mind, which finalised itself in the Pleistocene age (somewhere between 100,000 and 500,000 years ago).

This in itself is a somewhat surprising claim. Researchers have noted evolutionary effects over quite short periods – one example is the wing evolution of a species of city moth, light brown to black and back, tracking urban soot levels over a period of only slightly more than a century. It seems unlikely that the changes that the human species has experienced over 6,000 – or possibly many more – generations should have had absolutely no effect on the mind/brain. However, simply opposing this view is not the central reason for the existence of the book.

Some of the supporters of EP have gone one step beyond Broca and Burt; instead of validating existing social attitudes by their conclusions, they claim that their view of human behaviour should underlie the making of new social policy. Two of the key theorists, John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, recognise the possibility but believe that not enough is yet known about the 'human psychological architecture . . . to provide the basis for confident guidance in matters of social concern'⁴ (*Alas Poor Darwin*, p.125). Others have gone further: from a right-wing perspective, Matt Ridley has invoked EP ideas in arguing for the dismantling of the welfare state⁵. Helena Cronin wants to in-

voke the EP-theorised differences between men and women to secure justice for women in the courts⁶.

There are two basic but linked problems here. The first is that the adaptations made in the human brain/mind many millennia ago leave no record, and there is precious little data today that can support inferences about such adaptations. But even if there were, it does not follow that such knowledge could determine desirable modern social policy. The second is that the EP model of human evolution, which presupposes a 'human psychological architecture', is seriously flawed. Some understanding of Darwin's theory is needed to understand why.

Darwin and neo-Darwinism

Darwin's theory was that individual members of a species had small random variations from each other. Some of the variations would improve the chance for an individual to survive in its environment and others would not. Individuals that survived long enough to breed would transmit their variations to their offspring. It is this winnowing process that has gained Darwin's theory the common name of natural selection.

Darwinian change operates at the level of the individual and its descendants, not the species as a whole. It also depends on the cross-fertilisation of sexual reproduction for spreading the favourable variations from one 'family' to another; asexual reproduction would limit advantageous variations to just one family within the species.

Darwin and his supporters amassed supportive evidence from observation and from palaeontology, but they were unable to discover a mechanism that would explain why variations occurred and how they were transmitted. It was not until 1930, with the publication of *The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection* (by R.A. Fisher), that Mendel's genetics was recognised as the mechanism, and the synthesis established neo-Darwinism beyond reasonable doubt. Modern work in genetics shows that all life-forms share genetic information; humans genes are 98 per cent identical with chimpanzees and 35 per cent with plants; this constitutes huge evidence for common ancestry.

Fundamentalist Darwinism

The supporters of EP claim natural selection is the *only* means of adaptation. Darwin himself saw natural selection as the 'main but not the exclusive means of modification' (introduction to *The Origin of Species*, all editions), although he did not suggest other causes. This tendency of EP supporters to deny other causes does not originate with them; Darwin's contemporary Alfred Russel Wallace – whose independent derivation of the idea of natural selection was the impetus that caused Darwin to publish in 1859 the conclusions he had drawn in 1835 – later became a proponent of natural selection being the sole agent of species change, and in a remark reminiscent of a similar one by Marx, Darwin declared that if Wallace's ideas were Darwinism then he was not a Darwinist.

What other causes are there? The palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould offers three. First, chance contingencies – such as the asteroid or meteor that hit Earth 65 million years ago, which is now widely recognised as causing the extinction of the dinosaurs and opening the way for mammals to diversify and spread. Second, what he calls spandrels – non-adaptive by-products of some other change that find a use much later. (The original spandrel is the triangle with a curved side structure formed when an arch is built to hold up the centre of a flat beam forming a doorway). An example of a spandrel is the brain mechanism for reading/writing, which must have been present before reading/writing was invented, formed as a side-effect of something else. Third is his own theory of punctuated equilibrium, which holds that the tendency shown by the dating of fossils to suggest that many new

species appear in a short biological period (a few thousand years) and then persist in a relatively unchanged form, is not an effect of an incomplete fossil record but represents what actually happened. This suggests that evolution is not a permanently slow and gradual process but can sometimes go into high gear, and that there is some particular effect related to the diversification of species (rather than individuals).

Following on from their claim that natural selection is the only means of change and adaptation in species, the EP supporters claim that genes become all-determining in human behaviour. Richard Dawkins, a prime voice for EP, has gone so far in *The Selfish Gene*⁷ to claim that the gene is the unit of selection and that an organism is merely a gene's way of replicating itself.

Meanwhile, back to the plot . . .

Basing today's social policy on supposed Palaeolithic human characteristics has two problems. The first is establishing what those characteristics were, the second is whether they form desirable behaviour or not.

It is in fact almost impossible to work out what human behaviour would have been in Palaeolithic times. We don't know, for example, whether many key fossils are of males or females, so any assumptions about male-female relations and homo/heterosexuality are likely to be very speculative. In fact, many of EP's assumptions come from present-day animal behaviours linked to a genes-based approach to humans. Martin Daly and Margo Wilson epitomise this in their study of sexual abuse and violence by stepfathers^{8,9}. Recognising increased risk of violence to children in households where the mother is living with a man who is not the biological father, Daly and Wilson note a number of other species where males kill offspring of other males and conclude that human parental love is genetic. Various counter-arguments seem to have passed them by – on the genetic question, why do adoptive parents show less violence towards their children than average? On the social basis, could not the social strain on the men from their first family and the financial pressures of contributing to two families go some way to explaining the phenomenon?

As for what is desirable behaviour – Thornhill and Palmer recently argue that rape is a (presumably genetically determined) strategy through which sexually unsuccessful men propagate their genes, and unsurprisingly conclude that women are inviting sex if they wear non-concealing clothing¹⁰. Their evidence is based upon forced sex by scorpion flies and mallard ducks, and in each case the victim is a fertile female. How this can be transferred to humans where rape victims are very often outside childbear-

ing age, and where it is not possible to tell whether the female is in her fertile period or not, is a question unaddressed by the authors. But the effect of their research is to encourage rape as normal human behaviour and so to undermine attempts to reject and outlaw it.

Architecture of mind?

Alas Poor Darwin devotes considerable space to opposing EP's very static concept of the mind. Tooby and Cosmides talk of the 'human psychological architecture'. Dawkins talks about memes, contagious units of culture akin to genes, that colonise and parasitise human minds. What these concepts have in common is that they both relate to minds as being essentially unchanging things. Memes have evolved to fit their environment – the human mind – in a Darwinist way and in so doing have provided the universe of ideas, emotions, and experiences that is human culture. The most efficient memes are those that protect themselves against attack – Daniel Dennett speaks of 'the meme for faith, which discourages the exercise of the sort of critical judgement that might decide that the idea of faith was, all things considered, a dangerous idea'¹¹. It is ironic that Dawkins, the inventor of memes, should personally prove so resistant to parasitism by such an efficient meme that he is the prime voice called upon by the media when an anti-religious quote is wanted in the context – to give two recent examples – of the September 11, 2001 attack on New York, or the teaching of creationism in Gateshead.

EP supporters need memes because they need a thought-mechanism that can be subject to selection in order to maintain their thesis that the human brain/mind is essentially the same now as it was 100,000 years ago. In effect, they are trying to revive the old nature/nurture debate, this time to resolve it in favour of nature by generating a nature-mechanism to control learning and culture. But memes are proving elusive. They are formed neither of energy nor matter. They can colonise a mind and they can evolve, which are the two characteristics the EPers need them to have to support their model, but beyond that the EPers cannot agree among them selves what a meme is. A sceptic might well believe that they are entities of convenience, invented out of necessity.

But whatever mechanism exists for cultural evolution, memetic or otherwise, it cannot be subject to Darwinian selection. The hallmark of Darwin's thesis is that the modifications that occur are random. Internal brain/mind things follow the Lamarckian mechanism – modifications are selected with an eye to progress and passed on by education. Massive change can occur in a single generation. The idea that the memes, or

Stephen Jay Gould (1942-2002)

Professor Stephen Jay Gould, a contributor to *Alas Poor Darwin*, died on May 20 as this issue was going to press. He wrote several books, *The Mismeasure of Man* being the classic work against racist interpretation of IQ test results. Over a 25-year period he wrote 300 essays for the monthly *Natural History*, many of which were devoted to giving scientific backing to the fight against oppression, whether by race, sex, sexuality or disability. He also took up particular campaigns such as the anti-creationist issue. Throughout his academic life he was a defender of the social against the biological determinist view. Drawing a veil over his unsatisfactory *Rocks of Ages* (reviewed in *Workers Action* No. 12), we celebrate all his other work.

of the brain/mind to its Pleistocene situation and no further – is several million times as unbelievable at the corresponding idea about genes.

A series of classical anthropological and sociobiological papers from the 1970s and 1980s were reprinted in *Human Nature*¹² in 1997. The editor, Laura Betzig, asked each author to provide a current comment on their findings. All the anthropologists reported big changes in social behaviour of the societies they had studied over the decades that had passed: 'Kipsigis women no longer prefer wealthy men . . . the Yanamoto are no longer as violent . . . wealth no longer predicts the number of children reared' (p.262). All these groups had undergone rapid social, economic and technological change – but no more change than the human race had as a whole over the last 100,000 years. EP should have predicted no change in these societies because the only motor of change would be evolutionary and that motor had stopped 100,000 years ago, when these societies were associated with the rest of humanity and had not yet found their way to their isolated demesnes.

Such an analysis is farcical. It seems obvious that there is in fact a huge variety of possibilities inherent in human minds and we have been continually reshaped by them throughout our history, and the sudden exposure of previously isolated societies to a wider world has led to dramatic cultural evolution within them. The EP theory is false.

And in practice this is accepted by the EP supporters. Dawkins says 'we alone on Earth can rebel against the tyranny of the [genes and memes]¹³'. But where does this leave the EP assertion of an unchanging brain/mind?

A right-wing agenda

There are some good things about EP. It recognises that race and class reflect the influence of environment on a common biological heritage, and it recognises that certain human attitudes which might have been useful in the distant past could now be a problem – high aggression, for example, at a time when guns and explosives exist – not to mention weapons of mass destruction.

But already there are calls for EP to determine social policy. The political effect of shifting causes of behaviour to how our brain/minds were 100,000 years ago is to portray our present situation as natural, and it implies that if we can understand it in evolutionary terms then a fix might be found. Hence the recent excitement in finding a supposed difference between the brain structures of gay and heterosexual men – a difference which on further research has proved elusive. Hence the attempts in the US to relate violent crime to genetic disorder, when a statistical correlation of the numbers of

shootings against the number of handguns available in the population between the US and other countries would provide very persuasive evidence. Daly and Wilson's eccentric conclusions on stepfather violence have already been mentioned, and all these examples point to a systematic factor in EP which ignores the social explanations of phenomena in favour of less likely biological ones – or indeed, on the evidence from *Human Nature*, fails to recognise social phenomena at all.

The common factor with all these examples is that a right-wing status quo is being defended. Richard Dawkins, one of the most vocal and persuasive supporters of EP, met in 1994 with Charles Simonyi, a director of Microsoft in the US, and as a result of that meeting \$2million were given to establish the Charles Simonyi Chair of Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University – to which Dawkins was appointed. This gave him prestige, it promoted him as a mouthpiece for science, and it released him from his job of Zoology professor and his heavy teaching load. The appointment was almost certainly not planned with huge political calculation behind it; Dawkins himself would probably see it as (Lamarckian) natural selection for the qualities of being a good communicator who didn't make political waves.

EP is currently playing the role of suppressant. It provides rational scientific backing for the idea that there is nothing that can be done to improve social problems because they are just part of human nature. But the world is changing and if we accept that we are powerless in the face of ecological disaster, famine, genocidal conflict, mass rape as a war strategy, and the Palaeolithic alpha male global domination tendencies of US imperialism armed with weapons of mass destruction, we will have to accept extinc-

tion as a species and give something else a chance.

Notes

¹ US President Reagan and his wife made regular use of the services of an astrologer.

² The Natural Law Party stood for election in the UK in 1997 and 2002 on a programme that included a defence ministry composed of 150 yogic flyers. They did not explain how these individuals would operate. The Natural Law Party did not see themselves as a satirical addendum to the electoral process.

³ See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Penguin, New York, 1983, for an exhaustive debunking of racist IQ testing.

⁴ John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Evolution of Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p.123.

⁵ Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue*, Viking, London, 1996, pp.261-265.

⁶ Helena Cronin, 'It's only natural', in *Red Pepper*, August 1997, p.21.

⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New edition), Oxford University Press, 1989.

⁸ Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Homicide*, Aldine de Gruyter, New York, 1988.

⁹ Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, 'Evolutionary Social Psychology and Family Homicide', *Science*, Oct 28, 1988, pp.519-524.

¹⁰ Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, MIT Press, 2000, p.179.

¹¹ Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1995, p.349.

¹² Laura Betzig (ed), *Human Nature: A Critical reader*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.

¹³ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, op.cit., p.201.

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French lessons for Trotskyists

Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism

By Alfred Rosmer with Boris Souvarine, Emile Fabrol and Antoine Clavez

Francis Boutle Publishers, 2002, 250pp, £10.00

Reviewed by Nick Davies

A characteristically pithy observation by Al Richardson in his introduction to this interesting book sums up the historical paradox at the heart of its subject: '...Trotskyism asserts its fidelity to a "Leninism" that was created to oppose it, whilst inheriting a real legacy from the Stalinism whose antithesis it claims to be.'

Anyone newly interested or active in left-wing politics is often confused by the terms 'Leninism', 'Trotskyism' and 'Bolshevism', terms of abuse or self-flattery with which the different sects differentiate themselves from the rest of the market. Even with the benefit of several years' experience our activist could be forgiven for remaining somewhat confused, as these terms, and the leaders after whom they are named, are invoked in the name of support for, for example, free workers' organisations in Poland, or, alternatively, for the Stalinist state apparatus which suppresses them. A slightly more contemporary example might be the civil wars in Yugoslavia where, had the 'Leninists' and 'Trotskyists' had forces on the ground, they might well have ended up on opposite sides, shooting at each other. Anyone wanting to get behind the self-serving rhetoric surrounding these labels could do worse than read this book.

Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism deals with a turning point in the history of revolutionary politics: the degeneration in the 1920s of the Bolshevik Party in the Soviet Union, the effects of that degeneration on the influential French Communist Party, and the emergence of an opposition to that degeneration. The bulk of the book is a selection of writings by the first wave of oppositionists, notably Rosmer, Monatte and Souvarine, and a series of articles on

this period, dating from the late 1980s, which first appeared in the French left-wing publication *Prométhée*. Together, they constitute a critical demolition of the dogmatic state-religions of 'Leninism' and 'Bolshevism' devised to attack Trotsky and the left opposition by the *troika* of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin, which held the reins of power during Lenin's last illness and after his death in January 1924. 'Trotskyism' was also an invention of the *troika*, in order to present Trotsky's defence of what he saw as the true legacy of Lenin as some kind of heresy or deviation, only to be adopted by Trotsky's followers, though not by the man himself, as a badge of honour.

In his last speech, at the fourth congress of the Communist International, Lenin had warned the communists of all countries against a 'mechanical and slavish imitation of Russian methods', as Emile Fabrol puts it in his contribution, 'The Prelude to Stalinism'. Due to his ill-health, Lenin's participation in this congress was limited, but he thought it important to point out that the organisational theses agreed at the previous congress, in 1921, were 'too Russian', by which he meant that they were too closely modelled on the Russian experience. As far as Lenin was concerned, communists had to think for themselves. However, when the party leadership embalmed Lenin's body, they embalmed his thought as well. The obscene cult of Lenin, by which his every thought and deed was venerated in a way which would have appalled him, and certainly appalled his widow, did not just result in a bonanza for second rate artists and sculptors, it was crucial in the political degeneration of the party in Russia, and in the many countries where communists looked to the USSR for leadership, so that in the November 1925 edition of *Bulletin communiste*, Boris Souvarine was able to comment: 'What is a Leninist school? It is a collection of pitiable types, selected for their docility and subjected to a regime of carefully prepared subjection. They are made to stumble though formulae, recite clichés, and imitate the "higher ups".'

Hand in hand with 'Leninism' went 'Bolshevisation'. What did Lenin think of the word? 'Such a meaningless and ugly term' which 'expresses nothing whatever but the accidental fact that at the Brussels-London conference in 1903 we were in a majority'. Nevertheless, as Emile Fabrol tells us in 'The French Communist Party and Trotsky', included here, the 1925 plenum of the Communist international stated that 'the Bolshevisation of the sections of the Communist International consists of studying and applying in action the experience gained by the Russian Communist Party'. What happened was that the 'Bolshevists', Zinoviev in the USSR, followed by Treint in France, and Fischer in Germany were bent on 'wiping out any form of opposition, creating ideological conformity, and achieving "one hundred per cent Leninism" '.

'Comrades must understand', went the line, 'that only the theory, tactics and practice provided by Lenin and applied by his pupils are truly correct, and that any other methods and theories developed by even the best revolutionaries (like Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg) are false, and are only survivals of the old methods and theories of the social democratic left.' No wonder that in a January 1925 letter to the members of the French Communist Party, the expelled oppositionists, Rosmer, Monatte and Delagarde, admitted that 'Leninism without Lenin frightens us.' They wrote: 'We are committed to the Communist International: we are not acquainted with "Leninism" or "Trotskyism"'. While Lenin was alive the International was big enough to embrace Trotsky and so-called Trotskyism, as well as the Russian Workers Opposition and numerous elements who had come from revolutionary syndicalism in the rest of the world.'

'The Prelude to Stalinism' is Emile Fabrol's accurate description of 'Bolshevisation', which, he says, 'meant the birth of bureaucratic methods in the faction of the working-class movement that had come out of Social Democracy. It meant invective in the place of political debate'. Antoine Clavez, in his contribu-

tion 'The Bureaucratisation and Destruction of the Party', has this to say about 'Zinovievism': '[It] put the emphasis of the construction of an apparatus which would take complete charge of the programme, the party and the revolution. Even if it is true that, as opposed to the Stalinists, the Zinovievists were deeply attached to world revolution, it nonetheless remains true that they nurtured bureaucratisation, reformist degeneration and outbursts of putschist fever. It may appear strange today to talk about Zinovievism, for even though it has undoubtedly left its mark on the process of Stalinist degeneration among the communist parties, nobody in the spectrum of the far left now proclaims its contribution to the working-class movement. Its traces remain, nonetheless.'

So far, so uncontroversial, it could be said. Although the contributions to this book are interesting, and in many cases completely new to a British readership, the bureaucracy's cult of Lenin, its appropriation of the term 'Leninism' (and thereafter, its use of that dead-giveaway hallmark of Stalinist gibberish, 'Marxism-Leninism'), and the deleterious effects of 'Bolshevisation' have been well-documented for decades. However, there is also much to make any but the most uncritical disciple of Trotsky feel uncomfortable.

Firstly, Trotsky and the Left Opposition adopted the terms 'Leninism' and 'Bolshevism', outraged at the appropriation and misuse of them by the leadership. It's difficult to blame them, but it meant that they were in the game of bandying 'isms' with the *troika* and, thereafter, the Stalin faction. Since then, 'Trotskyist' groups have followed suit, so that for six decades they have clung to these problematic terms like a comfort blanket, including them, in any combination, in their names, and scattering them throughout their propaganda in order to justify conflicting or self-contradictory positions. With the aim, no doubt, of showing that they are the true defenders of the USSR, these groups have adorned their publications with the hammer and sickle, and adopted much of the kitschy aesthetic of Stalinism, such as iconic profile-portraits of Lenin and, of course, Trotsky. (One down-market sect in the USA actually cannibalised a masthead from a Stalinist paper, doctoring the portrait of Stalin with a goatee beard and glasses.) All this meant that in most countries workers lumped the Trotskyists in with the Stalinists, or were simply bemused; now that the Stalinists have collapsed, they are just bemused.

The second, more significant problem is that not only did the Trotskyists adopt some of the vocabulary of their opponents, they

adopted some of their political methods also. As Antoine Clavez points out, Rosmer, Monatte, *et al* was the first wave of oppositionists. The second, much larger wave of expulsions, after 1927, came in large part from the Joint Opposition of 1926-27, which had briefly united the Left Opposition with the followers of Zinoviev and Kamenev. This is how the Treint group in France and the Fischer-Maslow group in Germany went into opposition.

Clavez maintains that the group which bares the strongest of the 'traces' of Zinovievism, referred to above, is Cannon's American SWP. To help illustrate this point, he quotes from Cannon himself: 'For the proletarian revolutionist the party is the concentrated expression of his life purpose, and he is bound to it for life and death. He preaches and practises party patriotism, because he knows that his socialist ideal cannot be realised without the party. In his eyes the crime of crimes is disloyalty or irresponsibility towards the party.' (*The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*) As with Treint in France, for Cannon, argues Clavez, 'adherence to the organisation as such is more important than adherence to the programme, and adherence to an apparatus that will make the revolution is paramount'.

If these assertions are correct and Cannon is to be taken at face value, which, as he was prone to neither metaphor nor allegory, he should be, then those in the Trotskyist tradition have to stop using Gerry Healy as a scapegoat for all the ills of that movement, and recognise that there are problematic aspects of Trotskyism which have deeper roots than the post-war crises and split. In the words of Al Richardson in his introduction, 'the ways of dealing with dissidents in their groupings, the personality cults of their leaders, their internal regimes, the absurdity of their pretensions, and even their pronounced mendacity about their own pasts show that all too many Trotskyist organisations bear more than a passing resemblance to Stalinism.'

Unfortunately, the problems may go back further even than Cannon. Trotsky was always a party man *par excellence*, conscious, no doubt, of the way the non-Bolshevik baggage he carried into the party was used against him by many 'old Bolsheviks'. He left no doubt as to his loyalty to that party. It is certainly arguable, although beyond the scope of this review, that he made a mistake in confining his struggle against Stalin at the 12th party congress of 1923 to the ranks of the party, rather than taking the struggle outside the party, into the working class as a whole. This book documents how, in somewhat

similar vein, he counselled Rosmer and the other expellees to close down their independent journal, *La Révolution prolétarienne*, and instead appeal against their expulsion. It can be argued that some of the sectarianism and organisational voluntarism of the Trotskyist groups right back to the 1930s comes not just from Zinoviev or Cannon, or from the groups' isolation from the working class in extremely hostile conditions, but also from Trotsky's own lately acquired vanguardism, even if Trotsky himself often expressed his exasperation at the results.

The final part of the book, entitled 'On the Planet Without a Visa', is Rosmer's 'sequel' to Trotsky's *My Life*. Dealing with the years of exile after 1929, it concentrates less on the problems of the Left Opposition groups and more on the difficulties faced by Trotsky and his family, refused visas by 'democratic', 'civilised' countries which had instituted full diplomatic courtesies with the Stalin regime. One incident, in December 1936, has a particular resonance today, as liberal politicians do their best to appease re-emergent fascism by trying not to appear too 'soft' on refugees. As a result of an attempted attack on him by Norwegian fascists, Trotsky was being refused permission, by a Labour government, to stay any longer in Norway. Trotsky's reply to these spineless creeps, 'You are paving the road for fascism. If the workers of Spain and France don't save you, you and your colleagues will be émigrés in a few years', was as brave as it was prophetic.

Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism

Alfred Rosmer
Boris Souvarine, Emile Fabrol
and Antoine Clavez
with an introduction by
Al Richardson

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