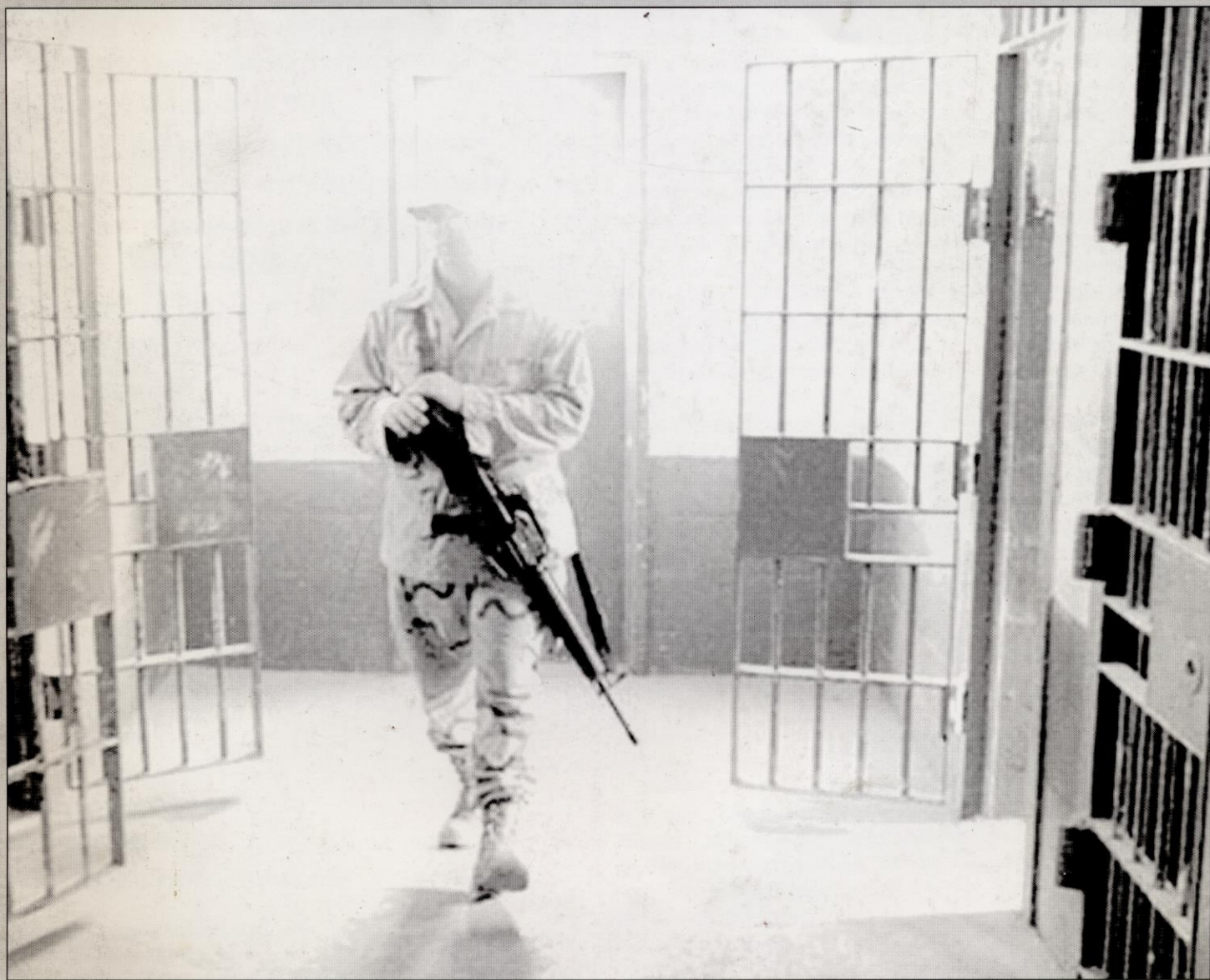


# Workers **ACTION**

No. 26  
June 2004

£1



# Truth, justice and the American way

## The war that won't go away

### Contents

June 10 – crisis elections for Blair	3
EU enlargement – a brave new world?	5
The housing crisis and how to beat it	8
Wrexham stock transfer plan defeated	9
Government wants teaching on the cheap	10
Challenges for the left in PCS	13
Build the Labour Representation Committee	14
The Respect coalition and women's liberation	15
Torture and assassination in the 'war on terror'	16
Iraq – there is no 'exit policy'	17
US elections – Kerry won't stop the war	18
Cyprus remains divided	21
India rejects BJP	22
Ethnic cleansing in the Sudan	23
Sri Lanka after the general election	24
Tribute to Al Richardson	26
Fred Jackson 1916-2004	28
Archive: Our Orientation by Bert Cochran	29
Review: Interesting Times by Eric Hobsbawm	34

PO Box 7268  
London E10 6TX

[workers.action@btinternet.com](mailto:workers.action@btinternet.com)

[www.workersaction.org.uk](http://www.workersaction.org.uk)

To contact Workers Action, please write or e-mail to  
the address above

Workers Action welcomes articles for publication and  
correspondence

#### Editorial team:

Lizzy Ali  
Laurence Barrett  
Simon Deville  
David Lewis  
Philip Marchant

Cover: Abu Ghraib prison, Baghdad

If George Bush were to be dealt with on the same basis as the defendants at the Nuremberg Trials he would be hanged, observed Noam Chomsky recently, as the US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq descended to yet new levels of barbarism. It is a sign of the perversity of liberal public opinion that the massacre of hundreds, possibly thousands of Iraqis at Fallujah caused disquiet, yet the sadistic humiliation of Iraqi prisoners prompted uproar. Nevertheless, those photographs have destroyed the last remaining vestiges of moral or political support for the war among a whole swathe of the population in Britain and the USA. The fact that the photographs in the *Daily Mirror* were exposed as clumsy fakes (the anti-war *Independent* expressed doubts about them at an early stage) should not let Britain off the hook. A number of British soldiers have already confirmed that there has been widespread abuse.

The release of new pictures showing US soldiers grinning over dead Iraqi prisoners, and emerging evidence of the murder of prisoners in Iraq and in Afghanistan, made attempts to scapegoat a few reservists look increasingly futile. All the signs pointed to systemic torture and abuse, sanctioned at the highest level. In a feeble attempt to cover their own backs, Bush and Rumsfeld called the torturers 'un-American'. In fact, the brutality in Abu Ghraib is as American as apple pie. Mainly from the poorer states of the union, the soldiers involved joined the military as an escape from poverty and unemployment. Fed on a diet of TV and radio talk shows and politicians' rhetoric which only dehumanises Arabs, it is hardly surprising that these soldiers do likewise, and in the process dehumanise themselves.

No less a figure than General Joseph Hoare, former head of US Central Command, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: 'I believe we are absolutely on the brink of failure. We are looking into the abyss.' He was speaking for a growing backlash in the US political and military establishment against the neo-cons, whose fanaticism and incompetence they are blaming for the present situation.

In this issue of *Workers Action*, we analyse the political nightmare that Bush and Blair's invasion and occupation of Iraq has become, and look at the network of camps and prisons in store for those the USA decides are its enemies.

What credibility Bush's regime still enjoys outside the hardcore Republican vote is largely courtesy of Tony Blair. It is Blair's unconditional support for Bush that enables Washington to refer to the occupiers of Iraq as a 'coalition'. For some US voters, British support was the factor which decided whether they supported the war in the first place. We now know, from Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack*, that Blair was given three opportunities by Bush not to participate in the invasion because of the political risks involved. Blair's response was 'I am with you'. Clearly, Blair is not so much



Bush's poodle as his guard dog. Every opportunity Blair gets to lock himself in with Bush, he takes. He joined Bush in supporting Sharon's plan to annexe to Israel parts of the West Bank. One of his policy wonks should tell him that Palestinian sovereignty is not his to give away. The support of Bush and Blair has given Sharon the green light to mow down unarmed demonstrators in Gaza and reduce the town of Rafah to rubble. One result of Blair's Middle East policy, other than to make the Britain more hated in the region than ever before, is an increase in the price of crude oil to record levels. If that affects the state of the economy, then come the next general election Blair will be facing hostility from voters on this issue as well as on the war.

A number of high-profile establishment figures have now distanced themselves from the war. Whether theirs is a genuine conversion, or merely that of opportunists deserting a doomed cause is debatable. The point is that Blair, his unpopularity in the labour movement growing by the day, is facing isolation in middle England as well.

But more important than whether Boris Johnson has changed his mind about the war is what is happening in the Labour Party. Talk of getting rid of Blair is longer confined to the Labour left. It is possible that the Blairites are beginning to see Blair as a liability. This is not just because of Blair's relationship with Bush, something that makes even right-wing Labour MPs edgy, or because he is becoming personally unpopular with Labour voters, highly important as that is, but because of Blair's increasingly erratic and confrontational style. Labour MPs are becoming tired of every issue being made a test of Blair's authority.

Take the recently-announced referendum on the EU constitution, a development which has potentially far-reaching consequences for the next Labour government. This decision was taken without reference to Cabinet members, let alone Labour MPs (nor party members, whose opinion he clearly values less than that of Rupert Murdoch). Hence, deputy prime minister John Prescott's cryptic remark that the 'plates are shifting', and the flurry of rumours from Westminster about the succession.

## PCS Conference Fringe Meeting

Labour Representation Committee

Thursday June 10

12.30-1.30pm

Belgrave Hotel (West Pier Suite)  
64 King's Road (Corner of West Street)  
Brighton  
(Two mins from Conference Centre)

Speakers:

John McDonnell MP  
Mick Rix – LRC convenor and former Aslef  
general secretary

But if Blair is showing signs of weakness and isolation, that is not necessarily a sign of the strength of the left, despite the size of recent parliamentary rebellions. In *Workers Action* No.25, we argued at length that an electoral challenge to Labour such as that mounted by Respect is, at this time, a wrong tactic, arising out of a complete misjudgement of the present political situation. We see no reason to reassess that view, and in this issue we set out the basis on which socialists should, in England at least, be calling for a Labour vote in the Euro-elections.

Blair's difficulties on Iraq, on the EU, and House of Lords reform, result from his own arrogance and bad judgement, rather than from a defeat at the hands of the left. After all, if Blair were to decide to go off to write his memoirs, who would replace him? The PFI-loving Gordon Brown, the increasingly Norman Tebbit-like David Blunkett, or Jack Straw, presently trying to protect Thatcher's anti-union legislation from the threat, real or imagined, of the EU constitution? However, the left in the Labour Party and trade unions can certainly take advantage of the situation, and use the Blairites' difficulties to strengthen its position.

Of the plethora of grassroots organisations and pressure groups set up over the past couple of years to try to democratise the Labour Party and fight for socialist policies, perhaps the most important is the Labour Representation Committee. This is because in addressing the crisis of representation in British politics for the working class, the LRC seeks to link up the unions and Labour Party members. In this issue we look at the importance of this initiative in building the fightback against New Labour. **WA**

# Labour Representation Committee

Founding Conference

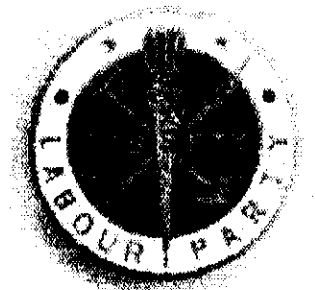
**Saturday  
3rd July 2004**

10.00am – 4.00pm

(registration from 9:00 am)

TUC Congress House  
Great Russell St  
London WC1

(nearest tube: Tottenham Court Road)



**SPLAKERS INCLUDE: Cllr Mohammed Azam, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Jeremy Dear (NUJ), Maria Exall, Kat Fletcher (NUS), Andy Gilchrist (FBU), Billy Hayes (CWU), Lynne Jones MP, Paul Mackney (NATFHE), Alice Mahon MP, John McDonnell MP, Michael Meacher MP, Jim Mortimer, Francis Prideaux, Mick Rix, Mark Seddon, Christine Shawcroft, Alan Simpson MP, Pam Tattow, International Guest Speaker, and others**

**A Conference for all Labour Party Members**

# Crisis elections for Blair

On June 10, there are elections for local councils in many parts of England and Wales, for the mayor and Assembly members in London, and for the European Parliament throughout the UK. **Charli Langford** considers how socialists should cast their votes

The June 10 elections are upon us as this issue of *Workers Action* goes to press. They will almost certainly result in a drubbing for Labour. Unless there is a particularly pressing local issue, mid-term council elections are seen as irrelevant since councils' powers have been massively eroded and the vote becomes a referendum on central government policies. Since at this point the ruling party is normally shifting from the early-term task of getting the dirty work completed to the late term task of sweetening the voters for the next election, this referendum normally goes against the government.

This time round, Labour is having some problems carrying out this traditional deception. The Iraq war has brought foreign policy to the fore. Clearly there never were any Iraqi WMD so the main justification for the war has evaporated. The Fallujah fighting and the exposure of widespread torture by US/UK forces is now undermining those who excuse the war by the removal of Saddam – because the repression and torture continue but the faces behind it are now those of Bush and Blair. The government's transparent attempts to dodge the questions – the Hutton white wash on WMD and the attempt to turn the *Mirror* hoax into a perception that no torture occurred – have magnified levels of cynicism to the point where over 60 per cent of people now believe the war was wrong.

Meanwhile on the home front the income gap steadily widens. The massive increases in council tax are hitting hardest the poorest people in the most deprived areas. The home secretary David Blunkett is playing to the most right-wing elements of society with his policies of scapegoating and vengeance – the prison population being at record levels is surely an argu-

ment against his recent attempt to lower the level of proof required for conviction? The punishment of parents for children's truancy and other misdemeanours is surely a tactical mistake even from Blunkett's perverse perspective, since many of the 'hang 'em and flog 'em' brigade are themselves parents and know how little they can control their children in the face of social deprivation and an education policy that promotes boring and oppressive schooling.

The main vote gainers are likely to be the Lib Dems and the Greens, although in the scattered council elections in England and Wales where the 'first past the post' system operates, the Tories are likely to show most gains in terms of seats. Many Lib Dem and Green votes are likely to come from traditional Labour voters wanting to register a protest. In Wales the situation is somewhat different as Welsh Labour is perceived to be well to the left of Blair, although Plaid Cymru is likely to add some anti-Blair votes to its usual quota. But the main swing is likely to be from Labour to 'didn't bother', and when this vote loss is factored in, the scale of the turn from Labour will be even worse than the results suggest.

The Scottish Socialist Party is standing in the Scotland Euro constituency. Judging by the 1999 Euro-election result, it will need between nine and ten per cent of the vote to gain a seat, so it has a mountain to climb. In England, Respect is standing in the European Parliament and GLA elections but its only – and very slim, given the pre-election polls – chance of a seat is in the London Euro-constituency where George Galloway heads the list. The Socialist Party, Independent Working Class Association and sundry remnants of the Socialist Alliance will be standing for local councils. Respect and IWCA are also standing for mayor of London, but are polling in round figures zero per cent each.

The other factor in these elections is the British National Party. Recently it has won some council seats, and it is trying to use this momentum to make further gains. It is standing for 40 per cent more local council seats than it did in the last election and has a full slate for the European elections, the Greater London Assembly and the London mayor – 400 candidates in all. The proportional systems for the European and GLA elections make it possible for the BNP to win seats on a much lower share of the vote. There have long been predictions that its leader, Nick Griffin, could win a Euro seat in the North West where the party has substantial support, but latest polls also show it on five per cent support across London, which may be sufficient to win a seat in the GLA.

The chance of a seat through proportional representation may also be the factor behind a recently-reported surge in the European election polls by the nutty nationalist celebrity bigots of the UK Independence Party. Latest reports are that four Tory peers are 'temporarily' transferring their allegiance and are calling on supporters to do the same. Tory leader Michael Howard is taking this sufficiently seriously to include specific campaigning against the UKIP. Hopefully this may just be a short-term blip but we should watch developments carefully; while there is a big chunk of racism in its views, the UKIP is nationalist, rather than fascist – but then so is much of the latest support for the BNP, and the UKIP's political trajectory could well be in the direction of the BNP.

Only in the London mayoral election is the Labour showing likely to improve. The recent decision to readmit Ken Livingstone was clearly taken to avoid repeating Labour's disastrous showing last time, and it has thrown up a rather strange effect. Labour's literature for the mayoral election poses the choice facing voters as Lib Dem, Tory or Ken. It would seem that London Labour is in alliance with a local party called Ken. Perhaps Blair and his cronies will make the traditional move from tragedy to farce and start a faction called 'New Ken' in it.

In national terms, the most important question in these elections is whether or not Blair will survive them. As the day approaches, the media are speculating ever more feverishly about his future. Already, opinion polls purport to show that Labour would win the next general election under Gordon Brown, but not with Blair. The Parliamentary Labour Party seems to be in turmoil; obviously any swing against Labour would lose some seats but the cost of maintaining Blair could put the figure at around 80 to 100, so many political careers are likely to be on the line. This explains the unexpected names appearing on the list of those calling on Blair to consider his future. Others want him at the very least to criticise openly the US regime of abuse and torture in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. All this will turn even more hectic if Labour does badly in the June 10 elections. At the moment the appeals are from the great and good for Blair to consider stepping down. After June this could turn into an attempt by backbenchers and the rank and file to *force* him out.

Booting Blair out as a consequence of popular discontent with current Labour policies which are closely identified with him would clearly be a huge gain, both within Labour and for the left as a whole. Unfortunately the likely replacement is Brown, who has yet again shown his prudence by saying as little as possible about

anything. He has managed to make his 'I support Tony' comments sound like party loyalty rather than conviction, and he has even been able to stay fairly tight lipped on the economy, which is quite an achievement when you're the chancellor. Since the election of an anti-war MP like Robin Cook as party leader would suggest that Labour had got the whole war issue wrong and would represent an obvious U-turn for most MPs, it is unlikely to happen. The Labour leadership needs someone who isn't overtly linked to Blair's pro-war policies but who isn't anti-war either. Brown fits the bill. His prime asset is not having a clearly-stated policy on the central global issue of the day. Unfortunately, we have to assume that silence is assent. He did, after all, unprotestingly bankroll the war. There is little reason to assume that under Brown Labour would be much different from now.

But if the left in the Labour Party has problems with a successor to Blair, the left outside is in an even worse situation.

The Scottish Socialist Party has build up a good local base, particularly in Glasgow, by campaigning on working class issues. It has a good record in the Scottish Parliament as a 'people's tribune', backed up with extra-parliamentary work, particularly with trade unionists. For this reason, in the Scotland constituency for the European Parliament elections, we support a vote for either Labour or the SSP.

Respect is a different matter. Its origins are from a de facto split in the Socialist Alliance but it has been built predominantly on the single issue of the Iraq war. It is not a socialist organisation but an alliance between socialist and non- (if not anti-) socialist forces. It has no significant base of support in the organised working class, but hopes to attract votes from Muslims on the basis of its anti-war record. While this form of building is appropriate for a single-issue, anti-war campaign, it is not sufficient for an electoral political organisation which needs a far wider programme.

In fact, Respect doesn't have a programme at all – merely a list of demands which have been rubber-stamped with inadequate democratic discussion and which can be jettisoned if needed to maintain the alliance. It is run by the Socialist Workers Party but the politics are moderated by the need to keep Galloway and elements of the Muslim Association of Britain on board. (Although MAB itself is not part of Respect and has not even given a blanket endorsement to Respect candidates.) Galloway is Respect's star candidate, and he is a firm opponent of a woman's right to choose to have an abortion if she wishes. Some of the other Respect candidates have expressed anti-gay views, and Respect is

allied with the People's Justice Party in Birmingham, which recently had to withdraw a leaflet containing a homophobic comment drafted by two of its candidates. The SWP has made light of the whole affair, but such an attitude to important issues suggests that the right wing holds the whip hand inside Respect.

But in terms of whether or not to vote for Respect, the facts above are secondary. The prime reason for not supporting Respect is that it fulfils none of the general criteria that would justify a non Labour vote. It has no real base in the labour movement.

Respect supporters are reduced to making the claim that there is no moral or ethical way any socially progressive person can vote Labour since to do so would lessen the pressure on Blair. Presumably it is morally OK to vote for Respect's anti-choice and anti-gay candidates. Lindsey German, Respect's candidate for London mayor and top of their GLA list, expresses this confusion best, claiming in the London hustings that a 'vote for Livingstone is a bullet in the back of an Iraq child' and then calling on Respect supporters to give him their second preference vote!

In Wales the situation is far less clear cut. Plaid Cymru clearly has strong working class support, has attracted a strong socialist membership, and has a programme which is to the left of Labour's. The basis of its appeal is nationalist rather than class, but the nationalism of what is at best a very junior partner in the British state and at worst an oppressed nation is very different from English or British nationalism. It has the scope for the expression of working class values – as evidenced by its leftist programme. While we recommend a vote for Labour in Wales, we will understand if some workers choose to vote for Plaid.

Our general view is that despite the appalling policies of the present government, a vote for Labour will in almost all circumstances be the best option for socialists and workers. We think this not because Labour is in any way a socialist party – like the Lib Dems and all points further right, Labour is completely wedded to a society where the guarantee of continuing profit for the major corporations is far more important than the welfare of the vast majority of the world's population. The Green Party is a slightly different case in that while it is not explicitly a capitalist party, its aims are couched in terms of what can be achieved under capitalism, and while many of its members may have identified the profiteering nature of capitalism as a main driving force towards anti-environmental practices, the party as whole and in its programme does not recognise this. Never-

theless, the Green Party has been a consistent opponent of the war on Iraq, and is likely to attract the support of a considerable number of former Labour voters.

What Labour has, which other capitalist parties don't have, is a hold on the consciousness of the more politically aware workers, who believe that Labour is *their* party which was built by them to support their interests against the parties of capital. The central tactical problem for socialists in Britain has always been to convince a sufficiently large part of politically advanced workers that this belief is false. Specific circumstances where there is a strong working class base of support and the chance to put forward an exemplary candidate – such as a protest vote for a popular Labour expellee, or a campaign with a strong local base, or a local breakthrough (such as in Glasgow with the SSP) – might allow an exception, but in general the need at present is to demonstrate that Labour consistently fails to defend workers' interests. To do that you must have Labour in office.

Most organisations of the far left are now supporting electoral alliances against Labour, arguing in effect that workers have already seen through Labour and are prepared to shift their support to the left. This view is basically wishful thinking and is governed by the needs of the left rather than the needs of the working class. First, it may well be true that sections of the class have seen through Labour, but they are likely to be tactically sophisticated enough to understand that by themselves they will achieve nothing by pulling out until they can convince a much larger layer. The idea of jumping ship immediately, abandoning the party to Blair's faction, may excite the sectarian party-building fantasies of some left organisations but it is clearly against the interests of the working class as a whole.

Second, it clearly flies against all the evidence. Leaving out the very few instances of a personalised vote (Ken Livingstone in London for instance), or a specific local issue (Wyre Forest in the last general election), politically aware working class voters still tend to vote overwhelmingly Labour – it is in fact the less politically aware that shift their vote and this vote generally shifts to the right. The evidence for this is that left of Labour candidates between them tend to poll around the two per cent mark, and even lower when there is a perception that Labour is threatened from the right. For all the crimes of Labour that Respect et al can point to, the working class still votes Labour and the left will not advance until it devises tactics that start from where the working class really is, rather than where the left wants it to be. **WA**

# EU25: a brave new world?

Following the enlargement of the EU from 15 to 25 states, **Darren Williams** looks at the neo-liberal agenda at the heart of the European integration project and explains why socialists should reject the draft EU constitution

On May 1, 2004, the European Union acquired ten new member states – Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – and 75 million extra citizens. This represents the biggest ever expansion of the 'club' created by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which has grown from the original six states to 25. Its significance is underlined by the fact that it has prompted the drawing-up of a new EU constitution – still, at time of writing, the subject of tortuous negotiations. Moreover, the process is not yet over: Bulgaria and Romania are expected to join the union in 2007, and Turkey also continues to seek membership.

For the more xenophobic right-wing elements within British politics and the media, enlargement means a flood of economic migrants from the east, threatening the economic and social stability of western Europe. By contrast, an unproblematically positive view of enlargement is presented by a wide spectrum of opinion, from the 'respectable' conservative right to the social-democratic centre-left. On this account, it is a progressive and inclusive development: the graduation of backward, impoverished countries which have proven themselves worthy of joining the club of enlightened free market democracies – leaving behind the dark days of communism. For the socialist left, our attitude to enlargement must be based on a careful assessment of the complex processes involved, but there are two fundamental questions to be answered. First, what is the project behind the enlargement process? And second, what are its implications for the working class, and for oppressed and marginalised peoples – in the established member states, in the accession countries and in those that will remain outside the Union?

## Triumph

In one respect, of course, enlargement represents a further confirmation of the triumph of Western capitalism and liberal democracy over the attempt to maintain an alternative social system in the East. The eight former Soviet bloc states among the accession countries (plus Bulgaria and Romania) submitted their applications for EU membership in 1994-96, a very short time after the overthrow of their Stalinist regimes. In order to satisfy the criteria for membership which had been laid down at Copenhagen in 1993 – which include 'a functioning free market economy' – they had to restructure their economies before their admission was finally agreed (again, in Copenhagen) in December 2002. This process, supported by new legislation and institutions, and policed and monitored by EU bodies, has involved transforming their

legal and financial systems in order to open up their economies to international finance, introduce currency convertibility and allow foreign control and speculation.

## Collapse

This structural change has supported and reinforced a process whereby the economies of the central and eastern European countries (CEECs) have reorientated away from the former Soviet Union towards the EU following the collapse of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, the Soviet-era trade organisation). Since the early 1990s, they have become increasingly dependent on the core EU states for financial inflows and export markets. As Gus Fagan and Andrew Kilmister have noted, 'By 1993, 60 per cent of Hungarian and Czech exports and 69 per cent of Polish exports were to the EU. Only 20 per cent of Polish exports that year were in the old CMEA area.' In addition, the CEECs have become drawn into a new international division of labour shaped by the core EU states, through the pattern of their investment in these economies. Fagan and Kilmister, using 'world system' analysis, characterise this as a core/semi-periphery/periphery relationship, with the core EU states using their economic and political power to impose policies that pursue their own interests. Like the USA in Latin America and South East Asia, the core states have been:

getting control of product markets, concentrating and centralising capital in the hands of core MNCs [multi-national corporations] and forcing out competition, gaining core control of the most dynamic regions of market growth, preventing the CEE states from developing national strategies for industrial restructuring and, at the same time, forcing them to open their trade regimes; buying local company assets...forcing the privatisation of state-owned assets....'

While the economic dominance of the core states has obviously been greatly facilitated by the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in 1989-91 and by the restructuring needed to qualify for EU accession, it had actually begun to be established as early as the 1970s, when all the CEECs, and especially Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia, borrowed heavily from western Europe. The resulting debt crises allowed the core states to demand policies that advanced their own interests, effectively transforming Hungary into a market economy (albeit with state ownership) even before the collapse of Stalinism. Economic 'shock therapy' policies dictated by the IMF in the 1990s saw the CEECs' industrial base decimated, state assets sold off at knock-down prices and public expenditure drastically cut back, causing large-scale unem-

ployment, impoverishment and misery. The Hungarian economist Laszlo Andor has likened this process to the Great Depression of the 1930s: 'Luckier countries like Hungary lost only about 20 per cent of their national income in the years after 1989, while the GDP of others fell by 30-40 per cent. Poland was first to recover its 1989 output level, in 1997; the rest only managed to do so in 2000 or even later. Of course, this did not mean that consumption levels or average living standards have been restored with the same speed.'<sup>1</sup>

### Investment

But while the economic relationship between core and semi-periphery is clearly driven by the interests of the former, do the CEECs not at least benefit from the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) they have received? In fact, neither in scale nor in pattern has FDI produced much advantage to the recipient economies. For example, the net investment flow into seven of these countries<sup>2</sup> between 1993 and 1997 was only one per cent of what the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development estimated as necessary to raise productivity to EU levels. Moreover, FDI has been very unevenly spread and largely geared to the pursuit of new markets. Where it has involved productive activity, this has been driven by low wage costs and has tended to take the form of low value-added labour-intensive production, usually sub-contracting to Western MNCs for the EU export market.

None of this is likely to change much as a consequence of EU enlargement. In fact, as Fagan and Kilmister suggest, one of the principal factors driving the process is the need for political legitimisation of the situation that already exists, assuring the acquiescence of the eastern European peoples by granting them formal equality with the established citizens of the EU, and thus reinforcing the credibility of the governments and capitalist classes of the CEECs. In addition, there are economic benefits to fractions of capital active in the east, by the creation of a more stable investment climate. It has also been convincingly argued that the decision to opt for a ten-state 'big bang' enlargement, rather than a more gradual process, was motivated by the need to stabilise the region politically after the 1999 Kosovo war.<sup>3</sup>

### Benevolent

Those who have presented enlargement as a benevolent process have also suggested that the new member states will benefit from their eligibility for EU structural funds. The most significant category of these is objective 1 funding, which applies to regions, or whole countries, whose

GDP per head is less than 75 per cent of the EU average. All of the accession countries fall into this category, thus the overall average will be substantially lower than at present. This, and the fact that the EU budget formula is to remain at a similar level to the present 1.27 per cent of total GDP, means that there will be massive transfers of funds to the new members from the current beneficiaries (Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, as well as poorer regions and nations of richer states (in the British case, Cornwall, West Wales and the Valleys, Merseyside and South Yorkshire). Thus, the consequence of enlargement is to force the poor and the very poor to compete for a share of a very small cake.

As Brendan Young has argued, 'the EU enlargement strategy, while formally and in the ideological outpourings of its proponents it appears to be a step in the unification of the continent, it is in reality deeply divisive'.<sup>4</sup> This is because it will maintain the economic dependence of the CEECs on western European countries, will be characterised by two-tier decision-making structures enforcing the dominance of the core states, will set the poor of the existing member states against the very poor of the CEECs, and it entails the re-division of Europe along a militarised border, between the newly enlarged EU and the impoverished countries to its east.

### Superstate

Some on the left have seen enlargement - along with economic and monetary union and moves toward a European army - as heralding the creation of a European superstate, as a dominant regional power and an economic rival to the United States and Japan.

On this account, the new constitutional treaty is seen as the latest stage of a process that began in the 1950s, further concentrating power in the hands of unelected bureaucrats. The rhetoric associated with such arguments (see especially the *Morning Star*) sometimes bears a certain resemblance to that of the *Daily Mail/Express/Sun* school of Euroscepticism, with its emphasis on protecting British 'sovereignty'. While the *Mail* et al warn that the 'British way of life' and capacity for self-government is threatened by the determination of Euro-federalists to merge all national identities into a European monolith, the CPB sees the (limited) popular sovereignty represented by national parliaments being expropriated by EU institutions in the interests of European big business.

Undoubtedly, the tendency of European integration has been to make decision-making less accountable and more remote from ordinary people. Moreover, there have always been, within EU governments, the

proponents of a 'deepening' of integration, involving some measure of political union, and the capacity for united European intervention in international affairs. Nevertheless, the 'superstate' approach suggests a degree of European ruling class unanimity that is palpably at odds with reality. Different national bourgeoisies have different and often conflicting interests, and it is these 'national' interests that are the prime concern of their respective national governments. The EU/EC/EEC has always been primarily a means of reconciling these interests as far as possible and allowing stable capital accumulation to take place to the mutual benefit of its members' capitalist classes. The ongoing arguments over the constitutional treaty - while no doubt overstated, in the British case, at least, for the benefit of a domestic audience - are a demonstration of the persistence of divergent interests. Successive British governments - Tory and New Labour alike - have resisted Franco-German moves toward political union and have actually been strengthened in this by enlargement, as the complexity of establishing common institutions among 25 states will inevitably slow down the convergence process.

### Exaggerated

So, how significant is the constitutional treaty? In relation to the issues around which it has been publicly debated - as relayed by the mainstream media - its significance has probably been exaggerated by proponents and detractors alike. It is neither the founding document of a progressive new European order, based on universal citizenship, nor does it represent the death warrant for national governmental sovereignty (to the extent that this existed in the first place). Notwithstanding the attempts of its authors to break new ground with the charter of fundamental rights, which were firmly blocked by the British government, it is largely a tidying-up exercise, and 'incorporates word-for-word most of the articles in the Treaty of Rome, the Single European Act, the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties', according to Sir Michael Butler, former British ambassador to the EC, who claims that the draft treaty involves far less sharing of sovereignty than the Single European Act, which he negotiated for the Thatcher government in 1985.<sup>5</sup>

One of the main sources of contention in the protracted negotiations over the last year or so has been voting rights at the council of ministers. Changes to the system of 'qualified majority voting' (QMV) seek to establish dual criteria for a majority decision, based on number of states and cumulative population. Arguments have

centred on where the lines should be drawn, with Spain and Poland – two medium-sized states – attempting to maintain the relatively favourable position they were granted by the 2000 Nice Treaty, and reduce the capacity of the ‘big four’ – Germany, the UK, France and Italy – to exercise a collective veto over decisions.<sup>8</sup> Spain’s change of government has made a compromise more likely, and in any case the big states would probably have little difficulty in buying off enough of the smaller countries to establish a majority. A more fundamental argument for the left is the fact that the council of ministers, together with the European commission, is the main decision-making body of the EU, while the European Parliament – the only directly-elected institution – has little real power.

### Overrule

But in addition to setting out how QMV should operate in the expanded EU, the constitution also seeks to extend the range of issues over which it will apply – those, in other words, where the council of ministers will be able to overrule the wishes of member states.

Of most concern in this regard, as Brendan Young explains in a recent paper,<sup>9</sup> is the inclusion in this category of decisions to open international trade negotiations in health, education and audiovisual services. The Nice Treaty allowed member states a veto on such decisions but this is abolished by the draft constitution, which gives the European Commission the sole right to make agreements at the WTO through the GATS process – one of the main instruments of international neo-liberal economic policy, which serves to open up public services worldwide to privatisation. The Commission would be allowed to offer particular services within Europe up for competition, and bid for European companies to obtain access to public services in other parts of the world. Already, leaked documents have shown that the Commission has pressed a number of developing countries to open their water and treatment services to international bidders. Since the GATS negotiations are secret, the details of such bids and offers would not have to be made public.

### Privatisation

Defenders of the draft constitution argue that protection against privatisation is afforded by the articles covering health and education, which give member states the right to determine policy in these areas. The common commercial policy contained in the treaty states, however, that any commercial aspects of public services would be fair game for ‘liberalisation’, and it is

clear that this would include health and education services, since these can – and in some cases, have already been – broken up into discrete functions, some of which have been run commercially (e.g., through PFI in Britain). EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy said in 1995 that he considered health and education ‘ripe for liberalisation’,<sup>10</sup> and his subsequent public statements demonstrate his continued adherence to this belief. Any dispute over whether a particular service should be subject to GATS would be settled by the European Court of Justice or the Disputes Resolution Panel of the WTO – neither of which, as Young points out, could be relied upon to defend public services or democratic accountability.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the EU constitution, then, is one that has received virtually no coverage in the mainstream media: an insidious attempt to advance the neo-liberal privatisation agenda. This should serve to reinforce socialists’ understanding of the dominant project of the EU: the creation of profitable conditions for capital accumulation, and the dismantling of whatever legal or political barriers stand in the way of this goal. In this respect, the pro-‘liberalisation’ clauses in the draft treaty are of a piece with the economic annexation of central and eastern Europe under the cloak of enlargement, and the drive towards economic and monetary union – as Laurence Barrett explained in *Workers Action* No.24.

### Austerity

However, the permanent austerity programme that has been underway since Maastricht, if not before, is already experiencing serious difficulties. Even Germany has now flouted the rules of the stability and growth pact driven through by the Kohl government in 1996. Spending cuts and welfare ‘reform’ by the Raffarin government in France were punished in this year’s local elections, while Gerhard Schröder had to threaten resignation in order to get similar measures passed by the Bundestag. Tony Blair’s decision to hold a referendum on the EU constitution may have been taken to appease the Eurosceptic right, but the campaign, when it comes, will provide a rare opportunity to open up the debate about the character of the European integration project. It is vital that the socialist left does not allow the xenophobes to monopolise the ‘no’ campaign. We should build a case against the actually-existing EU that highlights the democratic deficit, the attack on public services and the subordination of the impoverished east to the core capitalist wealthy nations and regions of the west.

Socialists need to be clear that the alter-

native to the EU is not socialism in one country (or even in several countries simultaneously). The case for a political alternative has to proceed from the reality of European integration, and to be based on the demand for a more democratic, equitable and unified Europe. We should argue for a union stretching from Ireland to the Urals and from Scandinavia to the Balkans, without militarised borders. There must be substantial redistribution of resources from the wealthy core states and regions, to those presently marginalised and impoverished. The neoliberal agenda advanced by Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and the current constitutional treaty must be halted, and replaced with an alternative programme based on the defence of jobs and public services. And power must be redistributed from the council of ministers and the European Commission to the European Parliament. On this basis, we can begin to build support for an alternative vision of Europe – one that genuinely reflects the interests of all its peoples.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> G. Fagan and A. Kilmister, ‘The EU’s eastward expansion and the response of the left’, Paper presented to Conference of the European Left, Stockholm, August 2001. Available from Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, 30 Bridge Street, Oxford OX2 0BA.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> L. Andor, ‘Europe’s Great Depression’, *The Guardian*, April 28, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and Estonia. Statistic from J. Sperlring, *Recasting the European Order*

(1997), cited by Fagan and Kilmister, *op. cit.*, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> See L. Andor, ‘European Union: big bang in slow motion’, *International Viewpoint* 350 (June 2003).

<sup>6</sup> B. Young, ‘Divisive, reactionary and anti-working class: EU enlargement strategy’, *Red Banner* 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by W. Keegan, ‘We got what we wanted in Europe. So be happy’, *The Observer*, May 2, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> The proposals drawn up by the European Convention, which drew up the Treaty, set the conditions for a majority at 50 per cent of states and 60 per cent of the population, thereby effectively giving a joint veto to Germany, France and Britain, which collectively account for 44 per cent of the EU population.

<sup>9</sup> B. Young, ‘The EU, the draft constitution and the GATS: constitution marks a victory for the liberalisers’, paper presented to conference at Maynooth University, on behalf of Democracy and Public Services in Europe (dapse@eircom.net), April 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in World Development Movement, ‘Serving (up) the Nation’, November 2002, www.wdm.org.uk. Cited by B. Young, *op. cit.*



# The housing crisis

**Pete Firmin** looks at the inability of the capitalist system to provide decent, affordable homes for low-paid workers and at the struggle to defend council housing

Stories about housing in the media alternate between those about how prices are on a relentless increase and others talking about a shortage, especially of 'affordable' housing.

House prices have been increasing now for many years, still on average by 18-19 per cent a year, and trebling in the last ten years. What has often been a phenomenon of only certain regions, particularly the South East, is now a national one. Despite regular predictions of a collapse in the market, mainly based on its 'inevitability', it has yet to come. It may well do so, but no one seems able to predict when. Last time around many lost their homes when they could not afford to keep up their mortgage payments.

This rise means that prices have reached ridiculous levels, with the national average house price now around £140,000. Of course, it means wealth for estate agents, mortgage and building companies and property speculators, but also to a lesser extent for those who have paid off their mortgages and (on paper at least) for those who have seen the value of their home rise considerably.

At the same time, however, this situation brings misery for others, either because it has dragged up rents in its wake or because they can't afford a first home.

Exacerbating the problem is the fact that house building has slowed considerably, meaning a general shortage – old stock needs replacing, the population is increasing, and changing lifestyles mean that extended families are less likely to want to live in the same home.

Given the way British society and the economy functions, this problem is at its worst in the South East. The government (in the form of John Prescott) periodically comes up with house-building programmes, sometimes for complete New Towns, but these encounter two problems – those already living in the area do not want such a massive encroachment, and the housing is not where it is most needed.

When house building is undertaken,

there is much talk of the need for 'affordable' housing. Sometimes the talk is of reserving such housing for 'key workers'. The definition of 'key worker' varies, but usually revolves around teachers, nurses and police, as if these were the only (relatively) low paid workers essential to the functioning of a community. A much longer list would include shop workers, local government workers, transport workers and postal workers at least.

'Affordable' is, of course, such a loose term that it can mean anything, and house builders are hardly interested in keeping their prices down if they can sell more expensive homes easily. The cost of such 'affordable' homes is often beyond the reach of the lower-paid workers it is supposedly intended for.

The solution to this problem used to be council housing – seen as one of the pillars of the welfare state after the Second World War; it meant secure tenancy free from the worst vagaries of capitalism and slum landlords for those who couldn't afford the deposits and payments required for a mortgage. In their heyday, council homes were welcomed as a massive improvement in living conditions for the poorest section of society.

Over time, though, with the rise in relative prosperity in the post-war period and improvements in general housing standards, coupled with neglect by (often Labour) councils, council housing in many areas became less attractive and stigmatised.

## The 'right to buy'

Then Thatcher tried to put the final nail in the coffin of council housing by introducing the 'right to buy' – enabling council tenants to buy their homes, and at a considerable discount for those who had been there for many years. Successive governments' policies have been aimed at encouraging and increasing home ownership, through tax incentives. The right of council tenants and later some housing association tenants to buy their homes under the right to buy and right to acquire policies has enabled over two million people to become owner-occupiers. Over 14 million households (69 per cent) are owner-occupiers, up from just under 50 per cent in 1971, and in surveys up to 90 per cent of people say that home ownership is their tenure of choice.

While the take up of the right to buy has varied considerably, with few sales on the most run-down estates (and some of those who bought finding it difficult to sell them on), this has meant a decline in overall housing stock as councils have been unable to replace homes they sold. Not only has there been no government house-

building programme to replace the lost stock, but local councils have been denied the right to borrow for house-building or access to the proceeds from sales.

## Labour builds on Thatcherism

This drive to encourage owner-occupancy has two ideological aspects. Like the spreading of share ownership during the privatisation of utilities, property ownership is intended to make people feel they have a personal stake in capitalism, even if the reality is that their stake is tiny compared to that of the banks. Secondly, it further weakens local councils and democratic collective control.

As with economic policy in general, New Labour not only adopted Tory policies wholesale, but looked to go one better (or worse).

Dressed up in the undoubted need to 'regenerate' many areas with run-down housing estates, and knowing that councils don't have the resources necessary for this regeneration, the government has come up with various schemes, all of which involve privatisation in one guise or another.

Not only has the Blair government not scrapped the right to buy (though it has occasionally talked about it, at least in areas with a shortage of 'affordable' housing), it has gone one further in introducing stock transfers.

If people are not buying their council homes in sufficient numbers, what do you do? Answer – transfer them *en bloc* out of council ownership to 'responsible social landlords' (RSLs), usually Housing Associations. The carrot to encourage people to vote for such transfers is that if they agree the government then (and only then) releases funds for the much-needed renovation of the properties. The catch, of course, is that tenants have even less control over housing management under Housing Association ownership, and less secure tenancies. And Housing Associations have moved on from their image of small, almost co-operative friendly societies to multi million pound businesses.

While such an offer has been irresistible to tenants in some areas, in others campaigns have persuaded people to reject the transfer. This has been no small feat, given that government and councils pump thousands of pounds into winning the ballots, with 'advisors', show homes and glossy, biased leaflets. Against this, tenants can only pitch their own resources, at most backed up by some finance from local unions (particularly Unison) also opposed to transfer, not least because their members would be transferred out of local government employment.

A national campaign, Defend Council

Housing, also came into existence to oppose stock transfers, co-ordinating local opposition, but also winning the support of most of the national unions concerned with the issue and a considerable number of MPs and councillors. Despite many of its key personnel being SWP members, Defend Council Housing has been built almost as a model campaign around a single issue, providing unions and tenants with back-up arguments and materials and organising lobbies of MPs.

### ALMOs – the ‘third option’

After more and more ballots were lost on stock transfer, the government introduced a new ‘third option’ in addition to remaining under council control or stock transfer – Arm’s Length Management Organisation (ALMO). While looking relatively innocuous, ALMOs also contain the seeds of privatisation. Most of the functions the current local authority housing department carries out would transfer into a company managed by a board of directors. The company would still be owned entirely by the council, not by any private organisation. It is claimed that ALMOs ‘empower’ tenants and leaseholders because they sit on the board of directors, alongside councillors and independently selected people. How independent the ‘independents’ are is, however, a moot point, given that they are interviewed and selected by councillors and council officers. This board has the final say in how the services are provided and delivered.

The pressure on local councils to go down this road is based on the fact that all councils have to reach the government’s ‘Decent Homes Standard’ by 2010. Local councils don’t have the money to meet this standard, but a ‘high performing’ ALMO, as assessed by government inspectors, would open the door to millions of pounds of extra money to spend on all homes.

From the start, Defend Council Housing warned that ALMOs were a half-way house to stock transfer/privatisation. This has now been borne out by the fact that Westminster Council’s ALMO is running out of money and the council has told tenants on two estates they will have to accept stock transfer. In Hillingdon, also now an ALMO, the council plans to sell off 100 homes a year to a housing association.

In drawing up the procedure for ALMOs, the government left out one important provision they include in that for stock transfer there does not have to be a ballot of affected tenants, the council only has to show there has been ‘full consultation’. In some areas, tenants have been transferred to ALMOs with hardly any re-

alisation that such a process was underway.

Despite this, under pressure from tenants (and, no doubt, feeling confident of winning) some councils have conceded a ballot before an ALMO takes over. Of course, the adverse conditions in the ballot procedure for opponents of ALMOs are the same as for stock transfer, but at least it gives a chance to mobilise for rejection. Islington Council got round this by balloting at a few days’ notice, giving no chance for opponents to build up their campaign.

The most spectacular defeat for the ALMO option was in Camden after a high-profile and expensive campaign by the council was matched by the efforts of tenants’ associations and Unison, resulting in a 77 per cent vote against the ALMO. To its credit, and against pressure from government housing minister Keith Hill, Camden Council has accepted the result of the ballot and has now joined forces with tenants and Defend Council Housing in campaigning for the government to adopt a ‘fourth option’ of releasing the monies for renovation and refurbishment direct to councils.

Alongside stock transfer and ALMOs, councils, under pressure from the government, have also adopted variations of the Private Finance Initiative to deal with their shortage of funds for regeneration. Thus

in South Kilburn, in the London Borough of Brent, where the cost of regeneration is estimated to be anything up to £600 million, only about £30 million is on offer from the government even with stock transfer and ALMOs. To make up the shortfall it is proposed to double the density in the area by building 2,400 flats for the private market to pay for the rebuilding and renovation of the existing 2,800 council homes.

### From defence to solutions

While socialists must defend current provision against the drive to privatise, we also have to come up with alternatives to the irrationalities of capitalism, whereby individuals and families are expected to invest a massive proportion of their income into housing to the benefit of mortgage companies and estate agents.

Individual house ownership is irrational. There is no reason why good standard housing cannot be collectively provided. Even other advanced capitalist states get along quite happily with much lower levels of home ownership than Britain – owner occupancy rates for Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, for instance, are less than 40 per cent compared to Britain’s 70 per cent.

A massive programme of social housing is necessary to meet both the shortage and the need for renovation. **WA**

## Wrexham council housing stock transfer plan defeated

The New Labour dogma of ‘private good, public bad’ took another knock in March when, in a referendum, 58 per cent of the 9,722 Wrexham council tenants who voted said no to the transfer of the council’s entire housing stock to a specially created quango. *Tai Wrecsam, writes Laurence Barrett.*

The Labour council attempted to blackmail tenants by saying it lacked the funds to carry out improvements to the town’s 13,000 council homes, and that without the transfer, rents would increase and jobs would be lost. But the tenants, led by Wales Against Stock Transfer (Waste) called the council’s bluff, realising that transfer would mean higher rents, less security and less control. Now the tenants are being punished for their choice with a three per cent rent rise, on top of a five per cent rise already imposed this year.

It is possible to have a twinge of sympathy for the council, however. The council is a victim of the blatantly rigged rules which prevent it from borrowing money to improve stock, yet which allow access to borrowing *after* any transfer has taken place. At the moment, the Welsh Assembly government can do nothing because housing finance is not devolved and remains under the control of the Treasury. At this year’s Wales Labour Conference, Unison showed its solidarity with the tenants with a resolution demanding an end to stock transfers in Wales, and a change in the financial rules.

The new socialist party Forward Wales, which is based in Wrexham, was prominent in the no campaign, and claims to have recruited members from Labour over the issue. Its work in the no campaign may well translate into seats won from Labour on June 10. Council housing may well be yet another issue in which Labour’s ‘heartland’ voters desert in droves.

# Teaching on the cheap

With the government trying to save money by reducing the number of qualified teachers and relying instead on low-paid teaching assistants, it is time for the unions to stop bickering and organise a united campaign, says **Andrew Berry**

There is a popular, right-wing misconception of teachers as a pampered, lazy, over-paid group who work less than six hours per day and have 13 weeks' holiday a year. This caricature falls apart the moment you apply more than three brain cells to it – when do they do marking, plan lessons, prepare work, read curricula, receive training, see parents, whatever? But it still remains a powerful unthinking populist reaction and this makes teachers vulnerable to political attack.

There has also over the last 25 years or so grown up a strong attitude against using physical violence, fear and oppression as the prime motivations towards learning. Teachers have had to resort to trying to engage the student's interest in the work instead. This is obviously a much harder task with younger students being far more interested in play and older ones having the hormones come crashing in. Social change has also played its part – in many inner-city areas the number of children who cannot speak English adequately on entry to school has risen hugely over the past quarter century. The fact that these children are fluent in Bengali, Turkish, Arabic, Chinese, and will become bi- or tri-lingual by the end of primary school is never seen as a good thing. Due to inadequate funding these children learn English while taking teacher resources – and sometimes class time – from those who already speak English adequately. The result has been that students tend to take longer to display skills at reading, arithmetic, etc. There is some evidence that children now have a greater understanding of how arithmetic works rather than a parrot-like ability to chant the times tables, but the perceptions of parents are still of the 'I could do my twelve times table at your age' variety. There is also a vicious racist sub-agenda from a situation created by inadequate government

resourcing. This false perception of falling standards and of preferential treatment given to non-English speakers also leaves teachers vulnerable.

Workers in schools have different grades and responsibilities. Many are involved in teaching, but the prime differentiation is between (qualified) teachers – mainly in the NUT, a smaller number in the NASUWT – and (unqualified, less qualified or qualified in different aspects such as pastoral care rather than teaching) teaching assistants organised through Unison, TGWU and GMB. This trade union organisation is based on the history and status of the various tasks, rather than the best structure to respond to the attacks they currently face. A prime example of this has been the response to the government's latest attack, which is disguised in the form of the document issued early last year entitled 'Raising the standards: tackling workload'.

## Classroom cuts

This document essentially proposes to decrease the workload on teachers by allowing teaching support staff to cover classes. A new grade of HLTA (higher level teaching assistant) would be created. In other words, it is proposing that less qualified staff take the teacher's role without the support of a qualified teacher in the class. This of course will save the schools and the local councils and eventually the government money because support staff wages are considerably less than those of teachers. The attack will impinge much more on primary schools because secondary schools usually have far higher teacher to student ratios and secondary students are more capable of working independently of teachers. Children will suffer because their 'teacher' will almost certainly be less experienced, less capable of handling alone around 30 kids, less aware of the curriculum, less qualified in teaching methods, less trained in observation and assessment of the children. In primary schools, where it is usual for one teacher to be assigned to a particular class and the teacher's role is far more *in loco parentis*, there will also be a loss of the familiar ever-present face. There will also be one less adult in the classroom, which is particularly worrying since the average number of adults in a classroom at any time is around two.

These problems were all exacerbated when it became clear that the HITAs would not cover just the odd hour during the school day when the regular teacher would be doing planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) and hence would be on 'non-contact time'. It would also cover sickness absence and other 'unspecified time' absences – which would presumably

involve such things as when a teaching post was vacant. More sinisterly, it could involve strikebreaking, and it could be an encouragement to school management to cut (expensive) teacher posts in times of funding difficulty.

## Teaching unions divided

The NUT, sensibly and predictably, raised all these problems immediately and condemned the document as 'teaching on the cheap'. Their concern is for their members – the number of teachers would obviously fall if this document was implemented. Supply teachers, maintained by local authorities to service teacher absence in any of their schools, would immediately become redundant. There is a strong correlation of the concerns of the NUT with those of parents and carers and others who regard the welfare of the children as prime; the question 'Do you want a qualified teacher or a teaching assistant teaching your child?' admits only one answer.

The three unions representing teaching assistants took a blinkered and naïve approach. They came out in support of the document, won by the promise of a new grade with 'a wider range of responsibilities' and hence presumably higher pay. The support staff whom this 'historic' agreement is aimed at are almost all women and notoriously low paid. £6,000 per annum for working the full school day is not unusual. Even a doubling of that salary would mean they were doing a teacher's job for around two-thirds of a teacher's pay. Unfortunately for Unison, TGWU and GMB, even this low-expectation belief has collapsed – while some councils have produced more money, many are saying that the HLTA is just a recognition of status, not a regrading and therefore attracts no further pay.

As if to vindicate the NUT position, a report from the Blue Skies think tank within the Department for Education and Skills was published in December 2003. This report presented a vision of a school with the head as the only qualified teacher, apparently directing all the school support staff who take the lessons. The report was withdrawn after a hostile reaction from teachers and the public, the government blaming 'over-zealous junior officials' for its escape. However, it is widely believed that David Milliband and Charles Clarke, the Blairites in charge of the department, were fully aware of the report and were testing the water for future policies.

The irony for the NUT is that the 'Tackling workload' document came out of the negotiations on 'workforce remodelling' (please excuse the management-speak, this term really means redistributing tasks

between grades such that the overall requirements for each school can be performed by fewer workers and by workers on lower grades, allowing the schools to make redundant the more expensive workers), which occurred as a result of industrial action and further threatened action by the NUT, defending their members from the ever more onerous demands on their supposed 'free time' caused by the need to take work home with them.

### What kind of response?

This situation requires a response from the unions at all levels. The first, most important, and what should in the trade union world be the most elementary response, has to be that the unions must show a united front to management and that all workers must be defended. The fact that teachers receive far better pay than teaching assistants is not an excuse to screw the NUT – instead, teachers' pay should provide a benchmark for what the teaching assistant grades get, and there should be a negotiated and recognised method for a teaching assistant to qualify as a full teacher, probably including paid time off for the required study and examinations. The teaching practice should be easy to arrange.

There are obvious bureaucratic problems for the unions in this approach in terms of members needing to change union – and possibly in the distant future, it would make more sense for both teacher and assistants to be in one union. The driving force, though, has to be the interests of the workers, not the prescribed boundaries of the Bridlington agreement. One future solution might be the amalgamation of the teaching unions into an education section of Unison as the largest public sector union and a reorganisation of assistants into that section. But whatever the solution, the driving principle has to be the best representation of the group of workers.

### Undervalued, underpaid

But while we wait for this utopian rearrangement, there are other immediate questions. Teaching assistants need appropriate pay for the work they are currently doing. Many take responsibilities for helping children with special needs or with behavioural difficulties, often outside of the main class. They also give one to one or very small group teaching support to the most vulnerable children. This allows the teacher to teach the rest of the class more effectively. Without teaching assistants, more children would fall behind in regular classes. The role is essential not just for the children the assistants work with directly, but for the other children in the class

as well, and it is a major source of shame for the government that such valuable people are paid below the poverty line.

The third issue is the lack of national agreements for teaching assistants. It is this that makes it necessary for pay battles to be fought again and again by local groups of workers against individual councils. It means that a strong and well-organised workforce can get a good local pay agreement while a weaker one has to suffer far worse conditions. While the likes of Aesop might draw a useful general conclusion from such a situation, the reality is that management can learn from the experiences of one struggle and apply the lessons to the rest. Nursery nurses in Tower Hamlets and in Kirklees won very good local agreement from their strikes, and teaching assistants in Islington and Nottinghamshire County also made big gains, but the Scottish nursery nurses are facing a far more recalcitrant employer; the Scottish management have seen the results of earlier struggles and are determined on a lesser settlement. Other local unions and councils are watching the Scottish struggle and if the settlement is worse or the strike is long then there will be a tendency to accept status quo. Tactically, a national dispute for a national rate would be far more effective. Unfortunately Unison, GMB and TGWU have refused to consider a national pay claim for teaching assistants as it would go against the 1997 'single status agreement' with the employers, which established a national pay spine and 'anchor points' for grades, but within this had a principle of giving as much negotiating independence as possible to local authorities.

There are specific problems organising trade unions in schools, because they are unlike any other section of the council. It is hard to stand up to local management when there are a small number of support staff paid part-time and isolated from the rest of the council workforce. Local management of schools gives massive power on staffing to head teachers and some schools such as Voluntary Aided Schools are legally the employers. Some Local Education Authorities have refused to negotiate at an LEA level. This leaves union branches having to negotiate school by school – which in some places means over 500 schools.

While the unions – particularly Unison – are recruiting hand over fist with the promise of increased pay after accepting workforce remodelling, in fact that agreement contains no commitment to funding and the government has refused to give the councils any more money. The effect is that low paid union members are taking on further responsibilities while the pay

increases are not forthcoming.

### Funding crises

While the national agreement on workload remodelling was being finalised in 2002/2003, a funding crisis was developing in schools. About 1,500 teachers were made redundant and while support staff figures are unavailable there were almost certainly considerably more job losses and cutting of part-timers' hours. Cuts are still continuing, although at a lower level. The cause is inadequate funding from central government. During the crisis, schools were allowed to use capital expenditure funds (i.e., money allocated to buildings and equipment) to pay staff on the basis that the government would provide extra funding the following year. Labour reneged on these promises and now many schools have serious debts and will be forced into staff redundancies or even closure. At this time of massive job loss the unions failed to take any action. It has been left to the conference of the NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers) – i.e., the school managers', rather than the workers', union to give notice of intention to withdraw from the agreement at the end of 2004 unless the funding materialised. This decision was a compromise between the rank and file (can you have rank and file head teachers?), most of whom wanted to withdraw in September, and the leadership who wanted to give the government until April 2005.

Remodelling is not possible without funding. The proposed changes include from September 2003 support staff taking on additional administrative duties that formerly fell to teachers. These additional tasks should mean employment of further support staff or extension of hours for those already in post. Instead, pressure is being put onto already overburdened staff to take on the work for no more money. CFA@Islington, the privatised Islington LEA, says: 'limited resources have been provided by the DfES in the current financial year to fund the movement of administrative tasks from teachers to other support staff. It has been argued that existing resources can be "remodelled" in order that additional financial resources are not necessary . . . routine clerical and administrative tasks, which used to be carried out by teachers, should now be incorporated in the job description of . . . teaching assistants'. The document goes on to say that they will take away management allowance from teachers to fund this remodelling. A local NASUWT official supported the document, saying that teaching assistants would have to take on the work because teachers wouldn't do it. But while the NASUWT is behaving disgrace



fully, Unison, GMB and TGWU are barely audible in their calls for more funding. The NUT has voted to strike over the funding issue as well.

It was no surprise to hear a New Labour minister like David Milliband attacking the NUT at a Unison conference for school support staff held in central London on May 27, where he maliciously referred to the NUT as the 'minority teachers' union' (in fact it has more members than any other teachers' union and in primary schools – where the proportion of teaching assistants is highest – it has an absolute majority). But it must have been music to his Blairite ears to hear Dave Prentis attack the NUT at the same conference. Referring to the NUT, Prentis made reference to 'other unions that do not in any way help us', and claimed that there was a 'class divide' in the class room between teacher and support staff. He also referred to a comment by Doug McAvoy, NUT general secretary, over a year ago in regard to not being in favour of education teams of support staff and teachers. If this was said it was not helpful, but NUT conference policy – a far more authoritative source to anyone but a union bureaucrat – states quite the opposite. If Dave is looking for evidence of a 'class war' between teachers and support staff he need look no further than Nigel de Gruchy, previous general secretary of the NASUWT, who referred to support staff as 'pig ignorant peasants'. NASUWT, however, shares Prentis's reactionary views on the remodelling sell-out. It was noticeable at that support staff conference that Unison did not invite NAHT, despite the fact that it represents mainly heads of primary schools, where the remodelling agreement bites deepest, preferring to invite the deputy secretary of the SHA (Secondary Headteachers' Association) – which is far more compliant with the agreement.

Part of the Blairite agenda is to foment division between unions, especially in education, and it has gone to some lengths to demonise the NUT. When the NUT was considering strike action to get rid of SATs in schools, the government provocatively said it would be making no change to the SATs regime; when NAHT – a very small union – threatened to take action over SATs, the government agreed to make enough changes to satisfy the interests of head teachers. This was not for fear of the diminutive NAHT but to ensure that the NUT would remain isolated on the question. The government is still trying to isolate the NUT; ministers will not even reply to its letters. Within this situation Prentis's remarks – despicable at the best of times – are a form of betrayal.

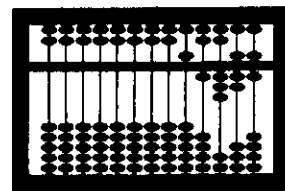
Unison is debating the agreement at its local government conference on the June 21. There are motions from several branches, including Islington, and also from two Unison regions (Greater London and South East), that call for a campaign, possibly including strike action, to secure more funding. There is also a motion to consider suspending Unison's involvement in the agreement. Within the debate we need to call explicitly for support for the NUT and publicly raise and denounce both the government's and Prentis's attempts to ridicule them.

We need to campaign for schools to receive the funding they need – both for

salaries and for work required – and within that campaign we need to unite parents / carers, teachers, support staff and any other supporters. We should call for all classes to have assigned teachers and teaching assistants; this would gain parent / carer support since it would better resource their children. The left in both Unison and NUT particularly have to ensure that we do not fall into either professional snobbery or Prentis's simplistic reactionary teacher bashing or his absurd notion of class war. These divisions play into the hands of the right wing. We need to call for 'across class' unity now.

WA

## FIGURING IT OUT



**LABOUR MARKET:** Employment reached an all-time high of 28.33 million in the three months to the end of February. Redundancy rates have fallen to their lowest level since records began. Only six in every 1,000 workers were made redundant in the winter of 2003-04. The Claimant Count is at its lowest since 1975 and the ILO measure of unemployment fell by 33,000 to 1.43 million in March. However, there are now 2.4 million people in Britain receiving incapacity benefit and 311,000 who receive severe disablement allowance – three times the number that were in receipt of health-related benefits in 1979. The region with the highest unemployment rate in Britain is London at 6.9 per cent.

**MANUFACTURING:** In the first quarter of 2004, manufacturing jobs fell by 22,000, and manufacturing output fell by 0.5 per cent. Compared with a year earlier, manufacturing jobs had fallen by 102,000 in the past year to 3.4 million.

**TWO NATIONS:** The richest 20 per cent of Britain's population earns 15 times more than the poorest. This means that inequality is much the same under Labour as it was in 1995-96 under John Major. However, some sources suggest the gap between rich and poor narrowed slightly last year as private sector pay slowed down.

**MINIMUM WAGE:** More than 200,000 people are still being paid less than the minimum wage.

**COUNCIL TAX:** One in four households now pays more council tax than income tax. Since Labour came to power in 1997, council tax has risen by an average of 70 per cent, hitting pensioners and other people on low incomes particularly hard. About 13 million people in 6.2 million households across Britain pay more council tax than income tax. This figure has increased from 5.5 million households in 2002 – the result of above-inflation rises in council tax.

**WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT:** In 1971 women made up 30 per cent of the workforce. By 1998, this had risen to 50 per cent.

**WOMEN AND MARRIAGE:** The proportion of women who are married dropped from 74 per cent in 1979 to 49 per cent in 2002.

**WOMEN'S WAGES:** In 1938, the average woman earned £1.12 per week compared with £20,314 per year in 2003. The average house price in 1938 was £596, compared with £139,716 in 2003.

**MUSLIMS AND INEQUALITY:** About 60 per cent of people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi background live on less than 60 per cent of the median disposable income compared with 20 per cent of white Britons. Unemployment rates among men of Pakistani and Bangladeshi background are up to three times higher than among white males.

**RACE HATE:** Figures from the Crown Prosecution Service show that the number of defendants accused of racially motivated crimes rose by more than 12 per cent last year to 4,200.

'Empiricist'

# Challenges for the left in the PCS

Following the victory of the left in the union's elections, **Richard Price**, Group Executive Chair at the Office for National Statistics, looks forward to this year's PCS conference

Delegates from the main civil service union PCS meet in Brighton from June 9-11 for their annual conference under a siege atmosphere, with both government and opposition vying with each other to slash civil service jobs by up to 20 per cent over the next few years.

In Gordon Brown's budget statement on March 17, he announced 30,000 jobs to be cut in the Department for Work and Pensions, 10,500 to go with the merger of Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, 1,460 to go from the Department for Education and Skills and a 2.5 per cent cut per annum from departments' administrative budgets from 2004 to 2008. These cuts are in addition to the 20,000 jobs the Lyons Review proposes to move out of London and the South East, while the Gershon Review is proceeding to look into the 'efficiency of the civil and public services', with the aim of cutting tens of thousands more posts.

With the Tories pledging to cut 100,000 civil service jobs, it's clear that what is involved is a Dutch auction in the run-up to the general election, in which both sides take it as read that civil servants are a soft target, easily portrayed as wasteful, idle and inefficient bureaucrats. As the lead motion at conference on defending public services, in the name of the NEC, argues: 'If the government want to reduce the number of civil servants they need to explain what services they are prepared to dispense with. There were no facts or proposals to back up Mr Brown's budget statement.'

Worthy (and long) though the NEC's motion is, it is weak in a few crucial areas. It doesn't clearly state its opposition in principle to the relocation of jobs from London and the South East, at a time when London has the highest unemployment of any region in Britain. It's also weak on the equal opportunities angle, when this needs

to occupy a prominent position. While the government talks endlessly about its commitment to diversity, it is planning to move large number of jobs from the most diverse part of Britain to some of the least, which can only result in a whiter, less diverse, civil service.

The NEC motion also talks about using industrial action 'as a last resort if, where and when appropriate'. It's clear that winning ballots for a campaign of strike action to defend jobs cannot be taken for granted, and will have to be built for over an extended period. But it's equally clear that if and when cuts of this scale get underway, it will be a necessity, and this needs to be spelt out in advance.

A motion from my own branch, where members face a cut of 50 per cent of the jobs in London, calls for industrial action in the event of compulsory redundancies or transfers, and for the union to seek a judicial review under the Race Relations Amendment (2000) Act to counteract the effects on equal opportunities. It also calls for a comprehensive political campaign, with the aim of exerting the maximum pressure on Labour MPs and GLA members.

## Relocation

The leadership of Left Unity is proposing supporting not only this motion and the NEC's, but also a motion from the Department of Constitutional Affairs South Wales branch that argues that 'there may be scope for some relocations of work (Lyons Review) without adversely affecting members' employment in London and the South East', provided that there is 'full negotiation and agreement on the terms' of relocation.

The line of 'not being opposed in principle' is the thin end of the wedge under these concrete conditions, since the relocations being proposed are not to deprived areas, but almost exclusively to cities that are already booming. The relocation of generally poorly paid civil service posts to such towns wouldn't redistribute the wealth of London so much as pile more misery on the public sector, and PCS members mustn't allow themselves to be split on regional lines.

On pay, PCS members face a new round of difficult negotiations, with the Treasury seeking to cap settlements at 3.5 per cent – even lower than the ceiling last year which led to the largest strikes for a decade. The raising of the pension age for civil servants, the steady drip-drip of privatisation and outsourcing, and the assault on established working practices under the banner of modernising government poses a further set of struggles to defend conditions of service.

In election results announced on May 24, the Democracy slate – a joint slate representing Left Unity and the centre-left PCS Democrats group – swept the board, winning 27 out of 34 seats on the NEC, and all seven senior officer posts. In fact, had the Democracy slate not 'double-banked' six of the candidates for senior officer posts, it would have won 33 out of 34 seats.

## Majority

The left and centre-left won 55 per cent of the vote compared to 45 per cent for the right wing Moderates and their allies. For the second year running, Left Unity members hold an absolute majority on the NEC. Although this represents a substantial victory on paper, it's somewhat undercut by the fact that only one in seven members voted, and a great deal more work is needed to connect with large sections of the membership that remain indifferent to the left-right battle.

Part of the problem lies in the current leadership of the left, in which current and ex members of the Socialist Party and the Scottish Socialist Party feature heavily. Ultra-left in their attitude to Labour, but conservative industrially, they are clearly over represented both in terms of numbers and ability. General secretary Mark Serwotka may well live to regret his decision to back the Respect coalition. If it polls as dismally as looks likely, it hands the right wing a stick with which to beat the left. The SWP, meanwhile, continues to operate as if its union activity is an annexe to its wildly overestimated electoral ambitions.

## Advances

The outgoing NEC has certainly made some steps forward over the last year. There were important advances in terms of campaigning, media profile and recruitment. Over a third of the union's members took part in industrial action over pay, albeit in one- or two-day actions, and without any significant victories. There was much better co-ordination across departments over national and London pay and in other campaigns. But the threat of massive job cuts, the first warnings of which came in April 2003, has seen the union slow to develop a concerted response.

The crucial battlegrounds over the coming year will be pay, job losses and relocations, pensions and privatisation. PCS needs to move beyond being a union with well-framed and principled policies to one that goes on the offensive and runs meaningful campaigns that mobilise large numbers of members. Otherwise, the danger is that the relentless series of attacks on all fronts will lead to demoralisation.

# Rebuilding a party of labour

**Graham Bash** looks forward to the founding conference of the Labour Representation Committee on July 3

The reason that the left should support the Labour Representation Committee is that it has the potential to be at least the beginnings of a solution to the crisis that we face. In this period, a key characteristic has been the enormity of New Labour's crisis, expressed in a number of ways: the mass movement and the huge demonstrations against the war; the parliamentary rebellions around top up fees, foundation hospitals and the war; the U turn on Ken Livingstone's re-admission into the Labour Party and support for his candidature as London mayor; the growing isolation of Blair following the Spanish general election result, and the potential further isolation in the event of a defeat for Bush in the US elections.

In my opinion, this crisis of New Labour all the more starkly reveals the crisis of the left and the failure to rebuild any political representation for the working class – in short, the working class in the UK is facing a growing crisis of representation. New Labour's prostration before the dictates of British and global capital and its attempts to take over and destroy the Labour Party have left the labour movement more and more politically and electorally disenfranchised.

One response to this crisis of representation and to the fact that the Labour Party has been hijacked by New Labour has been the various attempts to build electoral alternatives to Labour – in recent years the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance and now Respect. The primary reason for the failure of these electoral alternatives is not the errors made by various sections of the left in building them. It isn't the semi-Stalinist nature of the Socialist Labour Party that accounts for its electoral failure, nor the sectarianism or opportunism of the SWP that is responsible for the failure to build the Socialist Alliance or its successor, Respect.

The reason that none of these left groupings has succeeded, and cannot for the foreseeable future succeed, is because of the centrality of the Labour Party. The continued existence of the Labour Party, its historical embodiment of the British working class, and its base in the unified trade union structure, together with the nature of the electoral system itself, means that, alone

among the major social democratic parties in Europe, it has not suffered any serious splits or electoral challenges from within the labour movement (apart from the limited and partial exception of the Scottish Socialist Party which has yet to win a parliamentary seat under the first past the post system).

It has always been my position that if the Labour Party were to be destroyed by New Labour, our task would be to rebuild a mass party of labour based on the trade unions. None of the electoral alternatives to the left of Labour claims to be building an alternative labour party, and because of that could never be more than a marginal electoral alternative, or ever seriously address the crisis of representation.

It is not for us on the Labour left to take any comfort from the failures of those outside the party. As far as I'm concerned, that is practically a given, and I think that a lot of the emphasis given to the failures of the left outside is really just a mask for the crisis that we in the Labour left face.

So what form does this crisis take? In a nutshell, we can see in the real world outside the structures of the Labour Party and trade unions a mass, amorphous movement of opposition, most graphically revealed of course in the anti war movement, but also present in various different layers of struggle. The problem for us is that this opposition has only found the most limited expression within the structures of the party; the constituency parties remain in decline and membership is dropping, especially following the war in Iraq. There are fewer constituency delegates to annual conference, and the constituency left is small and poorly organised.

Above all, there is a movement towards disaffiliation in some unions and this is a major cause for concern. The RMT has already been expelled from the party for supporting the right of some of its Scottish branches to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party. It now seems more and more likely that the FBU will vote for direct disaffiliation at its next conference, which has been postponed for a month. This looks all the more likely in view of the attacks on the firefighters from this New Labour government. Of course disaffiliation from the party in the absence of a new mass party of labour can only lead to a split trade union movement and increase rather than reduce the crisis of representation. Our task isn't just to hector the disaffiliationists – we're infinitely closer to them than we are to the Blairites who lead the party. Our only answer to the threat of disaffiliation by the trade unions and to the haemorrhaging of individual party membership is to fight to ensure that the Labour and trade union left, speaking more and more in the name of the party itself, is visible and central in all of the key struggles against

New Labour's attacks on the working class in this country and internationally. Unless this happens, making the distinction between Labour and New Labour crystal clear, there is every chance that New Labour's historic task of destroying the Labour Party as a party of labour will succeed.

In this period, linking up with forces to our right is a necessary tactic to unite the growing forces opposed to New Labour – but our key task is more difficult: not only to ensure that the Labour and trade union left has a central place in the struggles against New Labour, but to attempt to bring the broader forces, often disparate and chaotic, into the structures of the labour movement and the Labour Party in a situation where it is desperately difficult to do so in view of the actions of the New Labour government.

Why should activists in the anti-war movement, in the community campaigns, even in the trade unions look to a Labour Party which still speaks in the voice, and under the leadership, of New Labour?

This is where I believe that the Labour Representation Committee has a role, representing both the majority of existing Labour Party members – those opposed to the war and the fundamentals of New Labour – and the tens of thousands who have been forced out or who have left the party in despair and disgust at the fact that it has been taken over by latter day Thatcherites, and who are desperate for the creation or recreation of a party of labour that can in some way represent their interests.

In short, the Labour Representation Committee has to appeal to existing party members and affiliates, but also to those we have lost in the recent years. It must be capable of fighting within the existing structures as well as appealing to those forces who must be part of any party of labour. Our task is to rebuild the party in such a way that those who have left can return to play a central role and those who are responsible for the disintegration of the Labour Party as a party representing the working class are marginalised in every way possible.

So we base ourselves on class struggle and against New Labour's control of the party, and our allies are all those forces engaged in struggle, whether inside or outside the party. Our task is wherever possible to work with these forces inside the various campaigns and struggles, and draw the struggles into the Labour Party and trade unions.

To me, the Labour Representation Committee represents a link between the existing party which must be rebuilt, and a vision of the future in which the party is fundamentally transformed, essentially from outside, by bringing in those forces of struggle. It is a desperately difficult task – but there is no alternative and there is no shortcut. **WA**

# Disrespect for women's liberation

Louise Whittle

*'The personal is the political' - slogan  
from the women's liberation movement*

I was pretty cynical about the formation of Respect and whether it was going to amount to much politically but I thought I would reserve judgement until I saw their national declaration and what they were intending to do as a coalition. With the SWP involved, I was quite worried about what they would have to say about oppression and liberation politics especially when considering the contemptuous remarks made by Lindsey German about lesbian and gay rights at last year's Marxism - 'Now I'm in favour of defending gay rights, but I am not prepared to have it as a shibboleth.'

I was reading a report from the South West Respect convention in *Weekly Worker* of March 25, 2004, and was amazed that one of the candidates from the West Midlands, Majid Khan, had made comments about 'gender segregation', which entailed having separate coaches for men and women for one of the anti-war demos. It seemed that nobody criticised him. The CPGB were obsessed with challenging Respect regarding the rejection of a republic at the founding conference but they kept quiet over the sexist claptrap being spouted. As a socialist feminist I was appalled by this and especially so as the CPGB tried to defend itself with the excuse of 'well, he said it in a personal capacity'! That is no excuse. As socialists we have a right to criticise these ideas. Majid Khan made his 'personal views' public. They may not be the views of Respect but he made these comments on a Respect platform. I thought this would have been obvious to the comrades in the CPGB, or are they willing, rather like the SWP, to make concessions to reactionary ideas?

Within the past few weeks George Galloway has made comments in a 'personal capacity' about his anti-abortion stance. He was supported by the Muslim Association of Britain, who issued a press release saying that 'they also affirm George Galloway's standing as a man of principle who does not shy away from putting his own

position on the line for his beliefs and convictions'. (See <http://www.mabonline.net>)

A woman's right to choose is an important demand and Galloway has decided to speak out against it. His stance on abortion is an attack on the fundamental right of women to control their own bodies. Does Galloway realise that he has something in common with George Bush? Again, Respect has said nothing about this and has kept quiet. Does this mean a woman's right to choose is expendable as well?

If Respect is serious about winning votes and garnering respect (pardon the pun), then it has to appeal to other sections of society, including lesbians and gay men, women and black people. This means broadening the campaign to include a feminist and socialist agenda, as opposed to a half-baked, misconceived coalition between reactionaries and socialists with a populist agenda. Backtracking on an already limited platform as regards oppression is a fundamental mistake. It is divisive and detrimental to the coalition as it alienates sections of society. What about women who feel constricted and isolated in various religious communities? What about appealing to them?

Respect is appealing to reactionary elements who, if you scratch away at their 'personal beliefs', have some very nasty and unpalatable ideas. If Majid Khan had indeed won the argument to organise separate coaches for men and women, what would have been the response from the left? More concessions? And now we have virtual silence over Galloway's 'personal views' on abortion.

I am not particularly 'having a go' at Respect/SWP as regards women's liberation, but other left groups are just as bad as well. Take the CPGB, for instance. They produced a leaflet at last year's Marxism condemning Lindsey German's remarks and supporting lesbian and gay rights and women's rights. Reading the leaflet, I felt compelled to check out the CPGB and *Weekly Worker's* website for further articles supporting liberation politics, involvement in campaigns and maybe even some feminist ideas. But no, I got nothing.

Again, if the CPGB were serious in supporting liberation campaigns, then their leaflet was a justifiable criticism of the SWP. But as they say very little indeed except in their programme - which is a rather bland, uninspiring and simplistic analysis of oppressions - then the criticism they made of the SWP seems based on opportunism and point scoring. 'Glass houses' and 'stones' come to mind.

As a socialist feminist and a union activist who still sees the fight for women's rights as being as important as ever, I get rather tired and bored by the lack of aware-

ness and by the sexism which exists around the left. A bit of consciousness raising and lessons not just in collective responsibility but individual responsibility wouldn't go amiss! Fighting oppression is integral to fighting the class struggle, not some amendment you can tack on to the end of a programme - the 'just wait for the revolution' response, which is patronising and insulting to say the least.

Finally, I know that feminism seems to be something 'not worth fighting for'. I read in the newspapers that women have 'got it all'. Well, not true! What about equal pay, a woman's right to choose, childcare, education . . . and so on?

Women are always at the bottom of the pecking order in a capitalist and patriarchal society. And now with globalisation and neo-liberalism, the fight is as important as ever. As Barbara Ehrenreich states, 'the globalisation of women's traditional roles poses challenges to anyone concerned about gender and economic inequality'. (*Global Woman*, Granta Press, 2003, p.13)

So yes, the fight is still ongoing! And that means the left has to take seriously women's oppression and other forms of oppression too. I leave the last comment to Southall Black Sisters who, in their excellent book *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers* (Zed, 2004, p.289), say 'that struggles against all oppressions including race, sex or class, can be waged simultaneously. Only by doing this can we hope to build a strong, progressive human and civil rights movement. Rather than rights for the few, we must have rights for all'.

● For discussions about feminism, debates, reviews and other links check out the website [www.thefword.org.uk](http://www.thefword.org.uk). **WA**



## Way forward or blind alley?

Articles from Workers Action

**£1.00**

Plus postage 50p (UK), £1.00  
(Europe), £1.50 (rest of world)

Prinkipo Press, PO Box 7268,  
London E10 6TX



# The new gulags

Assassination and torture are now the stock-in-trade of the US 'war on terror', says **Simon Deville**

The revulsion expressed at the photos from Abu Ghraib prison by US and British politicians shows a rank hypocrisy on two levels. On a general level the whole history of empire shows that an occupying army justifies its actions by convincing itself that the colonised are sub-human. The psychology of colonial occupation would naturally tend to encourage the occupiers to treat the occupied population as animals.

On a far more specific level, as disgusting as the actions of the individuals caught on camera are, they do not point to the existence of one or two 'bad apples', but fit in to a pattern of torture and humiliation used as a deliberate military tactic and authorised from the top. In its report that Geoff Hoon famously didn't read, the International Committee of the Red Cross stated that abuse contrary to the Geneva convention had occurred in Baghdad, Basrah, Ramadi and Tikrit, and possibly throughout occupied Iraq.

## Neo-cons

In *The New Yorker*, Seymour Hersh outlined the role of the neo-cons in this torture and the military crises that have led the neo-cons into supporting a policy of illegal torture of detainees. From the start, the Bush administration has treated international legality as an annoyance that got in the way of the world's only superpower doing whatever might be in its interests (or at least in the interests of the large multinationals that pull the strings). During the US assault on Afghanistan, US intelligence officers identified a vehicle that they believed was carrying the Taliban leader Mullah Omar, but didn't attack it as they couldn't get authorisation from the lawyer on duty at US Central Command HQ in Florida. Donald Rumsfeld was furious, viewing this hesitation due to legality as being political correctness. A number of similar incidents had occurred elsewhere – US Special Forces identified key individuals they were targeting, but waited to get authorisation before acting.

According to Hersh, Rumsfeld's response was to authorise the creation of a secret programme that was given carte

blanche prior approval to kill, capture and if possible interrogate high profile targets in the administration's 'war on terror'. The special operatives could interrogate prisoners at secret CIA detention centres around the world, using force if necessary, and relay the information back to the Pentagon. Fewer than 200 people, both operatives and officials, were alleged to have known about the programme. Of all the initiatives post-September 11, this secret Special Access Programme (SAP) was seen as one of the successes. The SAP and the prison at Guantánamo Bay operated outside any legal framework, the former because everything about it, including its budget, was kept secret.

## Belligerent

The Guantánamo prisoners were unilaterally categorised as 'illegal combatants' by the US. The notion that a belligerent power has the right to decide whether or not its prisoners have rights under international law might be a rather strange and circular legal argument (they don't have legal rights because we've invented a new category of prisoner who doesn't have legal rights), but it at least paid lip service to a legal framework.

After the 'mission was accomplished' in Iraq, with all their military might and intelligence, the US couldn't stop the growth of Iraqi insurgency. Sacking the Iraqi army en masse and sending them home with their weapons might in retrospect appear a tactical blunder, but this was only the first of many. Looters and criminal gangs grew exponentially and troops have opened fire on civilians for peacefully demonstrating or for driving a car too close to a check point – brutalising and humiliating the population.

The extent to which the US administration failed to prepare for the occupation is reinforced by their surprise at how the insurgency has grown. Internal reports concede that many of the attacks against Coalition targets show that insurgents have a great deal of intelligence about the movement and activities of the occupying forces and their Iraqi allies, but that US forces had very little intelligence on the Iraqi resistance.

## Resistance

It wasn't until last autumn that Rumsfeld realised that the insurgency wasn't just a dwindling group of 'dead-enders' trying to restore the Ba'athist regime, at which point he proposed a policy of 'getting tough' on Iraqis suspected of being involved in the resistance. The commander of interrogation and detention of Guantánamo, Major General Geoffrey Miller, was brought to Baghdad to review

interrogation procedures. One of Miller's key changes was to place military intelligence in charge of the prison.

Within Abu Ghraib prison there appear to have been numerous non-military personnel involved in the running of the prison and the interrogations. It is not clear whether these were military intelligence, whether they were working for the Special Access Programme, or whether they were simply from private 'security' firms. Clearly, military personnel were taking orders from people whose relationship to the US army is unclear. Rumsfeld was unable to answer how the command structure between military and non-military personnel worked in the prison.

The methods used in 'softening up' prisoners for interrogation are not simply random acts of violence but fit in with interrogation methods that Special Forces train for both in the US and in Britain. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, many neo-cons often referred to a 1973 study, 'The Arab Mind', which put forward the notion that Arabs were particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation. Hersh argues that two themes were prevalent amongst neo-cons – 'that Arabs only understand force, and that their biggest weakness is shame and humiliation'. Under this doctrine, photographs are taken of naked prisoners in order to blackmail them by threatening to show the photos to their families. By the time these methods had filtered down the military ranks, such photos became 'trophies' with troops using them like baseball cards or as screensavers on their computers.

## Mercenaries

The events within Abu Ghraib prison should not be seen as an exception; they are a microcosm of the occupation. Nor is this something that is just done by the US. There is no distinction between British and US forces as they are a single occupying force under a single command structure. The increasing use of mercenaries in Iraq has compounded the lawlessness amongst the occupying forces. In addition to the 130,000 or so regular forces in Iraq, there are around 30,000 'private security' personnel. These mercenaries don't need to operate outside the law because there is no law in Iraq. While soldiers may face a court martial, mercenaries do not have to worry since there are no Iraqi courts, civil or military, that will hold them to account.

It is clear that these interrogation and torture centres run by the US don't just exist in Iraq; they are becoming the normal way that the US deals with people it considers its enemies. Increasingly, the British government is being sucked in to justifying this illegality or else simply denying that it happens.

# In for the long haul

The occupation is a catastrophe, but there's far too much at stake for the US and Britain just to walk away from Iraq. **Simon Deville** is more than a little sceptical about the Coalition's exit strategy

Over a year since George Bush stood in front of a 'mission accomplished' banner and declared that major military operations were over in Iraq, things have gone from bad to worse. Pretty much everything Bush and Blair had predicted has failed to materialise. While many Iraqis may have welcomed the West's toppling of the Ba'athist regime, even at the time most were saying they wanted the US to leave Iraq. If you wanted to write a textbook on how not to conduct an invasion, Iraq is a good starting point. However, despite the disastrous nature of the invasion, there is a real chance that we end up as witnesses to a long and bloody occupation that is opposed not just by the overwhelming majority of Iraqis, but also by large sections of the populations of the colonising powers.

The architects of the 'war on terror', key right-wing ideologues in the Bush administration, no longer even pretend to defend their original strategy. The master plan espoused by the *Project for the New American Century* think tank was that the US would fight and decisively win two simultaneous wars as an example to the world of what would happen to anyone who broke from US wishes. Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz et al claimed that all this could be achieved using new technological weapons and a relatively small number of troops, with little need for a large regular military force. Coinciding with this plan was the long-held wish of right-wing Zionists in their camp to remove Saddam Hussein and replace him with a pro-Israeli, pro-US puppet government.

## Masterstroke

The one masterstroke of the US over the invasion of Iraq was to neutralise the leadership of the Iraqi military in advance of the invasion. 'Shock and Awe' appeared to have worked as the invaders faced little of the predicted resistance. From that point on, though, things have fallen apart. Iraqis were supposed to embrace the US inva-

sion and all the fuss would be over in weeks but the Iraqi population has obstinately refused to follow the neo-cons' script.

The problems faced by the Bush administration over the war were of a different nature from those faced by Tony Blair. Bush's popularity reached record levels for a sustained period as he led the country into two wars as part of the 'war on terror'. This side of the Atlantic there was never great enthusiasm for the war on Afghanistan, and the largest political movement in generations against the war on Iraq. That there were no WMDs may have been important in Britain, but it was never much of an issue for Bush, who from the start made it clear his aim was regime change. For Bush, WMDs were simply an issue to try and win support from the UN security council for the war he was going to have anyway.

The problems of the two leaders have converged as it has become absolutely clear that both countries are likely to be locked into a costly occupation that is facing an increasingly organised resistance movement from a population that overwhelmingly opposes them. The neo-cons will have to go back to Congress time and again to ask for further billions of dollars for a war that they claimed they could do on the cheap. Here in Britain, New Labour might have avoided real scrutiny over the torture of prisoners by blaming it on the US forces and diverting attention away from the issue by focusing on the fraudulent photos published in the *Mirror*, but this will only give them a temporary reprieve, and the issue will still rumble on. If Rumsfeld were forced to resign, or if Bush were to lose the election in November, it would have an immediate impact upon Blair's position. Blair's most loyal toadies are already publicly discussing whether or not he is an electoral liability, and how to have a smooth transition to a new leader.

The situation has forced the neo-cons and New Labour to look for the earliest possible exit from Iraq. Both the British and US administrations are desperate to 'hand over sovereignty' to either an Iraqi puppet government or the UN. For the neo-cons to have reached this conclusion is truly humiliating for them. The problem is that even the defeat of both New Labour and of the neo-cons will not automatically mean an end to the occupation; more likely it will mean a reassessment of strategy.

Many within the anti-war movement interpret Bush and Blair's problems as meaning that with one final effort we can bring an end to the occupation. Such a rosy picture misunderstands the nature of the forces we are up against, and in the longer

term will only serve to demoralise the movement. We shouldn't underestimate the importance of the occupation to imperialism. The growth of the Iraqi resistance and the revulsion of the actions of the occupiers around the world in no way mean that imperialism is about to up and leave. It is not just the military plans of a handful of Bush's advisers that are at stake, but US control of the world's major oil fields.

## Reconstruction

The exit strategy that imperialism is looking for is one that gives the government of Iraq an air of legitimacy while leaving Bechtel and Halliburton in control of reconstruction, permanent US military bases, and the Iraqi economy so indebted that the US could cripple its economy if ever an Iraqi administration considered acting against US interests. Much of the debate about how the 'Coalition' forces could pull out is simply about how they can hand over to a safe pair of hands for US interests. Whether this is done by handing formal power to an Iraqi puppet administration, to a UN force, or even to forces made up from Arab governments should not be the issue for socialists.

If the purpose of 'handing over sovereignty' is to secure and strengthen imperialist control of Iraq for generations to come, we should oppose it. We need to demand that real power is handed over to Iraq -- that Coalition forces are withdrawn, that US appointed reconstruction contracts are cancelled, and that Iraqis are allowed to develop their own democratic structures and government. **WA**

## LABOUR LEFT Briefing

Independent forum for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and trade unions

Annual subscription (10 issues):  
£15 ordinary, £20 supporting  
sub, £30 overseas. Cheques  
payable to  
Labour Left Briefing

Labour Left Briefing, PO  
Box 2378, London E5 9QU

# The election and the anti-war movement

John Kerry won't end the war, but independent political action can, says **Mark Harris**

'What's incredible was the guy who was president then was Richard Nixon, which shows that when you build a big movement from down below, regardless of who's in the White House, you can bring about change.' – Tony Mazzochi, former legislative director of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers' Union, on the passage of the first Occupational and Safety Health Act in 1970. (*New York Times*, August 24, 2002)

Some of the more enthusiastic moments at the March 20 anti-war rallies around the country occurred when speakers raised the spectre of President Bush being given the electoral equivalent of a one way bus ticket back to Crawfordsville next November. It's an understandable reaction. The Bush Administration is arguably the single worst thing to happen at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue since the British torched it in 1812.

But the fires this time are those of an unbridled demagoguery and deceit and crass superpower nationalism. The White House war against Iraq was built on a house of lies and oil and imperial ambitions that left unchecked now threaten even worse conflagrations to come. With over 700 American soldiers and an estimated 10,000 Iraqi civilians now dead as a result of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq (not to mention unspecified casualties of the former Iraqi army), it would hardly be an overreaction to suggest that the Bush Administration deserves not another term in the White House, but a war crimes tribunal.

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that international law, such as it is, will soon be bringing to justice the perpetrators of this war. That's because international law now is not much more than a polite term for what is otherwise the modern day rule of clubs

and cluster bombs – whoever has the most becomes judge, jury, and final arbiter of something supposedly akin to 'justice' in this world.

It's also unfortunate that the upcoming US Presidential election offers no likelihood whatsoever that an anti-war candidate will be elected who will do the principled thing and end the US occupation of Iraq. At least not at their own initiative. Apparently, Senator John Kerry's run-away Democratic primary campaign has emboldened the Massachusetts politician only in the sense that he has stepped up his efforts to win support from those who share his friend Senator John McCain's (Republican – Arizona) view that the occupation of Iraq remains a 'noble cause'.

As Tim Russert noted on NBC's Meet the Press, Kerry is sounding a lot like Bush these days when he talks about Iraq. Considering what a messianic ideologue of war Bush is, that's saying a lot. Asked if he thought the Iraq war was a 'mistake', Kerry would only say that it was the way the President went to war that was a mistake. As he earlier declared in a February 2004 speech at UCLA, 'Whatever we thought of the Bush Administration's decisions and mistakes – especially in Iraq – we now have a solemn obligation to complete the mission, in that country and in Afghanistan.'

Kerry's stay-the-course stance on Iraq is becoming more ironic by the day as support for the occupation plummets, both domestically and in Iraq. A recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll found 46 per cent of Americans believe the United States should find a way to get out of Iraq. In Iraq itself, a poll taken by Western news services just prior to the recent outbreak of violence in Fallujah found a majority of Iraqis – 57 percent – want the US military and its occupation allies out of the country 'in the next few months'. Where the violence of recent weeks has since driven Iraqi opinion is not hard to surmise.

Actually, Kerry is somewhat less inclined on the war issue than the President to engage in all the claptrap rhetoric about bringing 'freedom' and 'democracy' to Iraq. His declared concern now is more the establishment of a stable, pro-US (i.e., compliant) Iraqi government. And so it goes that the more things change, the more they stay the same: the same concerns for pro-Western stability once led President Carter and the CIA to support the 1979 internal Ba'ath party coup that originally brought Saddam Hussein to power. The same concerns led the Republican administrations of presidents Reagan and later Bush Sr to remain steadfast in their fidelity to Hussein's dictatorial rule throughout the 1980s (the decade of his greatest military power and human rights crimes).

The same concerns also led President Bush Sr to hold back from seeking the dictator's overthrow in 1991, even after a mass Shi'ite rebellion in the south in the aftermath of the first Gulf War threatened just that. Likewise, concerns for regional stability, not 'freedom' and 'democracy' or even 'weapons of mass destruction', motivated President Clinton's unflinching support of UN economic sanctions against Iraq, designed as they were to weaken but not destroy the central government while creating devastating conditions for the civilian population.

Accordingly, it is no surprise that while President Bush and apologists for the occupation blather on about bringing 'freedom' to Iraq, occupation authorities are also moving to bring back into the fold former Ba'ath Party officials and Saddamista military officers, to collaborate in the rebuilding of what is destined to be a new repressive political-security apparatus not essentially different from what Iraq has already known for decades.

## What's a progressive to do?

The Massachusetts Senator's 'Bush lite' foreign policy undoubtedly disappoints many among the broad left progressive milieu, such as it is, that supports him. Unless one believes criticising the President's lack of 'boldness' in rallying international allies to the occupation cause is somehow a galvanising message, Kerry is offering 'Anybody But Bush' supporters a rather tepid foreign policy 'alternative' to rally around.

What Kerry's hawkish views should not do is shock. He has in his recent history been far more consistently conservative on military and security issues than the Republicans would like voters to believe. Kerry voted for the 2002 Congressional resolution authorising the assault on Iraq. Kerry voted for the uncivil assault on civil and constitutional liberties legitimised under the Patriot Act. Kerry has been saying for a while that more troops are needed in Iraq – approximately 40,000 more, for now. He says expect at least a six figure presence of American troops to remain in Iraq a year from now – when he hopes to occupy the White House. Nonetheless, the presumed Democratic nominee says we must elect him because he will do a better job at 'internationalising' the Iraqi conflict, mending relations with European allies and the United Nations for purposes of the imperial mission.

Of course, no matter how disappoint-

ing Kerry's campaign (Ruth Coniff writes for *The Progressive* that this may be the year Kerry finally loses the liberal label for good), the desire to defeat Bush will not deter many who have marched against the war from also voting for Kerry. Nor will it prevent some in the progressive media from creating its own spin machine on the Democratic candidate's behalf. 'The right to choose, environmental sustainability and economic justice will all be hanging in the balance on November 2, 2004,' wrote Don Hazen and Tai Moses for *Alternet* (March 5), the progressive, San Francisco-based, news service. 'With positions, messages and values this starkly opposing, there won't be many undecided voters in this race.'

Admittedly, Hazen, *Alternet's* editorial director, and Moses penned these words in early March, when some of the free-for-all rhetoric of the primary campaigns, with multiple candidates raking Bush's handling of the economy and WMD issue, was still fresh. But flash forward two months and Hazen is now interviewing a linguistics expert on the problem Kerry is having finding a defining theme for his campaign! Such is the Unbearable Lightness of Being a Progressive Apologist for Anybody But Bush.

Kerry's pre-eminence as the party's front-runner has had some time to hang in the air now, enough to begin to smog up some of the hype of pro-Kerry groups like *MoveOn.org* with the grimy reality that the election is shaping up as a choice between a bad, pro-war candidate and a really bad, pro-war candidate. Of course, there are differences on issues (there are always differences!). Kerry is pro-choice and Bush is not, for example. But the idea that the future of choice or justice or even survival itself 'hangs in the balance' on November 4 is just not true. On the war issue, there's

not much difference at all. It's also unlikely the great wash of non-voters (somewhere in the range of half the adult population!) will be motivated by the programme of either of the two parties to begin an unprecedented rush to the ballot box.

If Iraq's weapons of mass destruction turned out to be illusory, no less so now will be the fantasies of Democratic Party critics that the Iraqi occupation can be transformed into a 'socially responsible' occupation. United Nations sanctioned or not. In this way, Democrats like left-leaning Illinois US Senate candidate Barack Obama, who ran in the state's primary boasting of his anti-war credentials, are selling something even more insidious than the rank Republican rhetoric. These are the 'anti-war' Democrats whose opposition in the build-up to the war melted into air the moment US troops crossed the border into Iraq. Now they attempt to paint an increasingly brutal military occupation with the veneer of hopes for resuscitated American good intentions. As if it's possible for the US presence in Iraq to transform into a benevolent mission! As if the United States (or the United Nations) has a track record of supporting democratic revolutions in the Middle East!

Of course, the wild card in the Western debates over the fate of Iraq is the Iraqi people themselves. When asked in the *New York Times/CBS* poll if they saw the American military as 'liberators' or 'occupiers,' 71 per cent of Iraqis said occupiers. Yet the architects and apologists for the war cling to the delusion that the resistance reflects only politically isolated 'regime remnants' and 'terrorists' (the latter professionals no doubt!). But with the city of Fallujah under a month-long American siege, soldiers and paramilitary security forces of the newly formed Iraqi Armed Forces have been deserting in droves, rather than fight, or even joining the rebels. It is a dramatic indicator of how military assaults by a foreign power on a city's neighbourhoods must be registering with the wider Iraqi population. But then winning the hearts and minds of the locals can become problematic when you're also dropping 500-pound bombs on the neighbourhood. It's somehow doubtful whether the victims of US violence care whether those bombs are sanctioned by neo-con Republicans or 'progressive' Democrats.

But with resistance and disaffection growing inside Iraq, it's more than the Iraqi security forces who are deserting the Americans. The Coalition of the Willing is fast becoming the Coalition of the Willing to Leave the United States in the Lurch. Internationally, the United States has never been more isolated before the court of world opinion. Spain has announced it is

withdrawing its troops, while six other countries are now restricting their small regiments to their bases. Nor does the United Nations show signs of becoming anything more than what Naomi Klein in *The Nation* calls 'the political arm of the continued US occupation'. The desire now by many Democratic critics to push the UN, or even a Nato intervention, as some kind of salvation for the American war (even as a desperate Bush also turns to the UN) is under the circumstances of the nationalist uprising unlikely to succeed. As Klein notes, 'The post-June 30 caretaker government being set up by UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi will be subject to all the restraints on Iraqi sovereignty that sparked the current uprising in the first place.'

### 'Anybody But Bush'

The 'Anybody But Bush' vision now has most of the progressive milieu in its trance, but it is not a vision as much as it is a paucity of vision. Faced with a war sparked by the extremist right-wing politics of the Bush Administration, the best so many otherwise articulate and powerful voices for justice can muster is an insistence on supporting whoever happens to win the Democratic nomination. It's a telling sign now of how truly rudderless left-progressive politics is in the United States. It's also revealing just how desperate progressives are that a return to the Clinton-style politics Kerry embraces is now considered almost a god-send.

In fact, the social policy of the Clinton Administration was the most conservative of any administration since the end of World War II, as historian Howard Zinn reminds us in the revised edition to his *A People's History of the United States*. The entire tenure of the Clinton Administration was defined by erosion of New Deal social policy, gutting welfare and other safety net programmes, deregulating industries, union and environmental protections, and generally cosyng up to the interests of silver spoon investors and corporate executives, the principal beneficiaries of the era's market prosperity. The campaign slogan of 1992, 'Putting People First,' came to mean 'putting the bond market' first, as Edward Herman, Wharton School professor of finance, remarked a few years ago in a *Z* magazine round up on the Clinton legacy. In this sense, the Clinton Presidency was but a stage-setting prelude to the Republicans Gone Wild nightmare of the current administration.

Is the only choice now one of the speed of the retreat from the promise of a better, more just society? Unfortunately, if the possibilities for political change are viewed only through the lens of Bush versus Kerry in November, then that is the sorry reality.

## Anti-war contacts

### Stop the War Coalition

PO Box 3739, London E5 8EJ

[www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk)

tel: 07951 235 915

email: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk)

### Labour Against the War

PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU

tel: 020 8985 6597

fax: 020 895 6785

email: [latw@gn.apc.org](mailto:latw@gn.apc.org)

Affiliation/sponsorship of

LATW is £10 for organisations,

£5 for individuals



But it's a mistake to view the election as the be-all and end-all of all our hopes. Let's instead get heretical in our thinking and declare that a neo-con Republican in power is not inherently less responsive to pressure from 'the street' than a liberal Democrat. Historically, when has progressive social change ever depended more or even mostly on whether a Democrat or Republican is in office, rather than on what happens outside the corridors of power, in the workplaces, campuses, and neighbourhoods, among the officially voiceless and disenfranchised or excluded? This is the story of the Civil Rights movement, when sit-ins and marches and a growing, relentless dissent compelled a bipartisan power structure, long comfortable with Jim Crow racism, to finally sit up and take action. This is the story of women's suffrage, too, the Vietnam peace movement, and labour's long quest for the eight-hour day, benefits, and such civilised ideas like vacations. This is the story of the historical movement of democracy itself.

Think about this: In 1970 labour activists helped secure passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, viewed by many as 'the most important pro-worker legislation of the last 50 years', as Steven Greenhouse noted in a 2002 *New York Times* profile of veteran labour leader Tony Mazzochi. Notably, the OSHA legislation was passed under a Republican administration. Those same Nixon years also saw an end to the military draft, and legal recognition of a woman's right to choose. Again, no thanks to Nixon or even to a 'progressive' Supreme Court (it didn't exist), but to the popular, organised activism and mobilisation of public opinion of millions of Americans. In this context, the million-plus March for Women's Lives on April 25 did more to secure women's reproductive rights than anything that will happen on November 4.

It might similarly be easy to credit President Clinton for passage of such legislation as the Family Medical Leave Act, but that leaves out the reality that the real impetus came from women's groups and unions, who had pushed for such legislation for years. Likewise, the belief that Clinton's early health care reform initiative failed because it was too liberal or visionary turns reality on its head. The proposal failed because whatever reformer's vision it could claim sank in the bog of endless reassurances by the Administration to sectors of the insurance industry that their profits would remain sacrosanct. But without a mobilised public movement, even that was not enough to ensure passage of the health care reform. This was not the case in Canada, where historically active public support for the independent, union-based

New Democratic Party helped to eventually win passage of a single-payer health system.

If Ralph Nader, an early endorser of the small Labour Party group founded by the late union organiser Tony Mazzochi, was actually running a campaign advocating Mazzochi's idea of truly independent, working-class campaigns for office, in opposition to the corporate-dominated two parties, it could at the very least set an example of the direction grass-roots organising needs to go if independent political action is ever going to gain momentum in this country. Unfortunately, that is not what Nader is doing. The Nader campaign seeks to oppose the Democratic Party while ostensibly trying to boost the party, hoping to pressure Kerry from the grass-roots left to take better positions on a host of issues. Accordingly, Nader thinks he can pull large blocs of disillusioned non-voters, independents, and even Republicans into voting booths, blocs otherwise beyond Kerry's reach, who, the thinking goes, will then invariably translate part of their presence in the voting booth into backing for various progressive Democrats running for local and state offices. It's a confused, ambiguous strategy and it makes about as much sense as Michael Moore's endorsement of General Wesley Clark, who led Nato in bombing civilian targets in Belgrade in 1998, as a 'peace' candidate for the Democratic nomination.

While Nader at least advocates getting out of Iraq (but in six months), the problem now with all the elite debates about the future of Iraq is the thorny problem of the Iraqi insurgency, which in one way or another, is likely to continue growing. Of course, it's possible the US military may perpetrate a repression so thorough and bloody that it effectively puts down the rebellion. For now. But with weapons you can never obliterate the spirit of human resistance. They also cannot kill everyone. The spirit of nationalism is such that the Iraqi people will in the long run never countenance the ongoing occupation of their country, puppet government or not, especially with the current atrocities and killings becoming part of their collective memory. They will one way or another be the final arbiter of the future of Iraq.

### More protest, more demonstrations

As a labour organiser, Tony Mazzochi understood that the type of progressive social change that endures always originates and grows from the grass roots, from the cellar floor, challenging the existing status quo as well as whatever conventional wisdom tells us about the limits of what is 'practical' to achieve. Social change rather

happens when the dissent in the air gets organised and visible and takes to the streets as well as the ballot box. And getting organised has never depended upon 'lesser-evils' or benevolent elites. Our battle now is not just against a military occupation, but against militarism itself.

Undoubtedly, last year's anti-war protests lost some of their urgency following the quick military victory by US and British forces over Saddam Hussein's government. Yet mainstream American politics is as much a creature of paradox as it is mostly an exercise in sound bites and personality contests. It was thus perhaps at the moment of President Bush's most triumphal war posturing, when he paraded macho style in full flight uniform on the flight deck of a US aircraft carrier, celebrating 'Mission Accomplished' in Iraq, that a sense of the seismic credibility chasm the Administration was about to plunge into began to edge into fuller view.

The chasm has opened. What is unfolding now in Iraq is a political disaster for the United States. As reports surface from Fallujah of Marine snipers who shoot at ambulances, or civilians who step out of their houses, or of American soldiers who sadistically abuse Iraqi prisoners in the very prison Hussein once used for his own tortures, the evidence mounts of the utter moral collapse this war represents for the government of the United States.

What our political leaders have done is criminal. Under the guise of a phantom weapons threat, the United States government started a war that after one year of 'liberation' has led not to dancing in the streets but street combat. The beginnings of a classic nationalist rebellion against occupation by a foreign power are now underway. Think Vietnam. Think Algeria. With the infrastructure still in crisis, electricity spotty, hospitals in disrepair, cities under siege, unemployment over 50 per cent, union rights denied under the same Hussein-era laws, and world opinion largely in square opposition to US policy, the corporate CEO-think that defines the Bush mind-set has proven its profound inability to lead. At least if political leadership still has anything to do with social justice, peace, and prosperity in the world. The Democratic front-runner John Kerry equally shows no signs of a fundamentally different mind-set.

The anti-war marches before the war and most recently on March 20 sent a vibrant, defiant message that international and domestic opposition to the US war and occupation of Iraq runs deep. They must continue. Now more than ever. Louder than ever. Bigger than ever. No matter who is in office. The killing must stop. Think Out Now. Bring the troops home now. **WA**

# Cyprus remains divided

**Nick Davies** is not surprised that Greek Cypriots rejected the United Nations plan for the 'unification' of the island

On the European Union's south-eastern border it really does look like fortress Europe. One hundred and twelve miles of barbed wire and sandbags snake their way across Cyprus and through its capital, Nicosia, separating the Greek Cypriot community, EU citizens from May 1, from the Turkish Cypriots.

The double irony is that in the referendum on April 24, it was the Turkish Cypriots who voted roughly 2-1 in favour of unification and EU entry for the whole of Cyprus, and yet remain outside; the Greek Cypriot community, which has made a 30-year grievance of the division of Cyprus, voted about 3-1 against. As both communities had to vote 'yes' for there to be change, Cyprus stays divided, with the Greek Cypriots cast as the sulky guests spoiling the EU's self-satisfied enlargement party, while their neighbours peer in at the festivities.

In its official statement, the EU talked about a 'missed opportunity'. The UN's envoy, when asked by the Associated Press what he thought, said he would 'have to bite his tongue'. Even the Guardian

could not resist sticking the boot in, questioning whether the Greek Cypriots should have been let in at all ('Island of lost dreams', April 26, 2004).

The more sophisticated critics of the Greek Cypriots' position have been quick to argue that the historic goal of right-wing Greek Cypriot nationalists, enosis, or union with Greece, has now been achieved within the EU, while the pariah state of North Cyprus, recognised only by Turkey, is to be rewarded for its 'yes' vote with 260 million euros' worth of EU aid, thus giving it the recognition, and the funds, that it has craved for years. Therefore, the argument follows, the consequence of the Greek Cypriot vote is the strengthening of the position of reactionary communalism on both sides of the divide.

But those who rush to condemn the Greek Cypriots for their intransigence should consider for a moment where this 'reunification' plan came from, and what the Greek Cypriots were being asked to sign up for. The USA, for its own strategic reasons, would like to see its ally Turkey in the EU. In December 2002, the US deputy defence secretary and prominent neo-con Paul Wolfowitz made a speech to the Institute of Strategic Studies, identifying a solution of the Cyprus 'problem' as the key to Turkish accession.

This gave fresh impetus to UN-sponsored talks which had been in progress since the previous January. The EU's Copenhagen summit agreed to Cypriot membership by 2004 provided the two communities agreed to the UN plan. Otherwise, only the so-called Greek Cypriot part would join.

## Bitter memories

Many Cypriots with bitter memories of the 1974 partition of Cyprus (see 'Forward to a united Cyprus', *Workers Action* No.22)

would have seen any plan sponsored by the US as akin to asking a fox to supervise a hen coop. The plan itself justified the worst suspicions. The proposed loose, federal structure legitimised the 1974 partition, replacing two states with three: not only a Greek and Turkish state, but also a federal authority. None of the laws of any state could override those of any other, guaranteeing a Turkish Cypriot right of veto. There would still be restrictions on the right of free movement and ownership of property, and Greek Cypriot refugees from the north would be obliged to accept compensation in lieu of their lost homes paid not by the Turkish government, whose troops drove them out, but by the Greek Cypriot government!

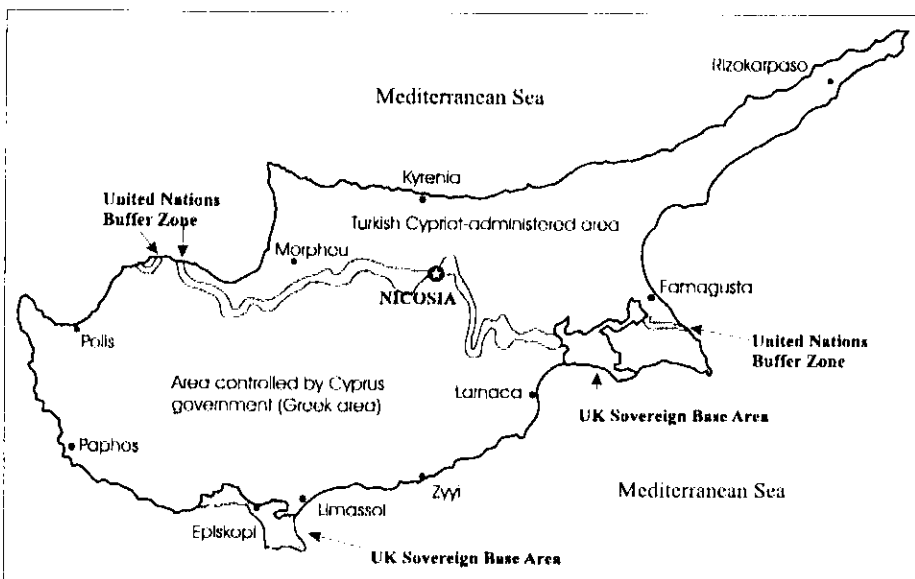
Although some in the Greek Cypriot community were inclined to accept the deal as the best on offer, there were enough objections for the plan to reach a fifth draft by the time of the referendum. Even then, it was too much for most Greek Cypriots to swallow, with opposition ranging from the centre-right president Papadopoulos to the Communist Party, Akel.

## Power sharing

If they had voted 'yes' there would be three mini-states, each with its own parliament, president and constitution. The Greek and Turkish Cypriot mini-states would be forced to compete for central government funds, jobs and investments. In the federal government, there would be 50-50 power sharing, despite the Turkish Cypriots being only 18 per cent of the population as at 1974. Up to 6,000 Turkish troops would stay in Cyprus until 2011, or whenever Turkey joins the EU, whichever is the sooner. The plan would also legitimise the presence in Cyprus of the two 'sovereign bases' – the British bases at Dekhelia and Akrotiri. Eighty thousand Greek Cypriot refugees would be denied the right to return home, having to accept compulsory compensation, and, in some cases, being deprived of access to their former businesses. A further 80,000 could return home only over three and a half years, and 20,000 other refugees could only return to land presently under Turkish Cypriot rule over a period of 18 years. Thus, 'reunified' Cyprus would be the only country in the EU where the EU's supposed fundamental freedoms of movement, ownership and settlement would not operate. It is little wonder that a majority of Greek Cypriots voted 'no'.

## Damaged by sanctions

For the Turkish Cypriots, it was a different story. Their mini-state, damaged by sanctions and lack of international recognition, is six times poorer than its neighbour. Last



year, there were huge demonstrations in the north, demanding that the government there sign up to the plan, and therefore to EU entry.

Crucially, the Turkish government, to which the Turkish Cypriot government is ultimately answerable, supported the two-state solution, thus marginalising Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş and his allies, possibly signalling the beginning of the end of the statelet.

### Renewed isolation

The referendum result is contradictory. While opponents of the plan cannot be blamed for voting against it, the renewed isolation of the Turkish Cypriots from their neighbours is undoubtedly a setback. But that is what comes of tying the interests of Cypriots of both communities to deals hatched in New York, Brussels, or Ankara. Any unity dependent on the interests of the USA, and by extension, Kofi Annan, would have to suit the interests of the USA's ally, Turkey; hence the blatantly partitionist dynamic of Annan's plan. Making EU entry for the whole island dependent on acceptance, by both communities, of a plan that was obviously rigged in favour of Turkey and against the Greek Cypriots was likely to increase divisions in Cyprus, not reduce them.

In 'Forward to a united Cyprus' we reported on the pro-unity demonstrations by Cypriot workers on the brief opening of the border last year, and the potential for working people from both communities to by-pass the politicians. The workers of both communities need to pick up where they left off last year, and build the links among themselves which can lead to a genuine unity of all Cypriots, not the sham unity foisted on them from outside.

WA

## India rejects BJP

Good riddance to the BJP, says **Nick Davies**, but we should remember that it was the Congress Party that introduced economic deregulation and privatisation to India

Former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee clearly thought that his party, the BJP, would win the recent Indian election. 'India shining' was the smug slogan on every billboard. This referred to the current economic boom, which has produced growth rates of eight per cent over the past few years, and has created a new layer of mobile brandishing yuppies, mainly involved in India's flourishing IT industry, and shops overflowing with consumer goods.

India's embrace of neo-liberal economics has produced some conspicuous winners, and some less well-publicised losers. Rural-urban inequalities are as wide as at any time since independence. Small farmers are mired in debt, and 47 per cent of Indian children suffer from malnutrition. To try to contain the opposition provoked by its economic policies, the BJP-dominated coalition government brought in the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). This piece of repressive legislation allows the use of confessions extracted by the police to be admitted as evidence in a court of law, effectively legalising torture. The POTA has been used in a variety of ways to stifle criticism of the government and to intimidate and terrorise those who protest against it. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, the POTA has been used against farmers protesting against the loss of their land.

But of course the BJP-dominated government did not just base itself on neo-liberalism and the growing urban middle class. It was also based on a virulent Hindu nationalism, and so the POTA has also been used against Muslims. In the state of Gujarat, where in 2002 a pogrom left an estimated 2,000 Muslims dead, of the 287 people rounded up under the POTA all but one were Muslim.

The BJP was expected to win the election. That it did not was a surprise. What was also a surprise was that it was rejected in some of the large cities like Delhi and Bombay where it was expected to do well. Although the victorious Congress Party had been courting the votes of the rural population who had been made poorer by BJP policies, it actually lost votes in some areas to the BJP.

While it is good to see the back of Vajpayee, will a government dominated by the Congress Party offer any real change?

The answer is probably not. In opposition to the Hindu nationalism of the BJP, Congress stands for secularism. But there the differences end. Congress is virtually indistinguishable from the BJP on privatisation and on the insane nuclear race with Pakistan. In fact, India's neo-liberal experiment started back in 1991, when Congress was in power. Under prime minister Narasimha Rao, foreign businesses were allowed to own majority stakes in their Indian subsidiaries, or set up wholly-owned subsidiaries in India. And who was regarded as the architect of India's economic deregulation? None other than Rao's finance minister, Manmohan Singh. After Sonia Gandhi listened to her 'inner voice' which told her that the BJP would use her Italian origins to discredit her, and that assassination virtually comes with the job description of being a Congress prime minister, Singh is now in charge. The more things change, the more they stay the same!

Congress will only be able to govern in coalition with smaller regional and leftist parties. The left-wing parties have done well, winning 64 seats out of 545 in the lower house. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI(M), won 43 seats, the Communist Party of India (CPI) won 10, the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party three each, and others, five. This provoked a 17 per cent fall on the Bombay stock exchange, but the yuppies can relax. They should not judge the CPI(M) by its rhetoric. The CPI(M)'s paper, *People's Democracy*, demanded that the new government did not 'succumb to bullying by international finance capital', and yet in West Bengal, a state it has controlled for nearly 30 years, the CPI(M) has been making life easy for multinationals, to the extent that in 2002 the state government amended the labour laws, banning strikes in the information technology sector on the basis that it was an essential service! The CPI(M)'s economic policies should not come as a surprise. It came into being in 1964 as a pro-Chinese split from the CPI, and loudly declares its support for Chinese economic policies, in the name of socialism, of course!

Manmohan Singh summed it up nicely when he said: 'Friends in the left have different perceptions about past economic policies, but they are great patriots. I don't see a problem in working out a programme that is forward-looking, progressive and growth orientated.' He is right, unfortunately. Workers and farmers looking for a respite from the effects of neo-liberalism will almost certainly be disappointed in this new government. For effective political opposition, they will have to look elsewhere.

WA

Subscribe to  
**Workers  
ACTION**

6 issues £6.00 (UK)  
£12.00 (outside UK)

Send your name, address  
and payment to  
**Workers Action**  
PO Box 7268  
London E10 6TX

# Ethnic cleansing in the Sudan

**Bob Wood** explains why Britain and the United States are reluctant to put pressure on the Sudanese government to halt ethnic cleansing in Darfur

Almost unnoticed by the media in the West, and apparently of little concern to the major world powers, ethnic cleansing, on a scale which dwarfs any in the former state of Yugoslavia, has unfolded over the last six months in western Sudan, in Darfur. An estimated one million black Africans, mainly farmers, have been driven from their homes by Arab militias, at least 10,000 have died, and approximately 100,000 have sought refuge in the neighbouring country of Chad.

There have been clashes between Africans and Arabs before, but nothing like this. As the Sahara has gradually crept southwards, nomadic Arab herders of camels and cattle have gradually intruded more and more onto land inhabited by African subsistence farmers – the Fur and Massaleit. The third main black African group in Darfur, the Zaghawa, are like the Arabs largely camel herders. There has been previous conflict over access to water and grazing rights. In 1987-9, fighting took place between Arab nomads and Fur farmers, the Arabs working together as the 'Arab Gathering' and adopting a thinly veiled racist ideology. They stressed their superiority as the people who brought wealth, knowledge and civilisation to the region. The racial nature of the current conflict is underlined by the fact that both Arabs and Africans are Muslims.

In response to what they saw as the continued marginalisation of the Darfur region,

and the lack of development, two rebel movements were launched in early 2003, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Both have similar political programmes, but whereas the SLA wants the separation of religion and state (sharia law operates in those parts of the Sudan controlled by the Khartoum government), the JEM is said to have links to radical Islamic groups.

In what it says is its attempt to crush the rebel movement, the Sudanese government has increasingly come to rely on Arab militias known as the Janjaweed, mounted on horses or camels. Although the government denies that it has any links with the Janjaweed, reports by survivors of attacks on villages tell a different story. It is clear that the Sudanese government is complicit in the ethnic cleansing which has little relationship to the war against the rebels.

A common pattern emerges from the survivors' accounts. First a village is surveyed or bombed from the air by Sudanese planes or helicopter gunships. A day or so later the Janjaweed arrive on horseback, supported by the army, who stay at a discrete distance on the outskirts of the village. The Janjaweed then enter the village, killing any boys or men who have not managed to flee, loot and pillage, burn the huts, and rape any women they can find. Time and again, refugees say that the Janjaweed, as they attack, shout 'Kill the Nuer! Kill the Nuer!' (the Nuer are a people in central Sudan, and the name is used as a general term for any black African). A few days later, the helicopter gunships return, to ensure that the village has not been reoccupied – if so, the village is likely to be attacked again.

The Sudanese government has shown considerable reluctance to negotiate with the rebels of the SLA and the JEM. There have been some talks chaired by the president of Chad, which resulted in a ceasefire agreement, lasting about as long as it took for the ink to dry. The Chadian president, although he is a Zaghawa (they live on both sides of the border), is nevertheless deeply compromised by the assistance he was given by the Sudanese when he came to power.

In spite of the universally acknowledged scale of the disaster in Darfur, the United States and United Kingdom governments have been remarkably muted in their admonishment of the Sudanese government, even though the United Nations has been more forthright. To understand the reticence of the US and the UK, it is necessary to look at the ongoing peace talks between the Sudanese government and the southern rebel movement, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), to end

the 20-year-old civil war.

For the last ten years, talks have been underway, supervised by the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), in which the US, the UK, Italy and Norway act as mediators.

Over the last two years the two sides have come very close to a final agreement, and it is out of fear that these peace talks could be jeopardised that the US and the UK are so reluctant to put pressure on the Sudan government.

But why are the peace talks so important to the US and UK? The answer is, not unsurprisingly, oil. Probably the major player in the Sudanese oil industry at present is China, through the China National Petroleum Company. BP has holdings in PetroChina, a subsidiary of the CNPC. The Gulf Petroleum Corporation (Qatar) is also involved in exploiting Sudan's oil, and finance also comes from India, Malaysia and France. Two British companies, Rolls Royce and Weir Pumps, supply the CNPC with equipment. Since the ceasefire, and the resumption of exploration, more potential fields have been found in the centre and east of the country. If the political problems can be solved, there are rich pickings in the offing for British and American oil companies.

Meanwhile a million people in western Sudan face famine. The Sudanese government continues to drag its feet in response to UN requests to allow humanitarian aid or independent monitors. And the rainy season is approaching, creating enormous problems for the distribution of aid, even if the Sudanese gave their permission. **WA**

## Special offer Workers ACTION

**Back issues**  
Numbers 1 to 20

**Price £10.00 plus p&p**

For postage and packing add:  
UK – £6.00, Europe – £10.00  
Americas, Middle East, Africa, South  
and South-East Asia – £20.00  
East Asia, Australasia – £22.00

Workers Action  
PO Box 7268  
London E10 6TX

Check out the  
**Workers ACTION**  
website:

[www.workersaction.org.uk](http://www.workersaction.org.uk)

for a selection of articles  
from back issues

# Between chauvinism and neo- liberalism

Sri Lanka's general election in April swept the right-wing UNP from office. But the alternative isn't much better. **A. Janaka** reports from Colombo

The general election in Sri Lanka on April 2 saw the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) – the popular front alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the petty-bourgeois left-populist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front - JVP) – winning the largest bloc of seats. It won 105 seats, 8 short of an overall majority in the 225-seat parliament. The result leaves Kumaratunga's government dependent on the votes of smaller parties.

The main opposition party, the bourgeois United National Party (UNP), led by Ranil Wickremasinghe, won 82 seats. The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), which has the largest following among Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin, contested the election on the UNP ticket, winning 99,785 votes and 8 seats in its hill country stronghold of Nuwara Eliya. Since the 1970s, the CWC has supported successive capitalist coalition governments, and its leaders have served as cabinet ministers. Militant trade unions have yet to emerge in the plantations to challenge the CWC's sway. Its rival in the hill country, the Up-Country People's Front (UPF), received 42,582 votes and won one seat. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, which had a mutual pact with the UNP, obtained 9 seats.

For voters in the Tamil majority areas of the north and east held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) during the long running guerrilla war, it was the first time that national elections had taken place for two decades. The Tamil National Alli-

ance (TNA), the four-party alliance supported by the LTTE, won 22 seats in Tamil majority areas, and emerged as the third largest parliamentary group. The anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a formerly militant Tamil group, won one seat.

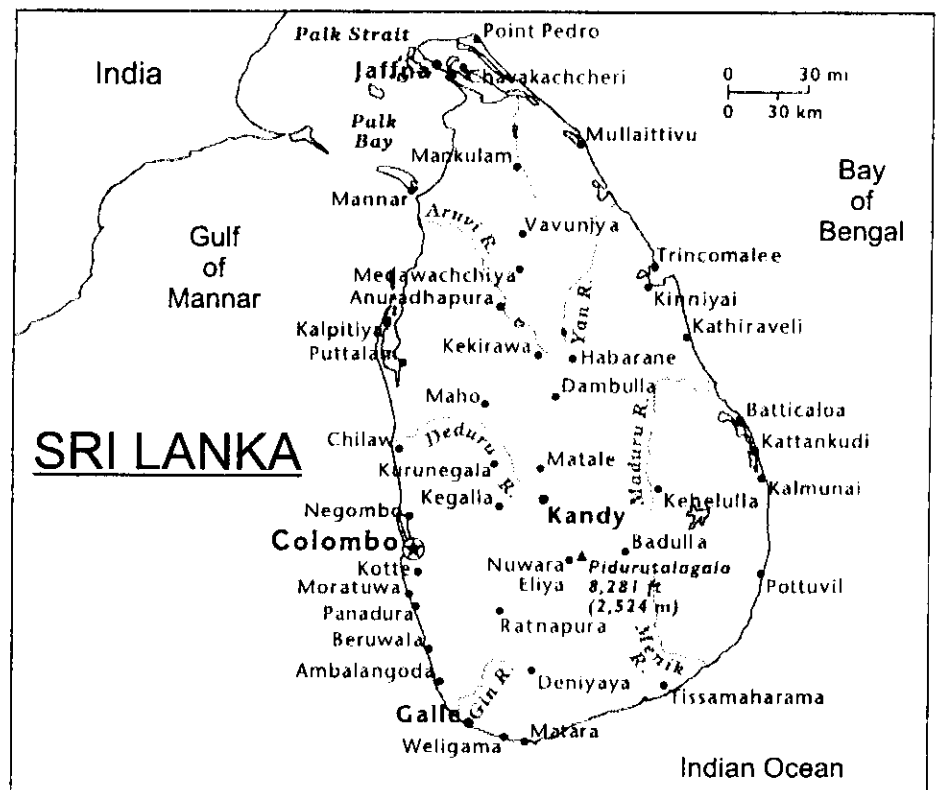
## Chauvinism

The far left parties, which campaigned against the strident Sinhalese chauvinism of most of the other parties and for an end to ethnic conflict through a negotiated settlement, saw their vote halved.

The Communist Party (CP) and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) – the traditional left parties – decided to support the UPFA on the eve of the election, as they have done on previous occasions. The CP won one seat, while the LSSP – once the Ceylon section of the Fourth International and the country's largest opposition party – lost its sitting MP, a Buddhist monk. The LSSP was thrown into crisis when Professor Tissa Vitharana, nephew of the late LSSP leader N.M. Perera, accepted the position of minister of science and technology in the new government without party approval.

But while the LSSP disapproved of the Sinhalese chauvinist elements of the UPFA's campaign, it couldn't bring itself to discipline Vitharana. This in turn led to the resignation of general secretary Baitty Weerakoon, who had been left off the UPFA's list, and his replacement by Wimalasiri de Mel on April 18.

A notable feature of the elections was



the entry on to the political stage of the Jaiika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage – JHU), a grouping of Buddhist monks that won 9 seats. The JHU emerged from the following of the popular television broadcaster and Buddhist monk, Soma Thero. He became ill during a visit to Russia to receive an honorary degree and died there. His followers believed his death was not from natural causes, and it gave rise to conspiracy theories that Christian evangelical sects were responsible.

His funeral in Colombo on December 24, 2003, was a huge event, with enormous crowds. In almost every street, banners, posters and funeral decorations were put up. Videotapes of his sermons were played to the mourning crowds on huge screens. Sinhalese chauvinist groups, including Buddhist monks, used the occasion for political mobilisation and anti-Christian agitation.

Through his weekly broadcasts, Thero had projected 'the image of a fearless religious reformer'. 'Socially and politically conservative,' he was 'devastating in his critique and even denunciation of what he believed was the cunning and manipulation of Tamil and Muslim traders at the expense of the hapless Sinhalese Buddhists.' (Polity, Colombo, Jan-Feb 2004) He founded a small political party in December 2001, and announced he would contest the next presidential election on a platform of Sinhalese Buddhist political interests. However, on its first appearance in parliament on April 22, the JHU suffered a split, with two monks from its group breaking ranks to support Kumaratunga's new coalition government.

### Setback

The first sitting of the new parliament also saw a setback for the UPEA government, when it failed to get its candidate for speaker elected. The opposition candidate, former leader of the House and former minister of Buddhist affairs W.J.M. Lokubandara, secured 110 votes while the government candidate, veteran Communist Party member D.E.W. Gunasekara, polled 109 votes. Kumaratunga is now canvassing the support of smaller parties to muster a working majority in parliament.

The JVP won 16.3 per cent and 41 seats – a significant increase on the 9.1 per cent and 16 seats it won in 2001. The JVP supported the SLFP-led People's Alliance government in the short-lived parliament of 2000–2001. Kumaratunga dissolved parliament in October 2001, after a number of Muslim MPs had defected from her coalition, and an alliance between the SLFP and JVP began in the run-up to the elections in December that year. Despite a broad understanding, differences persisted be-

tween the two parties on the national question and the resolution to the 20-year long guerrilla war in the North and East, with the JVP strongly opposed to devolution in the Tamil majority areas.

### Uneasy

The period from December 2001 to November 2003 saw an uneasy cohabitation between President Kumaratunga and the UNP-led United National Front government. On November 4, the country was plunged into political crisis, when Kumaratunga suspended parliament, sacked three ministers and brought the army on to the streets of Colombo in a dispute over talks with the Tamil Tigers.

In the run up to the election, the UNF government was shaken by strikes by state sector employees in support of long-standing wage demands. Widespread opposition to the government's privatisation measures found expression in protest campaigns and in workers picketing state-run retail outlets, which the government was planning to sell off to private supermarket chains.

The opposition parties in the UPEA mobilised the support of these workers during the campaign, by promising to put on hold some of the privatisation plans, provide jobs for 27,000 unemployed graduates, and increase subsidies to farmers. They also promised to address pensioners' demands. Pensioners complained that they have been pauperised because their

pensions are no longer linked to the cost of living index.

Shortly after the election, Kumaratunga invited Norway to resume its role as facilitator in peace talks with the Tamil Tigers. The previous government had agreed to a ceasefire in February 2002, and accepted the LTTE as sole representative of the Tamils in the North and East. The LTTE was no longer proscribed and six rounds of talks took place.

In June 2003, the Tigers boycotted a donors' conference in Japan, and in October put forward a proposal for 'an interim self-governing authority for the North-East'. The LTTE has been fighting since 1983 for an independent state in a bitter conflict that has killed 60,000 people. The fragile ceasefire has, however, held for the last two years.

The JVP, for its part, has now muted its stance on the peace process. Previously, together with the Patriotic National Movement, which had the support of leading UNP figures, it had vigorously campaigned against Norway's role.

Summing up the differences between the two main parties, G.L. Peries, who defected from the SLFP to the UNF on the eve of the 2001 elections, and was the UNF's chief negotiator with the LTTE, says: 'Quite candidly, if you look at the substantive policy with respect to both the economy and the peace process, the differences are marginal. They relate at most to matters of nuance.'

WA

### Pamphlets from

## *Prinkipo Press*

### **Lenin and the First World War**

by Roman Rosdolsky

£1.95

### **What Next? and other writings from 1917**

by Leon Trotsky

£2.00

### **How the Bolsheviks organised the unemployed**

by Sergei Malyshev

£1.95

### **Roumania and Bessarabia**

by Christian Rakovsky

£1.50

### **Class Struggle in the Second World War: The 1944**

### **Police Raid on the RCP**

by Jack Gale

£1.95

**Post and packing – each 50p (UK), £1.00 (Europe), £1.50 (rest of the world)**

Prinkipo Press, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX



# Tribute to Al Richardson

About a hundred comrades, friends and family members attended a meeting in London's Conway Hall on March 13 to commemorate the life of the socialist historian and activist, Al Richardson. **Richard Price** gave the following tribute on behalf of Workers Action

First of all, let me say that it's an honour to be invited to speak today. I'm aware there are many comrades here that knew Al better than I did, and for much longer, so if I concentrate on the aspects of his life that I'm familiar with, I also know it won't reflect the whole of his life.

I'm also aware that a number of Al's interests – Egyptology, hieroglyphics, ancient history and ancient languages – are among the areas where my knowledge is either woefully inadequate or non-existent.

I've been to a fair number of farewells for comrades on the left over the years, but I can honestly say that I have never felt as emotional as when I came out of Al's funeral. Not only was it the sense that Al had been taken from us at the height of his powers – full of life, producing books faster than many could afford to buy them, brimming with projects and plans for publishing more. It was also that Al's talents were unique and irreplaceable. He was a fiercely intelligent, critical thinker, with a store of historical knowledge that was unequalled on the left internationally.

Al and I came from different political generations. I began to get involved on the left a few years after Al had left the Chartist group. What passed for revolutionary activity in those days – paper selling on the streets, and getting cold and wet canvassing council estates – meant that our paths didn't cross for a long time.

## Negative

I first became aware of Al and Sam Bornstein's two books on the Trotskyist movement in Britain in 1987. My initial reaction was quite negative. By placing the experiences of comrades from the 1930s and 40s on what seemed to be a pedestal, they seemed to be denigrating the efforts of those who came in the decades after. (Of course they *were* to some extent, as

they made clear in the preface to *The War and the International!*)

What were the ideas that seemed so heretical then? The proposition that Trotskyism was 'a Marxist critique of Stalinism' that was 'merely the form taken by Marxism during the epoch of the defeat of the world proletariat' carried the implication that it would cease to exist as a distinct strand of Marxist thinking with the collapse of Stalinism.

The suggestion that 'the true home of revolutionary ideas is the trade union or Labour Party meeting', and not the sects that many of us cut our political teeth in, seemed to erode the necessity for a Marxist vanguard party.

The dismissive remark about 'civil service clerks' – whom Sam and Al identified with the middle class! – was evidently aimed at my own union (then the CPUSA), as if it was the fault of the left that large parts of the blue-collar working class of the 1940s no longer existed.

Only when I re-read the two books, particularly *The War and the International*, did the importance of the lessons Al and Sam drew from the demise of the RCP in the late 1940s really sink in.

## Inspired

What set these books apart was their inspired combination of oral history and close attention to the documentary record. They were streets ahead of almost all the oral history that began to be published in the 1970s, much of which indulged the interviewee so much that it encouraged rambling and self-justification.

At the time these books came out, much of the left dismissed the veterans of the 1930s and 40s – with the exception of the handful still active in their own groups – as hopeless sectarians whose time had passed. Al and Sam restored the voices of those pioneers to their rightful place, and in doing so undermined much of the myth-making the main groups on the left had engaged in.

Such an approach wasn't going to win many friends among the leaders of the left. But it did influence a lot of people. Speaking last night to a good friend and comrade in Wales, he told me that *The War and the International* was responsible for his rethinking his entire attitude towards building a socialist leadership.

The decision in 1988 through Socialist Platform to launch a journal dedicated to excavating the history of the revolutionary movement didn't come at an auspicious time. It was the aftermath of the miners' strike – a period of fragmentation and demoralisation on the left.

Al was the driving force in bringing together a dedicated group, which, despite

containing a range of different, almost incompatible views, managed to work together. The rest, as they say, is *Revolutionary History*. Some 30 issues – many of them book length – later, the journal is the foremost of its kind internationally.

Al always intended it to be a journal primarily intended for practitioners in socialist politics that kept a healthy distance from academic labour history, for which, with a few honourable exceptions, Al had a very low regard. It has maintained the most scrupulous standards of scholarship with hardly any of the support a journal of its type could expect from academia.

I'm reminded of a slightly heated exchange in which a comrade now prominent in the media accused Al of being the trainspotter of Trotskyism. Al was indignant that the work he'd put into the journal could be dismissed in such a way. But in another sense, and in the nicest way, Al did have some of the attributes of a trainspotter. I once offered him a high quality facsimile of a rare journal the Socialist Platform library lacked. But Al said he preferred to carry on the search for an original!

Al was an orthodox Marxist who at the same time held orthodoxy in very low esteem. Although he could quote the works of the great Marxists like scripture, he also had a restless intellect that wasn't content with simply repeating formulae derived from very different situations.

## Collapse

The collapse of Stalinism did have an impact on him, as it did with the whole of the left. With Al, I think, it removed any thought that the existing 'Fourth Internationals' were capable of rising to the tasks confronting the left. On a number of occasions, I remember him remarking that the only people on the left who did anticipate the collapse were those around the journal *Critique*, which lay much closer to the world of academia than Al liked to be.

Al's introduction to the collection *In Defence of the Russian Revolution*, published in 1995, is an interesting reflection of the development of his thinking. There he develops the idea of a state whose initial contradictions were resolved in 'a process in the direction of purely bourgeois norms'.

Al increasingly was not a knee jerk defender of the theory of the deformed workers' state. Privately, at least, he would admit that while he found neither convincing, both Shachtmanite bureaucratic collectivism and the theory of state capitalism exposed weaknesses in traditional Trotskyist theory, which had lain largely undeveloped for over half a century.

This leads me on to say that although a

gulf separated Al from anarchism and various other strands of ultra-leftism, he was always generous in acknowledging debts where they proved to have been correct on key issues, or had played a real role in revolutionary struggles.

### Mischievous

Al embodied other paradoxes. He cultivated the air of a man older than his years, yet he delighted in a mischievous, laddish sense of humour you might expect in someone half his age.

Al was about as far as you could get from being a trendy teacher. In fact, apart from his evident affection for his children, I found it hard to imagine Al relating to young people as a teacher – his profession for over three decades. Yet at Al's funeral you couldn't help being impressed by the numbers of pupils, past and present, who took time to pay their tribute to him, and also by the tributes of colleagues who didn't share many, if any, of Al's political views, but who held his dedication and scholarship in such esteem.

Al didn't suffer fools gladly. He didn't tolerate intellectual laziness, at least on the part of those who had the education and time to do better. But if you had a serious point of view, and could back it up, even if it was strongly opposed to his own, he would take it seriously.

Al believed passionately in vigorous and free debate among Marxists. He hated stage managed events as much as he hated pretentiousness, pomposity and hagiography. Just as some of his incendiary book reviews were calculated to offend, so his debating style sometimes took few prisoners. But in the bar afterwards, differences were laid to rest with suitable liquid accompaniment!

He had a string of nicknames and anecdotes about almost every group on the left, which were as irreverent as they could be and which I won't repeat here in the interests of working class unity!

But Al was anything but a cynic. How often I rang Al up with a half memory of a quotation, with only the vaguest idea of where it came from, or pestered him for obscure information on the national question, religions, and other by-ways of history. He was unfailingly generous with his time.

And despite the professional Yorkshireman exterior, Al was a very sensitive and kind man inside. He had a real feeling for the veterans he and Sam interviewed in the 1970s and 80s, and kept in touch with. He combined contempt for left wing Third Worldism, whether it was the cults of Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh or the rest, with a real regard for revolutionaries in non-metropolitan countries.

In this spirit, Al wouldn't forgive us if we made him out to be a saint. He could be tetchy and irritable, he could take deep offence over secondary questions, and he harboured a few grudges that went back over 30 years. When Al sent up the politics of 'don't nuke gay whales' he did it partly from a conviction that the left had collectively retreated from class politics, partly from I think an overly class reductionist position on issues such as national, racial and sexual oppression. But you also sensed that his pose as the unreconstructed Yorkshireman had a strong element of self parody.

It is surely ironic that Al seems to be at least as well known in Sri Lanka and Argentina as he is here. In Britain, of course, many were interested in the archival material Al played such a role in unearthing, translating and editing. But much of what he had to say himself the left didn't want to hear.

### Paradox

Al thought the history of post Second World War sect building had been mostly a disaster. At the same time, he knew that the activists on the left were the ones you had to relate to, even if he disagreed with them strongly. So Al embodied the paradox that he was the staunch defender of the tradition of a movement from which he

felt deeply estranged.

It's customary on these occasions to mention how much you regret not taking up the chances to meet up. From time to time, Al, Clarence, Lizzy and I would sit round the dinner table, and consume appropriate quantities of wine. If, more often than not, I didn't take up Al's invitations to meet up in pubs, it was sometimes because I was too busy, sometimes because I lacked the funds, and also because I lack an industrial capacity for beer drinking. Along with other comrades, I found that dinner at Al's could sometimes consist entirely of liquids!

### Rich legacy

Al has left us an exceptionally rich legacy of writings, of books, and particularly of the journal *Revolutionary History*. He freely admitted that his strengths didn't lie in the economic and philosophical components of Marxism. They lay in a body of strategic thinking, in a deep understanding of long historical processes and of the way they moulded the structures and consciousness of the institutions of the working class.

But most of all, I shall miss him as a warm, generous man, a friend of enormous convictions, whose contributions will be looked to by all those with a commitment to building a socialist future. **WA**

## Revolutionary History

Current issue

Vol. 8, No. 3

### The Balkan Socialist Tradition – Balkan Socialism and the Balkan Federation, 1871-1915

Includes sections on:

- The Origins of the Balkan Socialist Tradition: Between Populism and Marxism
- Marxism and the Eastern Question: Challenging the Orthodoxy 1896-97
- Bulgarian Socialism and the Macedonian National Liberation Movement, 1903-08
- The Revolution in Turkey and the Balkan Federation
- The Annexation of Bosnia by Austria-Hungary in 1908
- The Balkan Federation and Balkan Social Democracy
- The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and the Balkan Federation
- The First World War and the Balkan Federation

Price £12.95. Plus UK postage £2.00. For elsewhere, rates on request.

Cheques or IMOs in £ sterling only please, made out to Socialist Platform Ltd. To pay by credit card, send two e-mails, the first with half the digits, the second with the remaining digits plus the expiry date to: Barry.Buitekant@tesco.net

**Socialist Platform Ltd, BCM 7646, London WC1N 3XX, UK**

<http://www.revolutionary-history.co.uk>

# Fred Jackson

## 1916-2004

### Veteran of the 1930s and 40s

With the passing of Fred Jackson, who died aged 87 on March 3, another link with the pre-war and wartime revolutionary movement has been broken.

Born into an Independent Labour Party family in Scotland in 1916, Fred grew up 'on a diet of socialist discussion', as he noted in his foreword to Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson's *The War and the International*. His father, who was selected as an I.L.P. candidate for Ayrshire County Council in 1929, lost his job when he refused to accept an ultimatum from his Tory employer – who was chairman of the council – to withdraw from the election. For two years the family lived on the dole.

Fred joined the I.L.P. aged 16, shortly after it disaffiliated from the Labour Party, and remained active in it for seven years, first in Ayrshire, then Glasgow, and finally in London, where he moved in late 1937. Shortly afterwards, he came into contact with Trotskyist ideas, and in 1938 joined the newly formed Workers International League, which embodied the revolutionary ideas and practice he had been searching for. The next decade, spent in hectic agitation in the W.I.L. and then the Revolutionary Communist Party, he later described as 'the ten most satisfying years of my life'.

In 1939, he wrote an important internal document for the W.I.L. on how to work productively in the trade unions and the Labour Party, warning of the dangers of 'talking down' to workers, the overuse of Marxist jargon, and of '100 per cent revolutionary slogans'.

In 1940, Fred was one of four Trotskyists arrested in connection with obtaining a small number of documents that could be stamped to exempt people from military service on medical grounds. Since the policy of the W.I.L. was not to

oppose conscription, but to 'go where the workers were', this seems to have been something of a freelance operation to keep a small number of key militants out of the forces! The four were initially charged with stealing, receiving, conspiring to steal and conspiring to receive the cards, and while on remand a fifth charge of doing these things 'with intent to assist the enemy' was added, which carried a maximum sentence of 20 years.

At the trial in December, Fred conducted his own defence, taking the main responsibility on himself, and making a speech to the jury outlining revolutionary principles that lasted for an hour and a quarter. The speech succeeded in dispelling any idea that the Trotskyists were in league with the Nazis, and Fred, who the judge identified as the 'leader of the conspiracy', was given a two-year prison sentence. In jail, he continued making socialist propaganda, and even in the Fleet Air Arm, into which he was subsequently conscripted, he managed to sell his regular order of three dozen copies of *Socialist Appeal*.

Like many others, the crisis and disintegration of the RCP in 1947-8 propelled him out of active politics. But, as his foreword to *The War and the International* makes clear, he retained his fundamental Marxist beliefs. In later years, he became a keen supporter of the magazine *Revolutionary History*. He also subscribed to *Workers Action*, and before that to *Workers News*, and it was typical of his generosity that shortly before his death he sent us a donation of £50.

Richard Price

Become a  
**Workers ACTION**  
supporter

Send us a minimum of £15  
per year and we will send  
you the magazine and details  
of campaigns, supporters'  
meetings, etc

Workers Action  
PO Box 7268  
London E10 6TX

## Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism

Alfred Rosmer  
Boris Souvarine, Emile Fabrol  
and Antoine Clavez

with an introduction by  
Al Richardson

**Price £10.00**

Available from  
Francis Boutle Publishers  
Tel: 020-8889 7744

email:  
trotsky@francisboutle.demon.co.uk  
www.francisboutle.demon.co.uk

# Introduction

Richard Price

Bert Cochran, the author of the article that follows, was a senior figure in the Socialist Workers Party of the United States, and the leader of its autoworkers' fraction. In 1939-40, he supported the majority of the SWP, led by James P. Cannon, against the Burnham-Shachtman minority.

By the early 1950s, the radical upsurge among American workers at the end of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath had given way to the period of profound reaction synonymous with McCarthyism.

With the advent of the Cold War, a frenzied atmosphere of witch-hunting descended, from the denunciation of former State Department official Alger Hiss as a Communist agent in 1948, through the activities of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and reaching a climax with the trial and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in June 1953.

Although many accounts of the period have concentrated on the impact of the witch-hunt on Hollywood, the tentacles of HUAC extended deep into the workers' movement. Although the Communist Party was at the centre of the witch-hunt, members of the much smaller SWP were by no means exempt from its attentions.

Internationally, the situation had been transformed by the results of the Second World War. The common perception on both right and left was that the world was divided into two camps. In the Soviet Union, senile reaction pervaded the last years of Stalin. Radical nationalism had begun to spread in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, but it had as yet won few major victories. In Europe, the Trotskyists remained small groups that had been unable to pose a serious challenge to the authority of the mass communist and social democratic parties. To develop a viable perspective for revolutionary socialists in the United States – a minority within an embattled minority – was no easy task under such conditions.

This, then, was the background to the faction struggle which took place in the SWP in 1952-3, and precipitated an international split in the Trotskyist movement. In the mythology of 'orthodox Trotskyism', the Cochran-Clarke minority within this struggle are demonised as arch-Pabloite, pro-Stalinist 'liquidators'. In fact, although some of their views on Stalinism were certainly mistaken, they did raise some very pertinent questions.

The label of liquidators, borrowed from

Bolshevik polemics against the right wing of the Mensheviks who wanted to 'liquidate' the party's illegal apparatus after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, was also ill-judged. One of Cochran and Clarke's charges was that the strident anti-Stalinism of the Cannonite majority was a cover for largely abstaining from defending the CP against the witch-hunt, thereby safeguarding its own legality.

The main document of the Cochran-Clarke faction, 'The Roots of the Party Crisis – Its Causes and Solution',<sup>1</sup> had some weak sides. Overall, its point of departure was that a third world war was impending, and that it would take the form of an 'international civil war' between 'two hostile class camps'. Following the line of the Third World Congress of the Fourth International, Cochran-Clarke accepted the view that the mass Communist Parties would, under the impact of mass pressure and under certain conditions, be obliged to 'project a revolutionary orientation'. All of this was not only highly schematic and fatalistic, but proven wrong by subsequent events.

But the minority did land some important blows in its characterisation of the SWP as a routinist and essentially conservative grouping. The fetishisation of its own organisational independence led to sterile propagandism. Its shrill anti-Stalinism – at the height of the witch-hunt – walled it off from the significant layers of workers influenced by the CP, and it relegated the demand for a Labour Party to a minor question.

The following document, described as 'Draft Resolution Adopted by National Board, April 27, 1954', was first published in Volume 1, No. 3 of *The Educator* (May 1954), an internal publication of the Socialist Union of America – the group set up after the minority was expelled in November 1953. (The pretext for the expulsion was that the minority had boycotted an SWP banquet to commemorate 25 years of its paper, *The Militant*!)

It, too, has its weak and its strong sides. Its perspective is thoroughly wrong, but it does represent an honest and serious attempt to grapple with the problem of what Marxists should *do*, and towards which forces they should orient.

Most importantly, it upholds the idea of Marxists seeking to integrate themselves into real workers' movements and organisations, rather than the squabbling, self-important irrelevance that has characterised so much of the history of the left in the United States.

Al Hansen, in his introduction to the volume of Cannon's writings that covers the faction fight, wrote dismissively that: 'After the split, the Cochranites set up their

own organisation whose activity consisted almost solely of promoting the *American Socialist*, the magazine they founded. But after about five years together they split, each group going its own way and soon disintegrating. They simply disappeared from the political scene, with only a handful of their former members visibly active in left politics.'<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, a recent article, outlining some of the Socialist Union's efforts at regroupment in the 1950s, and praising the quality of its journal, concludes: '... the Cochranites represent one of the most advanced and sustained efforts to apply a classical Marxist analysis to American society in the mid 20th century. The fact that they failed to build a new Marxist left is not an indictment of their methodology nor their analyses. They were just ahead of their time. If a new Marxist left in the United States is to succeed today, it will be along the lines set down by Socialist Union.'<sup>3</sup>

One of Cochran's main supporters, Harry Frankel, went on – as Harry Braverman – to become the author of the well-known book *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.<sup>4</sup> Readers who want to form an opinion on these conflicting assessments of Cochran and his supporters will find a large number of documents on line.<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See James P. Cannon, *Speeches to the Party*, Pathfinder, 1973, pp.338-399.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> [www.columbia.edu/~ljp3/mydocs/american\\_left/Cochranite.htm](http://www.columbia.edu/~ljp3/mydocs/american_left/Cochranite.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Monthly Review Press, 1989; see also Michael D. Yates, 'Braverman and the Class Struggle', *Monthly Review*, January 1999; and [www.findarticles.com/cf\\_dls/m1132/8\\_50/53972886/p1/article.jhtml](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m1132/8_50/53972886/p1/article.jhtml)

<sup>5</sup> [www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspaper/amersocialist/American\\_Socialist.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspaper/amersocialist/American_Socialist.htm)

WA

## What Next? Marxist discussion journal

Subscriptions: £10 for 6 issues  
(£12 overseas)

Sterling only cheques payable to  
'What Next?/R.Pitt' please.  
24 Georgiana Street  
London NW1 0EA

<http://mysite.freemove.com/whatnext>

# Our Orientation

Bert Cochran

The discussion in the SWP ended abruptly with our expulsion in November 1953 before a number of important political questions had been clarified. Lacking confidence in his own ideas, and in the outcome of the debate, Cannon's method was one of solving a political problem by organisational means.

We, on our part, had made a good start in explaining the meaning and the consequences of the new world reality as embodied in the whole complex of contributions of the Third World Congress. We provided a scientific analysis for the first time in many years of the political reality in the United States. We began setting down with precision the place of the SWP within that reality. We elaborated a realistic approach to the Stalinists. We ripped apart the make-believe world in which the Cannonites were dwelling; we challenged the fruitless round of 'campaign activities' with which they kept themselves and their supporters stupefied, and we began to devise a tactical platform of work suitable to our position within the general political framework in the country.

But two main contributions – the interpretation of the international reality, and the analysis and practical platform of national activity – still left a gap. It was still necessary to re-evaluate the whole broad perspective, both national and international, of our movement. This was not an arbitrary or artificial problem capriciously posed, or sucked out of some individual's thumb. It derived logically and necessarily both from the situation of our cadres in relation to the world reality and the progress of the discussion up to that point.

It was futile at first to become embroiled in a discussion with the Cannonites on our role in the world when there was no agreement on the analysis of what the world was like today or what it would become in the ensuing years. Obviously it would be one thing if a major deal between the Kremlin and imperialism was in the offing, another if we faced a showdown on the broad basis of the present alignment of forces. It would be one thing if we recognised the consequences of the sweeping changes of post-war development (Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China, the developments in British Labour, etc.), another if we considered them temporary stages on the road back to the pre-war situation. We had no common ground from which to begin the most important side of the discussion that had been projected but not developed by the Third World Congress.

It will help place the problem in its proper setting if we recapitulate a few of the high points of the previous discussion; a discussion, let it be noted, brought on by the crisis of world Trotskyism after the sec-

ond world war.

The international discussion began, properly speaking, with our debate in the SWP in 1949 over Eastern Europe. Cannon understood at once, far more clearly than others, that the debate raised the question point blank of the role of the Fourth International. 'If you say,' Cannon declared, 'that capitalism can be destroyed by an agency other than world Trotskyism, then what remains of our role? We would at best be reduced to democratic critics of the Stalinists.' And since Cannon could see neither profit nor future in that kind of a movement, he solved the problem by denying reality, shutting his eyes to what was actually going on, and contriving a make-believe world for himself and his supporters. In this world everything remained as Trotsky had left it at his death. In Eastern Europe they had capitalism. The Stalinists were betraying right and left precisely as they had done in Spain. We were the only revolutionary opposition. And when the workers got more radical, they would lift us on their shoulders. It was a pretty picture, and a formally logical one, too. The only thing wrong with it was that it did not correspond to the facts, either in the United States, or any other major country of the world.

As the ensuing discussion and the further objective developments blew this construction out of the water, Cannon and his supporters took refuge in an eclectic patch quilt kind of perspective. They admitted that capitalism had been shattered in Eastern Europe by the Stalinists from the top. They admitted that quasi-Stalinist parties successfully led revolutions in China and Yugoslavia. But in the rest of the world, above all in the United States, everything remained as before, and we could continue along the old accustomed lines.

Sensing that their whole perspective was in danger of being blown to bits, they instinctively felt the necessity of building around themselves a 'Chinese Wall' to insulate themselves against the disturbing thoughts and embarrassing developments seeping in from the outside world. This explains the rise of the Messianic ideology in the SWP, the theory that the leadership has been ordained to lead the revolution if it only sticks together come what may, if it never questions the faith, if it never turns right or left to gaze at other Gods, lest this lead to destruction. Because surely it cannot be, they reasoned, that all this sacrifice and virtue will go unrewarded by History. The Cannonites thus 'solved' the question of the perspective of world Trotskyism by semi religious invocation and dedication, and the mysticism and cult of an ordained leadership. That is one answer to the problem, for whatever it is

worth.

How have we on our part solved this burning question? It is unnecessary here to repeat the world analysis that has been written down in many documents. Let us simply sum up some of the conclusions of the present reality: We see a world where our perspective of Stalinism being destroyed in the course of World War II has been proven wrong. We see a world where Stalinism is dominant over the eastern half of Europe, where the Communist parties are the leadership of the colonial revolution in Asia, where they constitute the strongest organisations of the working class in Italy and France. In the rest of the Western world, Social Democracy has been resuscitated, and in the United States, where labour has not yet advanced to an independent political existence, the reformist labour bureaucracy remains dominant. One of the recent International documents states that the Fourth International enters the next stage of upsurge in a far superior position to that of 1939, but that is just rhetoric. The truth of the matter is that the Trotskyist organisations are not stronger today at all than at the Founding Conference in 1938, even if we disregard the matter of the present split. The Trotskyist movements in their twenty-five years of existence have been unable to grow into mass organisations for a variety of reasons which have been exhaustively analysed and explained. The two lone exceptions to this, by their specialised character, even further underline this fact.

The Cannonites still retain the outlived perspective, however, that the small nuclei will tomorrow become the mass revolutionary parties challenging all contenders and destroying them in battle. But a more realistic perspective based on the actual world trends is sketched out in the recent International resolution on 'Our Integration in the Real Mass Movement'. (We reprint elsewhere certain concrete amendments and criticisms of the document. Here we confine ourselves to the main purpose of this document.)

Basing itself on our previous analysis of the world situation, the resolution finds that we are living in a profoundly revolutionary period where the relationship of forces is developing favourably for the revolution, and that consequently the existing mass Communist and Social Democratic parties are subjected to unprecedented pressure. This situation, as experience has demonstrated in England, France and Italy, does not lead to splits and new formations, but remains locked within the confines of the organisations, undoubtedly because the masses feel the hot breath of the approaching world conflict, and do not believe anything can be achieved by trying to build new organisations at this juncture of history. Hence, our resolve to orient towards and to integrate ourselves within these existing mass movements for a long period of time, to act as the Marxist catalyst, to comprise the conscious left wing within the mass movement. For only with such an approach can Marxists play a role in the historic unfolding of the struggle, for only in such integration is there a genuine perspective for our small revolutionary cadre. Outside of such integration one can only declaim and posture in a vacuum for a brief space of time until events finally disperse the cadre.

This leads us to the next question: How do we envisage the development of the next revolutionary struggles, and who will lead them? Naturally, the question can only be answered in very general terms. But even a general answer is required because it determines in large measure our course. If we take our analysis seriously, we must have the conviction that the mass struggles of the coming decade will rise to supreme revolutionary heights, and that in the course of those fierce clashes there is bound to develop a higher political consciousness, and a consequent regroupment of forces within the working classes. All experiences attest that in such periods the left wing grows at the expense of the right, and that at certain climactic points, the mass forces will be available for the creation of new revolutionary parties, either by a process of splits and fusions, or by the Marxist wings conquer-

ing the old organisations. If at such times the Marxist cadre is well organised and clearly understands the historical tasks at hand, if it has established itself over a period of time as an integral part of the existing movements having intimate relations with different layers of militants, if it has gained their respect in a series of struggles, the cadre can rise to the necessities of the historic moment, and with masses behind it, shape the course of events.

We are well aware that this is an algebraic projection, and that it cuts through such gargantuan problems as the third world war, the possible occupation of the heart of Europe by the Red Army and its allied troops, the possible bureaucratic-military transformation of several West European countries on the East European pattern, revolts against Stalinism of the order of the June 17 rising of East Germany, attacks of imperialism to impose a counter-revolutionary order, all taking place in the midst of unprecedented devastation and ruin of war. But nevertheless, the formula is an entirely valid one, especially in Europe, and at a later stage in the United States, because the aspiration of the masses, and the attainment of the next historic advance toward Socialism cannot be realised by the old parties and leaderships, even if one or two Communist parties in the West take a revolutionary path under the impact of mass pressure. The next historic advance will profoundly revolutionise not only all existing institutions, but the organisations and masses carrying through these transformations. Differentiations of considerable scope will alter the relationship of forces in favour of the Marxists. The experiences of China and Yugoslavia only presage more far-reaching developments to come. But the course of history is already revealing that if capitalism was first destroyed at its weakest points, in Russia, then in China, and is crumbling in the colonial world, it will have to be from the West that the revolution will rise to a superior level of consciousness, mass participation, democratic control and operation. The weakness and the backwardness of capitalism in the East pushed the revolutionary forces there to the fore for several decades. It will be the higher culture, tradition and the greater specific gravity of the working classes in the Western countries which will provide the conditions for the rise of higher type Marxist mass parties, and will lift the revolution to a higher level.

We are obviously discussing a very tortuous, complicated, and involved process which will take place very unevenly over a period of time, and with great variations from one country to the next. In what sense then can we speak of the future of the

Published by  
Socialist Platform

## The Revolution Defamed

A Documentary History of  
Vietnamese Trotskyism

Edited by Al Richardson

Includes articles on:

The origins of Trotskyism in Vietnam  
Trotskyism versus Stalinism in the  
1930s

The Vietnamese Trotskyists in their  
own words

Ho Chi Minh and the Trotskyists  
The Trotskyists and the Indo-  
Chinese workers in France

Price £6.00 plus £1.85 postage

Available from: Porcupine  
Bookcellar, 5 Caledonian Road,  
London N1 9DX

Barry.Buitekant@tesco.net



Fourth International, since the resolution declares, 'Naturally the world victory of the revolution will not be the exclusive work of the present national nuclei of the Fourth International but of their close fusion with broader revolutionary forces. From this fusion there will arise new revolutionary mass parties of tomorrow, as well as a new form of the world party, of the International.' The answer that the resolution supplies to the above question is as follows: 'To the degree that the world revolutionary upsurge continues to spread and moves toward the world victory of the proletarian revolution and of socialism, *the programme and organisation of the International will be validated*. The world victory of the proletarian revolution and of socialism cannot be conceived as the arithmetical sum of partial victories obtained through *centrist* programmes and formations. It will be *the victory of full revolutionary Marxism*.'

The longer one ponders over the meaning of this quotation, the more convinced he becomes that this is more irrelevancy than answer, as the question that needs illumination first of all, and above all, is the next historic period rather than the period of the world victory of the revolution and of Socialism. And the discussion has reached the point – and, even more decisive, the position of our cadres is at the point – where more has to be said about the next historic period and our role in it.

From the rise of Hitler to the World War, there did not exist a strong enough current upon which a new revolutionary formation, competing and supplanting the old workers' organisations, could be based. The Trotskyist groups found neither the open field that favoured the rise of the Second International nor a development equivalent to the October Revolution which started the mass trend toward communism. After World War II, contrary to our pre-war prognoses, Stalinism was not eliminated, but rose to new heights of influence. Because the situation was, and remains, revolutionary in the world – and because, therefore, the workers no longer

clung to the old parties merely for protection against reaction – there has been a clear test of the ability of Trotskyism to create an independent movement on a programme broadly confirmed by the new revolutionary developments. The fact that no one can realistically envisage a break-up in the old workers' movements prior to the next revolutionary developments is the clear sign that the old Trotskyist perspective has become outmoded. As before the war, the vanguard seeks to realise its revolutionary aspirations within the old parties, leaving no room for a new revolutionary mass organisation. Thus the Trotskyist movement, despite the brilliance of its leader, the considerable abilities and energies of its national cadres, and the many experiments with entries and fusions, was doomed to remain isolated. The test was made for a whole historic era, both in periods of reaction and revolution, and is therefore a decisive one.

But while Trotskyism, due to historic circumstances, remained outside the main currents of the labour movement, it built up in a quarter-century of its existence a truly formidable literature, doctrine and tradition. This tradition, we have said, gives Trotskyism the status of Twentieth Century Marxism. However true this claim may be from an abstract theoretical point of view, it has not entered the consciousness of broad masses as did similar claims made by the Social Democracy prior to World War I, or by Lenin and the Comintern afterward. The tradition of Stalinism led to the mass revival of the Communist Party in France after the war, and the tradition of Social Democracy to its revival in Germany, but the tradition of Trotskyism could do no more than maintain it as an ideological tendency.

Every important movement has its own specific tradition, and every important leader places his indelible stamp upon an organisation, not only through the formal resolutions and theses, but by his methods of work, his approach to big questions, his hundred and one evaluations, and in ways even more elusive and difficult to describe. Marx projected himself upon the First International. Lenin put his stamp on Bolshevism. And without any peradventure of a doubt, Trotsky did the same in fulsome measure in the case of the Fourth International. Now it is a fact that our whole tradition – so magnificent in many ways – is of no interest to the existing labour movements. Because the tradition has been created largely outside of the labour movements, it is foreign to them. They do not see or believe that any of it is pertinent to the solution of their problems. We therefore have to face up to this aspect of the reality just as we did to other parts of it,

and have to draw the necessary lessons.

The very formulations of the International Resolution must lead us to the conclusion that the revolutionary parties of tomorrow will not be Trotskyist, in the sense of necessarily accepting the tradition of our movement, our estimation of Trotsky's place in the revolutionary hierarchy, or all of Trotsky's specific evaluations and slogans. We in the United States had precisely this experience where Trotskyists fused with the small Musteite organisation to form the Workers Party in 1935. The fusion occurred only after we had overcome considerable resistance in the Musteite ranks to accepting the special characteristics of Trotskyism by assuring them that we had no special sectarian axes to grind. How much more operative will this be when the left wing develops through its own specific experiences and the merging of different currents and groups inside the big centrist or reformist mass movements.

Our analysis and our tactical orientation would remain like a knife without a blade if we do not follow through with the necessary conclusion. And this conclusion is that *in the present historical conditions, our cadres have to take the whole body of Marxist theory and struggle, including Trotsky's contributions to it, and translate them into the language of our lifetime, and into the language of the existing movements of the various countries in which we are situated*.

The worst error is to think this mainly a job of clearer language, or for our cadres to start masquerading as simple homespun mechanics who have none too secure a mastery of grammar or syntax. What is involved if we are to integrate ourselves in the mass movement and to begin functioning effectively as its Marxist wing, is that we have to rid ourselves of all faction spirit and too-narrow understanding of the Marxist's role in the centrist and reformist milieu of our time.

Our purpose is to bring our ideas into the mass movement, and to gradually raise the consciousness of the ranks to the historic tasks. But the last thing in the world we should attempt is to inculcate the ranks with the necessity of adopting our specific tradition, and impressing upon them the truth of all the evaluations and proposals broached by Trotsky from 1923 on. The thought that in the coming period of our activity we have to go out of our way to mention the name and work of Leon Trotsky, and the name and the existence of the Fourth International, shows how far all of us have become infused with narrow group thinking, and organisational fetishism, how far we have travelled from the outlook of Frederick Engels, who warned

**D.B. Riazanov**  
**Marx and Anglo-**  
**Russian Relations**  
 and other writings

Translated and with an  
 introduction by Brian Pearce  
 Price £10 from Francis Boutle  
 Publishers. See advert page 35  
 for contact details

the Socialists in America not to publish the *Communist Manifesto*, as it was based on old-world experiences, and that the American labour movement, developing under different conditions, would not understand it, and would not know what Marx and Engels were talking about. Why isn't it possible for us to take this simple thought of Engels and apply it to ourselves and our work? If Engels didn't think this was putting a question mark over his revolutionary integrity, why should we?

We said before that only by integrating ourselves within the existing movements could our cadres survive and fulfil their mission. We will now add to that proposition this corollary: *Only by dropping all sectarian notions of imposing our specific tradition upon the mass movements which developed in different circumstances and under different influences, can our approach register successes and guarantee the future of our precious cadres.* What is involved, it is clear, is not any modification of programmatic essence, but a sharp reversal of organisational concepts and perspectives on the nature of the development of the mass revolutionary parties of tomorrow.

There remains to say a word whether this course does not contain dangers that the cadre will get lost in the mass movement and therefore become liquidated as a specific revolutionary current. Of course, the danger exists, just as there is danger every time a revolutionist takes a job as an official in a union, and begins to live in an opportunist environment. Some succumb to material blandishments. But if the cadre is cohesive, and firm in its revolutionary convictions and aims, the losses are few and the gains are many. Events will justify the necessity for a Marxist policy and prove its effectiveness in action. The dangers will be counteracted by the struggle itself. We have an additional guarantee, insofar as there are any guarantees in these things, in the clarity of our views, the devotion of our ranks who have been tested over a long period of time, in our ideological solidarity, and in the unifying element of an international centre. If we try to impose additional guarantees by adopting narrow group viewpoints, and sporting narrow group ideologies in the mass movement, we will vitiate the whole concept, and defeat our common purposes.

Although in the United States the situation is unique as the working class is still not organised into its own political party, the orientation here discussed operates with full force. One has to dwell in the never-never land of a Cannon to seriously promulgate the theory that the American working class, which has not yet attained labour party consciousness, will pass, with

the next struggle, to the banner of Cannonite revolutionism, or what amounts to approximately the same thing, will in rapid-fire fashion, plunge in and out of a labour party to join up with Cannon and his lieutenants to storm the barricades. We have correctly stated before that the American workers will move massively through their organisations, and not jump over the heads of their organisations. That implies that they will move in deliberate stages, not when the forward columns are ready, but only when sizeable phalanxes of the class are prepared to move.

Basing ourselves on this analysis, we have oriented towards the organised labour movement, especially the mass production unions of the CIO, as the battleground of the big future class developments, and the repository of the forces that will advance the working class to its next political stage with the formation of a labour party. That does not mean that we are absolutely certain that a labour party will be formed. What the perspective does base itself on with certainty is that the inevitable political regroupment will pass through existing channels of the organised labour movement and have a political character capable of uniting masses at a minimum level. The broad character of this movement will provide room for the various existing political tendencies, Stalinists, Social Democrats, centrists and Marxists to operate within it. That is why, whatever the vicissitudes of the struggle may bring, whatever forms it may assume, whatever channels it may take, the strategy of basing ourselves on the organised labour movement, and particularly its mass production sectors, and directing our main attention to it, is the correct one and will provide us with the necessary sustenance

to carry on, and in due course to establish ourselves in conjunction with allies as the left wing of a growing political movement.

Of course, as we tried to explain to the SWP, between the present and the next developments exists a more or less protracted period of time, and a political tendency cannot deduce its day to day tactics solely, directly and immediately from the grandiose strategy, but must seek out and find every possibility for advancement of its programme and its influence, be it on the most limited basis, and from sources that by themselves will not necessarily be the main forces of the big labour advance. That is why in many localities, where trade union avenues are not open to us for one reason or another, we must seek out other milieus, whether of the Stalinist variety, or student circles, or various liberal or minority groups.

We approach all these strata, however, in the spirit of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* which proclaimed that the revolutionists had no interests separate and apart from the working class, that we are not a special sect, cult, or church, which seeks to draw people out of the broad currents into its backwater, but rather as American Marxists, we seek to join with others in advancing the existing struggles to a higher stage and on a broader front. We are convinced that out of these struggles and experiences, even before big mass forces take to the field, Left currents will arise with which we shall be able to cooperate and fuse; that the American Marxist tendency, as a stronger formation than at present, will thus be able to discharge its role as a left wing in the big movement—as part and parcel of the struggle to create the mass revolutionary party in the United States. That is our perspective. **WA**

### Workers News Theoretical Supplements

#### **The Fourth International and Yugoslavia (1948-50)**

Correspondence from Jock Haston on behalf of the RCP to the IEC of the Fourth International, with an introduction by Bob Pitt.

#### **The centenary of Andrés Nin**

'The open letter of the Communist Left and the party congress' by Nin, first published in March 1932, and an account of the murder of Nin by POUM leader Julián Gorkin.

#### **How Stalin aborted the Chinese revolution**

Max Shachtman's 1931 introduction to the collection of Trotsky's writings on China, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*.

#### **Vietnam: Stalinism versus revolutionary socialism**

An outline of the struggle of the Trotskyists against the Vietnamese Communist Party written by Al Richardson (Richard Stephenson) in 1972.

**£1 each or £2.50 for all four, including postage, from:  
Workers Action, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX**

# Shame about the politics

**Interesting Times: A Twentieth  
Century Life**  
By Eric Hobsbawm  
Abacus, 2003, 447pp, £9.99

**Richard Price**

The Communist Party of Great Britain was, throughout its history, one of the least distinguished in the world, both numerically and intellectually. Only in two fields – both of them well removed from contemporary politics – did it stand out. The first was in the natural sciences, where it had four or five of the outstanding figures of the mid-twentieth century. The second was history.

For an organisation of its size, it produced a remarkable group of historians. Figures like Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Maurice Dobb, Edward Thompson, Dorothy Thompson, Raphael Samuel, Victor Kiernan, Rodney Hilton and John Saville set the agenda for many of the debates that raged in the 1950s and 60s, from the Peasants' Revolt, the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the revolution of 1640 to the making of the modern working class, the origins of the modern labour movement and the nature of imperialism. The emergence of an avowedly Marxist school within the desiccated world of academic history marked a watershed. Hitherto, British historians had prided themselves on their lack of any theory beyond the collection of empirical facts – and highly selective facts at that – and mostly dismissed economic and social factors as mere 'determinism'.

Of course, much of the early work of this group consisted in embroidering aspects of Marx's writings. Some of its products, like Christopher Hill's *The English Revolution 1640* were quite crude, while others were heavily tainted by Stalinism. Nevertheless, despite their limitations, the members of the Communist Party Historians Group and the journal *Past & Present* which they founded changed historical writing in this country for good, and ensured that class, economic and social history could no longer be ignored by any historian who wanted to be taken seriously.

If Christopher Hill is generally considered the most eminent of the group (although to what extent he can be considered a Marxist is debatable) then Eric Hobsbawm is probably the most widely read. Where others left the Communist Party after Hungary to take part in the New Left, a few joined the Trotskyists and others dropped out of politics to further their academic careers, Hobsbawm remained with the CPGB right up to its little mourned demise in 1991, and at the age of 87 is still with us.

Both Hill and Hobsbawm wrote prolifically. But where Hill rarely strayed outside his chosen area of the seventeenth century (aside from an embarrassing book on Lenin and a short volume on economic history), Hobsbawm has ranged across

centuries, continents and themes in a manner far removed from the traditionally cloistered interests of specialist historians. The popularity of his four-volume epic, *The Age of Revolution, The Age of Capital, The Age of Empire and The Age of Extremes*, has ensured his celebrity, though there is still something strange about seeing him described on the cover of this book as 'Our greatest living historian – not only Britain's, but the world's' by the good old Tory *Spectator*!!

Such is the breadth of Hobsbawm's knowledge that, whatever we think of his liberal Stalinist politics and his reputation as guru to Neil Kinnock, his books can still be read profitably. How then does the history of his own life measure up? *Interesting Times* comes with all the usual Hobsbawm production values. It's elegant, learned, readable, populated with a gallery of interesting characters and – for the autobiography of a historian – fairly eventful. As often seems to be the case with autobiography, the act of reaching into the furthest recesses of memory to recall childhood brings out some of the best writing. Born in Alexandria in 1917 to a British-Jewish father and an Austrian Jewish mother, Hobsbawm grew up in Vienna. His description of his childhood in a non-practising family that struggled to maintain an air of respectability amid mounting problems is beautifully executed.

By 1931, both his parents had died, and he moved to live with relatives in Berlin with Hitler on the brink of power. There he joined a Communist secondary school students' organisation at 15, in time to take part in the last legal mass demonstration of the KPD in January 1933, and to leaflet workers' flats during the election campaign immediately before the Nazis consolidated their hold on power. He was sent to Britain shortly afterwards.

## Idealised

An idealised vision of the Soviet Union seems, if Hobsbawm is to be believed, to have exercised less of an influence upon him as a Cambridge student than it did upon predecessors such as Philby, Burgess, Maclean and Blunt. He was motivated by the threat of fascism, intellectually drawn to Marxist ideas, and by his own account, never a great activist or organiser. The CP never had more than 100 members at Cambridge in the 30s, but the wider Cambridge University Socialist Club had 1,000 by 1939 – over one in five of undergraduate students – which testifies to the strength of 'Red Cambridge' in spite of its privileged intake.

The student reds may have had a deep impact on Cambridge, but the venerable institution had a lifelong effect on them

too. There's something surely more than a bit odd about maintaining an adherence to the ideas of communism, and yet taking so much evident pleasure in being a 'Cambridge man'. It stems from the contradictions of this generation of CP intellectuals – the blind loyalty to 'ideals', the pride at belonging to an 'intellectual aristocracy', the exclusivity of the Apostles, the determination (cultivated by the CP) to be the best in their chosen profession, the complete inability to apply Marxist analysis to the Soviet Union, the deference to the party line.

This also tells us something about the compartmentalisation of the British CP. While the party intellectuals were encouraged to concentrate on academia, the atmosphere among the working class rank and file was often crudely workerist. I'm reminded of one leading CP building worker, for whom 'so-called bleedin' hinter-lee-chool' was top of the list of political put-downs.

Many interviewers and reviewers have asked why, given Hobsbawm's obvious talents, he remained in the CPGB for so long. Hobsbawm spends 24 pages touring around the subject, without ever giving a satisfactory answer, beyond an emotional unwillingness to break the commitments made in his youth and distaste for ex-communists. There are, however, clues to a more persuasive reason elsewhere. Paradoxically, the answer lies in the fact that Hobsbawm was less in thrall to *Soviet Stalinism* than most of his contemporaries. For others, the revelations of Khrushchev's secret speech or the bloody suppression of the Hungarian Revolution brought their entire world crashing around their ears. Hobsbawm's God failed in a much less spectacular way.

That being said, he doesn't make an honest assessment of his relationship to Stalinism, which his prestige as a historian bolstered – albeit at arm's length – for so long. As has been the case for most of his life, he writes remarkably little about the Soviet Union. There's no attempt to analyse why he showed so little empathy with Stalin's multi-millioned victims, or why the intellectual curiosity he showed in the best of his books like *Primitive Rebels* let him down so badly when he looked east.

Instead, he tells of a desultory trip to the Soviet Union in 1954, details his discussions with eastern European CP intellectuals, and spends a lot of time explaining what it felt like to be a communist. Astonishingly, he seems to have had almost no interest in the life of ordinary workers under 'already existing socialism'. At any rate, they barely get a mention.

And what are we to make of throwaway sentences such as: 'Obviously, none of us

believed the version of Soviet Party history contained in the, pedagogically brilliant, text of Stalin's *History of the CPSU (b): Short Course*'? When it comes to Hungary, Hobsbawm allows himself to wallow in self-justification on the strength of a letter signed by the Historians Group and published in the non-party press. In fact, arguably the CP *needed* pro party dissidents like Hobsbawm in 1957 to prevent total meltdown. The disreputable James Klugmann, author of *From Trotsky to Tito* – a book so chock full of lies it had to be withdrawn from circulation and pulped – and two incredibly tedious volumes on the history of the CPGB, is mentioned throughout as a decent old sort, whose only fault was that he lacked something called 'civilian courage'.

Once we reach the 60s, the interest wanes. The narrative breaks down into a succession of chapters detailing Hobsbawm's contacts with France, Spain and Italy, the United States and the Third World, and his late flourishing academic career. He makes no bones about being out of sorts with the student rebellions of the 60s, although you feel some sympathy when he writes: 'To enjoy that year [1967] in San Francisco, one really had to be permanently high on something, preferably acid, and we were not.'

### Guru

Only on one occasion did Hobsbawm take centre stage politically – during the debate around the series of *Marxism Today* articles subsequently published as *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* He rejects the label 'Kinnoek's guru' as absurd on the grounds that they only met twice, but there can be little doubt that New Labour owes a substantial debt to Hobsbawm. The effects can be seen over 20 years on with the presence of ex-CP members like Peter Mandelson, John Reid and Kim Howells at the heart of New La-

bour and the support given to Blair by former CP NUS leader turned *Guardian* columnist, David Aaronovich.

Hobsbawm strongly supported Neil Kinnoek as the man who 'saved the Labour Party from the sectarians', applauded Denis Healey's victory over Tony Benn for the deputy leadership in 1981, opposed the 'delusions' of the 'extremist leadership' of the miners, and breathed a sigh of relief when the leaders of Militant were expelled. Pretty rich for someone who never managed to purge the Stalin-worshippers from his own party. Hobsbawm even tries to take the credit for bringing the term tactical voting (for the Liberals and the SDP) into political debate. He is surely mistaken, since it was doing the rounds in the Liberal revival of the early 70s.

Hobsbawm's true kinship, he makes clear, lay with the Italian Communist Party in its Euro-Communist heyday. Its moderate politics, sufficiently distanced from Moscow, matched his own, and the all-embracing manner in which it dominated entire communities fulfilled his need to belong to a movement, albeit at arm's length. Hobsbawm is the man for whom Bernstein's aphorism that 'the movement is everything, the final goal nothing' should have been coined.

Too bad he was tied up dissecting the problems of the Labour Party to sort out the Italian Communist Party, which we're told vaguely, 'was beginning to lose touch with its *popolo comunista*' – something Hobsbawm had failed to pick up in his book-length interview with Giorgio Napolitano of the PCI, and published as *The Italian Road to Socialism*.

What's left of Hobsbawm's Marxism? Very little, it seems. It offers some interesting insights of use to the historian. Otherwise, it's the utopian grandchild of the Enlightenment, a suitable hobby to wife away a twentieth century life. **WA**

## Victor Serge Collected Writings on Literature and Revolution

Translated, edited and with an introduction by Al Richardson

The book gathers together for the first time the bulk of Serge's literary criticism from the 1920s to the 1950s

**Available from July 9, 2004, at £12.99**

Order now from Francis Boutle Publishers, 272 Alexandra Park Road, London N22 7BG. Tel: 020-8889 7744

e-mail: [serge@francisboutle.demon.co.uk](mailto:serge@francisboutle.demon.co.uk)

[www.francisboutle.demon.co.uk](http://www.francisboutle.demon.co.uk)

Cheques payable to Francis Boutle Publishers

## Workers **ACTION** back issues

### **Number 1 – December 1997/January 1998**

SLP conference – Red-green alliance – No to the single currency – Harney and Irish freedom – Socialist Democracy group

### **Number 2 – April 1998**

Irish peace deal – Chinese road to capitalism – US/UK out of the Gulf – *Transitional Programme* in perspective

### **Number 3 – June/July 1998**

*Communist Manifesto* 150 years on – Self-determination for the Kosova Albanians – Black liberation and the Comintern

### **Number 4 – September 1998**

Omagh bombing – Balkan crisis – Economic crisis – Bukharin's testament – Socialist revolution and ecology – United front

### **Number 5 – November/December 1998**

Pinochet and British justice – Martov and the Jewish workers' movement – Catastrophism and the *Transitional Programme*

### **Number 6 – March/April 1999**

Racism and the police – Asylum bill – Welsh Labour leadership election – Ireland one year after the Good Friday agreement – Swedish elections – RCP document against catastrophism in the FI 1946 – *Marxism Today* review

### **Number 7 – June/July 1999**

Balkans special – Working hours – GM foods – Debate on catastrophism – Are the productive forces stagnating?

### **Number 8 – February/March 2000**

Russia out of Chechnya – Livingstone for mayor – Section 28 – Seattle report – Theodore Draper on Castro – Marxism and the 'epoch' – Fighting under new conditions

### **Number 9 – May/June 2000**

The left and the London elections – Land reform yes, Mugabe's thugs no – South Africa – Perry Anderson reconsidered

### **Number 10 – September/October 2000**

Labour's vote-buying fraud – Lawrence enquiry, no change – Trotsky on hegemony – Victor Serge on liberation of France

### **Number 11 – March/April 2001**

Israel out of the occupied territories – Labour's end-of-term report – Ireland: peace but no justice – Bordiga on fascism

### **Number 12 – June/July 2001**

Macedonia under threat – Plan Colombia – Renationalise steel – Britain's rural crisis – Palestine – Tory crisis – May Day

### **Number 13 – October/November 2001**

Stop the war! – Prospects for the second term – A dissenter departed – Unison NEC talking left – Racism in education – The Tories choose oblivion – Growth, scarcity and socialism – British imperialism and Afghanistan – Imperial holocaust

### **Number 14 – December 2001**

Hands off Afghanistan! – Football riots reflect Iran's 'society' problem – Imperialist War and 'Revolutionary Defeatism' – Don't ignore existing labour movement! – Striking back against Empire – Half truths and evasions – Engels on Afghanistan

### **Number 15 – March/April 2002**

Hands off Iraq! – The original Assassins – Contradictions of the Socialist Alliance – The Vatican, fascism and the Holocaust – Revolutionary defeatism and the war against Afghanistan – Palestinian Trotskyism and the origins of the Israeli state

### **Number 16 – June 2002**

French elections – Trade unions and the left – Defend asylum seekers – Post deregulation – Sharon strikes again – Venezuela

### **Number 17 – Summer 2002**

Trade union-Labour Party link – Right-wing coup in PCS defeated – Moderates in the PCS – Council strikes – Telecoms pay and pensions – Education union leaders sell out – Communists and Labour 1927-29

### **Number 18 – October 2002**

War and the labour movement – Iraqi opposition – The Labour left – Chile's September 11 – Johannesburg Earth Summit – Kashmir – The Hartal of 1953 – Archive: Behind the Hindu-Muslim strife

### **Number 19 – December 2002**

Firefighters challenge New Labour – Labour Party conference – US mid-term elections – Behind the Moscow siege – General strike in South Africa – Arthur Ransome: double agent? – Zionism and the aftermath of WW2

### **Number 20 – February/March 2003**

Stop the war – Socialist Alliance stumbles on – Labour Left – Welsh politics – Palestine – The Ukraine famine

### **Number 21 – April/May 2003**

Troops out of Iraq – Build the Labour opposition – The Kurdish dimension – Firefighters' dispute – Child protection crisis – London weighting – Welsh politics – Christopher Hill – Peronists, priests and Nazis – Trotsky in Paris during WWI

### **Number 22 – Summer 2003**

War on asylum seekers – State terror in Northern Ireland – BNP and local elections – Scottish Socialist Party – Welsh Assembly elections – Afghanistan: a forgotten country – Forward to a united Cyprus – Farewell to the vanguard party

### **Number 23 – October 2003**

Is New Labour finished? – Brent East by-election – Pensions scandal – Iraq under occupation – Hands off Iran! – Sharon: 50 years a war criminal – Missed opportunities in Argentina – No middle way for PT in Brazil – Felix Morrow on religion

### **Number 24 – January 2004**

No to the Euro! – Asset-stripping Iraq – Obituary of Al Richardson – Bolivian uprising – George Orwell's legacy

### **Number 25 – April 2004**

The 1984 miners' strike – War on Iraq, one year on – The Respect coalition – Ken Livingstone: hero or villain? – Release of Mordechai Vanunu – Banning the hijab in France – Conflict in the Ivory Coast – F.A. Ridley's Socialism and Religion

**Price per issue:**

80p

**Post and packing:**

UK – 50p for 1 issue, 25p extra each additional issue

Rest of the world – £1.20 for 1 issue, 60p extra each additional issue

# Workers ACTION

No. 26

June 2004

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Torture in Iraq

EU enlargement

Britain's housing crisis

Ethnic cleansing in  
Sudan

Labour Representation  
Committee

India – Congress back in  
power

June 10 elections



PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka (left) joins civil servants on strike outside the London headquarters of the Office for National Statistics on April 13. Over 90 per cent of staff stayed away from work in the first strike in the department's history. (See story inside)

PHOTO: MOLLY COOPER

## About Workers Action

Workers Action is a Marxist current in the labour movement.

Workers suffered a series of heavy defeats under the Tories from 1979 onwards. The Labour movement is only now beginning to show signs of recovery both in terms of the level of strike action and the election of left-wingers to leading trade union positions. But the Labour Party leadership is resolutely pro-free market and pro-business, and has yet to see a real challenge to its authority inside the party.

Workers Action believes that the most important task at the moment is a struggle to renovate the existing labour movement, politically and in the workplace, so that it can fight effectively in its own interests.

This requires a struggle in the Labour movement as it is, with all its problems and weaknesses. Workers continue to support the Labour Party far more than any other party in elections and 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 a positive development in that they show that there is opposition, 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 at the moment there is a realistic possibility of a serious electoral challenge to Labour. 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](mailto:workers.action@btinternet.com)