

What Next?

Marxist Discussion Journal

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In Defence of Militant Secularism

Andrew Coates

A STRANGE alliance has arisen: from conservative members of the Muslim Association of Britain, the SWP, to London's Mayor, all are in an uproar about "Islamophobia". Ken Livingstone has taken it upon himself to criticise the French move to ban wearing ostentatious religious symbols in schools. He has also given lessons on religious freedom by defending a cleric, al-Qaradawi, who supports female genital mutilation.¹ This bloc draws support from the mainstream of the Anglican Church and Prince Charles to, with rare exceptions, the bien-pensant pages of the *Guardian*.

All are reactionary responses to the secular view, which is at the centre of anti-racism. This stand, eloquently supported by Henri Pena-Ruiz in *Qu'est-ce que la laïcité?* (2003), rests on the fundamental principle of the Enlightenment: the freedom of the public sphere from religious dogma. As he states, of the realisation of the problems religion causes: "Il a fallu que les fous de Dieu, auparavant encouragés par l'Amérique causant la mort en plein coeur de Manhattan pour que le monde prenne enfin conscience du danger." (It required those crazed by God and earlier encouraged by America to cause death at the very heart of Manhattan before the world finally realised the danger they posed.)² The imperialist reaction is well known. But as Henry Pena-Ruiz has also stated, we need to activate simultaneously "la lutte sociale contre toutes les dérégulations capitalistes et pour la promotion des services publiques, qui produisent de la solidarité et non de la charité; la lutte pour une émancipation intellectuelle". Through a "une laïcité universelle" we aim for "l'émancipation laïque du droit, gage de liberté de tous les êtres humaines". (A struggle against capitalist deregulation, for public services, for solidarity and not charity, a fight for intellectual emancipation. Through universal secularism we aim for secular emancipation, the measure of all human liberty.)³ Only by defending universal rights, and by denying special privileges to religious groups, can a genuine anti-racist position unite the oppressed.

The immediate cause of this polemic is the

progressive decision of an otherwise right-wing French government to ban the veil (le voile), and other divisive badges of faith from the public educational sphere. This was supported by the immense majority of the French left. Even most of those opposed to a formal interdiction admitted "the veil is an oppression" (that is the position of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire). Nearly all sides have pointed to the simple fact that men, under dominant interpretations of the Qur'an, are not required to cover their hair, and that women are obliged to do so because it is held that the sight of female coiffure will cause sexual feelings. Members of the North-African feminist movement, Ni Putes Ni Soumises, were at the forefront of the battle against the veil. Fadela Amara has declared that, whilst a believer, she sees the veil as "a tool of oppression, of alienation, of discrimination, an instrument of power by men over women".⁴ These brave feminist voices have aroused the violent hostility of the French Islamicists, the tellingly named Frères musulmans (Muslim Brotherhood). Only a tiny minority of the French left, inspired by the British Socialist Workers Party, or post-modernist relativism, defended the absolute right to be oppressed.

This has not been the stand in Britain. As we have seen, a majority appears to align with Islamicists against secularism. The Anglo-Saxon "left's" views correspond to an ideology resting on three sources.

The first derives from straightforward British imperialism. That is the practice of separating "communities" on religious ground. Under the Indian Raj different religious groups had the right to distinct "personal law". That is that the profoundly unequal relations between men and women under Hindu and Islamic "law" (with the notable contradiction of Sikh rules) were eternalised in jurisprudence. At present in Canada there are serious attempts to re-establish this state of affairs. "Community leaders" (not elected but given by their status as religious figures) are recognised by the state as those who determine "their" communities' rules.

The "left's" response has been to try to gain

their own constituency by trawling for support amongst sympathetic Muslim notables (and notably not amongst other ethnic or religious groups). The so-called Respect Coalition has explicitly pitched its propaganda at the “Muslim” vote and welcomed the endorsement of mosques. Abandoning any class-related politics it accepts the idea that there are fixed faith “communities” out there to be captured.

Secondly, there is the adoption of the American model of “multi-culturalism”. This, as *Historical Materialism* (Vol.11 No.4, 2003) details, is a model of social conflict in which different ethnic groups assert their “rights”. The very particular conditions of American class formation (in which the heritage of slavery, different waves of immigration, the existence of a colour-based privileged layer in the working class, and an immensely powerful bourgeoisie have combined) are regarded as universal. In place of unified class conflicts, we have religious and cultural organisations from the different class and ethnic fractions as permanent lobbies. Each is held to be separate but equal. Those British groups, such as *Socialist Action*, which derive their politics from America, are quite open about this. Class unity is dropped in favour of the “right to be different”. Lee Jasper, a key adviser of Ken Livingstone, has gone so far as to advocate racially segregated schools in the name of ... anti-racism!

Thirdly, this last response indicates another basis for Islamophilia. The French Nouvelle Droite (New Right) may seem an unlikely home for this. Anglophone readers are not generally familiar with the works of Alain de Benoist but at his core are some familiar themes. That is “neo-paganism”, the right to “difference” or “identity”, and the transposition of genetic racialism to cultural distinctiveness. Hostile to an Islamic presence in Europe, the Nouvelle Droite has enjoyed warm relations with Political Islam in what are considered “Arab” countries.⁵ Following an identical relativism anglophones claim that

everyone has the right to his/her cultural practices, and that there are no universal rights. Furthermore it is held that for “Europeans” to criticise Islam is inherently racist. The British defenders of the Qu’ran are not very open about the affinity between their ideas and the heirs of Maurras. But there is an American point at which the extreme right culturalists such as Alain de Benoist and the remnants of the post-modern New Left overtly meet, and that place is called *Telos*.

Such responses are fundamentally wrong. They divert attention away from the central question of racist reactions to “foreigners” (since in the UK racist sentiments are centred on asylum seekers regardless of their religion). They encourage the birth of communalism, promoting one religious community’s interest against others. They ignore the central problem for secularists in the Britain: that is to create a republic with no established religion and to free education from the influence of spiritual doctrines. That sphere should ideally be a place for equality between the citizens. They are steps backward from the centuries-long struggle for working class emancipation, which fused with the Enlightenment and the fight to free people from the yoke of Revelation and the Book. And most importantly, they in their misguided enthusiasm for religion follow imperialism’s central wish: to divide the peoples.

Notes

1. Brett Lock, ‘The Odd Couple: Red Ken and the Conservative Cleric’, *Tribune*, 30 July 2004.
2. Henri Pena-Ruiz, *Qu’est-ce que la laïcité?*, Gallimard, 2003, p.262.
3. Henri Pena-Ruiz, ‘Laïcité et égalité, leviers de l’émancipation’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 2004.
4. *Le Monde*, 29 January 2004.
5. Pierre-Andrew Taguieff, ‘Alain de Benoist, philosophe’, *Les Temps Modernes*, No.451, February 1984.

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Hijab: A Woman's Right to Choose

Salma Yaqoob

THE FIRST thing I'd like to say is that it is impossible to understand why we are having this meeting today without locating it within the increase of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism since 9/11. The grief of the victims of 9/11 has been exploited by George Bush under the banner of the "war on terror" to stamp new US military dominance on the world and to remap the Middle East in its own economic and strategic interests. Old-fashioned imperial conquest is now repackaged and disguised as a defence of "civilisation" against "global terror". The "threat of Muslim fundamentalism" is to White House propagandists today what the bogey of communism was during the cold war. The new phase of imperialism requires a new phase of racism. Today it takes the form of Islamophobia and Muslims the world over have become legitimate targets. In this context, a green light is given to every bigot to spew out their bile against Muslims. And this is seeping even into the official "respectable" discourse of our political establishment.

So, for example, in the UK, the *Daily Telegraph* – traditionally the newspaper for the Conservative Party here – prints articles comparing Muslims to dogs and argues for incorporating anti-Muslim sentiment into official British Conservatism, unashamedly calling for: "An anti-Islam Conservative Party." The fascist British National Party made an attack on Muslims the centre-piece of its television broadcast during the European elections. Such prejudiced views and blinkered thinking, unfortunately, are not just confined to the right. We hear echoes of the right-wing demonisation of us as Muslims even in some left circles.

This is at its most extreme in France where the bulk of the left, to its shame, has joined in the hysteria about the right of female Muslim students to wear a headscarf. Young women, like me, who wear a headscarf are apparently a threat to the values of the French Republic. Alternatively we are told that we need to be rescued from our own oppression, which we are apparently too backward to recognise ourselves. The debate about the danger of Islamic fundamentalism dominates

French discussion about their own Muslim population.

What is the reality confronting Arabs and Muslims in France? There are at least 5 million Muslims in France – the largest Muslim population in Europe. But there is not a single Muslim member of the National Assembly and not a single Mayor. The greatest threat to the "values of the French Republic" is racism and exclusion and not some supposed danger from within its Muslim communities.

Muslim women find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. We are caught between those who claim to protect us – the many Muslim men who act to restrict our movement and freedoms – and those who claim to liberate us – killing us with their bombs and allowing us no voice unless it mirrors exactly their own. The women of Afghanistan are an example of this. Laura Bush even stated that the "W" in George W. Bush stands for women. We are asked to believe that the US army was really on a feminist mission in Afghanistan!

The real emancipation of Muslim women can of course only come from themselves. In practice the voice of Muslim women themselves – in all their diversity – has to be heard. We have to get past the simple caricatures of the passive victim or aggressive fundamentalist. We have to recognise that while the road to female emancipation in the West has taken the route of the right to not be covered in response to the rigid expectations placed on women historically in terms of dress and societal roles, many women may choose to liberate themselves in different ways, and just because the trajectory of their resistance to oppression is different, it does not make it any less legitimate or significant.

For many Muslim women wearing the hijab is an expression of Islamic notions of women's empowerment. "Hijab" actually is a whole concept relating to the interaction of men and women, not just an item of clothing to cover the head or body. The hijab is not about the denial of female (or male) sexuality. Quite the opposite. I think sexual attraction between men and women is part of human nature and natural. The concept of hijab

actually denotes a code of behaviour between the sexes that both acknowledges that fact and encourages a mutually respectful interaction between men and women. "Hijab" literally means "barrier". It flows from the emphasis on marriage in Islam – the Qur'an describes a husband and wife as each other's "garments" – giving each other intimacy, warmth and protection. The idea of hijab is to maintain the exclusivity of that relationship, such that the degree of physical intimacy and exposure is limited in all other interactions between men and women. In this way the aim of hijab is to de-emphasise sexuality in public interactions, whilst encouraging sexuality in private ones.

It is important to remember that whilst the hijab has recently been associated exclusively with Islam, the idea of modest attire for men and women is referred to in the Judeo-Christian tradition in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as well as many other religious and cultural traditions (e.g. Sikhism and Rastafarianism). In many parts of the world, from villages in Italy to Indian suburbs women cover themselves in similar ways that Muslim women do.

For many Muslim women wearing the hijab marks a rejection of a world where women have to endure objectification as sex objects. It helps them to enjoy a sense of their own (special) privacy and personhood. For me, the wearing of the hijab denotes that as a woman I expect to be treated as an equal in terms of my intellect and personality and my appearance is relevant only to the degree that I want it to be, when I want it to be.

Wearing the hijab can also be seen as a challenge to the power of corporations and advertising. The French philosopher Alain Badiou, responding to the banning of hijab in French schools, makes the point that the headscarf law is a pure capitalist law in that it orders femininity to be exposed. He suggests that, by banning all reserve, women are brought into the market paradigm and are forced to display their bodies as merchandise. He further asks the question: "Is it not even more mean and petty for a woman at school to act as a sandwich board for a corporation than as a follower of God?"

Indeed it is true that while the Western feminist movement campaigned over many years for the right of women to be uncovered in public this "right" has quickly been appropriated by the forces of capitalism and consumerism. So much so, that we are at a point in time where much unhappiness, depression, eating disorders etc are directly attributable to the pressures on women to be seen to be sexually attractive. Clearly such expectations and consequences are oppressive to women. Prevailing cultural norms mean that young girls are robbed of their childhood as their clothes reflect and emphasise female sexuality; and older women

are made to feel irrelevant (or relevant to the extent that they can maintain the appearance of being younger).

Whilst I passionately defend my right to wear the hijab and urge solidarity on this issue, I think it is a shame that the identity of Muslim women has been reduced to simply the wearing of the hijab – by some Muslims as well as non-Muslims. It would be unfortunate if a Muslim woman was only viewed in terms of whether she wore a hijab – by her brothers and sisters in faith who may not regard her as "highly" if she doesn't, or non-Muslims who may regard her as less worthy if she does. Ultimately it is about her personal relationship with God, and not anyone else's business! Whilst we can point out the benefits or otherwise (whichever view you hold on the issue of hijab), coercion or enforcement from either side is not the answer.

Indeed the real crime that is committed against women is when that choice is taken away from them. That's why I am opposed to the Saudi and Iranian governments' imposition of the veil and that of the Taliban previously. But this is also why I oppose the ban on wearing the hijab. In both cases the woman herself is no longer free to make a choice. In both cases her dignity is violated. And with all the hype around the issue not many people are aware that actually right now the hijab is banned in more countries than it is enforced.

This issue of the right to wear hijab is a crucial one for the ESF. Because racism in general and Islamophobia in particular is central to the whole neo-liberal project, any movement which effectively wants to challenge that project – and the war, racism and poverty it leaves in its wake – has to rest on a solid foundation of anti-racism. It especially has to reach out the hand of solidarity to the Arab and Muslim communities bearing the brunt of racist attack and vilification.

I cannot exaggerate how important this kind of solidarity is. It is the antidote to both the current racist neo-liberal onslaught and the threat of extremism and fundamentalism. By focusing on what we have in common and fighting oppression – whether from inside or outside of our communities – we have a powerful alliance. The wonderful world-wide demonstrations on February 15th when millions across the world united together against the world gave us a glimpse of what another world would be like – a world united against war and oppression – but diverse in its colour, race, cultures and faiths.

This is the transcript of a speech delivered at the European Social Forum in London on 16 October 2004. It is taken (without permission) from the National Assembly Against Racism website.

Theo van Gogh: Hero, Anti-Semite, Misogynist or Islamophobe?

Herman de Tollenaere

THE MURDER of Dutch film maker and columnist Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam on 2 November 2004 shocked many people. Not only in the Netherlands but also abroad, reactions were, understandably, often emotional. Many commentators described Van Gogh as a martyr in the fight for free speech. That leaves the question: free speech for himself and people who shared his views, or also for his targets?

Many reactions, e.g. in Britain, were by people who didn't know the writings of either Van Gogh or his critics first hand in Dutch. I will try in this article to help provide this information, necessary for a rational assessment.

So, first, the murder is terrible, must be condemned, and everyone should make an effort to prevent violence like this from happening again. However, if I were to keep saying that one plus one makes three, and then someone murdered me, I hope no one would write that I was a mathematical genius (as at least some people seemed to do in the case of Van Gogh – not on mathematics, but you get the point).

Theo van Gogh's inspiration was films like *A Clockwork Orange*, and the writings of French author Louis-Ferdinand Céline (a supporter of Hitler during World War II), both of which took human depravity as their central theme.

So let us see, from what Van Gogh himself said, what he really stood for. (There is more – in Dutch – on Van Gogh in the archives at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/linksnederlands>.)

Van Gogh on Jews

“Fornicating yellow stars in a gas chamber.... What a smell of caramel today. Today the crematoriums burn only diabetic [in Dutch literally: sugar-sick] Jews”. Thus van Gogh in *Moviola* magazine, 1991. The court then fined him 1000 guilders for anti-semitism. He pictured Jewish TV presenter Sonja Barend in a concentration camp, and Jewish author Leon de Winter in “Treblinka-style fornication with barbed wire around his dick”.

When Jewish historian Evelien Gans criticised Van Gogh, he wrote in *Folia Civitatis* magazine: “I suspect that Ms Gans gets wet dreams about being fucked by Dr Mengele.” He hoped (*Volkskrant*, February 1995) Gans would sue him: “Because then Ms Gans will have to explain in court that she claims that she does not get wet dreams about Dr Mengele.”

Van Gogh on women (including right-wing MP Ayaan Hirshi Ali)

Van Gogh's last film, a few minutes long, was written by a Dutch MP, Ayaan Hirshi Ali, a naturalised refugee, from the ex-royal family of Somalia. (On Hirshi Ali see, in Dutch, http://www.tijdschriftlover.nl/artikelen/artikelen_islam.html – an article by Antillean Dutch Black [not Islamic] feminist Troetje Loewenthal. At http://www.sp.nl/include/sh_opinie.php?code=406 another critical article on Ms Ali can be found, this one by Anja Meulenbelt, arguably the best known Dutch feminist and now a Socialist Party senator.)

Ms Ali is an MP for the VVD party, which is in government and is the most openly pro-capitalist party in parliament. Arguably, they are the Dutch equivalent of the British Tory party (though more “secular”, without the Tories' Christian fundamentalists). The VVD, and Ali, and Van Gogh, have enthusiastically supported the government's expulsion of tens of thousands of refugees from the Netherlands, including Somali women who are refugees from female circumcision and who now have to fear it if the responsible VVD minister succeeds with her expulsion plans. (Female genital mutilation, by the way, is not an Islamic custom, as it happens in Somalia and among Christians in Kenya. It is not found among Turks or Moroccans, the biggest groups of immigrants from Muslim countries in the Netherlands.) In a parliamentary speech Ms Ali proposed that the African continent should not be given another cent of aid.

Anja Meulenbelt quotes Theo van Gogh as

saying that feminists should stop campaigning against husbands' violence in marriages: "Gentlemen who give a tough hiding are quite attractive to some ladies really." That remark was on women in general, not especially on Muslim women. But, as we know, about a hundred years ago, Lord Cromer, who was the boss of the anti-women's suffrage league in Britain, sounded very "feminist" in colonial Muslim Egypt.

The theme of Ali's and Van Gogh's film was Islamic wives beaten by their husbands, which was said to be inspired by the Koran. Muslim women who had suffered domestic violence reacted very angrily to the film when it was shown on Dutch TV: "I was beaten by that no good husband. Not by the Koran!", one objected. "Making this a Koran issue will just give them an excuse." The film was sort of soft porn David Hamilton-*Emmanuelle* style featuring a naked woman (with a Christian Moluccan actress playing an Islamic woman) in see-through clothes with verses from the Koran written on them. The women who objected to the film said this cheapened and sensationalised their extremely real issues with their husbands.

On a British internet forum, a comparison was made between "Van Gogh making films vividly critical of Islam and the likes of Bunuel or Scorsese who made films that challenged the basis of Catholicism". However, there is a difference. Bunuel and Scorsese came from a background where Catholicism/Christianity was the dominant religion, at least during their childhoods. While never-a-Muslim Van Gogh called all Muslims, most of whom in the Netherlands are a lot poorer and more powerless than he was, "goatfuckers". Not once: probably a hundred times or more in writing (I did not count).

The internet message continued: "There is therefore no comparison with the BNP or NF, whose staple diet is attacks and violence by Black men against White women, not intra-communal violence." However, even though Van Gogh, in contrast to Ms Ali, was no party politician, intra-communal violence, including hypocritical pity for the victims of female circumcision, was the staple diet in party political broadcasts by the now defunct Centriumpartij, then the Dutch sister party of the British extreme Right, over 10 years ago.

When, in 2002, Pim Fortuijn (he himself preferred the more "aristocratic" spelling Fortuyn) founded an anti-immigration party with four other people, one was former Centriumpartij leader J. Boiten. (When his past came out after Fortuijn's death, Fortuyn's - their spelling - party dismissed Boiten from his position as a parliamentary assistant. Boiten, however, claims Fortuijn knew all about his Centriumpartij past.) Van Gogh helped Fortuijn write his political speeches. Fortuijn wanted him to stand as an MP for his party, but

Van Gogh refused, as he hated other prospective candidates.

Can a fascist party be led by an open gay in some individual cases, even though gay bashing is a main point of the extreme Right? Yes it can. Michael Kühnen, the leader of the National Socialist Action Front of Germany, who died of AIDS in 1991, was openly gay and had a macho theory to justify it. Right now, Michiel Smit (see photos on <http://www.geenstijl.nl/paginas/michielsmit>) the leader of the Nieuw Rechts (New Right) in the Netherlands is openly gay. Though fascist competitors have used that against both of them.

Van Gogh on war and socialism

Van Gogh strongly supported George W. Bush's wars, and opposed all socialism in his columns. He wrote of Paul Rosenmöller, an ex-dockworker, then Green Left party leader: "May he get a joy-bringing brain tumor. Let us piss on his grave."

Van Gogh on migrants from Muslim countries

As I said, Van Gogh routinely substituted "goatfucker" for "immigrant to the Netherlands from an Islamic country". In his book *Allah Knows Best* (2001) he wrote: "There is a Fifth Column of goatfuckers in this country, who despise and spit at its native people. They hate our freedom." "Soon, the Fifth Column of goatfuckers will hurl poison gas, diseases and atomic bombs at your children and my children."

However, nothing justifies the murder of Van Gogh. The main immediate effect of it has been a further racist backlash in the Netherlands, with an Islamic primary school in Eindhoven fire-bombed for the fourth time, and mosques and buildings of secular Moroccan immigrant organisations attacked at night. Very many Dutch Moroccans participated in, and/or organised, protests against the murder of Van Gogh. However, that did not impress the bigots. Vice Prime Minister Zalm (VVD) declared, in George W. Bush style, "war on extreme Islam".

Who killed him and why?

The arrested suspect wrote a rambling five-page letter and left it at Van Gogh's body. Though his parents were from Morocco, he was raised in the Netherlands, spoke Dutch and apparently did not know Arabic. The letter contained nothing about Van Gogh. It was a long ramble concerning purported quotes from the Jewish Talmud. The suspect was said to be upset by his mother's death and by TV footage of US soldiers killing wounded Iraqi civilians. There is no proof that he did not act alone. So, an *individual* killed Van Gogh. Not "Islam". Not even "political Islam".

Again, there was *never any* excuse for this terrible murder. It seems murderer and victim had something in common: both fairly intelligent but mentally disturbed. Van Gogh often suffered from depression, according to the Dutch daily *NRC*. So, indeed, he certainly cannot be equated to a calculating racist politician who is neither alcoholic nor takes drugs.

Dutch poet Remco Campert wrote: "*De mortuis nil sibi bene*" [speak only good of the dead]. That is a maxim which Van Gogh violated consistently. I think I would insult him if now I would say nice sugary things about him." Campert continued his article with Van Gogh's quotes on Jews. He concluded: "These are not really the words of a true hero of free speech." ■

Qaradawi, Ken Bigley and Islamophobia

THE KIDNAPPINGS and killings by terrorist groups in Iraq, highlighted by the horrifying execution of the British engineering worker Ken Bigley, have appalled all of us.

Muslims across the world have been vociferous in condemning these acts and rejecting the murderers' claims to have committed them in the name of Islam. Daud Abdullah and Musharraf Hussain of the Muslim Council of Britain visited Baghdad in an effort to win Ken Bigley's release. The Qatar-based Islamic scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi also begged the hostage-takers to release Bigley, "whose only fault is having come to Iraq to help rebuild".

Dr al-Qaradawi, who was the subject of a hysterical Islamophobic campaign by the right-wing press during his visit to Britain in July, has in fact been one of the most active campaigners against the seizure of hostages in Iraq. He has declared that "Muslims are forbidden from kidnapping innocent people who have nothing to do with wars", and has demanded that the hostage-takers "stop such practices which unfairly brand Islam with terrorism and do disservice to its adherents". In August, Qaradawi blasted the terrorists who had executed twelve Nepalese building workers in Iraq as "people without religion and without brains".

After the journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot were kidnapped by a group demanding an end to the ban on the hijab in French schools, France's foreign minister Michel Barnier met with Dr al-Qaradawi in Cairo to enlist his support in securing the release of the two men. Despite the fact that he has been one of the fiercest critics of the hijab ban, Qaradawi had no hesitation in broadcasting an appeal on Al-Jazeera television condemning the kidnapping as "incompatible with Islam" and calling for the journalists to be freed immediately.

Antoine Basbous of the Paris Observatory of Arab Countries stated that Qaradawi's intervention was "fundamental" to winning support across the middle east for the French government's initiative. Michel Barnier later sent a letter to Qaradawi thanking him for his "vehement condemnation" of the kidnapping of the two journalists and other civilians in Iraq. "With such a clear condemnation of the abduction of the French hostages", Barnier wrote, "you have sent a clear-cut message demonstrating respect for the tenets of Islam." When the Italian aid workers Simona Pari and Simona

Torretta were abducted in Iraq early in September, Italy's foreign minister Franco Frattini visited Qaradawi's home in Qatar to ask for his help. Frattini declared his respect for Qaradawi as a moderate Muslim leader, and paid tribute to his role in initiating a dialogue with the West. Qaradawi for his part immediately condemned the kidnapping of the Italians, stating that "the two work for a humanitarian organisation which has nothing to do with the war". He pointed out that "while Italy participated in the war on Iraq, millions of Italians took to the streets to demonstrate against the war".

In view of the disgraceful coverage of his visit here in July, you might have thought the British media would give Dr al-Qaradawi credit for the contribution he has made in working with European political leaders to try and resolve the hostage-taking crisis in Iraq. On the contrary, not only has the press failed to report any of this, but they have slanderously accused him of backing the terrorists.

On 3 September the *Daily Mail* published an article falsely stating that Qaradawi had called for the killing of US and British civilians in Iraq. The *Mail* assured its readers that the report "demolishes the claim that al-Qaradawi is a moderate". The *Daily Mirror* followed up on 6 September with another lying article reporting that Qaradawi had issued a fatwa concerning "the religious permissibility of killing civilian Americans in Iraq". This provided the basis of a further article in the *Sunday Express* on 12 September, in which UKIP MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk claimed that Dr al-Qaradawi "asserts that it is permissible for Muslims to kill – by beheading? – American citizens in Iraq".

On 23 September, following the deaths of the two US hostages, Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong, the *Telegraph* reported a malicious and baseless accusation from a United Arab Emirates newspaper that Qaradawi bore responsibility for the killings, under the headline "TV sheikh incited hostage murders says Arab paper". And all this despite the fact that Qaradawi has stated unequivocally that US civilians in Iraq should be "treated in accordance with the Islamic tenets which stipulate the killing of civilians is forbidden".

The campaign against Islamophobia is a crucial one for the labour movement and all progressive forces in Britain today. The British media's treatment of Dr al-Qaradawi, both during and after his visit here, has only served to underline this point.

Robert Wilkins

A 'Clash of Civilizations', Sending Pink Sparks Flying

Yoshie Furuhashi

DO YOU remember Pim Fortuyn, a gay Dutch politician who rose to notoriety with his call for a moratorium on immigration and whose political party Lijst Pim Fortuyn received 1.6 million votes and 26 seats in the 150-seat parliament nine days after his assassination on 6 May 2002?

It is common today to automatically associate white gay male politics with the left. From Oscar Wilde, Magnus Hirschfeld, Sergei Eisenstein, Jean Genet, Harry Hay, Michel Foucault, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Guy Hocquenghem, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, John D'Emilio, to Tony Kushner, the finest and queerest of queer male intellectuals have been resolutely of the left (even when political parties on the left didn't welcome them, they remained radically pinko), and landmarks of gay men's activism from the Stonewall Uprising, le Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire, Act-Up, to Queer Nation stand on the left side of the political spectrum. While we know that some white gay men have espoused a range of right-wing politics (from Nazism of Ernst Röhm to Cold-War anticommunism of Roy Cohn to Log Cabin Republicanism of Andrew Sullivan), we (especially those of us on the queer left), noting that right-wing gay men are generally marginalized (and sometimes purged) by their fellow right-wingers, think that right-wing gay men have found themselves on the wrong side of the political spectrum, *against their own interests*.

The rise of Pim Fortuyn, however, signaled a new era of white gay male politics. By promoting anti-immigrant politics vigorously and marketing it with anti-Muslim prejudice demagogically, Fortuyn showed that right-wing populism can very well be gay and enormously popular to boot, as LPF votes in 2002 attest, in the Netherlands, "the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage (in March 2002)" (Wim Lunsing, 'Islam versus Homosexuality? Some Reflections on the Assassination of Pim Fortuyn', *Anthropology Today* 19.2, April 2003, p.19). It is ironic that the conservative thesis of Samuel Huntington finally

found its most charismatic advocate in the most liberal nation in the world:

"A prolific author, as far back as 1997 he [Pim Fortuyn] had published *Against Islamicization of Our Culture* (reissued as *The Islamicization of Our Culture: The Centrality of Dutch Identity* in late 2001, following 9/11 ...), in which he portrayed Islam in conflict with modern values and norms. He argued that because Islam does not tolerate separation between state and religion, it comes into direct conflict with liberal values. Already in August 2001 he had gone on record saying that 'I am ... in favour of a cold war with Islam. I see Islam as an extraordinary threat, as a hostile society'. He liked to call himself 'the Samuel Huntington of Dutch politics' because he endorsed Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1998)... [I]n an interview in the *Volkskrant* of 9 February 2002, he declared that there was no room for immigrants and asylum seekers in the Netherlands, that he was in favour of complete abandonment of the principle of non-discrimination, and that Islam was a backward religion: 'If I can legally manage it, I would say: no Muslim comes in[to this country] any more'." (Lunsing, p. 20)

While Fortuyn's life came to an end at the hands of a mad animal rights activist Van der Graaf, immigrants and asylum-seekers in the Netherlands live with his legacy:

"The Dutch parliament voted February 17 to expel some 26,000 asylum seekers from the Netherlands over the next three years, marking an escalation in the brutalisation of immigrants across Europe.... The bill affects all asylum seekers who arrived in the country before April 2001. They include Afghans, Somalis and Chechens facing civil wars or a return to regions with no functioning government. Many of those affected have been in the country for more than five years and have had children who have been raised within Dutch communities. Some have spent up to 10 years applying for residence, and consider themselves Dutch.

"All those who arrived before April 2001, and whose asylum applications have been rejected, are to be offered plane tickets and given eight weeks to leave the country. Levels of payment offered are to be assessed on circumstance by special committees. If asylum seekers refuse, they will be rounded up by immigration officers, supported by armed police if necessary, and taken to a departure centre. Here, for up to another eight weeks, they will come under pressure from lawyers and civil servants to leave voluntarily. The government has already opened deportation centres for the detention of families.

"If they still refuse to leave the country, they face a six-month prison sentence. They will then also lose any entitlement to a job, welfare, housing and health care. The government hopes that this will both force their expulsion and satisfy its obligations to support "voluntary" departure under international human rights conventions. (Paul Bond, 'Dutch Parliament Votes to Deport Asylum Seekers', *World Socialist Website*, 21 February 2004)

"Newcomers and settled immigrants will be forced to successfully pass an integration examination to prove they have integrated into Dutch society. The law is primarily aimed at non-EU family unification immigrants – especially those from Turkey and Morocco – who will be required to complete a basic integration test in their country of origin before arriving in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is the first country in the world to demand permanent immigrants complete a pre-arrival integration course. US, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and Japanese nationals are exempted from the pre-arrival courses.

"The changes come on the back of a Cabinet decision in March requiring Dutch residents earn at least 120 percent of the minimum wage before being allowed to bring their foreign partner into the country. Both the partner and Dutch resident must also be aged at least 21. Moving on, the Cabinet agreed on 23 April that after arriving in the country, a newcomer must report back to the local council after six months to monitor their integration progress. Authorities will determine when they will be assessed again. Those who fail to report will be fined.

"If the immigrant wants to be compensated for course costs, they must pass the integration exam within three years. If a newcomer has failed to integrate after five years, they will be fined.... A residence permit for an indefinite period can only be obtained once a foreigner has passed an integration exam. Settled immigrants will also be required to complete the integration exam except those who have already gained relevant diplomas.

"The Cabinet asserts that about 450,000 settled immigrants have a language deficiency and should

thus be forced to integrate.... To combat the growing problems in socio-economic disadvantaged areas in cities, the government has allowed the four largest cities demand that new residents earn a minimum level income before being permitted to settle in the city.... Taking up the fight against illegal immigrants, the Cabinet resolved on 23 April to boost the capacity of the foreign police and double the cells at deportation centres to about 3,000.

"Rental contracts can be dissolved if inquiries indicate that landlords have rented homes out to illegal immigrants. In the case of illegal subletting, the official tenant might also lose his or her home. Employers will be threatened with stiffer fines if they employ illegal workers. The average fine of EUR 980 will be increased to EUR 3,500 per illegal worker. More raids will thus be carried out and employers will also be forced to pay retrospective social security premiums and taxes if the illegal immigrant has worked there for six months. That bill could reportedly amount to EUR 6,000." (Aaron Gray-Block, 'Changes in Dutch Immigration Policy', *Expatica*, 19 May 2004)

"The Dutch government plans to scrap the law allowing third generation migrants to maintain dual nationality. Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk said it is "not permissible" for this group of people to have two passports. ('Dutch Set to Scrap Third Generation Dual Nationality', *Expatica*, 21 May 2004)

"Dutch political culture is sowing hate and criminalising migrants, former Liberal VVD leader Hans Dijkstal has claimed. He particularly slammed a proposal to publicly identify migrants on how much they have integrated into Dutch society. ('Dutch Political Culture "Cultivates Migrant Hate"', *Expatica*, 7 June 2004)

Will the phenomenon of a gay man successfully popularizing the rhetoric that pits "Islam" (misrepresented as inherently and monolithically homophobic and misogynistic) against "Western Civilization" (made out to be inherently and monolithically feminist and pro-gay) remain unique to the Netherlands? Or will the Netherlands be a harbinger, as more white gay men, now integrated in the militaries and soon to gain the equal right to marriage in most rich industrialized nations, lose the ability to identify with other outcasts like the Palestinians and migrant workers that once defined the politics and aesthetics of Genet (e.g., *Prisoner of Love*) and Fassbinder (e.g., *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*)?

Take Peter Tatchell, perhaps the most famous queer activist in Britain, for example. Unlike Fortuyn, Tatchell is still capable of gesturing toward the existence of tolerant Muslims, but a number of his writings suggest a paranoid fear of political powers of Muslims:

“The New Dark Ages are already with us. For hundreds of millions of people in parts of the Middle-East, Africa and South-East Asia, the ascendancy of Islamic fundamentalism has ushered in an era of religious obscurantism and intolerance. The liberal, compassionate wing of Islam – although it still has large numbers of adherents – is being forced onto the defensive and increasingly eclipsed.” (Peter Tatchell, ‘The New Dark Ages’, 1995)

“The political consequences for the gay community could be serious. As the fundamentalists gain followers, homophobic Muslim voters may be able to influence the outcome of elections in 20 or more marginal constituencies. Their voting strength could potentially be used to block pro-gay candidates or to pressure electorally vulnerable MPs to vote against gay rights legislation.” (Peter Tatchell/OutRage! Press Release, ‘The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Britain’, 10 April 1998)

While the politics of extreme Islamism presents indeed a danger (mainly to Muslims themselves rather than white British gay men like Tatchell), alarmist (and factually inaccurate) screeds like Tatchell’s do more damage than good to the very Muslims who are fighting for reforms – both in secular and religious arenas – by giving a gay obscurantist cover to the politics of intolerance. If Muslim voters are so vulnerable to radical Islamists’ persuasion, why not restrict their immigration to England, as the Dutch have sought to protect their “liberalism” and “civilization” by implementing more and more anti-immigrant measures? I won’t be surprised if Tatchell one day crosses the thin boundary between his rhetoric and Fortuyn’s.

Already, Tatchell’s politics may be properly called the advocacy of the Pink Man’s Burden, the White Man’s Burden in queer left drag:

“Peter Tatchell, Britain’s best-known and most notorious gay rights activist, still has ‘severe headaches’ from when he was set upon by President Robert Mugabe’s bodyguards after he tried to carry out a citizen’s arrest on the Zimbabwean leader in Brussels in March 2001. ‘I was battered far worse than most people think’, says Tatchell. ‘Thrown to the floor, kicked, punched.... I still have a bit of brain damage, and damage to my left eye. It’s not serious now, but I’m a bit slower than normal.’

“So can we expect similar sparks to fly during the UK election campaign, or has Tatchell learned his lesson about taking on figures in authority? ‘It’s long overdue that there were strong street protests against Blair’s authoritarian and pro-business policies’, says Tatchell. ‘He will continue to promote a social democratic version of Thatcherism, so long as people let him get away with it.’

“So how about a citizen’s arrest, to stop Blair in his tracks? After all, like Mugabe, Blair has been known to ‘break international law’ and show ‘contempt and disregard for human life’ (think Kosovo and Iraq). ‘Yes, but I’m not sure about arresting him’, says Tatchell. ‘I think you’d have a harder time getting to Blair than you would to Mugabe. And I don’t think there’s any comparison to the murders taking place in Zimbabwe.’” (Brendan O’Neill, ‘Me and My Vote: Peter Tatchell’, *Spiked*, 11 May 2001)

Mugabe is an authoritarian strongman who is no friend to democracy in Zimbabwe, to be sure, but he has not shown as much contempt and disregard for human life and international law as the multinational power elite like Blair who manage the empire of capital under the US hegemony, imposing the Washington Consensus globally with far bloodier results than Mugabe’s human rights violations at home. The Pink Man’s Burden, like the White Man’s Burden, has a way of obstructing the political vision of those who carry it, however.

Having left the Labour Party, which is to his credit, Tatchell has found a new political home in the Green Party. I hope he will at least remain where he is politically, without transforming himself into a British Fortuyn, who will stage a “Clash of Civilizations” that sends pink sparks flying.

This piece first appeared on Yoshie Furuhashi’s blog *Critical Montages* on 8 June 2004.

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Wombling Free? Anarchists and the European Social Forum

Geoffrey Brown

THE 2004 European Social Forum, held in London on 15-17 October, attracted more than 20,000 participants. The event featured 500 plenaries, seminars, workshops and cultural events, with more than 2,500 speakers representing every shade of opinion within the global justice movement. The ESF concluded with a 70,000-strong demonstration calling for an end to war, racism and privatisation, and for a Europe of peace and social justice. Hundreds of volunteers gave their services for free. The whole event was made possible by financial support from the Greater London Authority, who also provided free travel for the participants and cheap accommodation at the Dome.

However, the disruptive actions of the anarchist group the Wombles added a sour note to an otherwise successful ESF. On Saturday evening the Wombles and their allies invaded the main venue at Alexandra Palace and occupied the stage before the start of the anti-fascist plenary, at which Ken Livingstone had been billed as a speaker. They unfurled a banner bizarrely denouncing Livingstone – one of the most prominent opponents of the invasion and occupation of Iraq – as a Labour Party warmonger. Weyman Bennett of Unite Against Fascism, who was to have chaired the session, was assaulted and had his mobile phone stolen. The following day in Trafalgar Square, at the rally following the demonstration, the Wombles clashed with stewards while trying to storm the speakers' platform, leading to arrests by the police.

These actions were condemned by most of those involved in the ESF. A statement issued by 21 leading trade unionists and campaigners declared that “censorship of views by premeditated physical violence at the ESF is completely unacceptable. If such methods were introduced into our movements they would destroy all democratic functioning”.

Others, however, while not prepared to condone the Wombles' behaviour, have been inclined to see it as a response, albeit a mistaken

or exaggerated one, to the supposedly undemocratic process through which the London ESF was organised. It has been suggested that a more inclusive approach would have been able to draw the Wombles into the preparation of the Forum, dissuade them from setting up their own rival series of events, and avoid the disruption of the official ESF.

ESF – Bureaucratic and Undemocratic? Among those who were not involved in the organising process, the belief that the preparation of the London ESF was exclusive and bureaucratic appears to derive largely from reports in the far left press, and in the *Weekly Worker* in particular. It should be noted, however, that the criticisms of the London ESF in that publication were a repeat (admittedly in a greatly expanded form) of what it said about the Paris ESF last year.

In a *Weekly Worker* report of a preparatory meeting in Paris in September 2003, Tina Becker and Anne McShane complained about the lack of “democracy and transparency” there, and accused the French organising committee of acting in an “undemocratic and overbearing” manner. In the following issue Becker wrote that criticisms of the British SWP by Bernard Cassen of Attac were hypocritical, “as the French organising committee has been behaving in a similarly bureaucratic way”.

The fact that the *Weekly Worker's* reports and criticisms of the Paris process were not as extensive as those of the London ESF was due to the fact that the group has no members in France. If they had, we would no doubt have been subjected to numerous articles along the lines of those published during the preparation of the 2004 ESF, combining inaccurate accounts of meetings, half-baked gossip and the political fingering of individuals with influential positions in the labour movement.

Criticisms of the 2003 ESF similar to those by the *Weekly Worker*, but from a libertarian perspective, can be found in the current (November-

December 2004) issue of *Radical Philosophy*, where Les Levidow complains that the organisation of the Paris ESF was:

“... controlled by party cadres. When a French network of local social forums requested a meeting space, for example, their request was denied, though eventually they found a defunct church and expanded a Europe-wide network of such forums. The main opportunity for coordinating actions, the Assembly of Social Movements on the Sunday morning, centred on statements which bore little relation to strategic debates during the overall event. Indeed, the final declaration was largely written beforehand by an invitation-only small working group.”

Others favoured more physical forms of criticism. During the demonstration that concluded the Paris ESF a couple of hundred anarchists, incensed by the involvement in the Forum of members of a political organisation they regarded as bureaucratic and reformist, attacked the French Communist Party contingent with bottles and fireworks, provoking an intervention by the police. Even the *Weekly Worker* drew the line at this sort of behaviour. “In objective terms”, their reporter commented, “such a stunt is reactionary: frankly, it is the sort of thing one expects from fascists.” It might be remarked in passing that the same paper took a much more relaxed view of anarchist hooliganism at the London ESF.

There is no evidence that the Wombles themselves participated in the attack in 2003, but they were as scathing about the Paris ESF as they were about its successor in London. One of them has recalled that “one of the things we had found depressing about the Paris ESF was endless platitudes of speakers with little or no opportunity for participation”.

The point here is that criticisms of bureaucratism, centralism and undemocratic procedure, and violent protests against the involvement of members of political organisations, were not limited to the London ESF. Such criticisms and protests, whether at the Paris or London Forums, are a reflection not so much of deficiencies in the way they are organised as of the compulsive and destructive oppositionalism that afflicts a section of the far left.

Neither the Paris nor the London ESF would have been possible without the commitment of large sums of public money and the involvement of mass organisations, notably the trade unions. A formal delegate-based structure is therefore a necessity for the preparation of the ESF wherever it is held. Inevitably this provokes hostility from individuals and groups who have little popular support and therefore favour a looser format that would allow them to secure a prominent role for themselves within the organising process. Cynic-

ally, they present this demand – for small ultra-left minorities to wield powers entirely out of proportion to the negligible forces they represent – as a campaign for democracy.

Wombles' Critique of the ESF

The Wombles themselves, who are an extreme example of this tendency, have since attempted to justify their behaviour at the London ESF with the argument that it was undemocratically organised. They claim that the Forum was hijacked by Ken Livingstone, the Greater London Authority and the SWP, and that it “deliberately ignored all the guiding principles of the World/European Social Forum”. As others have pointed out, however, there is a considerable degree of double-talk going on here.

The Wombles were initially involved in the organising process for the ESF but walked out at a very early stage. They attended one of the early preparatory assemblies in December 2003 where their main contribution involved “heckling and shouting at every speaker from the SWP”, according to the *Weekly Worker*. When it became clear that the organising body would adopt a delegate structure, rather than remain a free-for-all in which any random individual could just turn up, the Wombles lost interest.

However, their argument at that time was not that the 2004 ESF had abandoned the established procedures and philosophy of the WSF/ESF. On the contrary, they argued that the organisation of the London event was very much in *conformity* with the principles of the WSF/ESF, principles which they themselves vehemently rejected.

The Wombles produced a critique of the World Social Forum and the ESF (available on their website, www.wombles.org.uk) in which they described the Social Forums as “institutions which parallel the development of capitalist institutions of governance”. Indeed, according to their analysis, the ESF was itself one of the “contemporary institutions of domination”.

In line with their attacks on Livingstone and the GLA, the Wombles' document criticised the involvement of Lula and other members of the Brazilian Workers Party in the original Porto Alegre WSF. They even condemned the presence within the Social Forums of NGOs, which they defined as pro-capitalist bodies. The Wombles accused the WSF/ESF of promoting “reformist demands such as taxes on corporations, protective/anti-privatization policies from governments, power to ‘civil society’ etc”. They specifically criticised the inclusivity, diversity and plurality of the WSF/ESF, claiming that this led directly to the adoption of such “minimalist objectives”.

The Wombles explained the allegedly undemocratic character of the ESF not as a consequence

of GLA/SWP dominance but of the ESF's own organisational structures. "Even if the ESF publicizes itself as 'decentralised participatory democracy'", they wrote, "it is in reality hierarchical and thus becomes a field where other hierarchical organizations, such as political parties, try to control it in pursuit of their own interests."

The Wombles concluded their critique by stating that they would work with other groups to promote "autonomous spaces" during the period of the ESF, based upon the principles of self-organisation, autonomy and direct action. The organisation of such spaces is not necessarily opposed to the ESF itself, and indeed there were proponents of "autonomous spaces" who saw these as complementary to the official Forum. On that basis they organised alternative events, which were listed in the official programme. However, as the Wombles themselves made clear, they were among those who argued that in London the fringe should be organised in outright opposition to the ESF.

Unable to convince the more moderate advocates of "autonomous spaces" of their case, the Wombles announced the organisation of their own series of events on the basis of explicit hostility to the official ESF, which was condemned as "a place where political parties and social democrats co-opt and dominate the new movement against capital for their own purposes". Entitled "Beyond the ESF", the Wombles' anti-ESF events were designed to attract the minority who are already committed to anarchist/libertarian methods of struggle against capitalism, rather than those those they sneered at as "sensitive, political active citizens", who would be attending the official Forum.

It is clear from the above that the Wombles' claim to have carried out their disruptive stunts at the London ESF in defence of the "guiding principles" of the WSF/ESF is simply laughable.

Who are the Wombles?

The Wombles ("White Overalls Movement Building Liberation through Effective Struggle") were set up in imitation of the Italian organisation known as *tute bianche* (white overalls) and of the dominant tendency within that organisation, Ya Basta!, who were themselves inspired by the Zapatistas. The *tute bianche* (who dissolved their organisation in 2001) participated in demonstrations dressed in white workers' overalls and chemical suits. This was supposed to symbolise the invisibility of people with no rights, no power, no individual identity, on the margins of a "normal life". They also wore protective pads, shields and helmets, though they said this was in order to pursue a form of militant nonviolence, countering

police brutality by interposing themselves between police and protestors.

The Wombles were launched in Britain by self-styled "libertarian communists" after the September 2000 protests against the annual meeting of the IMF/World Bank in Prague, where they joined the *tute bianche* in confronting the police. Alessio Lunghi, who is described as the Wombles' "default spokesman" (because the Wombles claim to have no official spokesperson or hierarchy), is the son of an Italian wine importer and it was apparently through him that contacts were made with anarchist currents in Italy.

The Wombles have attempted to reproduce the self-managed "social centres", which have provided Ya Basta! with its base in Italy, by occupying empty buildings, "initially for the purpose of having a space to organise and then to create a social basis and service to the local community". They admit this has not been an equivalent success in Britain: "We found that the nature of our actions affected the safety of liberated spaces and have led to several places being prematurely closed by police." A recent example of this was the squat in Fortress Road, Kentish Town, from which they were evicted in August. The result is that the Wombles lack the roots in civil society that Ya Basta! established and have evolved as a free-floating association of individuals united by a common commitment to supposedly non-hierarchical forms of organisation and to methods of direct action.

The "militant nonviolence" of the *tute bianche* has also proved less than successful when transposed to Britain. One critic has observed that the Wombles "never recruited to a critical mass to duplicate this nonviolent militant tactic". On May Day 2001 in London, when they were heavily outnumbered by police, the Wombles' methods proved ineffective. Since 2001 the anarchists' May Day protest, which provided the main arena for such actions, has gone downhill fast. The 2002 and 2003 events were something of a damp squib, with small groups of protestors dodging around the West End trying to evade the police. In 2004 the Mayday Collective, with which the Wombles were involved, was forced to announce that the annual protest had been cancelled due to lack of interest.

The Wombles themselves now downplay this aspect of their activity. Their website points out that "only a few WOMBLES actions have required helmets, padding and white overalls. Though the media impression of WOMBLES has been this, we do more things than look silly - honest!" In fact the *tute bianche* approach now appears to have been sidelined in favour of more aggressive tactics.

The Wombles have in fact always had an ambiguous attitude towards political (or, more

accurately, anti-political) violence. They accused Ya Basta! of “hierarchical discipline and authoritarianism” – because Ya Basta! stewards tried to prevent “Black Bloc” anarchists from smashing windows during the protest at the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001. Indeed, one of the Wombles’ charges against the Social Forums is that they have “promoted the distinction between ‘violent’; and ‘non-violent’ protestors so as to be compliant with the status quo”.

Wombles at the Dublin EU Summit

An example of the Wombles’ new, more aggressive methods was seen at the May 2004 EU summit at Farmleigh House in Dublin, where a protest march was organised in defiance of an effective police ban. Although the broad-based organising committee, the Dublin Grassroots Network, had decided on a peaceful protest that would avoid physical confrontation with the police, the Wombles were part of a group of anarchists who rejected this decision. According to their own statement, a plan to try and break through police lines was adopted the evening before the demonstration by “people planning to join the march who did not wish to march under the guidelines issued by Dublin Grassroots Network”.

Note that there was no claim that the DGN was bureaucratic, centralised, undemocratic, exclusive, dominated by political parties or anything of that sort. The Wombles simply decided that they and their fellow anarchists would not abide by the majority decision because they disagreed with it. Their justification was:

“In a world where hundreds of thousands of people die every year due to the economic policies of global capitalism, the discussion of the ‘violence’ of a push through police lines or property damage on a demonstration becomes an irrelevance.”

Needless to say, the anarchists’ attempt to break through police lines resulted in a backlash against all the demonstrators. A water cannon was turned on the marchers, who were then subjected to baton charges by riot police. A minority of the demonstrators responded by throwing bottles and cans of beer at the police, hitting one policewoman on the head and hospitalising her. The media of course seized on this in order to ignore the actual objectives of the march and instead misrepresent the event as a case of anarchist hooligans attacking the police.

As the DGN pointed out in a statement issued after the demonstration: “The main story is surely that between 3 and 5,000 people found the courage to march in the face of the ban and the threat of the riot police, in defence of the freedom of assembly and opinion and as a protest against privatisation, militarisation and ‘Fortress Europe’. A secondary story is surely that the police did indeed attack

citizens on the Navan Road, injuring several and arresting two dozen. Yet media attention has largely ignored both of these stories in favour of a focus on the alleged actions of a small number of protestors.”

The Wombles claimed that their own methods had been nonviolent, amounting to no more than linking arms and trying to push through the police line. However, they refused to criticise others who did favour attacking the police. As one Womble declared: “The only problem I had with people throwing beer cans was that it was a waste of good beer! For fuck’s sake people, this is a social war, are we really going to cry if people throw a few rocks and bottles – I’m sure I’m not!” In any case, the Wombles’ decision to force their way through police lines, in circumstances where the riot police were looking for an excuse to suppress the demonstration, inevitably led to a violent clash.

The actions of the Wombles and their friends prompted a fierce debate on the Irish Indymedia discussion list. As one critic of the anarchists’ tactics argued, “many had hoped there would be unity in the last part of the march to Farmleigh – this splinter group made everything turn sour and gave the state and the media exactly what they wanted”.

The arrogant elitism of the anarchists came in for particular criticism. “By deciding to have a confrontation with the police”, another participant pointed out, “these people were completely interfering with our attempts to have a peaceful protest. That showed no respect whatsoever for our tactics or goals.... By insisting on their tactics, and refusing to take others’ views into account, they were displaying fanaticism and closed-mindedness, as if *the only thing* that mattered was their right to do whatever they wanted ...”

Addressing the Wombles and their allies, another supporter of the DGN complained bitterly: “It is your small group of friends who try to dictate to the rest of us how we should act and what we should do. There is nothing ‘democratic’ nor ‘non-hierarchical’ about this strategy ... instead of creating new forms of resistance you offer division and violence.... You led people into a violent situation of your own planning. People came on to the street for the first time attracted to the positive energy of the march to Farmleigh, *not* because they wanted to be put in danger by the violence that you planned and provoked.”

Some might argue that these methods flow directly from the Wombles’ anarchist ideology. As Hal Draper argues in his pamphlet *The Two Souls of Socialism*: “Anarchism is on principle fiercely anti-democratic, since an ideally democratic authority is still authority. But since, rejecting democracy, it has no other way of resolving the inevitable disagreements and differences ... its

unlimited freedom for each uncontrolled individual is indistinguishable from unlimited despotism by such an individual, both in theory and practice.”

The Wombles’ actions at the Dublin EU summit, and their subsequent disruption of the London ESF, were entirely in line with this philosophy.

Whither the Wombles?

Apart from its roots in general anarchist ideology, the latest evolution of the Wombles seems to reflect the fact that they have reached something of an impasse as far as their original methods of action are concerned. As we have seen, by their own admission duplicating the Italian social centres has proved difficult in Britain, where the harsher character and more rigorous enforcement of anti-squatting laws have prevented the establishment of such centres on any but a short term basis. The methods of the *tute bianche* have also proved ineffective when relatively small numbers of

Wombles are confronted by the much larger forces of the Metropolitan Police, while it appears that the May Day anarchist protests have in any case fizzled out.

Recent experience suggests that the Wombles are now turning instead to publicity-generating physical confrontations that have more in common with the aggressive forms of direct action pursued by elements within the “Black Bloc”. With the forces of the state having proved too strong for them, there is no doubt a temptation for the Wombles to choose softer targets, namely their opponents on the left, as happened at the ESF. They should be persuaded that, even from their own standpoint, it would be disastrous to go down that road. If the Wombles’ preferred libertarian, “horizontal” form of organisation is to win wider support, this will be done by demonstrating in practice its superiority as an alternative to the hierarchical methods they oppose, not by arrogantly disrupting and obstructing the activities of those they have as yet failed to convince. ■

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Extending the Circle of Compassion: Socialism and Animal Rights

Terry Liddle

“Those who opposed slavery in the 19th century are those who today have stopped eating meat” boldly proclaims a poster produced by the *Cahiers Antispécistes* of Lyon and a number of other French and Spanish animal rights groups. It also calls for the 21st century to be the century of animal liberation. In his 1974 book *Animal Liberation* Peter Singer wrote: “The tyranny of human over non-human animals has caused and today is still causing an amount of pain and suffering that can only be compared with that which resulted from the centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans. The struggle against this tyranny is a struggle as important as any of the moral and social issues that have been fought over in recent years.

“For sure, the enslavement of millions of Africans by Europeans and Americans from the late 15th to the mid-19th century merits close comparison with the position of non-human animals in today’s capitalist society. Cities like Bristol and Liverpool were built on slavery and it was capital derived from the profits of slavery that financed the industrial revolution. Is it any wonder that when Thomas Paine wanted to include abolition of slavery in the American constitution the rich plantation owners stopped him?

Slaves could of course revolt as they did in Haiti under the influence of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the French Revolution. For such revolts, or for trying to escape, slaves were beaten, mutilated or executed. The animals in today’s battery farms or vivisection laboratories, unless they are liberated by animal rights activists, cannot escape. Slaves were not bred for food nor were they subjected to horrific experiments which are scientific fraud. Millions of animals are.

Few people nowadays know where their food comes from. They do not associate the chicken nugget, burger or sausage on their plate or the ready-prepared joint in the supermarket with the

living animal. If people had to rear and slaughter animals for their own consumption one suspects there would be many more vegetarians. The demand for cheap food has resulted in animals being forced to live in entirely unnatural conditions. Close-packed into battery sheds they neither see daylight nor feel the wind or rain. Stuffed with growth hormones and antibiotics, which then go into the human food chain, they are bred for death. Male calves in dairy herds are killed at two days old; hunting dogs grown too old to hunt are killed and fed to their fellows. Cattle, natural herbivores, were fed on the remains of dead infected sheep, thereby passing on new and deadly diseases to humans.

Areas of the Amazonian rain forests have been destroyed to make space for rearing cattle. Within a few years the topsoil has blown away. In a hungry world grains and beans, instead of feeding humans, are fed to animals reared for meat. The McDonald’s diet based on large amounts of saturated animal fat, salt and sugar and very little fibre is far from healthy. It is also very profitable. The pay and conditions for workers in burger joints are far from good and their owners have fought hard to stop workers organising in trade unions. They have gone to great lengths to silence their critics, such as London Greenpeace.

Vivisection is also highly profitable. Last year there were 2.79 million animal experiments and the number is rising. Yet the differences between animals, even those such as chimpanzees who share much of our DNA, and humans are obvious. Animals do not smoke tobacco or drink alcohol, they do not suffer diseases such as arthritis and hypertension. Trying to find answers to these human problems by experimenting on animals is plain daft. Drugs such as digitalis which tested unsafe on animals have been highly effective when applied to humans. Drugs which tested safe on animals have had disastrous results when applied

to humans. Remember Thalidomide? There are many safe, natural, herbal medicines which even when they do little good do no harm. The animal-tested drugs produced by the pharmaceutical monopolies are those which are foisted onto the public. The motive, of course, is profit.

There are many other aspects to animal abuse and exploitation. The pursuit across country by upper class twits of foxes and stags to the point where they become exhausted and are dismembered by packs of dogs, and the rearing of game birds to be blasted from the skies, are one. The breeding or trapping of animals such as seals so that their skins may adorn the bodies of pampered women with more money than compassion is another. There is also the wicked lie of so-called freedom foods. Better treated when alive, the animals still end up dead.

Despite the efforts of pioneer socialists and animal rights supporters such as Henry Salt, the Left has largely ignored animal rights. With its activities often geared up to the next strike, the next paper sale or the next election, its concept of the struggle for liberation is often at best one-dimensional. At one time the Socialist Workers Party supported vivisection and held meetings on whether socialists should be vegetarians. One did not have to attend the meetings to know the answer. Nowadays, they would doubtless see opposition to the horrific Moslem method of ritual slaughter as Islamophobia.

Many animal rights activists are rightly suspicious of the Left which they see as manipulative and dishonest, interested not in furthering the cause but solely in recruiting to the vanguard party. They are not, however, misanthropes and terrorists despite all the scare stories.

Many are involved in other causes such as the peace movement and anti-fascism. Keith Mann, a spokesperson for the Animal Liberation Front, who was awarded a 14-year sentence for his animal rights activity, has said that "extremism" will stop if the vivisection laboratories will but open themselves up to public inspection. He feels that if the public knew the truth about the suffering and death inflicted behind locked doors there would be such an outcry that vivisection would be ended.

Socialism, if it is not to be tyranny in a new guise, must of necessity be an extreme and consistently democratic humanism. Yet humanism is not an end in itself. In realising itself it creates new qualities.

One such new quality is the extension of the circle of compassion beyond humans to the other living beings with which we share the planet. Discounting the notion of creation, humans and non-humans are products of a common evolutionary process. Because humans can reason they have a duty to apply that reason to the treatment of animals. We need to stop abusing, exploiting and killing animals for our own ends. We need to see nature as something to be worked with, not subjugated. We need to explore alternatives such as natural medicines and an emphasis on the preventative rather than the curative. We need to have the land and the tools to grow some of our own food. We need to stop polluting the land with artificial pesticides and fertilisers which damage wild animal habitats. We need to re-examine our diet and move away from one based on animal products to one based on grains, vegetables and pulses. We need to stop vivisection, hunting and the fur trade. We need to cherish life and let it thrive in all its forms.

The Green Party, which has a much better policy on animals than much of the Left, has an animal rights working group. The Labour Party has an animal welfare society, which has managed to get animal rights issues debated at party conference. However, Labour in government has prevaricated on banning hunting with dogs while threatening a crackdown on animal rights activists. Attempts to form an animal rights group for socialists outside of the Labour Party have had little success in a Left mired in myopic economism.

In 1907 there was a united front of anti-vivisectionists, socialists and feminists against attempts to demolish a statue in Battersea of a brown dog which had been erected as a monument to the victims of fraudulent science. Nearly a century later such a united front is urgently needed. On animal rights demonstrations one often hears the slogan "human liberation, animal liberation – one struggle, one fight". It is high time socialists woke up to its essential truth. ■

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Brownshirts in Blazers? The Rise of UKIP

Martin Sullivan

WITH ITS 16% of the vote in the June Euro-elections the UK Independence Party, previously dismissed as a group of cranks on the political fringe, displaced the Lib Dems as the third largest party and won 12 seats in the European Parliament – a big advance on the 6.5% and 3 seats it achieved in 1999. UKIP followed this up in September by coming third in the Hartlepool by-election, relegating the Tories to fourth place. The party showed it had the potential to establish itself as a significant force in British politics.

UKIP has its origins in the Anti-Federalist League, which was formed in 1991 by Alan Sked, a London School of Economics professor and ardent Thatcherite, to campaign against the European Community (as it then was) and the Maastricht Treaty in particular. UKIP itself was launched in 1993 but made slow progress. It won only 3% of the vote in the 1994 European elections and subsequently found itself overshadowed by James Goldsmith's Referendum Party, which enjoyed the advantage of being bankrolled by a millionaire.

After Goldsmith's death in 1997 and the disintegration of his party, UKIP's fortunes began to look up. It attracted wealthy backers such as Yorkshire property tycoon Paul Sykes, who contributed over £1 million to the party's 2004 European election campaign, while the media attention generated by the recruitment of former TV personality Robert Kilroy-Silk and actress Joan Collins helped raise the party's profile among the general public. In this year's elections the UKIP campaign team included Dick Morris, Bill Clinton's one-time political strategist, and PR specialist Max Clifford who selflessly gave his services in exchange for a £30,000-a-month salary.

UKIP's ability to conduct a well-financed, effectively publicised campaign would not in itself have been enough, however, to secure such an increase in its vote. What, then, explained the surge in support for UKIP in June? Apart from the fact that it attracted a general protest vote against the main political parties, the obvious answer is that UKIP's euroscepticism struck a chord among a section of the electorate. Certainly, the party's

denunciations of the European Union's bureaucracy and lack of democratic accountability have a broad appeal (even if its MEPs show little compunction about getting their own snouts in the trough at Brussels). Indeed, some on the left have even suggested that UKIP's electoral gains expressed, if in a confused and contradictory form, a healthy popular opposition to the current project of European integration.

But this hardly explains the success of two UKIP candidates in the London Assembly elections, where Europe was not exactly a major issue. Rather, the attraction of UKIP's line on Europe has to be understood in the context of the openly racist propaganda that the party has directed towards white voters. Thus UKIP's campaign against the EU concentrates on the alleged threat posed by immigration from Eastern Europe, tying this into a wider xenophobic attack on migrants, asylum seekers and foreigners in general.

The party's website declares that Britain is "already full up", is in fact "bursting at the seams" due to an influx of foreigners. "Our cities are overcrowded", UKIP asserts, "our roads clogged up and our railways are grinding to a halt. Our doctors' surgeries cannot cope and the hospital waiting lists are growing. New housing estates are covering the countryside. In 2002, the UK government allowed in another 200,000 people. The UK Independence Party will put an end to mass immigration." The cover of UKIP's manifesto features three white babies with the slogan: "Concerned about their future? This is their country, make sure it stays that way."

Of course, UKIP repeatedly and indignantly denies that it is a racist party. But it combines this with an equally fervent denunciation of political correctness, which it claims prevents an honest debate on issues of race and immigration. In practice, this means that UKIP persistently plays the race card while claiming that it is merely exercising freedom of speech. Its website quotes a UKIP member as saying: "I am no racist, but I am prepared to have a discussion about how things like immigration affect our country. I went to a

Christian school where they were not scared to talk about the Empire and colonies and other races. You can't say anything now because people will point their finger and cry 'harassment'."

One of UKIP's most vociferous critics of political correctness was boxing promoter Frank Maloney, the party's candidate in the London mayoral election. After a visit to Tower Hamlets, Maloney posted an article on his campaign website condemning Whitechapel as a ghetto. "Immigrants are not integrating with the rest of British society", he wrote, "but creating their own areas, where the rule of law does not apply and people have no allegiance to Britain whatsoever – and even seek to harm British people." Pointing out that his own family comes from the area, he added: "Now barely anyone speaks English and to look around you would think you are in a different country."

It is understandable therefore that Robert Kilroy-Silk, now one of the party's 12 MEPs, chose to join UKIP after being sacked from his TV job for publishing an article in the *Sunday Express* describing Arabs as "suicide bombers", "limb-amputators" and "women-repressors". This sort of comment has in fact been a regular feature of Kilroy-Silk's *Express* column. Earlier he had written: "The barmy liberals like Diane Abbott don't like the word 'swamped' when used by the Home Secretary to describe schools and GPs' surgeries being overrun by asylum seekers who cannot speak English. What word would they prefer? Overwhelmed? Drowned? Submerged? What is the problem with using proper English words to describe an appalling situation that many British people have to put up with?" And he had a ready explanation for HIV and the rise in TB cases in Britain: "The indigenous population is not responsible. The diseases are being brought here by refugees, immigrants and tourists.... It is the foreigners that we have to focus on."

UKIP's political character is demonstrated not just by its recruits but by its friends in the European Parliament, where it is part of a euro-sceptic alliance which includes the League of Polish Families, a Christian fundamentalist, anti-semitic organisation that attacks the EU as a plot by freemasonry against Christianity. One of its leading figures is historian Ryszard Bender of the Catholic University of Lublin, who has described Auschwitz as "not a death camp, but a labour camp. Jews, Gypsies and others were killed by hard labour, not always that hard and not always killed".

UKIP is not without its own Holocaust deniers. In 2001 the party's then Scottish organiser Alistair McConnell wrote to the press supporting the views of right-wing historian David Irving and criticising the Board of Deputies of British Jews for exercising undue influence over the media on this issue. In an email to another UKIP member, McConnell wrote: "I don't accept that gas chambers were used to execute Jews for the simple

fact there is no direct physical evidence to show that such gas chambers ever existed.... there are no photographs or film of execution gas chambers.... Alleged eyewitness accounts are revealed as false or highly exaggerated." The UKIP leadership publicly defended McConnell's right to free speech and restricted itself to suspending him from the executive for a year.

In light of all this, it is not surprising to find that some of UKIP's leading members have past links with the far right. Two of its MEPs, Mike Nattrass and Jeffrey Titford, were formerly members of the New Britain Party, a pro-Apartheid, pro-White Rhodesia outfit whose leader Dennis Delderfield is on record as arguing that "suburb after suburb and town after town across the land have been taken over by Asians, Africans and Afro-Caribbeans.... In the not too distant future they will have direct control in many areas". Nattrass, who stood as a candidate for Delderfield's party in the 1994 Dudley by-election, has explained his change of political allegiance on the grounds that "UKIP is electable and New Britain isn't".

Another MEP, Nigel Farage, held discussions in 1997 with the British National Party's Mark Deavin, a former student of UKIP founder Alan Sked. Deavin was the author of a document entitled 'The Grand Plan: The Origins of Non-White Immigration', which argued that "the mass immigration of non-Europeans into every White country on earth" had been engineered by "a homogeneous transatlantic political and financial elite to destroy the national identities and create a raceless new world order". The plan was, Deavin wrote, "Jewish in origin". Farage wouldn't have felt entirely out of place in such company. Sked, who left the party in 1997, in part because he believed it was being taken over by "extremists", has recalled an argument with Farage over the inclusion of a statement on the party's membership form opposing discrimination against minorities. "We will never win the nigger vote", Farage told him. "The nig-nogs will never vote for us."

Concerning links with the British National Party, Sked has noted that, despite the UKIP leadership's public condemnation of the BNP, there is in fact "a symbiosis between elements of the parties". Indeed, in the summer of 2003 the UKIP and BNP held negotiations over an electoral agreement under which they would avoid competing for the anti-EU vote in their respective strongholds. While no official agreement was reached, Sked observes that BNP leader Nick Griffin has spoken on the BBC of "an informal pact between his party and elements of the UKIP leadership". Although the fascists have won suburban council seats and Frank Maloney's London mayoral campaign was clearly intended to attract a backward white working class vote, the basic division of labour is, as Deavin explained back in 1997, that "the BNP will be the official opposition in the inner cities, in

working class areas. The UKIP will be the opposition in the shires, the county areas, the middle class opposition”.

Although the parties are political rivals, and the UKIP leadership has in the past expelled BNP entrants, there is an evident overlap between the two organisations. Peter Troy, who headed UKIP's list for the European elections in Scotland, had previously stood down from the same position in the North East amid a row over his recruitment of a BNP activist to UKIP. And the Britain in Europe organisation identified nine candidates standing for the BNP in the European elections who were former UKIP members. In response UKIP's leader, former Tory MP Roger Knapman, insisted that his party had no connection with the BNP and that “we abhor racism”, assertions that caused much mirth on a fascist internet discussion list. “His nose must be a foot long by now”, one post read.

The UKIP's prejudices extend beyond ethnic minorities to gays. In an article in the *New Statesman* describing his experiences in the party, former UKIP member and co-author of its 2001 general election manifesto Aidan Rankin wrote: “Homophobia was one of the few forces uniting a notoriously divided party. To its brownshirt-in-blazer tendency, the dangers of Europe and the dangers of homosexuality were intertwined.” Indeed, Damian Hockney, now one of UKIP's London Assembly members, stood against Michael Portillo in the 1999 Kensington & Chelsea by-election under the slogan “It takes a real man to defend the £”, thus neatly combining anti-gay prejudice with opposition to the euro. During his mayoral campaign Frank Maloney attacked London's Pride festival, declaring that he had “a problem with gay parades. I object to seeing policemen in uniform holding hands in public – it's not a family way of life and we should support the family more”. He followed this up with the remark that he didn't intend to visit the north London borough of Camden because there were “too many gays” there.

Not surprisingly, UKIP is not exactly a fervent

supporter of feminism, either. Godfrey Bloom, UKIP MEP for Yorkshire and the Humber, who was selected to represent his party on the European Parliament's women's rights committee, proceeded to argue that “no self-respecting small businessman with a brain in the right place would ever employ a lady of child-bearing age”, adding that women should get back to the kitchen and learn to “clean behind the fridge”. Even the *Daily Telegraph* commented that Bloom's outburst gave UKIP “a misogynistic image that it will have difficulty shaking off”. The party leadership, however, refused to condemn Bloom's views, claiming that he was merely trying to highlight the cost of maternity pay for small firms.

During the June elections anti-racists rightly concentrated on preventing the BNP from winning seats, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the threat posed by UKIP. In contrast to the BNP, whose fascist origins have proved a heavy electoral liability, UKIP's more “mainstream” racism is capable of winning much wider support. If an extreme right-wing party with a broad popular base is to emerge in Britain, it is likely to take this form.

Whether UKIP can make any further advances in building such a party is debateable, given its tendency to tear itself apart by political infighting, currently demonstrated by Kilroy-Silk's bid for the party leadership and his consequent expulsion from UKIP's European parliamentary group. This came too late to prevent the resignation of Frank Maloney, who complained that the party had been “hijacked by a sun-tanned parasite”. Paul Sykes has left too, in protest at the decision to stand against Tory eurosceptics in the general election, taking his money with him.

One thing is certain, though – UKIP's brand of europhobia has absolutely nothing in common with the left's criticisms of the EU or indeed with any kind of progressive politics whatsoever.

A shorter version of this article appeared in the July 2004 issue of *Labour Left Briefing*.

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Neither New Labour nor Gorgeous George: How One Old Trot Ended Up a Reluctant Green Voter on Super Thursday

Dave Osler

B RITISH POLITICS is changing, and the multiple elections held on so-called Super Thursday last June amply make the point. For probably the first time since the formation of the Labour Party, watching it take a pummelling at the polls was arguably the optimum outcome for socialists.

By undermining Blairism, both the Labour left and the Respect-centred non-Labour left have been presented with opportunities. Whether either is sufficiently tactically astute to grasp them is another matter.

It may seem paradoxical – nay, blasphemy itself – to tell Labour leftwingers that their interests are not best served by the highest possible Labour vote. But trust me, fellas. This might hurt, but it is for your own good.

Far too many Labour left comrades cling to the essentially patronising idea that there are millions of class-conscious but somehow slightly stupid reformist workers out there who have been duped into keeping a shrine to Clement Atlee in their spare bedroom.

The masses honestly believe that Labour will slowly expropriate capitalism through piecemeal parliamentary legislative measures. The task of revolutionaries, as the orthodox Trot jargon has it, is to go through the experience of Labour government with them.

Life just ain't like that anymore. Of course the majority of the working class still vote Labour. Of course Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party. But the average trade union activist pretty much takes for granted that Blairites are a bad lot. They don't vote Labour because they believe there is a parliamentary road to socialism. They vote Labour because they are not quite as bad as the Tories.

That's if they vote Labour at all. Electoral

participation is in long-term decline, and not all of the no shows are down to apathy. A significant minority of abstainers – particularly among the young – are effectively saying “none of the above”. It's game over for such traditional Trot slogans such as “class vote for Labour”.

All of this dovetails with a second factor, which was that none of the votes on Super Thursday actually mattered very much. UKIP US import spindoctor and former Clinton staffer Dick Morris made the following entirely accurate prediction about the euro-elections six months ahead of the event: “What's going to happen is that UKIP is going to rack up an amazing vote ... almost precisely because the European Parliament doesn't mean a whole hell of a lot. It will be a symbolic vote for a symbolic body for a symbolic party.”

Super Thursday was a glorified opinion poll that, whatever the outcome, was never going to change anything essential about British politics. Or put it another way. Does any Londoner reading this frankly give tuppence whether Claude Moraes or Mary Honeyball are euro-MPs or not? Does it make any difference whatsoever to the class struggle, one way or the other, whether such braindead Blairite nonentities get into an essentially impotent body that is in any case saddled with a permanent large centre-right majority? To ask such questions is to answer them.

Come to that, how much of a tribune of the oppressed could Respect candidates such as Gorgeous George expect to prove in Strasbourg's heated debates over the latest European Commission widget manufacturing standards directive? You can just imagine the television interviews now, can't you? And now we hand you over to John Rees MEP, who explains the Leninist line on banana curvature ...

The London mayor and Assembly contests were also fights over essentially administrative positions of pretty limited power. True, many of Livingstone's supporters went into politics ardent for world revolution. Trouble is, they are now reduced to arguing that congestion charging is a pretty close second.

Labour Party comrades campaigned for Livingstone, while even Respect urged a second preference for Red Ken. Less than a fortnight later, comrade mayor was urging RMT members to cross picket lines. Bloody brilliant. Class vote for Labour, right?

The Labour London Assembly candidates were a pretty uninspiring bunch, even though individuals such as Lucy Anderson made a few token squeaks in the right direction.

When it comes to the local government contests outside London, things have clearly changed since the early eighties glory days that municipal socialism shared with Duran Duran. Councils are powerless to enact even localised progressive agendas. Their main role is to vote on which private company gets the contract to empty the bins. It is pretty far-fetched to describe Britain's town halls as sites of struggle. Come back dented shield, all is forgiven.

Does it matter whether it is New Labour, the Lib-Dems or the Tories that are creaming off inflated attendance allowances while overseeing cutbacks in local swimming pools and slashing library opening hours? Maybe there should be a political congestion charge for parties that clog up the centre-right of British politics.

Not only that, some Labour local authorities have a certain whiff of Tammany Hall about them. While I am no expert on Tyneside local politics, it's a fair bet that the whatever damage the change of administration in Newcastle has done to the machine politics employed by certain trade unions in the North East, it hasn't done municipal transparency in general any harm.

So if the "vote Labour with no illusions" guidelines of the past no longer apply, how should socialists work out which way to vote? These days, party label is no longer sufficient basis for an automatic decision. It is important to factor in a candidate's personal political track record and the political programme she is standing on before coming to a decision.

On the mayoral ballot, I voted Independent Working Class Association, safe in the knowledge that Lorna Reid would be one of the first candidates to have her votes redistributed and that my vote would then pass on to Livingstone. In the euros and the assembly votes, I backed the Greens as a vote for a semi-coherent left reformist platform. Note to my sectarian critics: I didn't "call on" anybody else to do likewise. Those were personal

choices.

True, there is nothing inherently socialist about Green ideology. But the Greens – in the UK, at any rate – are unmistakably an anti-establishment party. They opposed the invasion of Iraq. They are anti-racist and anti-homophobic. They reject the current laws on immigration, trade unions and cannabis.

Read the section on employment rights on their website. They have detailed policies on the issue politically far in advance of anything of the "repeal the Tory anti-union laws" approach of the far left, instead setting out a series of positive demands. It comes to something when a party derided as petty bourgeois is well ahead of the self-appointed proletarian vanguard on something as basic as trade union issues.

As for Respect, I have to confess that when I first heard about the idea of an SWP/Scottish Tankie/Taliban Lite bloc, I was almost tempted to back it. My reaction was hey, this is so opportunist it might even work. It almost did. In London as a whole, and in some other cities, the vote was better than I expected.

But the key question is not so much the vote achieved, but the means used to achieve it. Respect literature identified the party as "the party for Muslims", and its Muslim support was won on that basis.

There's no indication that in voting Respect, this layer consciously identified with socialist or class struggle politics. Indeed, like all good politicians, Respect seemed indifferent about their reasons they secured the backing they did. After all, a vote is a vote is a vote.

Incidentally, surely Marxists have a problem passing themselves off as "the party for Muslims". What Muslims? All Muslims? The 5,400 Muslim millionaires in this country, many of whom made their pile by exploiting other Muslims? The party for Mohammed al Fayed? The party for Sir Anwar Pervez?

Outside what might be dubbed its heartland vote, Respect's performance was abysmal. Its vote in Lambeth was down on the Socialist Alliance's 2000 tally. In Hackney, an impressive-sounding percentage disguises the fact that there are 4,000 hardcore hard left votes, as previously seen in the 2001 general election and Paul Foot's subsequent run for mayor. In Camden, the far left was once again slugging it out with such candidates as the felicitously-named Humberto Heliotrope of the Christian People's Alliance for fifth place out of six.

Nationwide levels of support – averaging 1.7% – were on a par with the bedrock far left vote, given that between 1-2% of adults regularly tell opinion pollsters that they are revolutionary socialists. What was gained on the Muslim roundabouts was

largely lost on the socialist swings.

Remember all those speeches about Respect getting a million votes? Remember the inflection in the voices of comrades Galloway and Rees, implying that this target erred on the side of caution? Remember the categorical statements that Respect would secure not just one MEP, but several?

In the event, just 250,000 backed Respect. Such a total would not be beyond what an organised and united far left party, campaigning consistently in the working class, could have achieved. Yet the following week's *Socialist Worker* was ridiculously complacent. Those quarter of a million votes were hailed as a triumph for Respect, while the more than 800,000 votes for the BNP were derided as a setback for the fascists.

There are plenty of other problems with Respect, too. It's difficult even to conceive of anything that could fairly be described as a step backwards from the Socialist Alliance. But this surely is it.

The whole manoeuvre was arrogantly hatched in secrecy between Galloway and the SWP leadership, without consultations on the wider left. Hardly surprising that – with only a handful of

arguable exceptions – Respect has little support in the labour movement, even from the awkward squad.

Candidates for the most favourable electoral terrain are routinely announced well in advance of the selection meetings. Even New Labour goes through the formalities of organising some sort of process before coming up with a spurious reason to keep Mark Seddon off a by-election shortlist.

Respect supporters will argue that there has simply been no time to put democratic structures in place. OK, it's early days and there is such a thing as the benefit of the doubt. But so far the talk has been of ditching boring old branch meetings in favour of picnics. You might call it the egg and watercress sarnie road to socialism.

Given the way the slightest difference from SWP/Galloway orthodoxy within Respect has so far been marginalised, I don't see much likelihood of evolution in a pluralist direction, along the lines of the Scottish Socialist Party. But if only for the sake of certain former comrades of mine, I hope Respect goes easier on dissenting voices than Galloway's financial supporters in the Saudi monarchy. ■

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Respect Coalition: No Joke

Martin Sullivan

ONE OF the consistent features of the far left is its inability to subject its own activities to any kind of honest political assessment. Whenever the Socialist Workers Party announces the size of a demonstration it has had a hand in organising, you can pretty well guarantee that the figure given will be approximately double the number of actual participants. Election results, of course, present a greater challenge – the figures are there in black and white and can't be fiddled. Even here, though, the SWP does its best to avoid any serious engagement with reality. Electoral defeats are invariably presented as major political advances and limited gains as stunning victories, all with a cynical disregard for objective truth that would excite the envy and admiration of the most hardened New Labour spin doctor.

In the Super Thursday elections on 10 June “Respect – The Unity Coalition (George Galloway)”, to give it its full title, stood for the European Parliament and the Greater London Authority, plus a handful of council seats. Its hopes were high. In a rousing speech to an eve-of-poll rally at Friends Meeting House in London, which was received with enthusiastic applause, Galloway predicted major gains for his new organisation. “We are going to get a result tomorrow that will see Lindsey German elected to the London Assembly”, the former Labour MP told the audience. “We will see other Respect candidates from around the country elected to the European Parliament.”

All that applause must have gone to George's head. As it turned out, in the European parliamentary elections the least worst result for Respect was in London where Galloway himself headed their list, but the 91,000 votes they received were a good 64,000 short of the figure needed to send George off to the fleshpots of Brussels. As for the GLA elections, Respect failed even to clear the 5% hurdle necessary to get leading SWPer Lindsey German onto the Assembly, while her mayoral candidacy attracted support from a mere 3% of Londoners. Not a single Respect candidate was elected anywhere.

Did Respect's leaders make any attempt to analyse their failure to estimate accurately the level

of electoral support they could expect? Is the Pope a Protestant? Predictably, they declared that Respect had achieved a “tremendous result” in the European and GLA elections, as a consequence of which it had “established itself on the political map”. Galloway himself hailed the Euro results in particular as “a very considerable triumph”. Given that Respect's share of the poll across England and Wales amounted to a derisory 1.7%, you wonder how low their vote would have had to be for Galloway to categorise it as a disaster.

Respect followed up its “tremendous result” on 10 June by contesting two parliamentary by-elections in July – in Birmingham Hodge Hill, where the SWP's John Rees received 1,282 votes (6.3%), and in Leicester South, where journalist, former Taliban captive and Muslim convert Yvonne Ridley got 3,724 (12.7%). The latter result, it must be said, was not too bad, although the anti-war, anti-Blair vote that Respect hoped to attract went mainly to the Liberal Democrats, who won with 10,274 votes (34.9%) in what had previously been a safe Labour seat.

Their by-election results were acclaimed by Respect as “spectacular and unprecedented votes”, which supposedly demonstrated “the sea change which is happening in British politics” and marked a “break through” for the Coalition. A week later when Respect candidate Oliur Rahman actually won a council by-election in Tower Hamlets, the Coalition leadership must have been left frantically leafing through their thesaurus in order to come up with new superlatives. They settled on “a quite incredible result”.

In point of fact, Rees's vote in Birmingham was not much better than the results achieved by the earlier SWP-dominated electoral front, the Socialist Alliance, when it first contested parliamentary by-elections four years ago. In April 2000 Weyman Bennett stood in Bernie Grant's former seat in Tottenham and got 885 votes (5.4%), while in the Preston by-election in November that followed the death of Audrey Wise the Alliance polled 1,210 (5.6%). As for Yvonne Ridley's result, it was almost identical to that achieved by Paul Foot when he contested the mayoral election in Hackney in 2002 as a Socialist Alliance candidate, receiving 4,187

votes (12.7%). Even Oliur Rahman's victory was no more than a repeat of that by Paul Lavalette, elected to Preston council on a Socialist Alliance ticket in 2003.

It would be easy to mock – and I haven't hesitated to do so. But the overblown, self-congratulatory rhetoric of Respect's leadership does contain a kernel of truth. A serious examination of the June election results reveals that there are in fact a few pockets of substantial support for Respect. These are to be found in East London, in a few wards in Birmingham and also in Preston, where the five Respect candidates who stood for the council failed to get elected but received between 24% and 34% of the poll. The common element is that these areas have a high proportion of Muslim voters.

To that extent, Respect is not – as I argued rather one-sidedly in the last *What Next?* – a simple re-run of the Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Alliance. Whereas those organisations based themselves on a moralistic denunciation of the iniquities of New Labour rather than on any actually existing social forces, there is a material foundation – if a very limited one – to Respect's electoral challenge, namely the significant number of British Muslims who are understandably disaffected with Labour as a result of the Iraq war.

But there are many other wards and constituencies with a similar demographic profile to East London, Birmingham and Preston where Respect has polled less well and the beneficiaries of Muslims' rejection of Labour candidates have been the Liberal Democrats. A recent *Guardian* poll revealed, interestingly, that only 4% of British Muslims intended to vote Respect, compared with 41% for the Lib Dems and 32% for Labour, demonstrating that there is no spontaneous mass gravitation of Muslims towards Galloway and his friends. A large Muslim electorate is therefore a necessary but not a sufficient condition for Respect to succeed. What is required, in addition, is an organisation with influence in the community – specifically, a local mosque – which can ensure that the vote is mobilised behind Respect rather than behind some other party.

There are, evidently, few areas in the country where this situation obtains. And that is the basic flaw in Respect's approach. By these methods the SWP and its allies may gain a handful of council seats, and could even conceivably get Galloway elected in Bethnal Green & Bow when he challenges Oona King in the general election – but it's hardly a strategy for replacing Labour on anything but a very limited and localised basis. Contrary to the claims of the Respect leaders, it provides no perspective for building a broad-based political alternative to the Labour Party at national level.

The Hartlepool by-election in September was very much a test of Respect's wider appeal, because Muslims comprise only 0.4% of the electorate there.

Galloway was quoted as saying that "Respect gained 13% of the vote in Leicester South, and we are confident of doing much better in Hartlepool". At the campaign's launch meeting on 18 August, Respect candidate John Bloom went even further, declaring that "we are in with a fighting chance of winning.... I can hear David Dimbleby's words on election night in my head: 'New Labour – born in Islington, died in Iraq, buried tonight in Hartlepool'." Which only goes to show that it's never a good idea to listen to voices in your head. To suggest that Respect had a chance of winning, or even getting 13% of the vote, was to lose all contact with reality. In the European elections the Coalition had gained precisely 266 votes in Hartlepool – 1.04% of the poll. Predictably, they did little better in the by-election. Bloom finished fifth with 572 votes, representing a mere 1.8% of the poll. Though Labour held the seat, its vote slumped by 18.5%, with the Lib Dems gaining 19.2%.

Respect's own sober assessment of the result was that "Respect and its candidate John Bloom did exceptionally well. We gained a clear fifth place and established Respect as the largest and best organised left challenge to the establishment, gaining well over twice the vote for the Green candidate.... the Hartlepool by-election shows we are well-placed to grow in the forthcoming weeks and months." Contributors to the UK Left Network discussion list initially mistook this report for a clever parody.

In his less bombastic moments (not that there are many of them), Galloway is apparently prepared to recognise that Respect's prospects are somewhat limited. With regard to the next general election, the Coalition's official line is that there is "an enormous potential for Respect to emerge as a very serious challenger to New Labour from the left". Galloway, though, seems to have set his sights rather lower. He has stated that Respect intends to stand between 25 and 100 candidates in the general election, but not with the central aim of actually winning seats. As he explained to BBC News Online: "We will stand against New Labour MPs who supported the war. We will split their vote and we'll cost them their seat and we are determined to do that."

So that's what it all amounts to in the end. Behind all the talk of breakthroughs and sea changes in British politics and building a mass party to challenge New Labour, in reality Respect's general election strategy boils down to defeating Labour candidates by handing victories to Tories and Lib Dems. It would be difficult to imagine a more conclusive admission of political bankruptcy. In that sense at least, the Respect Coalition is no joke.

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Prospects for the Left in Scotland

Vince Mills

THE EURO election results, especially in Scotland, confirmed the analysis and stance taken by the Campaign for Socialism. That, of course, offered little comfort to those who had hoped for some indication of a left-wing breakthrough and, for that matter, little comfort to those of us who would rather the foundations of New Labour were, at least, shaken a little. New Labour in Scotland performed in very much the same manner as they performed at the Scottish Parliament elections. Their vote went down a little.

They got 310,865 votes – 26.4%, down by 2.3% – losing one seat. But it was not by any means a bad result in comparison with the other parties. Something we shall return to.

By contrast the Scottish Socialist Party came 7th, behind the Greens' 5th and UKIP's 6th. They won 61,356 votes – a 5.2% share, up by 1.2%. Arguably this was a fair showing for a small left-wing party. However, given the hope that they might win a seat and the wider belief about their capacity to offer a route for social change in the foreseeable future, this result will, no doubt, be a cause for concern amongst the left beyond the Labour Party.

Why does New Labour continue to perform well despite widespread disillusionment over the Iraq war as well as cynicism about its performance in government in Holyrood? There are probably three reasons – ideological, economic and structural.

New Labour in Scotland as in England makes an unblushing direct appeal to working class conservatism, demonstrated, for example by their obsession with anti-social behaviour.

This is reinforced by the comparatively buoyant state of the economy. This needs some clarification. The Scottish economy has been, like much of Britain, transformed from a high skilled manufacturing economy to a low skilled, service sector economy. Further, there are areas entirely blighted by unemployment or with working people on disability benefits. However, within the limitations of this transformation, the economy has on offer plenty of low skilled, low paid jobs

and the ideological onslaught designed to squeeze workers into these jobs has been effective, especially in the light of the low levels of union organisation. It is in this sense that Brown has created "full employment".

One other effect has to be acknowledged when considering these results and that is the increasing fragmentation of voting blocs. UKIP took sections of the Tory vote. The SSP took sections of the SNP vote. The Greens probably took votes from the Lib Dems and Labour. In these circumstances, especially with the increasing use of PR, despite the historically low level of electoral support for Labour, retaining a sizeable slice of the vote means Labour is able to remain relatively dominant.

I think what the elections in Scotland showed is that New Labour here will remain dominant, in the relative way described, for some time to come and, therefore, as we have always argued, any real challenge will have to be mounted from within the Labour Party. Evidence of the possibility of a left recovery comes from two sources.

The first is the mood of individual party members. The left topped the NEC poll in July, taking the first three places, and Pete Willsman was close. The Scottish left candidate Irene Graham's vote was creditable and she managed to decisively see off the New Labour favourite, Mandy Telford, whose leadership of the NUS had given her hours of TV coverage. It has to be granted, however, that turn-out was low, even conceding the now officially acknowledged collapse in membership. The NEC was told in June that membership had dropped by nearly 50% to some 208,000 compared with 407,000 in 1997. A rough calculation suggests that only one in ten members voted. NEC member Ann Black reported that one website estimated it at 18%.

Secondly, there appears to be increased resistance from the biggest affiliated trade unions. The GMB decided to shift £750,000 away from the party to individual Labour MPs. General Secretary Kevin Curran cited the failure to push for new workers' rights in the EU Constitution or in domestic legislation. The T&G could follow suit, targeting resources into the key seats of Labour

members who back union policies.

The GMB's announcement came scarcely a week after a statement by the Amicus General Secretary Derek Simpson that the policies of the New Labour government could lose Labour the next election, in what was tantamount to a call for Blair to go. Simpson is concerned about a number of issues. The decline of manufacturing jobs, pensions and, along with Tony Woodley of the T&G, Blair's insistence on keeping increased union rights out of the European Charter.

Only Unison of the big four has yet to pronounce on the European Constitution, but it is unlikely they can do anything other than oppose it given the leadership's position on the Charter of Human Rights. This opens opportunities for the left in the party to build radical alliances with the affiliated unions.

In Scotland the Campaign for Socialism has tried to move the alliance between CLP activists and the trade unions beyond rhetoric. We are working jointly with several of the affiliated unions, most notably Unison, to mount a campaign called Revitalise the Labour Party. We organised a major conference in October. While the focus was on democratic issues for the Scottish Labour Party conference in March our aim is also to try and increase left representation on the Scottish Labour Party executive. The agenda is still limited, from a socialist point of view, but it opens the door to re-engaging union activists with party structures and party activists and could lead to increased activity in the CLPs.

Contrast this to the approach of the SSP. In the current issue of *Scottish Left Review* academic and SSP member Gregor Gall produces a very

honest attempt to consider the role of the unions in relation to the SSP:

"Consequently, it may be more sensible to see the realignment of the left and unions as a long-term project which should not be judged in the short-term on just whether it can deliver large-scale political representation on a par with that which hypothetically exists with Labour. The appropriate historical parallel here would be the twenty to thirty years that it took for the Labour Party to become an effective political force at the beginning of the twentieth century.... The SSP as the most advanced political formation to the left of Labour lacks the credibility of critical mass because of its relatively small size. Quite apart from only operating in Scotland (sic), without further union affiliation and support, other unions will not see the SSP as a credible option. Moreover, and without further union support, the SSP will not grow to the extent that it would need to in order to present itself a genuinely mass party of the working class." ('The Price of Influence', *Scottish Left Review*, July-August 2004.)

The continuing crises over Iraq will create more difficulties for New Labour. Many of those both here in Britain and abroad do not have the luxury of waiting the twenty or thirty years Gregor Gall believes necessary to build a movement capable of radical action. We need to use the movement that has already been built by generations of Labour activists to deliver peace and social justice here and now. New Labour's discomfort and the unions' increased hostility should be seen by the left as an opportunity to build new alliances and make new advances building up to the Scottish Labour Party conference in Dundee in March. ■

Campaign for Socialism

the left organisation of the Scottish Labour Party

AIMS

- To promote Labour as a party committed to socialism on the basis of common ownership of the means of production, distribution & exchange
- To campaign within the party for a democratic, comprehensive and accountable public sector; full employment; socialised medicine, transport and education; common ownership of the public utilities and an extension of common ownership in the banking and financial institutions; a reinvigorated and devolved system of local government; a parliament in Scotland; and the elimination of poverty and injustice
- To determine socialist policies for Labour in government – socialist policies that will build the sound planned economy needed to ensure equality and social justice
- To act as an organisational focus for all those within the party and Labour movement who agree with the above aims, and wish to see them form the basis of the party's approach to policy making

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The End of an Enduring Alliance? Trade Union-Labour Relations

Gregor Gall

Introduction

The unions and Labour were believed by most until recently to have a relationship that went together like fish and chips or bread and butter; organic, symmetrical and ever lasting in the slow pursuit of progressive common goals. The unions were the economic wing of the “labour and trade union movement”, the Labour Party the political wing of the “labour and trade union movement”. Leading union activists and lay officials were predominantly Labour Party activists, if not also constituency office holders and elected councillors. At a higher level, a good proportion of Labour MPs until the late 1990s were former paid union officers and lay officials.

By late 2004, the traditional destination of union political affiliation is now more under question than at any time since the Labour Party was founded at the end of the beginning of the twentieth century. A similar pattern of unfolding events is occurring in some other countries where labour or social democratic parties are now experiencing significant fissures and splits (e.g. Germany). The period that has now been entered is unlike any other before.

This article examines two primary issues. First, whether the current strains and conflict in the relationship are temporary or evidence of an irrevocable and terminal parting of the ways. Second, whether the alternative to affiliation to Labour must necessarily and immediately mean affiliation to another political party.

Current State of Play

Despite the apparent hegemony of Labour in the unions because the majority of large unions such as the Amicus, CWU, GMB, TGWU and USDAW are affiliated to Labour, there exists a diversity of positions throughout the union movement. Unison has an idiosyncratic form of affiliation dating from its creation from NALGO, NUPE and COHSE where it has a general political fund and an affiliated political fund. There are unions like

the PCS, NUT and Unifi which are not affiliated and never have been whilst there are also unions that do not have political funds with which to affiliate to any political party like the NUJ but do engage in political campaigning.

Finally, there are the RMT and FBU. The RMT has been disaffiliated from Labour for allowing its branches to affiliate to political parties other than Labour. But it is to contest this disaffiliation in the High Court shortly, citing a breach of natural justice for it has not been told which rule it has broken. It has also affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee, the internal Labour group established by a number of left-wing MPs. So far 7 RMT branches in Scotland and the Scottish Regional Council have affiliated to the Scottish Socialist Party, while one has voted to affiliate (subject to National Executive approval) to Forward Wales led by former MP John Marek AM as had ten in England to Respect. However, the leadership of the RMT is known to have not inconsiderable reservations about Respect so neither affiliation of these branches to it nor others in the future is guaranteed. Bob Crow has made sympathetic statements about the Green Party.

In the case of the FBU, it disaffiliated from Labour, opening up the possibility of funding these other left-of-centre parties. The London Region of the FBU had already voted to support Respect while the Scottish Region may providing funding to the SNP, and the Hartlepool branch has donated money to Respect. However, the way in which the FBU disaffiliated left it in a state of inertia until its conference next year by virtue of the motion passed requiring the union to organise a conference bringing discontented trade unionists together. Moreover, the method by which FBU branches can apply to affiliate to other parties is through the union’s national executive (like with the RMT) but some fear that this will be used by the Gilchrist leadership, which is of a “reclaim Labour” position and has instituted a purge of the harder left in the union, to block affiliations

to other parties. Elsewhere, the Scotland No.2 branch of the CWU has also affiliated to the SSP while a Welsh CWU branch voted to support Respect.

Political Fault Line

The major political fault line running through the union movement concerns whether unions should fight to “reclaim” Labour from “new Labour”, whether this is achievable or whether they should open up their political funds to other parties to the left of Labour. These parties include not just the SSP but also Respect, Forward Wales, the Greens, SNP and Plaid Cymru. The opening of funds may be through disaffiliation or democratisation of the political fund allowing a plurality of parties, including Labour, to be supported.

The “reclaim Labour” school of thought comprises the leaders of all the major affiliated unions (save USDAW), many of which are also members of the so-called “awkward squad”. Apart from the Labour left like the Campaign Group and the Campaign for Socialism, the Communist Party/*Morning Star* also takes this line. Their argument is threefold: “new” Labour is a clique which can be easily removed because it has no roots in the party, the level of local party activity is so low as to give unions a free run in “taking over” the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) and by working together national unions can exercise a disproportionate influence. Opinion varies on whether Blair must be replaced and on who should succeed him.

The premise of this is that Labour remains the “only show in town” and that being outside it is to be “outside the labour movement” and without influence. What are the merits of this case? The first concerns the practicality of staging a palace coup: when the unions came together at recent party conferences and policy forums they were able to turn over the Labour leadership. Second, taking an approach of gaining “best value” to funding Labour and determining the election manifesto may provide some recourse where Labour is in deep in debt and business donations have considerably dried up. Third, there are some signs the major unions are collectively developing an alternative economic and political strategy that they hope to present as an alternative election manifesto.

Set against these are important counter-considerations. Prime amongst these is that the Labour leadership is not bound by party democracy and that away from conference it carries on as it pleases. Other non-union forces are either more powerful and/or the leadership is more receptive to them. This raises the question of whether “new” Labour can be held

to account between conferences. It can be doubted whether there are sufficient numbers of highly motivated union activists to take over the CLPs and whether this would make much of a difference if achieved given two factors. The first concerns the administrative controls of a centralised party administration, the other parts of the electoral college that the Labour leadership can call on, and many of the new members who are inactive but may vote in elections are “Blair-ites”. The second is that taking over moribund CLPs is not like raiding an arsenal: it would not give an immediate army of shock troops with which to march.

The Warwick National Policy Forum

Does the compromise forced on the leadership at the National Policy Forum in July 2004 at Warwick University make any difference to this equation? Taking the comments of Tony Woodley, the most prominent and far sighted of the “reclaim Labour” position, as a rule of thumb, the results of Warwick have varied from “considerable” to “crumbs” (see various writings in *Campaign Group News*, *Guardian*, *Morning Star*, *Tribune* and *Socialist Worker* since July). Many of the fifty-odd policy commitments given from the list of over seventy demands were existing policy commitments that had not yet been acted upon, and many of the new ones were only minor ones. The big issues of repealing the anti-union laws, ending PFI and instituting progressive taxation were not touched upon.

The most favourable light that Warwick can be cast in is that in the run-up to a general election where Labour is only neck and neck with the Tories and with its finance and internal organisation in a poor state, one could say that Labour was particularly susceptible to such union pressure but only at the margins. The jury is still out on whether this means that Labour is now open to further influence from the unions, and particularly so in the period after a general election. A temporary lull in hostilities between the union and Labour leaderships is likely to break out on this basis after a season of open warfare. Most unions will probably wait to see what happens next. Of course, no commitment was given to not sack thousands of civil servants, to provide student grants or not continue with a right-wing law and order agenda. Shortly afterwards several events are worth noting. While Blair told the TUC Congress he “had come not to bury Warwick but to praise it”, at the Labour conference the four big unions saved Blair from defeat over setting an early date for troop withdrawal from Iraq as a payback for Warwick. Lastly, the Labour conference voted to renationalise the railways but the leadership immediately

made it clear that it would ignore this.

Outside Labour: Outside the Tent?

Is being outside Labour being outside the “tent”? Does leaving Labour necessitate joining others? First of all we need to consider what is being outside the “tent”. The unions made Labour in their own image as a result of requiring independent parliamentary representation. In that sense, the unions are perfectly free to remake the form of their political representation, that is, to create another “tent”. Clearly, there is a possibility of the depoliticisation or apoliticalisation in disaffiliation but this is latent rather than real given several factors. Unions are leading the political opposition to Labour and are likely to remain so as long as Labour is in power and the Tories and Liberals stay weak. Moreover, the unions recognise they need political representation and this can take many forms other than Labour or other political parties. A number of unions campaign politically and obtain representation without affiliation.

The RMT has found like many unions there was no leeway for compromise within Labour or progress for left-wing policies. Now outside Labour, it is hard to conceive of it as being any less influential than before. But, nonetheless, is it any stronger now? Does it provide a model for other unions? The SSP, as the most advanced political left formation in Britain (politically and by size) does not have sufficient parliamentary representation to significantly advance the RMT's interests. It only operates in Scotland (sic) and in a situation where many important matters are reserved business. Neither can the SSP construct sufficiently wide alliances within civic society (i.e. outside parliament) to do so. If this lack of is true of the SSP, it is all the more true of Respect, the Greens and Forward Wales. This is why the SNP and Plaid Cymru look much more appealing to many union activists and full-time officers. Despite their rightward drift in recent years, they are much bigger and more credible. Indeed, since the return of Salmond, the SNP may appear a lot more attractive.

However, the SSP and others can potentially use their parliamentary representation and their general profile to raise the case of the unions in extra-parliamentary campaigning. Here their key resource is the size of their party memberships and the extent of activity of these members. This offers the distant possibility of trying to build a mass or popular coalition or movement that can exert influence on parliament and government from without, no matter which political party is in government. Currently, unions are between a rock and a hard place. The old way of representation through

Labour no longer works (to the extent it did) but a new method and form does not yet exist.

Consequently, it may be more sensible to see the realignment of the left and unions as a long-term project which should not be judged in the short term on just whether it can deliver large-scale political representation on a par with that which hypothetically exists with Labour. The appropriate historical parallel here would be the twenty to thirty years that it took for the Labour Party to become an effective political force at the beginning of the twentieth century. If this is the case, it suggests that unions that go down this non-Labour or not exclusively Labour route will need to advance their interests in an analogous way in the industrial and social spheres. Whilst this would not mean a syndicalist approach per se, it would mean a much heavier emphasis on recruitment, organising, collective bargaining and membership mobilisations. Alongside this, the union movement would become a social movement where the route to having strength in the workplace is not always directly via the workplace but also through communities and social networks. It would be the organiser and tribune of the people for gaining social justice, democracy and liberty.

Industrial and social strength would compensate for current conventional political weakness and out of it greater political strength could be created. Unions, in essence, could adopt the strategy of demanding “x” or “y” or else! This would see them use their industrial and social muscle for political ends. Each side of this orientation (political, social, industrial) is risk laden because there is no guarantee that either or both can be achieved. Thus, it is just as possible that unions will not be able to gain adequately extensive political representation and/or rebuild themselves industrially and socially.

The big four unions (Amicus, GMB, TGWU, Unison) have already begun to displace the TUC as the representative of organised labour in relations with the Labour Party and the Labour government, and have established themselves as a pole of attraction for many of the other smaller, left-led unions. They have viewed the TUC as insufficiently robust in its dealings with the government and too ideologically entrenched in the perspective of social partnership. This development could be taken further by these four unions drawing up their own political programme in the form of a revisited Alternative Economic Strategy. Tony Woodley appears the most able to do so in terms of setting out a social democratic or democratic socialist vision of an alternative society. However, the signs of a full-blown manifesto involving a critique of “new”

Labour, an alternative vision and a means of achieving have not been forthcoming. Warwick may have ironically stymied them from doing so.

Conclusion: Catch 22?

One key reason for viewing the process as a long-term realignment is the "Catch 22" situation that exists. Many unions, judged by their rulebooks, members' interests and leaderships' politics, have much in common with the policies of the SSP and the like. They all coalesce around policies associated with "old" Labour and social democracy. But agreement is not sufficient on its own. The SSP still lacks the credibility of critical mass because of its relatively small size. Without further union affiliation and support, other unions will not see the SSP as a credible option. Moreover, and without further union support, the SSP will not grow to the extent that it would need to in order to present itself a genuinely mass party of the working class with elected officials and leading members in different

spheres of life. For Respect, the cool, if not hostile, response from the RMT national leaders like Bob Crow and Pat Sikorski may prevent it from making the advance than the SSP has been able to. If this is so, at the very least, it will take longer for Respect to grow and entrench itself. Winning a good percentage of the vote and a few councillors will not change this.

If the clock could be wound forward several years so that we could look back in hindsight, it would be probably be safe to say that whatever the eventual outcome of the unfolding union-Labour relationship, whether estrangement, separation or divorce, we are witnessing a crisis of the sort that Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci conceptualised. This means an organic and prolonged one, rather than a short and sharp one. Britain could begin to move towards the fragmentation of union political affiliation like that which has existed in a number of European countries like France, Italy and Spain. "Slow burn" as opposed to a "big bang" might then be the best characterisation. ■

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CPGB: Centrism, Vacillation and Capitulation

Ian Donovan

Author's Note: The following article, replying to political attacks on the author in the *Weekly Worker* (14 October), was submitted to that journal but denied publication. Given that *WW* publishes all kinds of lengthy and often esoteric material when it judges such material useful to its publishers, readers can judge for themselves whether this material is, as the editor maintains, "unsuitable for publication", or whether this is a cynical break with *WW*'s proclaimed policy of openness and claim to be "champions of political debate".

PETER MANSON'S letter in the 14 October *Weekly Worker* illustrates perfectly the kind of contradictions in logic that characterise the CPGB today, the tortured reasoning that bedevils its attempts to engage with Respect. Comrade Manson pooh-poohs the idea that there is anything "Islamophobic" in the CPGB's attitude to Iraq or Respect, and selects recent material on Iraq to supposedly illustrate that the CPGB majority position on Iraq has always been no different to my own: that of unconditional but critical support to all mass-based indigenous Iraqi armed formations that are engaged in armed conflict with the US-UK coalition armed forces. Today, the CPGB claims to agree with this concretely over Fallujah, perhaps a helpful step. In the 21 October issue it writes that "Communists stand unequivocally with the working class of Fallujah in their daunting struggle against imperialism, while at the same time criticising the brutal and counterrevolutionary politics of groups like Tawhid and Jihad".

This sounds rather like "unconditional but critical support" to me. I have no differences whatsoever, not even a "nuance", with this position. It is exactly what I have been arguing inside and outside the CPGB ever since the uprisings in April. It appears that the CPGB has found itself under a degree of political pressure from my external criticism on these questions and has shifted over to a more correct position.

Good! It only goes to show that public ideological criticism has impact. However, would comrade Manson care to explain the difference between this position, and this passage from a

draft article that I wrote in May this year:

"The demand for troops out now is an important test of any socialist or communist tendency in this period of brutal military occupation of Iraq. Indeed, the armed opposition in Iraq has now broken out of the murky 'phoney war' phase that existed in the early stages. No more does it primarily consist of shadowy forces engaging in scattergun, spectacular actions that as often as not targeted not merely the imperialist occupiers, but also the Iraq people themselves, or formations like the Red Cross that really are not legitimate or even intelligent targets. Now that substantial sections of the masses have become embroiled in a national revolt, it is absolutely obligatory for socialists and democrats in the West to offer their fullest solidarity with these Iraqi masses."

In the published article, as edited by the editorial team, the crucial last sentence was amended to read "Now that substantial sections of the masses have become embroiled in a national revolt, it is absolutely obligatory for socialists and democrats in the west to call for the defeat of their 'own' side" (*Weekly Worker*, 13 May).

This is rather a significant change. Can Peter tell me what is the difference between the formulation "stand unequivocally with the working class of Fallujah in their daunting struggle against imperialism", and the statement that "Now that substantial sections of the masses have become embroiled in a national revolt, it is absolutely obligatory for socialists and democrats in the West to offer their fullest solidarity with these Iraqi masses."? Tell us Peter, what is the difference????!!

The reason that this has significance is that the former draft article from May not only had its correct demand for “solidarity” with the Iraqi masses in Fallujah and Najaf edited out, but was the occasion for a mini heresy-hunt in the CPGB. At a meeting of the Provisional Central Committee on 20 May every single other PCC comrade made clear their strong disagreement with my position of favouring “solidarity” with the masses of Fallujah and Najaf. As comrade Marcus Strom falsely maintained in a written exchange on this very question when I protested against the attribution to myself of a “solidarity with Al-Sadr” position that I never held:

“... your theses on Iraq only mention broad ‘solidarity with the Iraqi masses struggling against imperialism’. It does not pin-point solidarity with al-Sadr and the specific political leadership as you later tried to do in subsequent articles. (Which was *edited out* of your articles by Peter and John.)” (email, Strom to Donovan, PCC internal list, 18 June, emphasis in original. The “theses” comrade Strom referred to were published in *WW* on 29 April)

Behind my back, I was branded by the PCC “mainstream” as a deviant and a political supporter of Muqtada Al-Sadr. Comrade Strom wrote a special “Party Notes” column as a supposed “corrective” (*WW*, 27 May) to this putative pro-Sadr “deviation”, from which was derived an alternative set of theses containing the following formulation: “Any ‘alliance’ with the likes of Muqtada al-Sadr and his militia must be episodic. Yes, his blows against the occupiers weaken our common enemy, but they do not build working class, democratic and secular forces.” This hunt against pro-Sadr “deviations” was taken to the CPGB membership in a whispering campaign, and for example was reflected in the minutes of the London non-PCC CPGB cell, in which the following highly revealing remarks were minuted: “Anne liked Marcus’s Party Notes column, it is good to quote Ian Donovan’s articles back at him” (30 May).

Comrade Strom’s theses were subsequently passed, along with a rather opaque set of theses by Mike MacNair, at the CPGB’s aggregate in July, which I was too ill to attend. I earlier attempted to analyse at length comrade MacNair’s very convoluted and opaque theses (see *WW* for 17 June, for instance), but their real thrust was summed up by comrade MacNair in his reported motivation of them at the aggregate: “Comrade Macnair said the occupation of Iraq can have no progressive role. He disagreed with those on the left, particularly the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, who are, to say the least, ambiguous and uncertain about this. Communists are for the defeat of our own state. However, we are proletarian internationalists, who believe the creation of socialism

is the role of the working class movement worldwide. Therefore, we should be in solidarity with the Iraqi workers’ movement, but not with the Islamist or Ba’athist militias who are fighting the occupation, as these are not working class forces” (27 July).

So, as it appears from the vote of the July aggregate, the CPGB is not in favour of “solidarity”, in any sense of the term, with forces fighting the occupation that it deems “reactionary”. What this rejection of “solidarity” means is not made clear, according to Marcus Strom it could allow “episodic” alliances with some of these forces; according to comrade MacNair, who subsequently elaborated on his total rejection of any “anti-imperialist united front” in theory as well as practice in polemic with the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, such “alliances” seem to be pretty much ruled out. But they both seem pretty much at odds with outright support for the people of Fallujah, hardly under the command of “working class” forces, against the coalition occupiers in the current, escalating onslaught. After all, would that not involve an “anti-imperialist united front” with “reactionary forces”?

So is Paul Greenaway, the author of the piece that calls for “unequivocal support” to the people of Fallujah (*WW*, 21 October), destined to be falsely accused of being a supporter of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and the minuscule and psychotic “Tawhid and Jihad”? Will he be so accused in the same viciously Islamophobic manner in which I was accused of being a supporter of Muqtada Al-Sadr and the (more mass-based and rational) Jaish al-Mahdi when I raised politically identical demands in May? I think the CPGB membership, and the readership of the *Weekly Worker*, should be told.

Peter wants to pretend this is all about “nuances”. It is not. It is about political honesty in the conduct of political debate, and maintaining some level of programmatic consistency. The behaviour of the CPGB leadership over the past period has been classically centrist, zig-zagging wildly from roughly correct positions to wildly wrong, Islamophobic ones as reflected in the heresy-hunt this spring-summer against “pro-Sadr” deviations. Knowing the comrades as I do, I have little confidence that the correct position represented by Paul Greenaway’s article in the 21 October issue represents anything other than another zig, this time in a left-wing, anti-imperialist direction. If this is not to be succeeded by yet another zag back to the right, there must be a proper accounting of all these questions, and a break from the centrist method that gives rise to these wild vacillations.

Comrade Manson, rather unconvincingly, attempts to defend the CPGB/Red Platform’s “Pregnant Galloway” graphic and article. This was

in reality a sectarian provocation designed to undercut any meaningful engagement with the Respect project. Indeed, in his efforts to justify this, Peter once again illustrates the inability of his current to deal with the phenomenon of Respect in a coherent manner. Peter asks: "Now, I can understand some male chauvinist bigot claiming that to be portrayed as a woman would be demeaning, but why would any progressive person, let alone a communist, be offended?" In making this point, Peter knows very well that comrade Galloway did object to the personal attack that this material represented – indeed he refused to be interviewed for the *Weekly Worker* the following week.

So we can take it as read, then, that Peter believes that George Galloway is not a "progressive", and in fact is, in his words, a "male chauvinist bigot". Peter is of course entitled to his opinion on this – though it is one I certainly do not share. But if this is his opinion, and that of the CPGB, then *why did the CPGB advocate a vote to Respect, and its best known public figure, comrade Galloway, in the June elections and subsequent by-elections?* Are the CPGB in the habit of advocating votes to "non-progressive" people (i.e. reactionaries) and "male chauvinist bigots"? Or is this, yet again, another piece of political schizophrenia, or more straightforwardly, rank hypocrisy?

What is also notable about this graphic and article, of course, is that comrade Galloway is the first, and so far the last, person who has been lampooned in this graphic manner in the *Weekly Worker*. Given the level of bourgeois hysteria against Galloway over the past two years, a hysteria that *WW* has not been shy of joining in with at times, it is remarkable that the only recipient of such "satire" is the MP the bourgeoisie seeks to brand as a "traitor" and worse, with the help of forged documents that *really* reek of McCarthyism at its worst.

The CPGB material that supposedly advocates "support" to Respect is often hardly supportive at all. It often reads similarly to outright *hostile* material, with an artificial phrase about "support" tacked on the end to preserve the most superficial of appearances. Thus at the meeting in early spring where Respect selected its slate for the European and GLA elections, the CPGB distributed a leaflet headlined "E for Equality, or Enrichment?", which carried the innuendo that comrade Galloway's involvement in Respect was motivated by hopes for personal gain, i.e. a form of corruption.

Again, if the comrades really believe this, then they should not be voting for Respect. The CPGB's material on Respect is replete with ritual denunciations of Respect "populism" – which if they really believed it would, again, dictate open non-support for Respect. Even the virtually *communistic* call for

a "society based on common ownership and democratic control" in the draft constitution is dismissed as mere "populism". Given this emphasis on alleged "populism", one could almost say that the CPGB's material in "support" of Respect has the flavour of the (probably apocryphal) story of the misspelled election leaflet for a "populist": "Vote for George, the people's *fiend*."

This has found reflection in *WW*'s coverage of the witchhunt of George Galloway over his supposed receipt of "Iraqi gold". The initial response of *WW* when this classic piece of 1950s-style secret police disinformation first erupted in April 2003 was to publish a back page article (written by a non-member – but obviously reflecting the knee-jerk reaction of the leadership itself) stating that Galloway was almost certainly guilty and "the left should lead the condemnation" (*WW*, 24 April 2003).

Almost immediately, realising that this article gave the distinct appearance that the CPGB *backed* the *Daily Telegraph*'s CIA-inspired witchhunt, they switched over to a more mealy-mouthed and legalistic position that Galloway was "innocent until proven guilty" and should receive "the benefit of the doubt" (*WW*, 1 May 2003). At the time these events broke, I was out of the country. On my return, I wrote a strongly Galloway-defencist article as a sharp corrective to this equivocation in the face of imperialist reaction (*WW*, 8 May 2003). This was the article that drove the AWL's Sean Matgamna to express his foul-mouthed rage in print (*Solidarity*, 14 May 2003).

It is notable that today, even after the exposure that someone (no prizes for guessing who!) has been forging documents to smear Galloway in this way, all that *WW* (14 October) can do is repeat the feeble mantra that Galloway should be given "the benefit of the doubt" regarding the report of the "Iraq Survey Group", which once again recycled accusations that Galloway received money from Saddam's regime. What is the "Iraq Survey Group"? A clue can be gained from reading the *Washington Post* (3 October 2003) which refers to it as "The CIA's Iraq Survey Group".

It is a 1400-strong Anglo-US team of "experts" set up by the CIA to justify the invasion and occupation of Iraq. It was unable to come up with any data on alleged WMDs, since there were none and fabricating evidence of them would be an enormous political risk, but as you would expect from a CIA-initiated body, it nevertheless found other ways to strike back at left-wing opponents of the war with propaganda lies. For socialists, there should be no "doubt" that this *disinformation* about Galloway is the work of the world's biggest international terrorist propaganda network, and should be dismissed with utter contempt.

Peter claims that the CPGB “are champions of open, democratic debate”. This has been the case in the past. It has, however, atrophied in the recent period as real, serious differences began to emerge in the organisation over questions relating to Iraq, Galloway and Respect. Another petty example of this is in the same issue of *WW* as the “pregnant Galloway” caricature was run. On the page opposite Neira’s piece is my review of Galloway’s recent book, *I’m Not the Only One*. In the original draft of this review there was a sentence addressing comrade Galloway’s explanation of his notorious gaffe on his 1994 visit to Iraq where he seemingly praised Saddam Hussein’s “courage” and “indefatigability” in standing up to the imperialist onslaught.

Galloway’s explanation was that he was actually intending to praise the Iraqi *people* in this manner, in a televised speech in the presence of Hussein, but that errors of presentation and a badly delivered speech led to a misleading impression being given. I stated in my original draft that I saw nothing wrong with this explanation – but this was removed on the insistence of the core leaders of the CPGB, John Bridge and Mark Fischer. So once again, anti-Gallowayism rears its head, doubly so, as the running of a strident caricature of the man is accompanied by the censorship of more sympathetic views in the *same issue* of *WW*. This is not really the behaviour of “champions of open, democratic debate”. This is sect behaviour.

Centrist vacillation, programmatic instability and sect behaviour find their organisational reflections in bureaucratic deformations. In particular, we see Peter attempting the most craven wafer-thin justifications of the bureaucratic norms that have been introduced into the internal life of the CPGB with the advent of pre-moderation on their internal discussion list. Peter cynically responds to my point that this involves leadership control over non-public (i.e. in a sense private) debate: “What nonsense. Since when has debate in an official party forum been considered ‘private’? The email list is to facilitate disciplined discussion to advance the ideas of the whole, not a channel for individuals to engage in ‘private’ correspondence.”

If the CPGB’s internal list is no longer in any sense “private”, i.e. limited to members only, then why don’t they open it up so that the entire socialist public can observe the debates (or lack of them!)? Don’t hold your breath on that one. The hysteria that results when it is suspected that someone who is not a member or a favoured sympathiser might be reading the list shows how seriously the CPGB takes its “privacy”. But the use of the phrase “disciplined discussion” to describe what the leadership wants to see on their “private” list is very revealing.

As indeed is Peter’s bizarre analogy between the activities of a pre-moderator and those of a chair at a meeting in “keeping order”. No meeting chair has prior sight of all remarks to be made at a meeting – and the power to reject any he/she does not approve of. Maybe this is a power someone like Alastair Campbell might crave, but no communist leadership should need such a weapon, particular against their own comrades. This is treating members like children, and should be intolerable to a communist.

According to Peter, the list has to be pre-moderated so that the leadership can ensure that the discussion remains “disciplined”. The assumption being that in the absence of pre-vetting, the membership will be inclined to violate party “discipline” on the internal list. Quite how is not spelled out. But “discipline” appears to mean not engaging in a “slanging match” on the list – a “slanging match” being defined as something other than “serious business”. Peter has not defined what this “serious business” actually is – but it is possible to make some educated guesses as to what he means.

Manny Neira, for instance, was involved in “serious business” (serious for the CPGB, that is, in terms of loss of membership and support) when he was involved in organising a split from the CPGB to form a separate organisation, now known as the Red Party. There were some in the CPGB who suspected that this is what he was up to all along and said so. Such matters, the task of organising a split from an organisation such as the CPGB, as well as the counter-activities of those who suspect that such a split is being prepared, tend by their very nature to generate heat. Indeed, it is testimony to the discipline of the comrades who were opposing the incipient splinter faction that there were not raging “slanging matches” on the internal list.

Indeed, the final confrontation between myself and Neira, representing opposite poles in a rapidly polarising organisation, took place *off* the list and *out of sight* of the membership, as Peter knows very well. So much for the poor “non-sectarian” members having to be protected from such “slanging matches” – they only found out about it when it was all over. This Peter knows very well, as does the entire CPGB leadership and most of the members. But then if an organisation goes through centrist degeneration, one sure symptom is when leading members begin to tell blatant untruths, as Peter is doing here. I’m sure Peter would agree, if he gives it a moment’s thought, that matters connected with splits in his own organisation are a very “serious business” indeed.

How did the CPGB leadership respond to this situation, which was largely of its own making? In two interlinked ways: by hiding its head in the

sand like an ostrich; and then by declaring a state of siege. It simply denied that anything untoward was happening in its ranks until it was far too late, and then decided that, when the split did happen, it was the fault of the people who made “inopportune”, “personal attacks” etc. on the leader of the splinter faction. This is the classic behaviour of an opportunist leadership, seeking to incorporate politically incompatible elements by making unprincipled concessions (in this case on basic norms of democratic centralism), and turning on the “nasty” elements in their own ranks who, in opposing such opportunist concessions, “drove away” the object of their affections.

The “discipline” Peter is talking about here is the “discipline” of centrist opportunism, of trying to force fundamentally incompatible forces, divided by issues of principle, to capitulate to each other in the name of a spurious unity. That is not the politics of Bolshevism. It is, however, strongly reminiscent of unprincipled combinations such as the August bloc that Trotsky was involved in during 1912.

Peter wants to talk about “discipline”. I am all in favour of a discussion of democratic centralist discipline, because I have some concrete points to make about the indiscipline of the CPGB leadership, and undisciplined and unprincipled concessions that were made to the anti-Respect, anti-Galloway, Islamophobic and social chauvinist Red Platform (proto-“Party”) during the May-June 2004 election campaign. Two CPGB aggregates voted to campaign for a vote for *all* Respect candidates in that election.

There are clearly defined norms in the CPGB’s version of democratic centralism, which I regard as (providing it is adhered to) the best version, indeed the correct version, of democratic centralism. These mandate that during a party action, minorities opposed to an agreed action may only publicly criticise and comment on the subject of the action concerned in a manner that does not disrupt the carrying out of that action. The concrete, authorised form that this “non-disruptive” criticism of the majority action was to take in the case of the “Red Platform” was their authoring of a discrete column, “Seeing Red”, in which they could put their case.

Fair enough. Except that this did not happen. Some concrete examples. In the 6 May *WW*, a prominent report was published of CPGB activities in Guildford Respect, written by Manny Neira. This was *not* part of the Red Platform’s column – indeed it was far larger than that column which also appeared. In this non-column article he boasted: “I was elected secretary, and my fellow CPGBer and also fellow Red Platform member, Jem Jones, was elected chair. We suspect we may be unique in being the only branch in the UK with a

CPGB/Red sympathising majority. We also suspect that [SWP] comrade [John] Molyneux may not have been aware of our local support when he called me – though, as a good democrat, I am sure he welcomes the diversity we bring.”

So comrade Neira is able to boast in the CPGB press about Red Platform activists taking positions in Respect, an organisation whose election campaign it does not support, and in the process of so boasting, is able to promote his own faction, a minority current that is supposed to be subordinate to the democratic centralist norms of the CPGB – which had voted not once but *twice* to support Respect. I have news for comrade Neira – as a partisan of Respect, I do not think Respect’s “diversity” should extend so far as to allow *outright opponents* of the Respect project to hold office in Respect branches. In fact, I would seriously consider supporting the *expulsion* of such people from Respect. Indeed, one does not have to believe in democratic centralism to tend to such an attitude – just elementary loyalty to *any* organisation or movement.

Neira was here not only trampling all over the CPGB’s democratic centralism – with the approval of the *WW* editors who allowed this article to be published – he was also pissing in the face of any genuine partisan of Respect. The editors who allowed this remarkable little piece to see the light of day in *WW* are as guilty as Neira himself of *concretely* undermining democratic centralism. That is, they are guilty of a gross breach of discipline.

Second example – the extremely shrill attack on George Galloway in *WW* of 13 May. Neira’s “Pregnant Galloway” party piece again plugged the Red Platform in Rabelaisian fashion: “Gorgeous George was pregnant ... the famous Armani suit has already been let out twice. They could not afford a new one, thanks to the Red Platform: an organisation she could not name without cursing.” Again, entirely separate from the Red Platform’s column – and much more prominent, with a cover graphic to advertise it.

There are, by the way, other examples – these are only the two most blatant ones.

By allowing Neira to plug the Red Platform’s politics in strident public attacks on Galloway and Respect, the CPGB leadership succeeded in temporarily transforming the *Weekly Worker* into virtually a publication of Manny Neira and the Red Platform. The tail was wagging the dog with a vengeance! When I challenged Neira internally over this flagrant act of contempt for party discipline, in which the *WW* editors were also of course deeply complicit, after a hysterical attempt to force me to apologise for the criticism (using the CPGB editors’ complicity and concurrent indiscipline to muddy the waters), the founder of

the Red Platform resigned from the CPGB to begin his splitting manoeuvre.

Of course, Neira may well believe, and is entitled to believe, that the CPGB's endorsement of Respect, despite such flaws as Galloway's conservative-Catholic views on abortion, justified the violation of democratic-centralist discipline. A pity he did not openly state this – then he might have been able to gain some “Respect” and lead a *principled* split. Though given that Galloway's abortion position amounts to an anomalous flaw on an otherwise strident (if left-reformist) opponent of capitalist and imperialist oppression, whereas Neira, who abhors Galloway above all for his “second campism”, has no trouble voting for imperialist institutions like the Euro, this was not on the agenda.

Neira's antipathy to Galloway always stemmed from liberal-imperialist moralism, not from any ultra-left impulse, despite Mark Fischer's tortuous attempt, riven with irrelevant citations from Lenin (and numerous inappropriate analogies), to excuse his own capitulations to Neira by furiously banging that particular square peg into the legendary round hole in the 21 October issue of the *Weekly Worker*.

One final point about comrade Manson's reference to Trotskyism and splits over matters of alleged nuance. Peter equates leaving the organisation over the CPGB's erratic behaviour over Respect with splitting over some abstract difference without consequence in the real world, such differences being “two a penny” in the Trotskyist milieu.

No, comrade Manson. When you are dealing

with Respect you are dealing with the party question in a very concrete manner. I see my leaving the CPGB over Respect as being fundamentally *similar* to my leaving the International Bolshevik Tendency over their refusal to engage properly with the early Socialist Alliance. I see Respect as having considerable potential *in itself* to lead to the creation of a new mass-based party of the working class in this country. If erratic CPGB antics threaten to damage that potential, or to undermine it, or even to constrain my ability to participate in it fully, then I have no more hesitation in leaving your pseudo-“vanguard” than I have had in leaving other such formations in the past.

When I left the IBT, I did not seek to create another sect, I published my views and got involved with the SA. I subsequently joined the CPGB because they were the most consistent exponents of the partyist logic of that project. For a whole range of reasons, most notably concerning the Iraq war and the emergence of new forces, the SA ceased to be viable and Respect came into being out of the anti-war movement. The complexities of how this happened are the subject of a future article – suffice to say I am developing an analysis that differs considerably from that of the CPGB. But I intend to participate fully in this project – and that requires a break with the “discipline” of the vacillating centrist CPGB. Only if the CPGB fundamentally breaks from its vacillation and frequent left-Islamophobia (which by the way is more analogous to Stalinophobia than to the anti-semitism Peter erects as a straw man) can this breach be healed. ■

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The Stalinist State in China: The Social Meaning of Mao Tse-tung's Victory

Wang Fanxi

This article was written in Hong Kong in 1950. It first appeared in the March-April 1951 issue of *New Internationalist*, the theoretical journal of the (Shachtmanite) Independent Socialist League in the US, and was reprinted in Britain in the August 1951 issue of *Socialist Review*, published by the tendency led by Tony Cliff. Wang Fanxi (1907-2002) was active in the Trotskyist movement in China and later in exile. He was the author of *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary* (1991, original edition 1980). We are grateful to Mike Pearn for providing a copy of the article.

1. Now that the CCP's military forces have conquered the entire mainland, the People's Republic in official existence for five months, and the New Democracy in effect in some of China's principal cities for approximately one year, we possess sufficient material and facts to judge the nature of the CCP and its state machine and to test the accuracy of our past views concerning them.

2. In judging and estimating the nature of a movement, a political party, or a state, for the proletarian revolutionist there is one unchanging standard: What is its relation to the working class, that is, to the only revolutionary class in the modern world? For us there can be no more decisive standard than that, nor can there be any other point of departure.

3. What is the relation of the CCP, the Liberation Army led by it, and the People's Republic which it has established, to the Chinese working class? What attitude does it take toward that working class? Notwithstanding the fact that the CCP calls itself a working-class party, notwithstanding the fact that the CCP proclaims this new state to be a "people's" state led by the workers, nevertheless a variety of facts demonstrates that the political and economic position of the workers has not only failed to improve, but in certain respects has even deteriorated. The working class is the victim of this "War of Liberation". "The liberation of the working class is the function of the working class itself." Consequently, "liberators" drawn from another class cannot confer

genuine liberation upon it. And this has in fact been the case. Politically speaking, the position of the working class has not changed at all. The military governments established by the conquerors are composed entirely of a new nobility, and have no connection with the working class. Not only could workers' soviets not be formed in practice, they were not permitted to exist even as a concept. All that the workers got from their "liberators" was the designation – on paper – of "leaders" of the new society. A new government which proclaims that the working class occupies a position of leadership in it has not given the working class an ounce of such latitude as would enable it to advance to political power.

In the early period of the "liberation", because of the long-standing prestige of the Communist Party and because of the revolutionary illusions entertained toward it by the workers, the working class got out of hand in some of the big cities and went so far as to demand an improvement in living conditions, even confiscation of factories (as, for example, the Lien-ch'ang iron works in Tientsin), the liquidation of certain capitalists, and so forth. But this period came to an end very quickly. In Tientsin from February to April and in Shanghai during June and July there was extensive activity on the part of the workers, but after the suppression in April of the Tientsin movement by Liu Shao-ch'i and the promulgation in Shanghai on August 19 of Military Government regulations for the adjustment of labour-management disputes,

the working class was robbed completely of its right to fight and of its fundamental right to strike. In other words, it was made the victim of exploitation at the hands of private entrepreneurs. This new slave status of the working class was finally fixed in September by governmental fiat, and the workers have been unable to win an improvement in living conditions by striking. In order to disguise this act of barbarism, the new rulers have given the working class the right of "factory control". But this right, as a glance at the *Regulations for the Conduct of Factory Committees* will indicate, is a patently worthless piece of trickery. For example:

"7. The Factory Committee shall be presided over by the Head of the Factory (or the Manager) ... 8. If a decision passed by a majority of the Factory Committee shall be judged by the Head of the Factory (or the Manager) to be in conflict with the said Factory's best interests, or when the said decision shall be in conflict with the instructions of higher authority, the Manager or Head of the Factory is empowered to prohibit its implementation."

In other words, everything depends on the decision of the factory head or the manager, who is not elected by the workers but is appointed by the "people's" government, which has no connection with the working class. Basically, what is the significance of this sort of "workers' control"? Let us have our answer straight from the mouth of one of the "national capitalists", Sung Fei-ch'ing:

"In my opinion, it is not such a bad idea to let the workers participate in the factory management. While on the face of it the workers would appear to be detracting somewhat from the rights of the factory head, in reality the purpose of the participation of workers' representatives in the administration of personal, material, profits, finances, etc., is merely to assure the implementation of all decisions passed by the Factory Committee. Since the workers participate in the formation of these decisions, they cannot later oppose them. Thus much friction is eliminated, and in any case the final right of decision remains in the hands of the manager."

These few words constitute a frank and honest description of the real nature of this "workers' control of production". It merely exalts the workers "on the face of it", while retaining control of the factory "in reality"! This is the Chinese Communist regime's general attitude toward the working class, one of paying it lip-service in theory while oppressing it in practice. And besides this, the CCP has yet another poisonous weapon to use against the working class, the system of "heroes of labour", which divides the workers on the one hand while oppressing them more cruelly on the other. Therefore we may affirm that politically the Chinese Communist regime has not

improved the position of the working class, while economically it has lowered its standard of living. The Chinese Communist regime, while characterizing itself the "representative of the working class" and making use of the words "people" and "nation", has in reality, like the Kuomintang, in effect enslaved the Chinese working class. This view must constitute the point of departure for our interpretation of the nature of the CCP and its government.

4. Any political party or state apparatus which enslaves the working class is, in this day and age, from a proletarian, socialist, revolutionary point of view, fundamentally and completely reactionary. Therefore the CCP and the state apparatus which it has set up are also reactionary. Yet at the same time we must recognise the following facts: They have overthrown the Kuomintang government, which represented foreign imperialism and the native bourgeoisie and landlord class; they are wiping out the anachronistic agrarian relationships in China's farming villages; they have dealt a mighty blow to the foreign imperialist powers led by the United States. All of these actions, from the point of view of Chinese nationalism and democracy, have an undeniably progressive character.

5. The difficulty is this: How and why can a fundamentally reactionary political party and government perform objectively progressive acts? At bottom, what class does such a political party represent? To answer these questions we must first make a brief study of the development of world capitalism over the last twenty-some years, of the processes of political and economic change within China itself, and of the history of the first proletarian state in the history of mankind. Within this space, naturally, we can point out only with the utmost simplicity and brevity the principal peculiarities in the history of these developments, since our immediate purpose is merely to shed light on the international background and historical origins of the CCP's victory and the emergence of this new state, and thence to draw a conclusion as to its fundamental nature.

6. Since the end of the economic crisis of 1929-33, and particularly since the end of the Second World War, world capitalism, in its imperialist stage, in order, on the one hand, to deal with the proletarian revolution within each country (a task in which it has succeeded) and, on the other, because of ever more intense international competition, has acquired certain new characteristics in its internal structure, characteristics which Lenin could not adequately foresee at the time of his analysis of imperialism. The most important among them is the process by which monopoly capitalism becomes more closely bound up with the state, some enterprises are taken over by the state, and capitalism becomes statified. Hitler's Nazism and Roosevelt's New Deal, carried

out at approximately the same time in Germany and the United States, represented fundamentally the same tendency towards statification on the part of capitalism. This movement for a time resolved the internal crisis of capitalism, but intensified the international crisis and culminated in the Second World War. As soon as the war broke out, this tendency was greatly accelerated, because the production of the implements of the war reached an unprecedented height. It exceeded the manufacture of the machinery of production and of consumers' goods and wrought a change in the most important sectors of the national productive plant. This one sector is of exceptionally large proportions and of an exceptionally exacting nature and makes it difficult for other capital enterprises to function with complete freedom; hence, the control of it must be directly in the hands of the state, which causes an unprecedented growth in the statification of enterprise. Since the war, this process, far from being retarded, has been intensified in scope.

Beginning with the war itself – except for the Soviet Union, which has a planned economy, and the United States, which gained economically from the war – all the capitalist empires, victors as well as vanquished, have found themselves in a position from which they cannot extricate themselves. The economy has completely collapsed, the revolutionary crisis is very tense, and at the same time, on the international scene, the world powers, American and Russia, are moving closer and closer to a clash – all of which forces these capitalist countries, for the sake of their continued existence, to concentrate the economic machinery in the hands of the state, to plan for internal stabilisation, and, to whatever degree possible, to ward off external attacks. As a result, such countries with traditionally “free” economies as England and France have both carried out “nationalisations” on a very large scale. The United States would seem to be the exception to the rule whereby, since the end of the war, the system of state interference in the individual economy has become more or less solidified. The principal reason, naturally, is that the power of American private monopoly capital is very great, and at the same time the United States is experiencing a period of abnormal prosperity on the back of a bankrupt world, whence these “free entrepreneurs” have a high power of resistance to the incursions of state capitalism. But if we examine more closely, we see that the production of the implements of war, with the atom bomb heading the list, is being more and more concentrated in the hands of the state, while at the same time Truman's so-called “Fair Deal”, under the impetus of a future economic panic, could most assuredly take long strides in the direction of state capitalism. (If at such a time a socialist revolution should take place and be successful then of course the whole picture

changes.)

7. A phenomenon accompanying the statification of capitalism and pointed out by Lenin in his study of imperialism, namely, the parasitism and corruption of the bourgeoisie, is also further intensified yet another degree. Broadly speaking, the entire bourgeoisie becomes separated from the means of production and becomes a class of “profit-consumers”. The state becomes the agent that reaps the profits for the owners, and the capitalists simply turn into a decayed leisure class.

8. The decay and stagnation of capitalism causes a further change in the polarisation of classes within capitalist society. On the one hand, capital concentration and the capitalist class shrink in quantity and size; on the other, the ranks of the proletariat cannot continue to expand, but in some countries the ratio of this class to the total population decreases. The bankrupt, impotent petty bourgeoisie becomes ever larger. At the same time, the so-called “new middle class” formed under conditions of state capitalism, that is, specialists, technicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals of every type and description – these and other elements of the impoverished petty bourgeoisie at certain times form the base for the Fascist movement, and at others the cadres of Stalinism.

9. These three phenomena, viz., (a) the tendency of world capitalism toward statification, (b) the thoroughgoing corruption and decay of the individual capitalist, and (c) the numerical increase of the petty bourgeoisie and its rise in importance as a social and political force, may serve to explain the principal events that have taken place throughout the world during the last twenty years, particularly since the end of the war, and can explain very adequately the events that have transpired in China.

10. The semi-colonial, backward Chinese bourgeoisie, under the pressure of the enmity of the workers and peasants from within and the direct blows of Japanese imperialism from without, fell in wholeheartedly with the world current of the nationalisation of capital. But precisely because the weak base of Chinese industrial capitalism and China's political and social backwardness caused her “nationalised” capitalism to assume a particularly shameless rapacity, the result has been in the last six or seven years a so-called bureaucratic capitalism and unprecedentedly graft-ridden political setup, the stench of which rises to the heavens. This sort of rule not only enraged the Chinese workers and peasants, but also angered broad layers of the urban petty bourgeoisie and even the medium bourgeoisie, the so-called national capitalists.

11. The Chinese Stalinists, taking advantage of this state of affairs, basing themselves on the overwhelming numerical strength of the impoverished and embittered peasantry, and proposing a programme of reformed state

capitalism (that is, the New Democracy), rallied the urban petty bourgeoisie and medium bourgeoisie, and gathered to their banner even a part of the working class. Through military might they easily transformed the rotten rule of the Chinese-style “national capitalists” and took over (but by no means abolished) the state machinery and the entire economy under its control.

12. The above constitutes our explanation, on the basis of the development of world capitalism and its peculiarities, of the reasons for the collapse of Kuomintang rule and the rise of Chinese Stalinist rule. Of course, this explanation can account for only one half of the story. It still leaves unanswered questions such as the following: Why did the CCP rely on the peasants rather than the workers? Why did the “communists” at the head of China’s impoverished peasantry put forth a programme of reformed state capitalism rather than socialist revolution? Why are they carrying out a reform from the top down rather than a revolution from the bottom up? Why did they merely “take over” undisturbed the bureaucratic state apparatus rather than abolish it? Why, although they have transformed the rule of the landlords and the bureaucratic capitalists, have they adopted a friendly attitude towards the bourgeoisie in general while carrying out repressive measures against the proletariat? Why do they proclaim themselves to be a working-class party and China to be a “people’s republic led by the working class” while giving the workers not the least opportunity to participate in the government or even to organise soviets?

To answer these questions, we can point out the following facts about the internal situation in the country: The Chinese proletariat since 1927, when it suffered a staggering defeat thanks to its adherence to Stalinist policies, has not ascended the political stage. Although a year or two before the struggle with Japan and within the first year after Japan’s surrender the labour movement revived for a time, nevertheless, thanks to the weakness of the proletarian parties, the Kuomintang’s oppression and deceit, and the degeneration of Chinese industry in the war, and under the influence of the decay and stagnation of world capitalism, the ranks of the working class were scattered and weakened, and these movements could never acquire sufficient political and revolutionary character. The fact that the Chinese proletariat for over twenty years was unable to interfere in China’s political processes to a significant extent determined the peasant aspect, the capitalist nature, and the bureaucratic-collectivist direction of Chinese Stalinism. Of course – and this is far more important – we must seek the answer to this question in the nature of the Soviet Union and the CPUSSR and the influence they exerted on the CCP.

13. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union,

since the late Twenties, after the elimination of the entire Old Bolshevik leadership, quickly degenerated into a bureaucratic clique exploiting the proletariat. Of course, as far as membership, organisation, and ideology were concerned, it ceased to be a vanguard of the proletariat or even a part of the proletariat. As for membership, except for a handful of Stakhanovites, workers simply could not join the party; as for organisation, democratic centralism gave way to bureaucratic absolutism, and lower-ranking party members (to say nothing of non-party workers) had absolutely no right to criticise, change, or recall the leaders or their policies; as for ideology, internationalism gave way to narrow Great-Russian nationalism, world revolution gave way to national construction based on the Soviet Union, the class struggle was transformed into “national cooperation” (or a bureaucratic operation), equalitarianism was transformed into the most naked system of privilege and discrimination, collective leadership was transformed into the most arbitrary personal dictatorship. Along with the complete degeneration of the Bolshevik party, and inextricably bound up with it, was the complete change in the character of the Soviet state.

This change expressed itself primarily in the following ways: (a) The soviets on which the working class had relied to control the state remained in name but disappeared in fact, and the workers were not only unable any longer to “recall at will those of their elected representatives who did not suit them”, but even to elect their own representatives. (b) The officials of the state apparatus, the officers of the regular army, the responsible persons and specialists, formed a relatively stable ruling class, became estranged from the working class, then oppressed the working class cruelly. (c) The working masses in general were cheated not only of their right to participate in government but also of any right to fight for the improvement of their own living conditions. (d) Therefore the Soviet Union now stands in the following class relationship politically and economically: On the one hand the bureaucracy collectively holds all political and economic power in the state, and on the other the toiling masses are absolutely without rights. This sort of state is naturally not a workers’ state, nor even a degenerate workers’ state, because the working class is politically ruled over and economically exploited; and yet it is not a capitalist state, since there is no capitalist class in it which privately owns the means of production. In that state all the means and materials of production are concentrated in the hands of a bureaucracy comprising the party, the governmental machinery, and the army, which collectively owns all the wealth.

Therefore we may say that the Soviet Union of today is a country in which the bureaucracy collectively owns the means of production. The

reason this sort of state was able to come into being is that, in the first place, the world socialist revolution was late in arriving and its energies dissipated, thus forcing a backward and isolated workers' state to degenerate completely; in the second place, that the decay of world capitalism itself and the process which is pushing it at top speed in the direction of state capitalism made it impossible for the degenerated workers' state to revert to orthodox capitalism.

14. On the face of it, bureaucratic collectivism, that is, Stalinism, would appear to be a completely new thing. It is neither socialism nor capitalism. But upon closer examination it is not difficult to perceive that it belongs under a subheading of capitalism. One difference between it and traditional capitalism is collective ownership of the means of production as opposed to private ownership. The ownership of the means of production has not been socialised, but it has been collectivised (in the hands of the ruling class). And as for the relationship of owners to producers, exploitation continues exist, and is in fact intensified. Bureaucratic collectivism has two great advantages over private capitalism and even over state capitalism (under the latter also there is large-scale private ownership): (a) it is possible to regulate capital in a more systematic fashion; (b) it is possible to exploit workers more efficiently. These two advantages are precisely what is needed to overcome the present crisis of capitalism. Seen from this point of view, Stalinism is a special kind of reformism, it is the reformism of the age in which capitalism has developed into imperialism. On the one hand it prevents the emergence and success of a genuine socialist revolution, and on the other, by means of collective exploitation, it continues the rule of capital over labour. Bureaucratic collectivism or Stalinism is essentially the transitional form which obtains during the delayed and difficult birth of socialism from the womb of capitalism. It cannot create a new historical era, but it can maintain itself for a long time, and in several countries at once. In southeast Europe several such states have already been created, while the New China is being recast in the same mould.

15. To create a bureaucratic-collectivist state, one must first have a bureaucratic-collectivist party to carry out the action. The Chinese Communist Party has been that ever since Communism degenerated into bureaucratic collectivism. Because of a common international situation and longstanding historical ties, also because the class relationships within China after the defeat of the Great Revolution (the destruction of the proletariat, the long peasant wars, the utter corruption of the bourgeoisie, the anger and dissatisfaction of the petty bourgeoisie) were favourable to reformism and utterly unfavourable to the growth of revolutionary socialism, the Chinese Communist Party took over entirely the

bureaucratic collectivism perfected by Stalin within the Soviet Union. The ideological change was complete by the early Thirties. Now the CCP, embracing this ideology, has come to power and is organising the state around it. Hence it is quite natural that it can only carry out a reform from the top down, put forth a state-capitalist programme, simply and easily take over the Kuomintang's bureaucratic state apparatus, destroy only part of the bourgeoisie, put a strict check on the genuinely revolutionary proletariat, and regard with hostility every mass action from the bottom up. Since the creature spawned by the CCP is a bureaucratic-collectivist state and must continue to enslave the workers, it is reactionary; but since such a state must reform capitalism, change property forms, and increase productive power, it cannot help adopting certain progressive measures. Herein we have found the answer to our question posed in 4: How and why can a reactionary regime carry out certain progressive measures? The contradiction between progress and reaction which characterises the Chinese Communist Party's regime expresses itself particularly in its relation to the bourgeoisie on the one hand and the proletariat and poor peasantry on the other. To stabilise the rule of the bureaucracy it is necessary to conciliate the former and oppose the latter, while to reform capitalism it is necessary to conciliate the latter and oppose the former.

16. This internal contradiction has caused the Chinese Communist rule for the present to assume Bonapartist features. It attempts to play the part of a supra-class mediator and proclaims "labour-capital unity for the benefit of all society", while in reality manipulating and smoothing over class contradictions for the ultimate advantage of the bureaucratic caste. All varieties of Bonapartism rest primarily on the mass base of the petty bourgeoisie, the present CCP included. All forms of Bonapartism are fundamentally anti-working class, and the CCP at present is no exception. Of course, Stalinist Bonapartism attacks private property, while orthodox Bonapartist dictatorship does not, and therein lies the great difference between them. It is absolutely necessary for us to understand this point. Therefore we cannot say that the Bonapartism of the CCP will perform a capitalist function in the sense in which we could say it of traditional Bonapartism, of Bonapartism in the literal meaning of the word. It will perform the functions of capitalism in a peculiar way, that is, by substituting the collective ownership of the bureaucracy for the private ownership of the individual capitalist. The capitalism represented by the Stalinists is no longer capitalism in the original sense of the word, but bureaucratic collectivism; the class they represent is not a capitalist class in the original sense, but a bureaucratic class which collectively owns the means of production. This distinction is of exceptional importance. If one

points to the Bonapartism of the CCP without understanding this difference, then one will be unable to understand the events taking place before one's eyes or to predict future developments, because, while others may expect the attitude of the CCP to become daily more conciliatory towards the bourgeoisie, what we shall in fact see is a greater solidification of collectivism and a strengthening of state capital.

Of course, we are under no obligation to make airily optimistic promises about what the CCP will achieve from these sad beginnings. In semi-colonial, backward China, which has suffered the ravages of civil and foreign wars for over ten years, if only because of the power of resistance of the internal "automatic economy" (not to mention the increasingly acute contradictions on the international scene), the construction by the CCP of a bureaucratic-collectivist system will probably be extremely difficult. Thanks to two wars within the last ten years, the decisively significant sectors of the Chinese economy are nationalised. This gives the CCP's future activities a great boost, but they have yet to absorb all private capital, abolish the backward relationships in the farming villages, and collectivise the small farming units which have gone bankrupt in their technical backwardness – all of them uncommonly difficult tasks. To do this the first and most important step is for the Stalinist party to initiate a broad mass struggle, to absorb countless worker and peasant elements and organise them for action, but this is a step that the Stalinist party is wary of taking. To guarantee that the new China shall remain under bureaucratic rule and not turn into a genuine workers' and peasants' state, they must limit this movement to certain well-defined bounds, beyond which it must not be permitted to stray so much as a single step. In its present position of extreme caution, events have naturally made it impossible for the CCP's collectivisation to go very deep; however, the general tendency is in the direction just described, and its principal features have been pointed out above.

17. When the Stalinist party, in order to advance the cause of bureaucratic collectivism, very cautiously initiates its mass movement, can the workers and poor peasants, taking advantage of this opportunity, push the struggle further, work free of the limitations imposed upon them by the Stalinist party, and cause a bureaucratically dominated movement to turn into the Chinese socialist revolution – or can they not? In theory, we can never exclude this possibility, and we – the Chinese Proletarian Revolutionary Party – must turn all our subjective efforts in that direction. But, in fact, if we passionately analyse China's present class relationships, we cannot deny that this possibility is extremely slight. The prestige of the Stalinist party among the general masses is still very great, the illusion that bureaucratic collect-

ivism equals socialism is widespread; the Chinese proletariat and its real vanguard have yet to educate the Chinese themselves and unite through the bitter experience of Stalinist rule for only then can they initiate a mighty anti-Stalinist revolution.

Our chief task at present is patiently to interpret and reinterpret the fundamental nature of Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism. Naturally, "patient interpretation" by no means signifies passive observation. We must participate actively in these events. We must, while pointing out the internally contradictory character of the Stalinist party's present struggle, on the one hand advance and broaden in scope the fight against the landlords and rich peasants and advocate and participate in all anti-capitalist struggles; and, on the other hand, oppose simultaneously the fight of the bureaucracy, oppose the enslavement of the workers under whatever guise, oppose the oppression of the poor peasantry, and, above all, consistently advocate the convocation of a Congress of workers, peasants, and soldiers, to exchange the Stalinist military agencies and the so-called "People's Government" for a genuine workers' and peasants' state. We must direct every struggle toward the formation of soviets. Our principal slogan must be for a Congress of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants.

18. In view of the political and economic evidence, the China of Mao Tse-tung, unless a new world war or an internal revolution stops the course of its development, can "peacefully" turn into another Stalinist Russia (that is, it need not necessarily first go through a proletarian revolution and then degenerate in order to reach the same end result); or, if the China of Mao Tse-tung is to become a workers' state, then nothing short of a proletarian revolution can alter the present rule.

Therefore, not only can we state positively that China is not a workers' state, but we can also prove by the same token that the Soviet Union is no longer any sort of workers' state. The difference between the new China and the Soviet Union at present is one of degree, not of kind. Both are equally bureaucratic-collectivist states, except for a huge difference in *degree* of thoroughness. Therefore the Fourth International's traditional attitude towards the Soviet Union must be altered. It must reject the view that the Stalinist parties are parties of Menshevik opportunism, because, although the Stalinist parties are at present indeed fundamentally reformist, their principal crime is not their collaboration with the bourgeoisie but bureaucratic enslavement of the proletariat. Needless to say, it is only by viewing the Soviet Union and the Stalinist parties from the point of view of bureaucratic collectivism that one can understand their nature and their actions. The same is true of the Chinese Stalinist party and its newly-established state. ■

A Danish Trotskyist in the Spanish Civil War

Åge Kjelsø

This piece was first published in 1977 in issue No.17 of the Danish magazine *Hug!* The translation is by Mike Jones, who contributes the following note: "This verbal account of his experience in Spain by Åge Kjelsø, was written down by Carl Heinrich Petersen and agreed as a true record in June 1976. Åge Kjelsø begins his account with an analysis of the civil war from its start. He goes on to describe the workers' organisations, their revolutionary actions, and the counter-revolutionary role of the orthodox Communists, pointing out that these events unfolded at the same time as the Moscow Trials and purges in the USSR. He furthermore points out that the Communists had made clear that anarcho-syndicalists and Trotskyists in Spain would be destroyed just as efficiently as in the USSR, 'and that this would not just remain a threat I myself would find out very clearly during my stay in Spain 1936-38'. In order to save space I have omitted this first part of the account in order to give the personal experiences of Åge Kjelsø."

IT WAS during a journey in Yugoslavia together with a Danish comrade and co-thinker, Tage Lau, that I became aware of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. We had travelled from Denmark owing to unemployment, and we were fed and received other assistance from workers-esperantoists and other socialists.¹ In Yugoslavia we experienced a number of great strikes, and it gave us a strong impression of the solidarity and will to struggle, of which a few years later the world would see an even greater manifestation in the resolute struggle of the Yugoslav workers and peasants against the army of the fascist great power which attacked their country. But otherwise it was the struggle in Spain which mostly concerned us, and for us as for thousands, yes millions, of workers the world over, the struggle of the Spanish workers stood out almost like a miracle.

In the winter of 1933, with horror and shame, we had seen the collapse of the German labour movement without a fight as Hitler was installed, and the year after we experienced the February battles in Austria, where a few thousand members of the socialist defence organisation, the Schutzbund, attempted a hopeless defensive fight to prevent the forward march of fascism. Mussolini was in power in Italy, and in most of southern and eastern Europe reaction and semi-fascism had

triumphed, and even in our country large sections of the farmers and bourgeoisie admired Hitler and Mussolini.

In this situation, the magnificent and partially victorious struggle of the Spanish workers against fascism resulted in a huge enthusiasm and admiration for it among many of the young socialists of that time, and this atmosphere led to me deciding to go to Spain to participate in the first serious resistance struggle against fascism raging there.

Therefore, I set course from Yugoslavia to Spain, and after a long and exhausting journey by cycle I reached the great southern French port of Marseilles, from which I assumed good possibilities existed for journeying to Spain. At first, I tried to contact the Trotskyists and anarchists through their meeting rooms, and I did succeed in contacting some anarchists; but as they didn't quickly assist my further journey to my promised land, I tried to take a short-cut to it with the aid of the French trade unions and Peoples Front. It seemed to go well, as I was able to get on board a ship which was taking volunteers of different nationalities to Spain. I lived on the ship for a few days, where I engaged in frank discussions with a part of the other volunteers, among them some Greeks and Germans. It resulted

in me being summoned to an interrogation room, where the tone in my regard was sharp and in the manner of the police in a murder case, and where I – despite my protest – was forced into being photographed. Thereafter I was shown out and put off the ship with the message that I was not wanted in Spain owing to my anti-Stalinist, so-called “provocative” statements. This was my first clash with the international Stalinist apparatus during the Spanish Civil War.

Before I continue with my political description, it would be opportune to say a few words about my previous political development up to the summer of 1936.

I joined DsU² as a 15-year-old in 1930, and in the following years had different jobs as a labourer and messenger-boy, but was often unemployed. After Hitler’s elevation to power on 30 January 1933, a number of political émigrés from the defeated German labour movement arrived in Denmark, and among them was Professor Tschachotin, the inventor of the three-arrows emblem,³ spokesman for a more active struggle against Nazism and therefore oppositionally inclined towards the leadership of the German social democracy. Tschachotin influenced many Copenhagen DsUers in an oppositional direction, among them myself, and I remember that Hartvig Frisch⁴ took part in some of our meetings and expressed a certain criticism in respect to the toleration of Brüning and general passivity in the face of reaction by the SPD – in the same way that he did in his book *Pest over Europa*, which was published in the autumn of 1933. Through the then well-known wholesaler Boggild, who was active within DsU and the social democracy in Copenhagen, but had at the same time close links with the German émigré Trotskyist group, also located in the city, I came into contact with these Trotskyists, was excluded from DsU and participated in the establishment of a Danish Trotskyist group, which we called the “Leninist Work Group”. I was also a member of the “Anti-Fascist Struggle League”, which had been built by expelled DsUers, who wanted a degree of joint struggle with the Communists against the Nazis, and which broke up a number of the Nazi meetings in Copenhagen during their first manifestations in those years. Before I left Copenhagen in the summer of 1936, the Leninist Work Group gave me a statement to present to foreign comrades, and it was amusing for me to see the confusion the mere name of the group caused among those Stalinists who got to see it.

After being thrown off the ship in Marseilles, I again contacted the anarchists, who gave me an introductory letter to the Spanish comrades and a train ticket to the Spanish frontier, where I received

an excellent reception from the Spanish anarchists, who also took care of my further transport to Barcelona. It was August 1936, and I was one of the first Danish volunteers in Spain. At an anarchist barracks I received training in the use of a rifle and hand grenades for a few weeks, and then was sent to the front at Huesca in Aragon, where I spent a couple of months.

Apart from myself, at that moment there were only very few foreigners in the Durruti Column, which was stationed here and had been named after the famous Spanish anarchist Durruti, whose life had been one long struggle for the liberation of the working class. He had been condemned to death in the '20s, both in Spain and in Argentina, for his contribution, and he was in the van on the barricades and during the attack on the fascist positions in Barcelona on 19 July 1936. During the following weeks, the Durruti Column took part in purging Catalonia of fascists, and half of Aragon too, and during the critical November days of that year Durruti and 6000 of his column hurried to Madrid’s relief. Durruti fell there on 20 November, on a section of the front otherwise quiet at the time, apparently assassinated by a political opponent. The whole of Barcelona was on its feet for his funeral to salute this great son of the city, and the workers of Spain cried at his bier.

I had some extraordinarily good comrades in the Durruti Column, and although only a few of them had a talent for languages, we nevertheless had the best understanding between us on account of the common cause we fought for. I sometimes use the term anarchist for them, but could just as well use syndicalist instead. This is because all members of the anarchist elite organisation FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation) were at the same time members of the bigger syndicalist union confederation CNT, where they played a leading role, so the relationship between them was akin to that between the social democracy and the Danish trade unions here.

After a couple of months’ service in the Durruti Column on the Huesca Front, I sought and got leave in the autumn of 1936, as despite being on excellent terms with the Spanish anarchists and syndicalists, who were my militia comrades there, I did not want to remain inactive too long on what was almost a “dead” front. The Durruti Column was very badly supplied with arms and could therefore not carry out very much of an offensive nature against the better supplied fascists on this front, and when the Russian arms arrived they were directed elsewhere than to the revolutionary elements on the Aragon front.

Therefore, I went back to Barcelona and reported at the office of the International Brigade. The aim was partly to get to a livelier front with

better weapons, and partly to agitate among the many German Stalinists in the brigade; but it proved to be an illusion that anything could be attained in that fashion. As far as the great majority of these people were concerned, the authority of the party and its discipline was far too strong for that. As a member of the brigade I was sent to a training camp at Albacete in south-eastern Spain, and there I learnt to service machine-guns; but for a while I was occupied with unpacking Mexican weapons. Mexico was the only country which delivered arms to the fighting Spanish Republic on the basis of an openly proclaimed sympathy with its struggle against fascism and, in contrast to the USSR, without placing special conditions for the aid. The small and quite backward Mexico was naturally unable to provide the same quantities as the European fascist powers did on Franco's behalf.

From Albacete I went to the Andalucian front in southern Spain, and in the war of manoeuvre there we came up against the very skilful Moroccan sharpshooters and foreign legionnaires, who, among other things, perched up in the olive trees and shot at us as we advanced. It led to great losses amongst us, sometimes as much as every other man. Of course, there were also dead on the other side, and I found numerous dead Moroccans with a hand closed around a madonna figure. It was quite strange that these primitive Mohammedans were equipped thus with Catholic saint figures; but both these Moors, as they have been called in Spain since ancient times, and the foreign legionnaires, played a great, maybe even a decisive role in the fascist advances, especially during the first months of the civil war. *It was a very great error, which approximates to suicide, that the republic did not, as soon as the war started, proclaim independence for the then Spanish Morocco*, as in all probability it would have removed the possibilities for recruitment by the fascists among the Moors and forced them to leave the Foreign Legion in Morocco, if they wished to maintain power over this country. Among the republican parties, only the left-socialist POUM went in for the independence of Morocco, while the Socialist Party, for example, entertained illusions about aid from Britain and France, if one avoided annoying the ruling classes there by stimulating independence movements in their colonies by liberating Spanish Morocco. The great syndicalist CNT was also passive on this issue, strangely enough, maybe a result of its one-sided trade unionist-economical and anti-political orientation.

It was as a soldier in the Thälmann Battalion, mainly composed of Germans but also including other foreigners, that I participated in the fights of the International Brigade on the southern front

and later on the Madrid front. I came to the general conclusion that in the military-technical sphere the fascist officers were more skilful than those of the brigade; but the former also had much better equipment at their disposal than we had. On the other hand, there was a higher morale and greater courage in the brigade and the republican army than among the fascists, and the brigade has as its due the greatest share of the honour for succeeding in stopping the fascist onslaught on Madrid at the end of 1936. There were long periods between our leave, and the food was alien and quite spartan, in the main consisting of tinned stuff. We were somewhat better supplied with spirits.

A lot was said and written about Franco's fifth column. The description came from the fact that four columns were advancing on Madrid while Franco boasted that he had a fifth one of secret supporters in the city itself. The Stalinists shamefully misused the description by applying it to all the anti-Stalinists, namely to us revolutionaries; but that such a fifth column did exist is unquestionable. In Albacete it happened that people from the brigade could get their throat cut by barbers in the town. The criminals concerned were naturally shot themselves when caught; but the slogan "Don't go to the barber", was quite common in the brigade for a time!

I saw the horror of war at close quarters and in many ways. In the south I saw endless horrible lines of refugees, and the material superiority of the fascists, which was especially manifest in the air, showed itself often by German planes in particular attacking the crowds of refugees. During the war in the south I also saw the disfigurement of the corpses of comrades, and in the University City in Madrid, where I spent the winter of 1937 in the trenches, I experienced a true hell. The civilian population of the capital received almost as much bombardment as us at the front by the way. Aerial bombardments with great destruction and many dead and wounded were a common occurrence. Myself, I was wounded in the leg by a bullet and, physically exhausted and mentally depressed, I was taken to a hospital in Madrid, near the Puerto del Sol.

During my stay in hospital I tried to leave the brigade. This was not a result of the wound and the rest of my physical weakness, but because of deep disappointment over developments in the republic, where the Stalinist influence had dramatically increased in tempo with the Russian arms deliveries and the Russian pressure, exercised by all the Soviet representatives, including the Spanish CP, which had expanded massively in its capacity as political spokesman for the arms suppliers. Another source of the growing Stalinist

influence was the appearance of the Spanish CP as spokesman for all the petty bourgeois, moderate and conservative elements in regard to economic and social affairs, especially concerning the party's struggle against collectivisation and for re-privatisation. Because of its energetic struggle for a unified command and blind discipline in the new unified army, for re-establishing the authority of the state and the police, and not least by its violent witch-hunts against all kinds of revolutionary "experiments" and their proponents, the CP became the natural party for civil servants, officers and policemen, while, on the other hand, its adherents among the working class were still quite scarce and, relatively speaking, even less than at the outbreak of the war. In brief: the Stalinist counter-revolution was rapidly advancing, and as a revolutionary worker, for whom the task was of war (against fascism) and revolution (against capitalism and feudalism), I was finding it difficult to remain in the International Brigade led by the Stalinists. As a volunteer I could surely leave again when the preconditions for my original application to join were no longer present. I stated this in my application to be demobilised, but received a rejection.

However, there were still masses of revolutionary comrades in Spain, both native and foreign, and I always met with some of them when in difficulty. This was also the case in the hospital, and some of them helped me get out past the guard when I was again able to walk, and I mixed with a large group leaving, so he was unable to check the papers of everyone.

I visited the POUM in Madrid, and here I arrived among co-thinkers, because in this city, as opposed to its main section in Catalonia, it was Trotskyist-oriented, partly as a result of the influence of foreign Trotskyists. The POUM was only a small party in Madrid; but before the May fighting in Barcelona in 1937, it did have at its disposal in Madrid a small tailoring workshop, where uniforms were produced, together with a radio station and a detachment at the front, with a small tank with Trotsky's picture on it. It also distributed some small front papers and the main party organ *La Batalla*, which was published in Barcelona. The Madrid POUMists were mainly youngsters; there were, however, some more mature people among the leaders. They expected a campaign of extermination by the Stalinists and advised me to go to Barcelona, where the anti-Stalinist forces as a whole were stronger than in Madrid, and I succeeded in reaching the city via Valencia in a POUM motor car.

In Barcelona I was quartered in a POUM-run hotel on the main street, the Ramblas, and soon came into contact with the POUMists and the

Trotskyists, even being elected to the central committee of the Trotskyist section. The latter wasn't very big, and about 50% of the participants in Trotskyist meetings were foreigners, while the POUM was quite a numerically large party in Barcelona, even though it could in no way compete with the mighty syndicalist CNT movement, which included the majority of the workers of Barcelona. It was these people who, partly spontaneously, and partly through their great union organisation CNT, immediately after the victory over the military coup in the city in July 1936, moved to the greatest direct workers' take-over of production, distribution and transport the world has ever seen. It was a totally free and popular but also natural and effective collectivisation, and through such different jobs as a waiter in a spa hotel, assistant in a market garden and worker in an ammunition factory, where we produced grenades, I was able, during the next period, to experience this unique working class socialism at close quarters. The co-operation in these worker-controlled enterprises was excellent, and the spirit among the employees so good that a wage-slave under capitalism can only dream of it, when imagining the liberation of the working class. But to return to earth again, I must add that the heat in the market garden and from the furnaces in the ammunition factory was especially unpleasant for me – in spite of collectivisation!

On 3 May 1937, the May fighting broke out in Barcelona. A series of episodes and a violent witch-hunt from the Stalinists had preceded this – directed against the revolutionaries in general and against the POUM and the Trotskyists in particular, as the two currents were accused of being Franco agents and fascists. Totally contrary to the truth also, the POUM was presented by the Stalinists as a purely Trotskyist party; but this was one of their more innocent lies. Right from July 1936 the telephone centre in Barcelona had been collectivised, and it was even run jointly by both of the large union organisations, the syndicalist CNT and socialist-led UGT, and had functioned excellently under its employees. Probably as a test run, but also probably as a provocation, the Stalinist police chief Salas sent police against the building in order to seize it from its rightful owners: the telephone workers and functionaries. As soon as the police forced their way into the building they were met with resistance by its occupiers and forced back, but when the rumour of the attack on the Telefónica spread round the city – and it went quickly – Barcelona's workers went onto the streets just as on 19 July 1936, and built barricades everywhere. Together with the other occupants of the POUM hotel on the

Ramblas I helped build barricades on the Ramblas, and in the space of a few hours almost the whole city, and especially the working class quarters, was once again ruled by the revolutionary workers. If the CNT leaders had wished it, we could have smashed the whole Stalinist counter-revolution, at least in Barcelona and Catalonia; but the fact that the Russians would again place an arms blockade against the republic, and that Franco could take advantage of a split in the official anti-fascist unity in the republic, made these leaders reach a compromise with the Stalinists. The police-chief Salas resigned, and in return we had to remove the barricades and hand over our weapons.

From then on, the Stalinists and their helpers were by far the strongest, as the sacrifice of Salas was only of symbolic significance, and when Largo Caballero, the head of the central government and a left-socialist, and the four CNT ministers in the same government, refused to go along with Stalinist demand for the prohibition of the POUM, they were forced to stand down by the demand of the Russian ambassador, and a Stalinised social democrat, Dr Negrín, took over as head of the government. From then on the terror against all the different revolutionaries met with no hindrance. The POUM and the Trotskyists in particular, together with the foreign anti-Stalinist militants who had rushed to Spain to participate in the fight against fascism and to aid the building of socialism in the republic, were targeted.

After some days on the barricade I was arrested myself, as I was going to a working class quarter with some comrades from the POUM hotel to join our co-thinkers, though we were released again after 36 hours. For a while I lived half way up Mont Monich with the wife of an imprisoned anarchist, and it was there that I was arrested again early one morning by Spaniards in the service of the GPU, and the same occurred to a comrade I lived together with – together with the whole of the Barcelona Trotskyist group. At first we were put in an ordinary prison with a number in each cell, and I was able to smuggle out a letter to the leader of the Danish Trotskyists, Poul Moth, with an enclosed description of the situation in the hope that he could promote an international campaign to help us through our international movement. It proved to be impossible for them to help us from outside. Later I heard that one of Trotsky's earlier secretaries by the name of Erwin Wolf would have attempted to do so; but he himself was kidnapped together with another Trotskyist, Hans Freund, by the GPU in Spain, and has never been seen since. One should note that when the POUM leader Andrés Nin vanished into the clutches of the GPU in the summer of 1937 the leader of the Independent Labour Party, James

Maxton, undertook a large journey of investigation to Spain, but succeeded only in finding out, being told by no less than three members of the central government, that Nin had never been in any prison run by the government, but had vanished in a private house. One of them added that there was no evidence to back up the charges against the POUM leaders of espionage – in spite of them all being arrested shortly beforehand!

Just as with Nin, my comrades and I were transferred to a private GPU prison in a villa, and there we were subject to many and long-lasting nightly interrogations in English and German by out-and-out sadists and psychopaths of different nationalities. We were shown the photo of a young German captain in the International Brigade, where he was to have operated for the Trotskyists, and the photo showed us him as a terribly mutilated and maltreated corpse; but he had been murdered somewhere other than where the photo had been taken. We were accused of having murdered him, which we hadn't, of course. Maybe the GPU had mistreated him until he died of it, in order to get information from him on others?⁵ Under interrogation I was subjected to kicks and other forms of rough mistreatment, sharp electric light in the face, and was confronted by an Italian, wholly broken by them, who reeled off quite incredible false accusations against me. Apart from the murder of the said captain, who we had supposedly considered as a traitor, I was also accused of a plan to kill Dr Negrín, etc. The other Trotskyists experienced the same, and the villa often resounded with terrible screams from the prisoners.

Finally, we were put before a proper Spanish judge, and as a result of our thorough treatment our tormentors were able to present a number of false confessions to him, both from the above-mentioned Italian and also from a Frenchman and a few others. The likeness to the "real" Moscow Trials was therefore quite significant; there was, though, the important difference that most of us refused to confess. The prosecutor demanded the death penalty for us all; but a Spanish anarchist among the guards in the court helped me to escape, so I missed the end of the trial.

I went straight to the headquarters of the CNT-FAI and explained the whole case to the well-known German syndicalist Augustin Souchy, in the hope that the anarcho-syndicalists could stop it. I remember a leading Spanish anarchist there said to me: "You Trotskyists are leading us to catastrophe!", to which I replied: "You anarchists have already led us to catastrophe!"

I admit that the situation was difficult for the CNT leaders; but in my opinion they should have

acted against the GPU. There was also an opposition among the anarcho-syndicalists, which called itself “The Friends of Durruti”, which was opposed to the compromises of the CNT leaders, especially participation in the government and the rotten deal after the May fighting. They were close to the Trotskyists and the left wing of the POUM, and supported the working class taking power, but unfortunately attained no decisive influence.

Anarchism is a beautiful dream, of which some parts were to become materialised in Spain during the summer of 1936; but because of the capitulationist line of their leaders, over the next few years the anarchists disappointed their worker base so fundamentally that when Franco’s troops advanced into Barcelona, on 25 January 1939, not one barricade was raised against them – and no arms arrived from the democracies, just as the Russians gradually stopped their supplies to the republic, in spite of the CNT-FAI leaders’ policy of capitulation to the Stalinists.

After my escape from the GPU prison I lived for a while in the CNT building. My hair was dyed black from time to time and I received food and very good economic support from the CNT, and I went out only in the dark. Later I found good lodgings in a large room with an anarchist doctor’s family, and I escaped from Spain with the aid of Scandinavian seamen, who brought me on board their ship in a staged and collective bawling bout of drunkenness.

I had visited the Danish consul in Barcelona beforehand; but he refused me any help whatever and marked me down as an “adventurer”! In Marseilles, I was arrested and expelled, and back in Denmark my reports from Spain were not very enthusiastically received in all circles. During a meeting at the Painters House in Copenhagen, I got an umbrella on the head from a Stalinist woman, and I was once attacked by young Stalinists too.⁶

In November 1942 I was interned by the Danish police along with most of the other Spanish volunteers; but I was released again during the summer of 1943, maybe because I had never belonged to DKP or its youth organisation.⁷ The Danish police stole books from me, including Lenin’s Works and other working class literature, together with diaries trying to reconstruct my experiences in Spain. The GPU had also stolen my Spanish diaries from me in Spain when I fell into their hands.

Finally, I can recount that at least a part of my companions in suffering from the above-mentioned “little Moscow Trial” emerged from it with their lives, because I know that one of the Trotskyist leaders from the Barcelona case of 1937 arrived in France after the collapse of the republic. He was

called Muniz Grandizo. After developing disagreements with the leaders of the Fourth International, he went back to Spain where he was caught and imprisoned for twenty years. Maybe he is still inside rotting away in one of the Spanish prisons, if he isn’t already dead.⁸

Editorial notes

1. Poul Moth and Tage Lau were talented linguists and the group made an intervention into the Workers Esperanto movement, where they built a fraction and published Trotskyist materials in Esperanto. According to Steen Bille Larsen’s book *Mod Strømmen* on the Communist oppositions in 1930s Denmark (Copenhagen, 1986), Kjelsø and Lau were cycling to an Esperanto Congress in Yugoslavia, and from Croatia cycled together to Marseilles. As Lau spoke various languages he worked in a POUM propaganda section in Barcelona instead of being sent to the front. Why Lau isn’t mentioned as being in Spain by Kjelsø is a mystery.

2. DsU is the social democratic youth organisation, founded after the original one, SUF, attached itself first to Zimmerwald and then to the Communist International.

3. Sergej Tschachotin designed the three arrows symbol for the Iron Front, the anti-Nazi alliance formed in Germany in 1931 by the Social Democrats with the Catholic Centre party and others.

4. Hartvig Frisch was the translator for Trotsky when he delivered his speech to social democratic students in Copenhagen 1932, published as *In Defence of the October Revolution* (see *Mod Strømmen* for details). Bøggild is also covered in the same book, as is Professor Tschachotin and his theories.

5. The reference is to Leon Narvitch, a Stalinist spy who had infiltrated the Trotskyist group in Spain, though Narvitch claimed to be Russian not German (he was in fact Polish). He was killed by a POUM action squad in retaliation for the murder of Andrés Nin, whom he had betrayed to the Stalinists.

6. The Painters House was the then Painters Union building. It has since moved.

7. Those Spanish volunteers not interned founded the Communist-led resistance organisation BOPA, the main one during the Second World War in Denmark. The DKP was the Communist Party of Denmark.

8. Having returned to Spain to take part in the Barcelona strike of 1951, Muniz was arrested the following year and given a ten-year prison sentence. After his release he lived in Paris where he led a small revolutionary grouping. He died in 1989.

REVIEWS

Why Did the USSR Collapse?

Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenny, *Socialism Betrayed: Behind the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, International Publishers, 2004. Paperback, 230pp, £14.

Reviewed by Mike Rooke

THE THESIS of this book is summed up by the comment made by Fidel Castro in 1992 on the collapse of the Soviet Union, and quoted approvingly by the authors: "Socialism did not die from natural causes: it was a suicide." The authors, two academics aligned politically with the Communist Party of the USA, have assembled a detailed case against the "petty bourgeois tendency" represented by Gorbachev. They argue that it was the Gorbachev reforms, begun in 1986, that started the process of economic and national disintegration of the Soviet Union. The essence of Gorbachevism was that it favoured compromises with capitalism (the market), a tendency whose genealogy goes back to Bukharin and Krushchev. This is contrasted to the "left wing tendency" of Lenin and Stalin which was characterised by the promotion of class struggle in the interests of the working class. The Gorbachev programme reflected the interests of those with a stake in private enterprise and the market (would-be entrepreneurs and corrupted CPSU officials). These representatives of the "2nd economy" were expanding in number and influence after 1953, a trend further strengthened by the burgeoning of an educated urban intelligentsia in the '70s and '80s. The final years of Perestroika (1989-91) directly reflected the interests of these elements.

There is certainly some truth in the claim that Gorbachev expressed the interests of those who wished for a return of the market and private enterprise. In which case the authors would really have had to explain just why such restorationist impulses were gaining strength in Soviet society. Trotsky in his 1936 book *Revolution Betrayed* predicted that it was precisely the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union inaugurated by the Stalinist bureaucracy that would prepare the ground for capitalist restoration. By contrast, what the authors argue is that although Soviet socialism had problems (they argue "democracy" was continually being developed), it "embodied the essence of socialism as defined by Marx". The pro-market intelligentsia and proto-entrepreneurs supporting glasnost and perestroika were in fact a product of

the very success of socialism, in which case their politics cannot be understood as anything other than an irrationalism. This crude apologetics is of course entirely in line with the thinking of the Stalinist caste that dominated the Soviet Union for 70 years.

For many revolutionary Marxists the Soviet Union after the early '20s (and for some beginning in 1917) was a bureaucratic command economy that rested on the systematic atomisation of its population at all levels. Moreover, rather than a system of state supervised economic planning, what in fact did exist was a level of disintegration and corruption that was only held in place by terror and repression. When this dictatorship was relaxed, the whole edifice began to unravel. The question of the Soviet Union has understandably pre-occupied Marxists for the whole of the twentieth century. Identifying its class nature – bureaucratic collectivist; degenerated/deformed workers' state; state capitalism – remains of critical importance, since on the diagnosis hangs the very notion of what socialism is and how it is to be achieved. This book contributes absolutely nothing to that ongoing critical debate.

These unreconstructed Stalinists, whose criticism of the CPUSA is that it underestimated the likelihood of socialist collapse during the Gorbachev period, have unashamedly written a book that lends academic respectability to the mythology of the Stalinist version of socialism (i.e. which for this reviewer represents the very antithesis of socialism). Theoretically it possesses little that is worthy of serious attention, and in parts descends to the level of the old official CPSU prop-aganda texts. But the book, advertised prominently in the *Morning Star*, carries a message to a new generation of militants and activists who may read it, that the monstrous experience of Stalinism was somehow in the interests of the workers whose blood and sweat sustained it. For that reason alone it has to be taken seriously and its arguments criticised.

US Imperialism in Latin America

Clara Nieto, *Masters of War: Latin America and United States Aggression from the Cuban Revolution Through the Clinton Years*, Seven Stories, 2003. Paperback, 622pp, £25.

Reviewed by Will Podmore

IN THIS excellent history of Latin America since 1959, the Colombian diplomat Clara Nieto surveys

the continent country by country, showing how the US state has consistently intervened in their internal affairs.

The alliance of neo-liberalism and social democracy internally, the USA and the EU externally, has kept capitalism in power in Latin America. So half its people live in worsening poverty, a third are unemployed, and foreign debt totals \$400 billion.

Nieto focuses on the Cuban revolution and its effects. In March 1959, President Eisenhower ordered CIA sabotage and terrorism against Cuba. Kennedy was worse. Nieto writes: "His policies opposing the Revolution were more aggressive than Eisenhower's." Two days before the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, US planes bombed Cuba's cities, under Kennedy's orders. Kennedy started the US policy of counter-insurgency in Latin America (and Africa and Asia), supporting death squads and military dictatorships. Nieto shows how the US state sponsored counter-revolutionary wars in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Guatemala and Chile.

Johnson carried on Kennedy's policies: he backed the generals' fascist coup in Brazil in 1964, and attacked the Dominican Republic in 1965. Nieto depicts Reagan's wars – occupying Honduras, arming the death squads of El Salvador, running the Contras' terrorist war against Nicaragua, attacking Grenada – and Bush's attack on Panama.

The US state has never ceased its illegal, terrorist attacks on Cuba. The *New York Times* reported in 1983 how the head of a Miami-based anti-Cuban terrorist group admitted in a US court that he had taken germs to Cuba in 1980, proving Cuba's accusations of CIA biological warfare against Cuba. The US state made Armando Valladares – a former Batista police officer and convicted terrorist – ambassador and president of its delegation to the UN Human Rights Commission.

But the Commission's 1989 report refuted all the US slanders about Cuba's torture and abuse of political prisoners. The world knows now who tortures and abuses political prisoners detained without charge or trial.

Nieto's final chapter examines how Cuba has survived and kept its revolution going. The key is that its people, determined to defend their democracy, independence and sovereignty, actively prevent the counter-revolution from organising.

Good, Evil and George Dubya

Peter Singer, *The President of Good and Evil: Taking George W. Bush Seriously*, Granta, 2004. Paperback, 256pp, £8.99.

Reviewed by Catherine Lafferty

GEORGE W Bush is the most controversial world leader of our times, notorious for stealing the electoral laurels of 2000, invading Iraq and

mispronouncing English words.

Peter Singer is Ira W DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton. He is credited with having inspired the animal rights movement with the seminal text, *Animal Liberation*. He is no stranger to controversy: his Princeton appointment was greeted with protests by disabled rights activists because of his justification for the killing of disabled children up to 28 days after birth.

In *The President of Good and Evil* one controversialist examines the record of another on his own terms. Singer notes that Bush is prone to couching his political arguments in explicitly moral terms and sets out to assess his ethical record, taking in such diverse policies as taxation, bioethics and war. He says he wants to take Bush seriously.

He starts in a good place: Bush's rhetoric, which is studded with references to good, evil, morals, right and wrong. A lot of this sounds embarrassing to a non-American audience and Singer, an Australian, frankly admits that Bush's distinctively American moral outlook sounds weird to the ears of sophisticates and cynics alike.

Bush, in common with other conservative leaders since Thatcher, claims a moral case for cutting taxes. Where there are budgetary surpluses, the money should be remitted back to taxpayers in the form of tax cuts. Or as Bush told a Tax Family event in February 2001: "It's your money". Singer juxtaposes Bush's tax-cutting agenda with his stated aim of building a single nation of justice and opportunity. He asks rhetorically, if the money really is "your money" and should be given back to the people, where will the money needed to fight poverty and achieve justice come from?

But the polemic bursts into life when Singer dissects the claim that budgetary surpluses are "your money". He demonstrates the fallaciousness of this claim with admirable precision and economy of prose. In a complex modern society, he explains, it would be impossible to establish property rights with government and without taxes.

Singer then turns his attention to another area of Bush's ethical/political record, Bush's stated aim to build a "culture of life" in America. Given that Singer is possibly the world's most controversial bioethicist, this should be one of the book's highlights.

Bush maintains that human life is sacred from the moment of conception until death. Many people agree with him, but Bush is in a unique position in being able to effect legislation that recognises the dignity of embryos and foeti.

First to be tackled by both Bush and Singer was the use of embryonic stem cells for medical research. Subjected to fierce lobbying by both pro and anti sides, Bush sidestepped the furore by denying federal money to embryonic stem cell research. He also delivered what was widely acknowledged to be one of the most thoughtful speeches of his presidency on the topic.

Singer takes aim at Bush's decision to withhold money – a ban on research in all but name, he asserts – and rubbishes the ethical framework for his position. Along the way he rehearses the specious arguments for embryonic stem cell research. Embryonic stem cells *could* pave the way for curing a range of diseases. They *could*, but is a possibility enough to justify human cloning? Embryos may be human life (he doesn't quibble that point) but have no intrinsic worth precluding their use in research. If they have no intrinsic worth, the pain of women who've suffered miscarriages is irrational – the mere ravings of hormonal females. And they may be human but so what? Why is human life considered more special than, say, chimpanzee life, he wonders, banging on his favourite ethical drum. Well because it is, the rationalist answers – because I care more for humans than I do for chimps and so do you, dear reader and so, ultimately, does Singer.

The debate on embryonic stem cells should provoke some genuinely incisive thinking from Singer. How valid are the excitable claims made about embryonic stem cells? How much are they influenced by the financial interests of the biotechnology sector? What does the desperate hype of cloning enthusiasts tell us about science in an age of scepticism?

The fact is that embryonic stem cell research does not hold out the only hope for understanding and curing diseases. Indeed a cursory glance at the scientific literature shows that it's the dull, plodding work using ethically uncontroversial adult stem cells that are making significant strides in our understanding of and battle against disease.

After this unpromising start, the mistakes come thick and fast and Singer's thinking becomes positively sluggish.

Bush reinstated the Mexico City Policy, first implemented by Reagan, which denies aid funding to groups that perform or promote abortions. Singer attributes this Bush's pro-life convictions. But you don't have to be a signed up member of SPUC to find something absurd and deeply sinister about governments using aid budgets as a cloak for anti-natalist projects in the southern hemisphere, particularly given the historic overlap between sections of the birth-control and eugenics movements.

He defunded the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for similar reasons, Singer claims. Wrong. UNFPA was defunded when the State Department found the agency complicit in massive human rights violations in China. This mistake would be understandable if made by an inexperienced hack but is simply inexcusable when made by an Ivy League academic of international renown.

Its difficult to take this book seriously having read the pages dealing with bioethics, supposedly Singer's specialist subject. He criticises Bush's

support for the death penalty but this is hardly controversial stuff to a European audience and adds nothing to the voluminous literature on the topic. He moans about Bush stymieing Oregon's law on physician assisted suicide because he thinks individuals, with no prospect of recovery should be able to take death in their own hands. How he squares this fatalistic pessimism about terminal illness with his irrational faith in the possibilities of embryonic stem cell research is not explained.

He is more generous when looking at Bush's record on AIDS and admits that shortsighted development polices of previous administrations has been reversed with the investment of significant funding to fighting the disease.

A chapter is devoted to Bush's fusion of faith and politics, taking in the controversial decision to allow federal funding for faith-based charities. Singer crackles briefly into life again, applying dispassionate rigour and cutting through the hysteria this measure has provoked. But it's a short respite and is followed by a protracted sneer at Bush's folksy evangelical theology.

Singer rightly devotes an enormous chunk of the book to examining the record of Bush at war. He starts with Afghanistan and using the example of Hungary in 1956 demonstrates that the cost of war in terms of civilian casualties was disproportionate to the stated goal of securing a Taliban-free country. The Afghan war was ethically unjustifiable he maintains.

He is unsparing in his criticism of Bush's invasion of Iraq and what he terms of the "Bush doctrine" of pre-emptive actions against adversaries. He succinctly argues that when this is combined with the Defense Department's view of the enduring interests the US must defend, the distinction between offense and defense becomes "hopelessly blurred".

So is Bush's ethic Christian? Selectively so, concludes Singer. Bush seems to have ignored Jesus Christ's words about turning the other cheek and the Pauline teaching of repaying good for evil. Most Christian leaders, including the Pope, emphatically opposed the Iraq war. When the leaders of the National Council of Churches and his own denomination, the United Methodists, asked for an opportunity to present their objections to the war, Bush refused to meet them. In fact, the characteristic Bush demagoguery about good and evil owes more to Manichaeian ideas about cosmic clashes of good and evil, than orthodox Christianity.

This is a diverting read, if not a particularly original one – surely no one is surprised to find that an American president's ethical pronouncements fall down when subjected to critical scrutiny. It is also marred by some sloppy passages and at least one hair-raising factual error. After 2 November 2004, Singer at least has the opportunity to write an updated and revised edition.

To Clone or Not to Clone?

Glenn McGee and Arthur Caplan (eds), *The Human Cloning Debate*, Berkeley Hills Books, 2004. Paperback, 330pp, £11.99.

Reviewed by Will Podmore

THIS IS a thought-provoking collection of essays by 25 contributors, pro and anti cloning, scientists, doctors, academics, researchers, journalists and the odd US President.

The most mind-changing essay for this reviewer was Ronald Bailey's 'Cloning babies is not inherently immoral'. Throughout history, some have violently opposed scientific developments. For example, *Guardian* columnist Jeremy Rifkin described biotechnology as "a form of annihilation every bit as deadly as nuclear holocaust, and even more profound". This dispute between science and anti-science, progress and reaction, the materialist and idealist philosophies, can never be resolved. It is a fundamental philosophic divide that cannot be bridged. One or other must prevail.

The argument that we must wait for a consensus to emerge is reactionary, for this would mean waiting forever. No amount of additional debate can ever win round the opposition to progress, because that opposition is entrenched behind ramparts of dogma; faith-based, it is impervious to evidence and reason.

Presidential calls for a moratorium are prevarication. Similarly, the search for absolute safety, like all searches for absolutes, is a delusion, which makes the precautionary principle another recipe for stasis.

Some who oppose cloning opposed In Vitro Fertilisation earlier. Possibly one million babies have been born through IVF since 1978. This safe and beneficial procedure arose from decades of refining techniques in a variety of animals. Safe cloning will similarly result from animal research: a ban on research would prevent work into making cloning safe.

In Germany the government has banned all research work on embryos, so Germany makes no contribution and has no influence on this matter. Britain's parliament passed a law that regulates therapeutic cloning, but unfortunately bans all efforts at reproductive cloning.

Fear of biotechnology has done great harm, because technological stagnation poses greater risks than technological innovation. Banning stem cell research or research into reproductive cloning would prevent many promising developments in medical research; it could drive research to countries less equipped to balance safety with development. The biotechnology revolution has already brought enormous benefits, IVF for instance, and will bring many more, but only if we encourage and support research into cloning.

Rationalising Imperialism

Francis Wheen, *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World: A Short History of Modern Delusions*, Harper, 2004. Paperback, 338pp, £8.99.

Reviewed by Bob Pitt

THE TITLE of this book is not encouraging, with its thoughtless reference to an eighteenth-century Mandingo deity. Why should it be an aspect of West African religion that has become a byword for nonsense rather than, say, one of the many absurdities of Christianity? Er ... perhaps because the colonisers of Africa were themselves Christians who justified their oppression and exploitation of its inhabitants by depicting them as ignorant, superstitious savages who had to be "civilised" by European conquest?

At least we are given fair warning that an anti-imperialist sensibility is not to be expected from the author. And so it proves.

The book's theme is contained in its subtitle, "A Short History of Modern Delusions" (it was originally going to be "A Brief History of Bollocks", but the publishers demurred). The text comprises a series of often sarcastic attacks on various of the author's ideological *bêtes noires* – monetarism, New Age gurus, postmodernism, New Labour, creationism, militant Islamists – rather pompously dressed up as a defence of the Enlightenment.

At times it makes for entertaining reading. Who can object to Deepak Chopra or Tony Blair getting a slagging off? But Wheen treats the ideas he criticises primarily as stupid or malevolent thoughts in people's heads, without any serious examination of their material foundations and social origins.

Contrary to Wheen's critique, the free market theories adopted by Thatcher and Reagan were not just a product of wrong thinking – they provided the bourgeoisie with a necessary justification for the attacks it launched on organised labour and the welfare state following the end of the post-war boom. If postmodernist scepticism towards "grand narratives" has gained some purchase, it is not least because the forces who are the main agents of historical progress were severely weakened by the partial success of those bourgeois attacks. If forms of political Islamism have acquired mass support, this has some relationship to the fact that, whereas secular and leftist forces in the "Third World" were often defeated and discredited, the Iranian revolution and the Afghan mujahideen provided examples of political victories inspired by religious belief.

Predictably, in the closing section of the book Wheen lurches into an Islamophobic rant of the sort that has become fashionable among broad sections of the liberal intelligentsia. Rather as the colonialists regarded worshippers of the original Mumbo Jumbo, Wheen depicts Islamist militants as

no more than primitive savages who lack his own superior western understanding of the world. So Seamas Milne's suggestion that the 9/11 atrocities might have been inspired by certain genuine grievances against US imperialism is contemptuously dismissed as an apologia for mindless barbarism. Quotations from right-wing commentators are wheeled out to condemn those like Michael Moore who question the modernising mission of the West.

Admittedly, your reviewer has an axe to grind here, in that he is one of the more minor figures When polemicalises against. Regarding Afghanistan under the Taliban, When writes: "Valiant feminists who protested against the compulsory wearing of the burka or the abolition of girls' schools were accused of 'racist arrogance'. How dare they, living in the West, presume to pass judgment on poorer and weaker nations?" The reference is to an article by yours truly in the *Weekly Worker*.

Quite why it should require any particular valour on the part of western feminists to condemn the Taliban is not explained. Was Mullah Omar going to send out a hit squad to assassinate them? As for myself, in the article When quotes I made no mention of feminists at all and was in fact criticising certain self-styled Marxists who during the murderous onslaught by US imperialism on Afghanistan argued for neutrality on the grounds that the victims were reactionary Muslim fundamentalists who were no better than those who had invaded their country.

So much for the "Enlightenment values" When claims to hold so dear. When it comes to diatribes against his opponents on the left, intellectual honesty and even an elementary capacity for coherent thought desert him. Personally, I would propose an alternative subtitle for the book: "A Short Illustration of the Limitations of Bourgeois Rationalism."

US Imperialism Endangers Us All

Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, Penguin, 2004, Paperback, 278pp, £8.99.

Reviewed by Will Podmore

THIS BRILLIANT study is based, like all Chomsky's

writings, on a vast range of sources, including Pentagon, CIA and White House statements. He uses these to detail how the US ruling class seeks to rule the world.

It seeks "full spectrum dominance", weapons in space, greater powers of attack through "ballistic missile defence", and the break-up of all international treaties and agreements that might limit its ambitions. Chomsky argues that the US ruling class threatens an earthly wasteland.

He explains that the Republican-Labour doctrine of preventive war justifies all aggressions: Japan at Pearl Harbour and Hitler attacking the Soviet Union also claimed "anticipatory self-defence". He points out that the US and British states constantly use the Security Council to flout UN Resolutions; their record numbers of vetoes prove them to be its worst non-compliers.

Chomsky reminds us that the old British Empire proclaimed the right to "humanitarian intervention". Liberals like John Stuart Mill defended this, writing shameful apologetics for the imperial crimes of aggression against India and China, and for France's atrocities in Algeria, "exterminating the indigenous population", as its War Minister urged. David Lloyd George praised the British government's sabotage of Disarmament Conferences by "reserving the right to bomb niggers". Now Blair's adviser Robert Cooper writes: "the need ... for colonisation is as great as it ever was in the 19th century."

Chomsky notes that today's imperialists commit war crimes too. President Clinton flew Al Qa'ida terrorists from Afghanistan to fight for the US side in Bosnia. Labour imperialists backed the Kosovo Liberation Army terrorists, even though Defence Minister George Robertson admitted, "the KLA was responsible for more deaths in Kosovo than the Serbian authorities had been".

The same forces drive empires past and present. John Maynard Keynes explained: "the democratic experiment in self-government was endangered by the threat of global financial market forces." So now the European Union uses Eastern Europe to "hammer away at high wages and corporate taxes, short working hours, labor immobility, and luxurious social programmes", as the business press boasts.

In sum, *Hegemony or Survival* is an extraordinarily well-informed survey which shows how capitalism endangers us all.

Correspondence Welcomed

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LETTERS

Labour, Livingstone and the War

THE LATEST issue of your "Marxist" journal has an article by a member of the Labour Party urging support for Ken Livingstone in the London election against anti-war candidates (irrespective of the virtues or otherwise of the Respect Coalition) when anyone who is opposed to the war will never vote for the party whose leader led us into it (Martin Sullivan, 'Third Time as Farce', *What Next?* No.28).

Livingstone may have opposed the war last year but since then has crawled back into the imperialist-Labour Party. Also, anyone who opposed the war would not hesitate to vote for a Tory who opposed it – as Ken Clarke said he would have done had he been Tory leader last year. As it was, the best mainstream option we had was Kennedy's partial opposition for the Lib Dems. Now we have a variety of Green, Respect and other anti-war candidates that people opposed to the war can vote for.

I can't see your journal has any claim to call itself a "Marxist discussion journal" if you invite discussion with non-Marxists such as Sullivan.

Patrick Ainley

Ken and the *Sun*

I WAS interested in your defence of Livingstone's time as a hack for the *Sun* (Letters, *What Next?* No.28). My own memories of that time are maybe not so rose-tinted. I seem to remember that Livingstone used his column for a vicious red-baiting assault on the Anti-Nazi League and the SWP.

If the editors believe that red-baiting and ridiculing the left are "political arguments that *Sun* readers never usually get to hear", then frankly they should try reading it sometime.

Darren Williams
Red Party

UKIP: Not Racists or Fascists

AFTER BROWSING the web I came across the article 'Brownshirts in Blazers' [see this issue – ed], which implies the UK Independence Party are racist Nazis. As a member of the UKIP I find this offensive and if you had bothered to do more research on the subject, assuming a reasonable level of intelligence, you would have not bothered with such a poorly thought-out smear article.

UKIP does not care what colour you are, and

even welcomes controlled immigration. All it is against is allowing unlimited people, and that includes everyone in the human race including white people, from coming in and joining the British society thus obtaining all the rights and privileges that this provides.

It is like me asking you to let anybody come and share your house, because you have a spare room, and even if you have 50 people already, having to let them in. Controlled immigration is not the same as shutting up shop to all foreigners.

Articles like yours will only drive people towards supporting the UKIP, and while I am happy about that, I would think you would want people to hear a balanced argument for your case rather than trying to rubbish others.

Matt Davies

Trotsky and the United Front

YOUR ARTICLE on the United Front (*What Next?* No.28) makes some interesting points. However, the assertion that Trotsky advocated something called "the United Front from within" is highly dubious.

I take it this was intended as a paraphrase rather than a direct quote. The reference is presumably to Trotsky's advice to his French supporters in 1934 that they should enter the Socialist Party, on the grounds that it was "necessary to find a place for oneself within the framework of the United Front" in circumstances where the Trotskyists were "too weak to claim an independent place".

The late Al Richardson took this as evidence in support of his view that "revolutionary entry is simply the form this same strategy" – i.e. the early Comintern's United Front strategy – "takes when revolutionaries do not lead any substantial sections of the working class". (See his review of *The Labour Party: A Marxist History* by Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, in *Revolutionary History*, Vol.2 No.3.)

But the quotation from Trotsky doesn't really prove that. In 1934 Trotsky was arguing for participation in an *existing* United Front, namely the alliance between the Communist and Socialist Parties. Simply joining a reformist party when it is *not* part of an alliance of workers' parties, is something rather different.

You could no doubt argue that entryism is based broadly on the method of the United Front, but I think you'd have difficulty finding a quote from Trotsky to back that up.

Dave Roberts