



weekly **worker**

Is it 'the oil, stupid'? Cyrus Bina refutes the simplistic 'blood for oil' argument

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SWP: the fight gets ugly



LETTERS



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

Misunderstood

James Turley has written a highly critical appreciation of the life of Chris Harman ('The working class intellectual and the apparat', November 12).

Despite the best efforts of comrade Turley, his piece is replete with errors of both fact and interpretation. In this short letter I intend to reply to some of those errors, concentrating my remarks on the comrade's discussion of the downturn perspective developed by the Socialist Workers Party in the late 1970s.

To begin, though, I must register my disgust at the comparison Turley makes between Harman and RP Dutt. Both men were prodigiously gifted intellectuals and contributed immensely to their respective organisations, but that is all they had in common. Dutt was a first-class hack prostituting his talents in the name of Stalin to the point, and beyond it, whereby he betrayed working class struggles that the misnamed CPGB played a significant role within. Harman, by way of contrast, stood four square throughout his life on the side of the working people and anti-imperialists throughout the world. Unlike Dutt, he never betrayed the principles he began with as a young man.

In one respect, however, there is a similarity between the two men, which Turley misses, in that the influence of both is not confined to this country alone. Even today the work that Dutt did in developing an analysis of India and its mode of production regrettably remains influential to a surprising degree within the Indian left. Hence, the 'stageist' schemata within which almost the entire Indian left remains confined. Harman's influence too, although not as far reaching, has an international scope, especially with regard to his essay 'The prophet and the proletariat', which has been instrumental in enabling small groups of revolutionaries in Pakistan and Egypt to orientate to oppositional currents in those countries. There is little doubt in my mind that this influence will grow in the years to come.

It is, of course, in Britain that the influence of Harman's writings have been of most significance and, with regard to his contributions to the downturn thesis in the late 1970s, Turley displays a total lack of understanding of the SWP's perspectives during that period. He argues: "The difficulty with the Cliff/SWP version of the 'downturn' is that it was too mechanistic. The fact that there is a downturn means that every event must be viewed myopically through its prism. This particular 'downturn' was dated to 1978 (similar theses were advanced by the Eurocommunist Eric Hobsbawm at the time), but within the year there was the winter of discontent. Five years later, of course, there was the miners' strike. It seemed to escape Cliff that the balance of class forces could shift suddenly as well as molecularly - there is no way a strike that lasts almost a year can have been doomed from the outset ..."

This is an almost total simplification and distortion of the analysis that the SWP adopted in 1978. In fact, the SWP and its forerunner organisation, the International Socialists, had been debating the changing nature of the balance of class forces from late 1976 and cannot be reduced to a simple "announcement from guru Tony Cliff", as Turley suggests. The truth of the matter is that the downturn thesis was far more nuanced than

he claims and the SWP was at pains to point out that in the period 1979-81 the industrial downturn was matched by a political upturn that saw a massive upsurge of interest in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the rise of the Bennite left in the Labour Party. This was also the period that saw the SWP deeply involved in the Right to Work campaign and, crucially, the Anti-Nazi League. Both were areas of work that were anything but "inward-looking", contrary to comrade Turley's allegation.

It is also far from the truth that the downturn perspective meant "that every event must be viewed myopically through its prism". But it did mean that each and every struggle was seen within the context of the changed balance of class forces and the always changing nature of the working class and its organisations. This last point is crucial and it is one that Turley totally misses.

It is worth pointing out then that, even during the upturn of industrial struggle that took place between 1965 and 1974, defeats took place and sections of the class adopted reactionary positions. In other words, the SWP did not move from a simplistic analysis of periods similar to those of the communist parties when they decreed a 'third period' in 1929, only to abandon it in 1934 for reasons more closely related to the needs of the Stalinist state formation in Russia than the needs of the working people. It follows that, even in a period of retreat like the downturn, sections of the class can achieve victories and the SWP was clear that this meant no struggle could simply be written off in advance, as all too many critics of the downturn thesis falsely claim.

As important for the downturn thesis were the changes in the balance of class forces, which cannot be reduced to that *between* the contending classes - the balance of forces within the working classes all too often being of greater significance. It is crucial then to recognise that the struggles of the 1970s were often characterised by a considerable degree of rank and file militancy and were frequently led by unofficial bodies in opposition to the trade union bureaucracy.

Such offensive, wage-led struggles were, however, marked by a low political level: that is to say, they were concerned with economic questions until 1969 and the fight against *In place of strife*, the anti-union bill that the Labour government was then attempting to push through parliament. By contrast, the struggles that took place after the mid-1970s were far more political in content and tended to be defensive of wages and conditions.

The winter of discontent, for example, was viewed by all concerned - and rightly so - as being waged directly against the then Labour government. Another important change was that this struggle was far more directly controlled by the trades union bureaucracy with far less rank and file initiative displayed than had been the case earlier in the decade.

Turley is correct, however, to note in relation to the miners' strike that "there is no way a strike that lasts almost a year can have been doomed from the outset". But if by this he means to suggest that this was the viewpoint of the SWP, then he is much mistaken. If anything, the SWP was too hopeful that the dispute might result in a victory, assuming that the correct tactics were adopted and other sections could be encouraged to fight alongside the miners. It was this hope that mistakenly kept the SWP outside the miners' support

groups for too long, as the party saw the axis of its work in arguing for mass pickets and the extension of the strike to additional sections of workers. As we now know, this perspective did not materialise within the ranks of the class, but there is no doubt that it was correct to fight for it and that it has no relationship at all to the views Turley foists on the SWP.

To what degree Chris Harman has responsibility for developing the downturn thesis I do not know but, as a central leader of the SWP, he was responsible for the actions of the group in that period. Far more importantly, his theoretical work gave depth to the thesis and can still be consulted with profit in his essay, 'Days of hope: the general strike of 1926', in 'Gramsci versus reformism' and in 'The summer of 1981: a post-riot analysis' - all demonstrating in their different ways how the downturn was affecting the nature of the working classes and its struggles. 'Gramsci versus reformism' in particular explains the differences between a war of manoeuvre and a war of position, as related to the struggle between the classes that so many comrades, including James Turley, sorely fail to understand.

Finally, Turley correctly tells us that Harman "was mostly concerned with direct or indirect interventions in the political life of the SWP". The same thing might be said of a chap called Lenin who was similarly unconcerned to be seen as "original".

Mike Pearn
email

Bedroom guardians

The *Weekly Worker's* publication of the Partisan Defence Committee's letter defending Helen Goddard, the young teacher who was jailed for 15 months for having a *consensual* sexual relationship with a 15-year-old female pupil, drew a flurry of outrage from among your readership (September 3).

These 'guardians of morality' are enraged by the PDC's simple assertion that Helen Goddard committed no crime and that this relationship should be no business of either the school or the state.

An article by Eddie Ford professes to agree with the PDC and Spartacist League's call for abolishing reactionary age-of-consent laws, rightly saying that these laws "give the state powers to interfere in, and potentially criminalise, what should be purely personal and private matters" ('Intrusive and authoritarian', September 10). But Ford's conclusion belies this, saying: "Communists propose that there be alternative legislation to cover sexual misconduct and abuse, based on both effective consent and the empowerment of youth". In other words, there are some bedrooms in which the government does belong, if it deems that "sexual misconduct" has taken place.

This exposes the CPGB's touching faith in the benign nature of the capitalist state, which you entrust to establish the principle of "effective consent" and to regulate the sexual activity of youth and children. Against such liberal illusions in the capitalist state, we oppose 'age of consent' and 'statutory rape' laws. For us, the guiding principle of effective consent means that, as long as the parties involved agreed to take part at the time, no-one, *least of all the state*, has the right to tell them they can't do it.

And what about Roman Polanski? Like the rest of the reformist left, the

Weekly Worker has maintained a studious silence about the renewal of the outrageous witch-hunt of this 76-year-old film director who was arrested in Switzerland and is threatened with extradition to the US for having *consensual* sex with a precocious 13-year-old some 32 years ago. Roman Polanski committed no crime! At the time of Polanski's original persecution, we were virtually alone on the left in defending him.

As we noted in 1978, "What is genuinely 'tawdry' and sordid about the Polanski case is not the actual incident itself, but the vile official persecution and the hideous hypocrisy of it all. The national press has carefully 'omitted' the real facts of the case ..."

"The 13-year-old whom Polanski was accused of raping was described in the *Los Angeles Times* ... as 'an aspiring actress', whose mother had known Polanski for over a year and given permission to photograph her daughter for the French edition of *Vogue* magazine. One of those photography sessions with the celebrated director turned into an evening of sipping champagne, nude bathing in a Jacuzzi whirlpool bath and consumption by the girl of part of a Quaalude (a fashionable sedative). Following this, there was sexual intercourse (translated in the press as 'drugging and raping')."

"It came out in court, however, that the girl had been 'experimenting' with Quaaludes since the age of 10 or 11, and had a 17-year-old boyfriend with whom she had had prior sexual intercourse" ('Stop vendetta against Roman Polanski! Free him now! No extradition!' *Workers Vanguard* October 9 2009).

In today's reactionary climate, liberals and reformists buy into the hysteria that wilfully conflates consensual sex between adults and young people with violent crimes such as rape and even murder. We Marxists oppose not only reactionary 'age of consent' and 'statutory rape' laws, but also other laws against 'crimes without victims', such as gambling, prostitution, drug abuse and pornography. Government out of the bedroom!

Julia Emery
Spartacist League

Collaborators

The Anarchist Federation condemns the group, Unite Against Fascism, who openly handed one of our members over to the police during a mobilisation against the English Defence League in Leeds city centre on Saturday October 31.

Several UAF stewards, including the head of UAF Leeds, physically prevented our member from rejoining the cordon and then called the police over to arrest him. We will not tolerate collaboration with the state to halt the activity of genuine anti-fascists and ask other progressive organisations to do the same.

UAF's policy of negotiating with the state for its public protests is well known, as is its alliance with religious leaders, trade union bureaucrats and politicians. Apart from being nothing more than a front group for the Socialist Workers Party, UAF has never been an effective means to combat the rise of fascism in Britain, nor does it offer anything to working class communities.

D Yates
Anarchist Federation

Can't miss it

Tina Becker says of the animated film shown at the opening rally for Socialism 2009: "Funnily enough though, the SPEW comrades deleted the last

scene - and surely not for time reasons. This comes just after the clever mouse suggests that they should vote for a government of mice: 'Oh, they said, he's a Bolshevik. Lock him up! So they put him in jail. But I want to remind you that you can lock up a mouse or a man, but you can't lock up an idea'" ('Confident and boasting of growth', November 12).

Erm, no they didn't. I quite clearly remember this exact scene being played on the video. It was right there and got a great response from the rally. How on earth did you miss it?

Lindsay Wheatcroft
email

Catholic jihad

I was watching *A history of Christianity* on BBC4 last week. It made some very interesting points about the increasing empire of the Catholic church, with the Spanish inquisition torturing heretics to death.

It also explained the origin of the term 'holy war' in the Crusades against until-then peaceful Islam in the Middle East, particularly Palestine. 'Jihad' is, of course, the Muslim word for precisely the same thing.

After this violent persecution first brought the two religions into conflict, it is understandable why so many young male and, occasionally, female Muslims lay down their lives for the Islamic version of holy war. Although it is understandable, it should be opposed resolutely.

Those who, like the SWP leadership under Martin Smith, pander to religious fundamentalism/extremism must be viewed as the enemies of all loving humanity (and our wonderful allies in the animal kingdom).

Amy Miranda Bowers
email

Mock shock

How many more insults are going to be directed against the Iraqi people like the insincerity which has been shown in relation to further allegations of prisoner abuse? The government's claim to be upholding the law today sounds as ludicrous as it did in 2003.

This abuse of prisoners by British troops is only the tip of the iceberg. Britain sent its troops into a sovereign country under the pretext of a lie - that Saddam had ties to al Qa'eda and was part of the 9/11 attack, coupled with claims that he had weapons of mass destruction which, according to the foreign office's 'sexed-up' dossier, could be launched within 45 minutes. Each of these justifications is as pathetic as the government's claim that British troops were liberating the Iraqi people from the human rights abuses of the Saddam regime.

Few people ask how the Iraqi people are meant to trust any claim that the British government makes in relation to justice and procedure when the only thing that fighting for queen and country has brought to the average Iraqi is a thuggish 'democracy'. This includes the planned execution of over 1,000 oppositionists by January, the ethnic cleansing of Christians and Iraqi Palestinians, the murder of Iraq's LGBT community, attacks against media freedom and the use of rape and torture inside Iraq's prison system.

There have not been any words of apology by the British government for the one million dead or the five million orphans created since 'freedom' came to Iraq. Or for the war widows, many of whom are being forced into prostitution as a direct result of the poverty which Britain helped to install.

The first act of Iraq's new democracy was to sack every worker in the country, but it was hailed as a success and described as 'deBa'athification'.

The numbers of Iraqi children who are being kidnapped and sold into the sex trade and the sale of human organs have been going through the roof.

If British soldiers are found guilty of prisoner abuse inside Iraq, the only thing they will be guilty of is being caught doing something which is apparently commonplace. Look at the other cases of prisoner abuse since 2003. Please do not insult our intelligence with any more 'mock shock' from either politicians or the media when these cases get into the public domain.

Hussein Al-alak
Iraq Solidarity Campaign

Who's confused?

I am delighted to learn that, according to Gerry Downing, I am, somewhat impishly, "sowing confusion" in the ranks of Communist Students on the question of fascism (letters, November 16).

If indeed I am partly responsible for some change in mood on the question among our comrades in Manchester, so much the better - certainly differences exist, and hopefully will be clarified in this forum and others.

The rest of his letter is directed against my comrade, Ben Lewis, who has the temerity to keep bringing up the somewhat infamous 'Schlageter line', during which the German Communist party shared platforms with leading Nazis. This culminated in the Bolshevik leader (and later oppositionist) Karl Radek making a somewhat nationalism-tinged speech imploring Germans to rally to the KPD against the oppression of the Versailles treaty.

Comrade Downing does his best to divorce this event from orthodoxy, taking special care to distance Leon Trotsky from the affair. Yet there is a small problem - Trotsky isn't half as bothered about it. His target is not the architects of the Schlageter line, but precisely August Thalheimer and his close collaborator, Heinrich Brandler, who were on the *right* of the party and pursuing suitors in the social democracy.

For Trotsky, the central error was quite simple: "In 1923, Brandler, in spite of all our warnings, monstrously exaggerated the forces of fascism. From the wrong evaluation of the relationship of forces grew a hesitating, evasive, defensive, cowardly policy" ("The turn in the Communist International and the situation in Germany"). For Downing, on the contrary, the central priority of communists in a revolutionary crisis was shunning the Nazis with the correct level of horror and disgust. For that, he is welcome to join the ranks of the Brandlerites. Trotsky wouldn't have had any of it - nor would he tolerate the hysterical outbursts of a British left neurotically obsessed with the BNP.

James Turley
Walthamstow

One country

In reply to Fern Rachels (Letters, November 12) the concept of socialism being impossible in one country was not the invention of Leon Trotsky. Trotsky was following the arguments of Karl Marx. So it was the orthodox Marxist view held by virtually everyone (including Stalin when younger) before the rise of Stalinism in the late 1920s.

Capitalism itself arose on the back of the world market and cannot exist in one country either. The struggle is between two irreconcilable international classes to organise the world politically and economically. The systems are incompatible: the one destroys the other. The positive gloss given to the concept of socialism in one country by Stalinists jus-

tifies nationalism and discounts the real nature of socialist revolution. It isn't really about what isolated revolutionary struggles should do, but about how bureaucrats can establish their own rule.

'One country' is a somewhat misleading phrase. The central issue is that of isolation from the world market, which means inevitable defeat for the isolated side through economic and military strangulation. There can be no such thing as pulling yourself up by your own bootlaces when the other side can always cut them. The side which controls the world division of labour is bound to win the economic and military race.

Some Stalinists defend socialism in one country as a holding operation while the working class regroups for a new revolutionary push. That it is not in itself an abandonment of internationalism, they say, but a necessary defence of it, and in so far as it represents a degeneration in socialist practice this is not the fault of the beleaguered 'socialist bloc', but of the working classes in capitalist countries. Trotskyists, on the other hand, claim that Stalin represented the coming to power of a non-working class elite, riding on the back of 'socialist property forms', but destined to return the Soviet Union to capitalism if ever the opportunity arrived, because capitalism favours the interests of the elite. Soviet foreign policy was the Machiavellian achievement of Russian, Chinese, etc state interests (as perceived by the elite) based on state power, not on the power of the working class nor on any consideration of the interests of the world revolution. This can be judged historically. In my view the Stalinists haven't a leg to stand on.

For my part socialism means the rule of the working class, not of the party on their behalf, which is a Stalinist defence of socialism in one country. There is no distinct mode of socialist production - socialism is a process from capitalism towards completely socialised production, communism. So I wouldn't regard the socialist bloc as socialist, which means that socialism has never existed even in one country.

The Russian Revolution was led by the working class, but they never came to national power as a class. The Bolshevik Party despite making lots of mistakes correctly tried to hang on to power in the hope of revolution spreading to Germany and they subordinated Soviet interests to encouraging working class revolutions. Being orthodox Marxists, they expected to be defeated if the revolutionary movement stalled for an extended period, but they didn't expect to be defeated by senior cadre of the Bolshevik Party.

I don't expect the working class to come to power over a weekend, so I think Fern Rachels is right to expect a prolonged struggle. The working class may well have to hang on desperately to power in some places and perhaps do things that reflect badly on socialism, exactly as the Bolshevik revolution did. Inevitably they will try and socialise production, but unless they can integrate into the world division of labour, shortages will occur and the state will become a policeman regulating access to necessities, as Trotsky pointed out.

Support has to depend on programme. The programme of the Russian Revolution in 1917 was for world revolution and working class rule. Stalin's programme was for state-to-state power relations and bureaucratic rule. When did the changeover occur? Opinions differ, but with Stalin's rise to complete power in 1928 it had irrevocably happened.

The scenario of socialism in one country makes the prospect of isolation seem inevitable. But it wasn't inevitable even in 1917. In the 1940s a

whole range of revolutionary attempts developed and in 1968 working class revolts happened on both sides of the iron curtain, raising the levels of working class struggle in Asia, South America and the US. In other words, the integration of the world means that revolutionary movements start from an international base.

It should be the conscious practice of revolutionaries to develop a programme that ensures revolutionary struggles are coordinated. Europe in particular is central to world events, representing a very high level of production and technical skills. It is also geographically one. The working class is the vast majority of the population and has the longest revolutionary history. Europe offers the best chance for the working class to unite the world around revolution.

Since the rise of Stalinism, revolutions calling themselves communist or socialist have all really been nationalist, bureaucratic and almost always dictatorships. That is the living reality of socialism in one country. In practice they have not only been unable to challenge the rule of imperialism, but have left millions thinking, if that is communism, no thanks!

Phil Kent
Haringey

No letter

The statement from the Irish Republican Socialist Party on the decision of the Irish National Liberation Army to renounce armed struggle was certainly not a letter to the CPGB (November 12).

I have no objection to your reprinting it, but prefer you make it clear it was from an email newsletter circulated to many on the left called *The Red Plough* and not in the form of a letter.

Gerry Ruddy
IRSP

No to cuts

Students and staff have united in a campaign called Manchester for Jobs and Education against the recently announced 127 redundancies as the "first wave" of job cuts at the Manchester Metropolitan University. It was formed by the three unions at MMU - Unison, GMB and the UCU - while Communist Students and student members of the Socialist Workers Party and Permanent Revolution are also involved in the campaign.

There is no evidence of a financial crisis at MMU - the vice-chancellor has recently awarded himself an 8% pay rise and is wasting money on new building projects. These support staff are vital in ensuring lecturers are not burdened, and it is obvious that the cuts will affect the level of education that students receive.

But the student union, run by Manchester Labour Students in alliance with a couple of Tory toffs, has refused to back the campaign. General secretary Rob Boardman released a statement stating that they will not get involved. Yet already we have hundreds of MMU students have signed up to the anti-cuts campaign and will no doubt have thousands to hand in by the time the board of governors meet on November 27. Labour Students and the careerists at MMU student union should be ashamed of the themselves for refusing to defend the education of thousands of students.

The campaign is to hold stalls every day until the governors meet, and will be building support across campus. We already have great backing, but what is needed now is united action by all the workers and students against these cuts. If we fail to win this fight, the next set of cuts will be much harder to resist.

Chris Strafford
email

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sundays, 5pm. Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee. Ring 07950 416922 for details.

November 22: John Bellamy Foster, *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Ecological and social revolution; the elementary triangle of ecology'.

Oxford: Study group, every Monday evening, studying David Harvey's *Limits to capital*.

Details: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site will feature voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Communist Students meetings

London: Every Wednesday, 7.30pm: Introduction to Marxism series, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1 (Russell Square tube).

November 25: Imperialism: why capitalism needs war. ben@communiststudents.org.uk; 07792 282830.

Manchester: Every Tuesday, 7pm, University of Manchester Student Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13.

November 24, 6pm: 'Communists in the French Resistance'. Speaker: Matthew Cobb.

www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Oxford: Mondays. e.mail: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

Sheffield: Every Sunday, 7pm. 07730 682193; sheffield@communiststudents.org.uk

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, until December 15, 6.45pm: Evening course, 'Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution', St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1.

November 24: 'What future for forest people?' Speaker: Jerome Lewis www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Shraddha

Ends Sunday November 21, 7.30pm: New play, 'You are what's in your heart', Soho Theatre, 21 Dean Street, London W1. Director: Lisa Goldman. 020 7478 0100

People's Charter

Saturday November 21, 10am to 3pm: Convention, Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1. Speakers include Bob Crow, Matt Wrack, Mark Serwotka, Caroline Lucas MEP. www.thepeoplescharter.com.

Yurukoglu Memorial Lecture 2009

Saturday November 21, 1.30pm: Meeting, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1 - 'The Paris Commune and democracy'. Speaker: Claudine Rey. Organised by Union of Turkish Progressives in Britain: yml.2009@yahoo.com.

No more prisons

Sunday November 22, 2pm: Conference: 'Building communities of resistance: against prison expansion in Britain'. London Action Resource Centre, 62 Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel, London E1. Followed by a special performance of *Prison?* by Charlie Ryder. Organised by Communities of Resistance: www.co-re.org.

Troops out now

Wednesday November 25, 1.30pm: Die-in protest against the war in Afghanistan, Parliament Square, London SW1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stewart@stopwar.org.uk.

Close Campsfield

Saturday November 28, 12 noon: 16th anniversary demonstration at Campsfield detention centre, main gates, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxfordshire. 2.30pm: Meeting of Barbed Wire Britain Network to End Refugee and Migrant Detention, Exeter Hall, Kidlington. Organised by Campaign to Close Campsfield: www.closecampsfield.org.uk.

Climate emergency

Saturday December 5, 10am: Bike ride, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2. 12 noon: Rally, Speakers Corner, Hyde Park, London W2. 1.30pm: March, Grosvenor Square, London W1, to surround parliament for 'The wave', 3pm. Organised by Campaign Against Climate Change: www.campaigncc.org.

Latin America 2009

Saturday December 5, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico - facing the challenges. Supported by Cuba Solidarity Campaign, Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, Unite, Sertuc: www.latinamerica2009.org.uk.

Right to Work

Saturday January 30, 11.30am: Conference - 'Fight for every job'. Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Organised by Right to Work: www.righttowork.org.uk.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

ANALYSIS

Is it the oil, stupid?

To say that oil figures prominently in the Middle East is to state the obvious. However, does this mean that the politics of imperialism in the region should be solely or mainly explained through attempts to gain control over oilfields and pipelines? That has certainly been the approach of much of the left in Britain and elsewhere. Noted US-based academic **Cyrus Bina**, author of *The economics of the oil crisis*, disagrees with such crude simplifications. Having studied the oil industry, international relations and global economics for many years, he has developed a sophisticated Marxist theory of the oil crisis, oil rent, and monopoly and competition in the oil industry. Here, in this short, representative, article, first published in 2004, he makes a convincing case that the US under George W Bush was not concerned with obtaining direct control over oilfields.¹ With the ongoing US-UK campaign to impose tougher sanctions on Iran, including its huge oil industry, plans for regime change brought about from above and, failing that, a devastating military strike, the left urgently needs to correct past mistakes. Cyrus Bina is about to embark on a speaking tour of Britain that will include meetings in Manchester, Glasgow and London. In particular he will be addressing the November 28 annual general meeting of Hands Off the People of Iran

Saddam Hussein was an ideal enemy and Iraq was an easy target. Iraq had already lost nearly two thirds of its forces and more than 80% of its infrastructure and civil society in the 1990-91 Gulf War and, if that was not enough, it was subjected to frequent American and British bombings, along with nearly 12 years of stringent sanctions. The war against a weak symbolic enemy seemed inevitable.²

In the May 12 2003 issue of *The Nation*, there appeared a tiny piece entitled, 'It's the oil, stupid', by Michael T Klare, who - like much of the majority of the popular left - is obsessed with oil in connection with the deceitful invasion of Iraq by the Bush administration.

To be sure, the motivation of the Cheney-Wolfowitz gang and the impeachable actions of the president himself all point in the direction of personal gain. Similarly, the fact of the transfer of tens of billions of dollars from the public coffers to the willing hands of a handful of favourite companies that were readily chosen as the beneficiary of this *destructive creation* is beyond dispute. Yet, to be worthy of analysis, one needs to be brave enough to go beyond surface phenomena in order to grasp the complexities associated with deeper epochal understanding of this bizarre tragedy.

Writers like Klare and George Caffentzis (the latter, incidentally, holds that oil is a "metaphysical" commodity) should realise that their oil scenario, firstly, ignores the analytical periodisation of oil history into: (a) the cartelisation of oil; (b) the transitional period of 1950-72; and (c) the globalisation of the entire oil industry since the mid-1970s. Secondly, it overlooks the distinction between 'administrative pricing' and *value theoretic* price formation. Thirdly, it neglects the nature of property relations, formation of differential oil rents, and character of the Organisation of Oil-Exporting Countries (Opec) in the (post-1974) globalisation of oil. Fourthly, it discounts the pivotal role of the least productive US oilfields that is key to the worldwide pricing of oil. Fifthly, it fails to recognise that Opec prices are constrained by worldwide competitive spot (oil) prices, and thus Opec oil rents are subject to global competition. And finally their oil scenario fails to realise that the unqualified usage of words, such as 'access', 'dependency' and 'control', in the context of a globalised oil industry, is anachronistic.³

Hegemony and mediation

The concept of hegemony is indivisible and 'organic' in respect to its constituent economic, political and ideological counterparts. And it is due to the *consensual* internal dynamics and intrinsic ideological power of the whole that one can exert minimal *external* and antagonistic power projection. This, in a broad measure, defines hegemony and its relevance to international relations, for instance, during the rise and fall of *Pax Americana* (1945-79). Gramsci, nevertheless, focuses on the "organic intellectuals" and examines their relationship with the "world of production" mediated through the complex intricacies of "civil society" and "political society".⁴

Hegemony, in my view, has four characteristics. It must be: (a) organically consensual; (b) internally driven; (c) historically endowed; and (d)

institutionally mediating. The focus here is upon the rise and fall of *Pax Americana*, a historically specific inter-state transnational system that rose after 1945 and fell in the late 1970s. The matter of hegemony and hegemonic structure is the mutual characteristic of the *system as a whole*, and not a separate property of the hegemon. Therefore, given the demise of *Pax Americana*, the claim of American hegemony remains baseless.

The epochal measure of hegemony

In order to see the concrete manifestation of hegemony in the then-ascendant *Pax Americana*,⁵ one has to focus on the application of the (tripartite) 'doctrine of global containment' after World War II. This doctrine embodied: (a) the containment of the Soviet Union; (b) the containment of democratic/nationalist movements in the 'third world'; and (c) the containment, cooption and moulding of the social, political and intellectual atmosphere in the United States.⁶

The example of the first containment is the forceful confinement of the Soviets behind the 'iron curtain' and imposition of cold war. The cold war was a multidimensional hegemonic phenomenon, spanning the economy, polity and the entire realm of culture and ideology worldwide.

Evidence of the second type of containment is the declaration of an anti-colonial policy, on the one hand, and subversion of the democratic national movements in the 'third world', on the other. This doctrine often led to covert campaigns and coup d'états that brought a number of dictatorial regimes to power whose contradictory material existence and discursive mirror image have, nevertheless, become an embodiment of *Pax Americana* itself.⁷ At the same time, America's deliberate attempt at the speedy economic transformation of these social formations - for instance, via the introduction and forceful implementation of universal land reform programmes - has led to their hasty inclusion within the capitalist sphere of transnational exploitation and transnational markets.

Finally, the third containment strategy was implemented in terms of US domestic thought control and marginalisation of independent and militant institutions and labour unions within America's 'civil society'. Thus, historically, the American state smashed the militant labour unions and political and professional institutions of the left in order to universalise a 'hegemonic model' of intellectual emulation that shifted the entire American political spectrum significantly to the reactionary right. McCarthyism was just the tip of the iceberg in this regard.⁸ Here, underpinning social relations, on the one hand, and the mediating economic, political and ideological institutions, on the other hand, have reflected the measure of hegemony embedded in this system.

At a more concrete level, since the 1970s, it is through the particular historical relationship of state and the manifold social, political and economic integration and disintegration *vis-à-vis* transnational capital that the US-dominated hierarchy of *Pax Americana* and thus American hegemony has come to an end. Yet during the 'golden age', Soviet containment had its own manifold objectives that proved successful. The containment of democracy and independence in the third world chunk of *Pax Ameri-*

cana had, nonetheless, left some degree of formal national sovereignty. And post-war containment of people's political thought and action in US domestic 'civil society' had not led to the establishment of a police state with arbitrary, pre-emptive and systemic totalitarian objectives, if not practices.

In December 2001, the Bush administration unveiled its 'National strategy to combat weapons of mass destruction'.⁹ The Bush administration used the unfortunate events of September 11 2001 as a convenient cover in order to advance toward its 'permanent war' policy.¹⁰ This was a formal announcement of the *Doctrine of pre-emption*, a fundamental policy break from the *Doctrine of containment*, as follows:

"An effective strategy for countering WMD [weapons of mass destruction], including their use and further proliferation, is an integral component of the national security strategy of the United States of America. As with the war on terrorism [ie, invasion of Afghanistan, etc], our strategy for homeland security, and our new concept of deterrence, the US approach to combat WMD represents a fundamental change from the past

"Because deterrence may not succeed, and because of the potentially devastating consequences of WMD use against our forces and civilian population, US military forces and appropriate civilian agencies must have the capability to defend against WMD-armed adversaries, including in appropriate cases through pre-emptive measures. This requires capabilities to detect and destroy an adversary's WMD assets before these weapons are used" (emphasis added).¹¹

The mismeasure of 'blood for oil'

Institutionally, the traditional petroleum cartels must be viewed as a precursor to, and not a substitute for, the highly developed contemporary global oil market. Today's oil sector is globally structured and competitive.¹²

Here, contrary to the bourgeois reading of the term, competition is neither perfect nor imperfect. It rather reflects the coercive aspect of concentration and centralisation of capital in the oil industry. Yet, the myth of the war-for-oil scenario is hard to resist.

On the right, in an interview, James Schlesinger remarked: "The United States [Bush, the father] has gone to war now, and the American people presume this will lead to a secure oil supply. As a society we have made a choice to secure access to oil by military means. The alternative is to become independent to a large degree of that secure access."¹³ On the left, Michael Klare declared: "Two key concerns underlie the administration's [Bush, the son] thinking: First, the United States is becoming dangerously dependent on imported petroleum to meet its daily energy requirements, and second, Iraq possesses the world's larg-

est reserves of untapped petroleum after Saudi Arabia."¹⁴

Thus, the positions of the right and the left on the cause of these wars are remarkably identical. The question is, why? Is it because of the *correctness* of rightwing neoclassical theory in revealing the universal truth? Or is it because of the *fallacious* economic ideology that is uncritically accepted by the theoryless and clueless left?

Finally, the Indian leftist electronic journal *Aspects of India's economy* devoted its entire December 2002 double-issue to 'What is behind the invasion of Iraq'.¹⁵ The authors conclude, among other things, that the attempted conversion of oil revenues from the US dollar to the euro prompted the invasion of Iraq by United States. As Krugman pointed out in a short note, any possible shift from the US dollar to the euro on the part of Opec will result in a "small change".¹⁶

However, the fly-by-night authors do not lose any opportunity to grasp this straw in the midst of dreadful confusion. The globalisation of oil since the mid-1970s has rendered the *sui generis* categories of 'access' and 'dependency' meaningless.¹⁷ Based on my value-theoretic framework, I distinguish between what is 'organic' and what is 'conjectural' in the pricing of oil. To be sure, the *price of production* of the highly explored oilfields within the US lower 48 states is the global centre of gravity of oil prices everywhere. As a result, in competition, the more productive oilfields in the world are potentially able to collect additional profits in terms of *oil rents*.

Let us look at a simple exercise, attempting the calculation of the value of all Iraqi proven oil reserves in today's prices.¹⁸ Given the Iraqi proven oil reserves of nearly 110 billion barrels, in two separate assumptions, let us assume two alternative production schedules of 2.5 and 5 million daily barrels, as follows:

If the rate of utilisation of these reserves, *ceteris paribus*, will be set at 2.5 and 5 million average daily barrels, these oil reserves would be exhausted within nearly 120 years and 60 years, respectively. Accordingly, our respective annual production schedules are:

1. (2.5 x 365 = 912.5) 912.5 million annual barrels
2. (5 x 365 = 1,825) 1,825 million annual barrels.

Assuming \$20 per barrel for the price of Iraqi oil (*viz* the 1990s average market price) and about \$10 for the Persian Gulf differential oil rent.¹⁹

Let us further assume:

1. an 8% real discount rate;
2. a 3% annual inflation rate;
3. a 3% annual growth rate of addition to the proven reserves.

Scenario 1

1. The assumption of 2.5 million daily barrels: Given an annual production volume of 912.5 million barrels within 120 years and \$10 of differential oil rent per barrel, the value of differential oil rents for 120 years is as follows: 912.5 million x 120 = 109.5 billion barrels

Public meetings with Cyrus Bina

Manchester: Tuesday November 24, 8pm: 'Iran, oil and the working class', meeting room 4, University of Manchester Student Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. Organised by Hopi.

Glasgow: Wednesday November 25, 5pm: 'Post-election Iran: why did the left turn right?',

room 315, Adam Smith Building, Glasgow University, Bute Gardens, Great George Street, Glasgow G12.

Organised by Critique.
London: Sunday November 29, 4pm: 'Is it the oil, stupid?', University of London Union, Malet Street, WC1. Organised by CPGB.

109.5 billion x \$10 = \$1.095 trillion

Given an 8% annual discount rate, a 3% annual rate inflation and a 3% annual growth rate of addition to proven reserves, we have applicable rate of discount of 8%. Thus, the present value of \$1.095 trillion at 8% discount rate to be received in a lump sum after 120 years is \$106.8 million.

2. The assumption of five million daily barrels: Given an annual production volume of 1,825 million barrels within 60 years and a \$10 differential oil rent per barrel, the value of differential oil rents at the end of 60 years is as follows:

1,825 million x 60 = 109.5 billion barrels
109.5 billion x \$10 = \$1.095 trillion

Given an 8% annual discount rate, a 3% annual rate inflation and a 3% annual growth rate of addition to the proven reserves, we would have applicable rate of discount of 8%. Thus, present value of \$1.095 trillion at 8% discount rate to be received in lump sum after 60 years is \$10.81 billion.

Based upon the second, much larger figure of the two, the price tag for differential oil rents in Iraq is slightly less than \$11 billion. Now, let us assume that the Iraqi oil reserves are

underestimated: say, that they are five times the reported figures. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, one would arrive at \$11 billion x 5 = \$55 billion. Now, let us double our reasonable figure of \$10 for differential rent per barrel. Again, we would never arrive at a figure much larger than \$110 billion for the present value of all differential oil rents to be paid to the Iraqis. In other words, the 'Iraqi oil price tag' does not exceed \$110 billion to be received in lump sum at the end of the period. This is indeed chump change, given the staggering costs associated with prosecuting the war and the unanticipated financial and incalculable human costs of the occupation of Iraq.

Scenario 2

Let us further assume that the proceeds from differential oil rents in Iraq will be received on an annual basis: say, for 55 years. In other words, assume that the Bush administration and its future successors are able to invent a pill that tranquillises not only the people of Iraq, but also the people of the entire world in order to calmly and comfortably steal the Iraqi oil rents for 55 years, till

2058. Now we need to calculate the summation of the present value of annuitised annual Iraqi oil rents for the period of 55 years. This scenario is more realistic, since the payments of oil rents are made on an annual basis. Again, for the sake of argument, we have chosen a much larger average figure of 5 million daily barrels, assuming a very optimistic production schedule:

5 million x 365 = 1.825 billion annual barrels
1.825 billion x \$10 = \$18.25 billion

The present value of \$18.25 billion annual payment, to be paid for 55 consecutive years is equal to \$224.8 billion.

According to the Nordhaus estimates, the direct and indirect costs of forceful occupation of Iraq would range somewhere between \$120 billion and \$1.6 trillion over a 10-year period.²⁰ Should my estimated value of Iraqi oil warrant such a huge undertaking? As we can see, the reductionist view of 'no blood for oil' is hardly an answer to the complex objective forces that - despite the misleading intention of new US foreign policy - are underlying the upheavals of

present global polity. Rather such misleading intention, and prior and subsequent actions on the part of the US government, are readily explicable by the underlying epochal forces that so irreversibly led to America's loss of hegemony, on the one hand, and American refusal to accept it gracefully, on the other hand.

This is the main and real cause of the new world disorder rather than this ad hoc 'oil scenario' that the popular left harps on about ●

Notes

1. This article originally appeared in *Union for Radical Political Economics Newsletter* of spring 2004. See www.urpe.org/index.html
2. See, for instance, a neo-conservative view by Kenneth Adelman: 'Cakewalk in Iraq', *The Washington Post* February 13 2002.
3. For theoretical underpinnings see C Bina *The economics of the oil crisis* New York 1985.
4. A Gramsci *The prison notebooks* New York 1971, p161.
5. See R Steel *Pax Americana* New York 1977.
6. See GF Kennan *Memoirs: 1925-1950* Boston 1967.
7. The 1953 and 1954 CIA coups against Mossadegh and Arbenz are but the two prime examples.
8. See MB Levin *Political hysteria in America: the democratic capacity for repression* New York 1971.

9. One has to distinguish between epochal and temporal reflections of the Bush administration.
10. The Wolfowitz-Berle neo-conservative project of permanent war, particularly for 'redrawing' the map of the Middle East, was formulated long before September 11 2001.
11. White House *The national security strategy of the United States of America* September 17 2002, pp1,3.
12. Here competition is defined in Marxian terms.
13. J Schlesinger, interview: 'Will war yield oil security?' *Challenge* March-April 1991.
14. MT Klare, 'Oiling the wheels of war' *The Nation* October 7 2002. As a corollary, the 'necessity' of oil exploration from Alaska's wildlife can also be justified by such arguments.
15. 'Behind the invasion of Iraq' *Aspects of India's economy* No33-34, December 2002.
16. See P Krugman, 'Nothing for money', March 14 2003: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2003/03/14/AR2003031400111.html
17. MT Klare, 'Oiling the wheels of war' *The Nation* October 7 2002.
18. This is a rough exercise just for the sake of illustration and approximation of the order of magnitude of Iraqi oil rents. One or two points in the discount rate or inflation rate would not make a significant difference in the basic argument. The figure of \$224.8 billion is for 55 consecutive years. If the occupation of Iraq is assumed to be for a 10-year period or so, then a fraction of this figure will be relevant, which in turn will be even much smaller in magnitude than the commonly estimated cost of US war and occupation of Iraq.
19. See C Bina *The economics of the oil crisis* New York 1985.
20. WD Nordhaus, 'Iraq: the economic consequences of war' *New York Review of Books* Vol 49 (19), December 5 2002.

Iran

Workers organise against regime

More than 300 workers in the Abadan oil refinery gathered on Thursday November 12 to protest against non-payment of wages and bonuses, saying they had not been paid for more than three months.

The refinery authorities associated with what remains of the state-owned Iran National Oil Company say the workers are employed by a contractor and they cannot do anything about their demands. The protest followed a strike by the whole workforce of 450 involved in the development of Bandar Abbas Oil refinery. This was their third walkout in less than three months and the strike is continuing. The Iranian government's privatisation plans are notoriously corrupt and generally help empower and enrich the Islamic Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards). But in the oil industry it is different from elsewhere. Privatisation has been undertaken with the aim of dividing workers and hampering national negotiations over wages and conditions, in the knowledge that for oil workers deployed in various sectors of the industry, working for so many different contractors, it would be impossible to negotiate common terms and conditions.

Private ownership of some oil functions is still prohibited under the Iranian constitution, but the government has permitted buy-back contracts, allowing international oil companies to participate in exploration and development through an Iranian affiliate. The contractor receives a remuneration fee, usually an entitlement to oil or gas from the developed operation. Iran's total refinery capacity in 2008 was about 1.5 million barrels per day (bbl/d), with its nine refineries operated by the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company. Iranian refineries are unable to keep pace with domestic demand, while the threat of sanctions and removal of fuel subsidies have created price rises and the fear of a shortage of refined fuel.

The current protests are very significant because the Islamic government, wary of the power of oil employees, has so far avoided confrontation with this section of the working class by making sure they receive regular payment and imposing very strict security measures in refineries, servic-

es to the oil industry and oil extraction fields.

Iran ranks among the world's top three holders of both proven oil and natural gas reserves. It is Opec's second largest producer and exporter after Saudi Arabia, and fourth largest exporter of crude oil globally. Natural gas accounts for half of Iran's total domestic energy consumption, while the remaining half consists predominantly of oil. The continued exploration and production of the offshore South Pars natural gas field in the Persian Gulf is a key part of the country's energy sector development plan. Iran has nine oil refineries with a total capacity of 1.4 million bbl/d. They include Abadan, which was one of world's largest when it was destroyed in 1980 in the Iraq-Iran war. It was also the refinery where the first political strike took place in the late 1970s. Meanwhile, gasoline demand is forecast to grow at around 11.4% per year.¹

The Islamic government has not forgotten the significant role of oil workers in the events that led to the February uprising of 1979. In November 1978, a strike by 37,000 workers at Iran's nationalised oil refineries initially reduced production from six million barrels per day to about 1.5 million. That strike not only cost the government about \$60 million a day in oil revenue, but also suddenly raised the spectre of petroleum shortages in Japan, Israel, western Europe and, to a much lesser degree, in the US; all these countries to one extent or another depended at the time on Iranian crude. After a week of strikes and protests, some oil employees went back to work. But the strike played a crucial role in encouraging further militant action and boosted opposition to the regime. It was also significant in asserting the role of the working class in political struggles. The oil workers' walkout climaxed two months of labour unrest that had spread to nearly every sector of the economy. Demands ranged from pay rises to compensate for spiralling inflation to political reforms, an end to martial law and the release of all remaining political prisoners. A strike of a million civil servants and government workers followed that of the oil workers.

There are many parallels between those strikes and the current unrest

amongst oil employees. The present strikes follow weeks of political protests up and down the country. Also Iran's economic situation is worse than anyone can remember - in addition to rocketing inflation, mass unemployment and systematic non-payment of wages, the new subsidies legislation, passed only a week ago, has already increased the price of basic goods. Everyone is predicting major price hikes.

Bread prices reached 1,000 toman (\$1) in Tehran this week. The newspaper *Hemayat* said that the two traditional breads, *barbari* and *sangak*, were being sold for 600 and 2,000 toman respectively. The semi-official news agency, ILNA, predicts that both a litre of milk and a kilogram of sugar will soon reach 1,000 toman. The estimated average wage is around \$223 a month, and many workers are not paid for months at a time, while the employer can use the threat of job losses to get away with this form of systematic super-exploitation. In recent statements Iranian workers have once more called for international solidarity and support for their demands - and they are adamant that such support must be from fellow workers. Over the last few years labour activists inside Iran have sometimes been innocent victims of the foolish mistakes of sections of the Iranian 'left' that have collaborated with social-imperialist political groups and pro-imperialist, rightwing trade unions.

Those who maintain the principled position of opposing war and sanctions have a duty to show genuine international solidarity with Iranian workers. We can do so by supporting their immediate demands. One of the major organisations trying to unite the current nationwide struggles, the Coordinating Committee to Form Workers' Organisations, has issued a number of statements regarding recent events, as well as a list of basic demands. Sections of that statement can be summed up as follows:

● The Iranian working class is struggling against the entire capitalist system (all factions of the regime). There is a need to safeguard the independence of the working class in the class struggle. Our movement uses the strength of its organised and conscious forces against political power

in its totality; that is why workers must unmask ruthlessly the reformist capitalist faction, a faction that misleads workers by creating the illusion of reform within the system.

● The unity of the working masses in the struggle against capitalism and the need for promoting its material and moral ability to struggle for the abolition of the wage-slavery system requires that this class initiates its organised and conscious struggle from basic demands as described in the Charter of the Fundamental Demands of the Working Class of Iran.

● The main condition for the success of these efforts, including the takeover of factories, the general strike or any struggle for the abolition of capitalist social relations and seizing political power, is the existence of anti-capitalist councils of the working class.

● There must be a struggle against unemployment caused by factory closures, against various forms of intensification of exploitation in the workplace. Proposed tactics include taking over closed down factories or those that are on the brink of closing down in the first instance, and strikes in the second instance.

"Based on the above points," the statement reads, "we call upon all anti-capitalist activists of the working class movement to unite around the following points" for the organisation of the class against capitalism:

● Agreement on the basic demands of

the working class.

● Efforts to form anti-capitalist councils of the working class within workplaces and neighbourhoods.

● Unified planning for launching strikes in all centres of work and centres of production.

● Preparations for the takeover of factories that have closed down or those on the verge of closing down.

● Participation within the current movement, with the aim of forming an independent line for the realisation of the basic demands of the working class.

"Workers, let's get organised against capital!" concludes the call from the Coordinating Committee to Form Workers' Organisations.

We in Hands Off the People of Iran must continue our efforts in support of Iranian workers, not just as an act of international solidarity, but as an integral part of our international efforts to confront the economic crisis. Excellent work has been done in 2009, with funds raised by the Fire Brigades Union, Unite, Unison and the RMT, and the efforts of the Labour Representation Committee and Hopi cricket teams. But we must do a lot more in 2010 ●

Yasamine Mather

Notes

1. www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Iran/Profile.html
2. <http://hopinewsfromiran.wordpress.com/2009/09/08/fundamental-demands-of-the-working-class-of-iran-coordinating-committee-to-form-workers%E2%80%99-organization>

Hands Off the People of Iran

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

November 28 2009

central London

10 am - 6pm



Somers Town Community Centre, 150 Ossulston Street, London NW1. Come along to discuss the situation in Iran and our plans for the future. Speakers include Yasamine Mather, Moshé Machover (founder-member of Matzpen) and leftwing author Cyrus Bina. www.hopoi.org

WORKERS POWER

Rival CNWP launched

Another month and yet another call for a halfway-house working class party - this time by the Trotskyist group, Workers Power. Peter Manson is not impressed

Back in June Workers Power's monthly paper published an article calling for "a democratic party like the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, within which revolutionary socialists would be able to mount an argument in favour of overthrowing the capitalist system for good. If you agree, contact Workers Power and join us in the fight for a new anti-capitalist party!" (*Workers Power* June).

By September this had been formalised into the 'Call for an Anti-capitalist Party', in which Workers Power comrades "appeal to all the trade unions and socialist organisations, to all activists fighting for resistance from below, to anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigners confronting the BNP, to the trade union leaders and members: let's unite and build a new anti-capitalist party".

WP hopes to see the establishment of "local committees for a new party" which would "start building roots in communities". Eventually there would be "an open conference - bringing together unions, socialist organisations, workers, youth and left campaigners - to launch a new anti-capitalist party". The call also looks forward to standing "a slate of candidates in the general election" - presumably before such a party is formed.

WP claimed in a leaflet put out for the November 7 RMT conference on working class representation that "nearly 300 activists" had signed up to the call, but at the November 14-15 Anti-capitalism weekend school *Workers Power* editor Richard Brenner was vaguer: he announced to the Saturday evening rally that "hundreds" had signed, including, he said, members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales and Socialist Workers Party, "whether their leaders want them to or not". The new party he had in mind would attract "thousands" of people, he predicted.

He reported that WP had approached the SWP suggesting an initiative to form such a party, but the SWP leadership had responded that the "time isn't right". But the time for building a new party was now and standing a slate of candidates in the general election must be regarded as part of the process. As for 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy', comrade Brenner did not know the process for getting involved. But "if the train doesn't stop at our station, we'll have to find an unconventional means of boarding" - not to mention "find out where it's going".

Writing in *Workers Power* in October, John Bowman elaborated further on the example of France: "The New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France of over 10,000 members was set up, not primarily by an alliance between the left and trade union leaders with a programme written up behind closed doors, but by local committees of struggle in over 400 towns and cities across France. They developed a radical programme in an open conference of 600 delegates from these committees in February this year. In addition, the NPA, despite its faults, is a party of struggle that campaigns on the streets and the picket lines, not just outside the polling booths."

The NPA was, of course, not formed as a result of some spontaneous coming together of "local committees of struggle", as comrade Bowman's account would have you



'Bash the fash': anti-fascist 'theory'

believe. It was actually established on the initiative of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, whose members made up the bulk of the local committees and eventually managed to draw in three or four times the number of LCR members. But WP is no LCR - its leader, Olivier Besancenot, is a national figure, who polled 1.2 million votes in the 2002 presidential election. So what chance is there of Workers Power, a group of a few dozen comrades, being able to 'do an LCR'? To ask the question is to answer it. Either comrades Brenner, Bowman and Luke Cooper are playing a cynical game or they are seriously deluded. I fear it is the latter.

But there is another difference between the French and proposed British versions of the Anti-capitalist Party. Brenner and co are explicitly looking to the unions - national bureaucrats as well as rank-and-file members - to launch the new party. In this their approach is virtually identical to that of SPEW and its Campaign for a New Workers' Party. But WP walked out of the CNWP earlier this year after the latter's steering committee voted to back the first Lindsey strike (which, of course, began with some workers displaying placards with the slogan, 'British jobs for British workers').

I asked comrade Brenner during the Saturday lunch break what WP would do if either workers or union leaders that signed up to the anti-capitalist call used the same slogan themselves; or if, like SPEW (and the CPGB, of course), they were prepared to back Lindsey-type strikes despite such a slogan. His reply was less than con-

vincing. While he accepted that it was more than possible that a party of the type he envisaged would include such people, he told me that there was a difference between a campaign, like the CNWP, and an actual party.

So let me get this straight: WP would work in the same party alongside workers or bureaucrats whose combativity came mixed with nationalistic ideas. But it would not support any militant action they took where the same mix was on display. However, even that would only apply once the party was set up. In the campaign to form it, WP would have to walk out if the majority, very sensibly, decided that the Lindsey strike was clearly over jobs, wages and conditions despite the initial reactionary slogans. Or have I missed something?

Minority

This is hardly an impossible scenario, since WP expects - hopes? - to be in a minority if its new party ever sees the light of day. This was made clear by WP comrades who spoke from the floor at the rally.

To say that the party had to be revolutionary from the beginning was to be passive, claimed one, while another asked us to imagine the meeting hall full of hundreds of delegates from the unions and socialist parties. Obviously in such a fantasy situation the revolutionaries would be in a minority: "Probably we would lose the initial argument." This comrade thought that until such a time as the League for a Fifth International (WP's oil slick 'international') gained prestige from having led a revolution (he

thought that might happen in somewhere like Pakistan), we "have to engage with reformists".

In view of all this comrade Brenner predicted from the platform that criticism of the call would come from two sides: first there were those who would say that WP was seeking to create a "reformist party"; second, others would say that WP wanted to "impose our revolutionary politics" on the new entity. However, neither was correct, he said. Although the party WP was seeking to establish would definitely not be "pluralist", it would be "a democratic party where people could say what they think" (he did not explain what he meant by that - which, given WP's recent record of expelling a third of its old membership, is not exactly irrelevant).

He summed up by saying that the new formation would "not be an alternative to the revolutionary party of the working class" - it would be "a way of getting there". If ever there was a description of a halfway house, this was it.

Unlike myself, Barbara Dorn from the International Bolshevik Tendency was able to speak in the very short time available for debate. She denounced WP's proposed "halfway house" and said that, while it might be correct to join a new party set up by left Labourites, as with the Socialist Labour Party when it was initially formed, it was not the job of revolutionaries to try and set up an SLP-type formation themselves.

In response, comrade Brenner denounced this approach as sectarian: it was necessary to "reach out to peo-

ple breaking from Labour", to "workers in struggle". While WP did not want a party that was "half revolutionary and half reformist", sometimes "the prophet has to go to the mountain". He criticised groups like the IBT for joining a new party only if it was set up by reformists: "Let's take the initiative, comrades. Let's think and act like revolutionaries."

Superficially this is an attractive argument. As comrade Brenner says, if we are in the forefront of the campaign for a halfway house, that will leave us better placed when such a new party is formed. That was certainly the case with the 'revolutionaries' of the Fourth International Supporters Caucus of Brian Heron and Pat Sikorski in the SLP. It was also the case, of course, with the 'revolutionaries' of the SWP in Respect. Both achieved influential positions thanks to their "initiative" in driving forward the halfway house in question and in both cases they willingly behaved like reformists.

But what else can 'revolutionaries' do when they find themselves in positions of leadership over reformists in a party constructed to attract non-revolutionaries? They *must* water down their Marxism if they are to appeal to the "millions out there", as John Rees put it. If we suspend our disbelief and imagine comrade Brenner playing the role of a Sikorski or Rees, no doubt we can picture him toning down his revolutionism much more reluctantly than they did. But he would be forced to do that nevertheless. After all, if the masses will not join a party that stands for revolution, the revolutionary "prophet" will have to think of another way of enticing them.

Sympathetic non-WP comrades were on the platform. They included Nick Durie from the Scottish Socialist Party, who believes that "Unity comes from doing things" and that "a new anti-capitalist party has to come from the ground".

Duncan Chapple from *Socialist Resistance* and Respect is a signatory to the call and, not unexpectedly, favours a new formation that will be unambiguously reformist (and rather to the right of the NPA): "We want a new party - a party where people don't have to be a Marxist to join." Like comrade Durie, he hoped it would be built "from the ground up" from the various struggles - "we must aim to occupy the whole space to the left of Labour".

Andy Yorke, a WP postal worker, concentrated in his speech on winning union support. There are three broad positions amongst the unions. Firstly, those where it is necessary to mount "guerrilla war" on the "oppressive bureaucracy" just to get the question of working class representation on the agenda. Secondly, those like the PCS and NUT that do not have a political fund. Thirdly those like the RMT and FBU, which have broken with Labour. Comrade Yorke sounded exactly like SPEW comrades and their CNWP - he is definitely of the opinion that for the unions to disaffiliate immediately would be a highly positive step, even though there is clearly no viable alternative party to support.

Right now, said comrade Yorke, if WP addressed a group of a 100 workers engaged in militant struggle, "maybe five would join Workers Power". But "what about the other 95"?

They “can be won to revolutionary politics too”.

Carl Zacharia of Surrey Anti-capitalists is another signatory, along with his group, which brings together supporters of existing left organisations, including the Socialist Workers Party and the CPGB. But he said: “We don’t think the national groups are capable of meaningful unity”. He singled out the CPGB, which he implied makes the sectarian call to “build the Communist Party”, whereas in reality we appeal for the unity of *Marxists as Marxists*.

The evening rally was in effect the second of the day. The first session in the morning featured a panel of five speakers, consisting of four WP supporters/members and a representative of the striking Leeds bin workers. The intention was to display Workers Power at its best, as an organisation at the heart of every militant struggle. So comrade Yorke (CWU) was joined by Kam Kumar, who spoke of the importance of anti-racist work, Alex Kelly from Revolution, WP’s youth front, whose comrades have been active in attempting to physically confront the English Defence League, and Luke Cooper from the WP leadership, who talked about the current political situation and the need for “clear anti-capitalist answers”.

Comrade Cooper referred to the experience of what he called the “French workers and youth who formed the New Anti-capitalist Party” in France. In this session too WP or LFI comrades who spoke from the floor talked of the “tens of thousands of workers who could form a new party”. We “can’t sit around waiting for Labour to be reclaimed”, said one, while a comrade from Austria stated that an alternative must be provided “for social democrats who want to fight”.

Bash the fash

Attendance at the Saturday evening rally increased by perhaps a dozen or so over and above the 60-70 who were there during the day. Many were students or young workers whom WP has pulled into Revolution mainly around anti-fascist work. The leadership, particularly comrade Brenner, made a concerted effort to recruit them into WP itself.

Apart from the rallies, I attended two other sessions, the first of which was on the far right: ‘How can the BNP be stopped?’

Dan Edwards, a young WP comrade, shows all the signs of actually trying to *think* about the subject. Pity about the bog-standard far-left ‘bash the fash’ template he has to work from. He said, for example, that, in his view, the EDL is “not consciously fascist”, but is “playing the role of fascists”. His critique of the popular-frontist Unite Against Fascism was sound enough, but he came out with the usual nonsense: you “don’t beat the fascists by winning arguments”.

In my contribution from the floor I pointed out that an essential element of the communist analysis of fascism had been missing from comrade Edwards’ opening. The bourgeoisie turns to fascism in a revolutionary situation, where the proletariat is actually threatening to take power. But today, far from such a situation existing, working class organisation is in a pitiful state. However, if there *were* a revolutionary situation, would the bourgeoisie look to the BNP or EDL as its counterrevolutionary fighting force?

While nothing is impossible, it was much more likely that a new organisation of some kind would be summoned forth. I gave the Countryside Alliance as an example of a reactionary grouping that - while not fascist, of course - mobilised mass support and enjoyed the support of key sections of the establishment. For all these reasons it is foolhardy to regard groups like the BNP as the main and most immediate threat.

I also pointed out that it is neces-

sary to “win the argument”. There was something worryingly elitist about the demand that far-right views be totally suppressed. While, unlike the SWP, WP is against demanding that the state denies the BNP the ability to state its views, it believes this is the job of communists always and in every situation. I said that it is not a question of defending Nick Griffin’s right to free speech, but about the right of workers - the future ruling class - to hear the arguments and decide for themselves. Or do we say that only the wise leaders can be trusted to judge which views are suitable for the masses to hear?

One WP comrade demonstrated this elitism to perfection. He said that there were two mistaken liberal arguments for ever allowing the BNP to be heard. First, it is assumed that the BNP can be beaten by “rational debate”, when this is impossible (like others who say this, the comrade did not explain why it is that a working class audience is incapable of choosing between BNP irrationality and scientific socialism).

The second mistaken liberal argument, according to the comrade, is that if people found out that the BNP were racists they would not vote for them. However, lots of people sympathise with the kind of opinions the BNP puts forward and these opinions would be strengthened if the arguments are heard. Obviously then, we should deny the ignorant workers the right to make a judgement in case they get it wrong.

Luke Cooper said that Marxists are the “strongest proponents of democratic rights”, but (there was bound to be a ‘but’) “not in the abstract”. Of course the CBI isn’t about to sponsor the EDL, he said, but it remains an immediate danger. However, he was contradicted by another WP leader, John Bowman, who said that “only people who don’t really talk to workers” (he meant people like me) could say that the far right was *not* sponsored by the bourgeoisie.

Comrade Brenner was at his most pompous. Didn’t I realise I was addressing a “courageous audience of communists” and my views were out of place? Unlike the “brother from the CPGB”, who displayed an “extraordinary bit of credulity” for taking the word of a fascist leader (I said that the EDL is clearly not a wing of the BNP), WP comrades had studied the history of fascism. Apparently this taught them that every statement of people like Griffin must be a lie - but you do not have to be a student of history to know that even pathological liars mix their falsities with large elements of the truth: the job of communists is to distinguish one from the other.

Comrade Brenner asked me: “Where have you been for the last two and a half years?” Didn’t I know that there had been the “deepest capitalist crisis” and we are about to enter a “period of sharp class struggle” (the implication was that this would produce intense polarisation between strongly organised communists and establishment-backed fascists)? I should be ashamed for “spreading deadly complacency” and for trying to “turn us away from our responsibilities”.

Marxist party

I was also at the afternoon session led by comrade Brenner, entitled ‘Two decades on from the fall of the Berlin Wall: 20th century communism - what went wrong?’ Here was the WP leader going all out to confirm those new recruits through placing his organisation firmly in the revolutionary Marxist tradition.

It goes without saying that the period beginning with the Russian Revolution was outlined according to WP’s version of Trotskyism - Stalin’s USSR was a “degenerated and degenerating workers’ state in transition to

capitalism”. But the only reason I could detect to justify the “workers’ state” description was that the Soviet Union had a “planned economy” (although other comrades also mentioned nationalised property forms).

In my contribution - also from the floor - I disputed this claim. Comrade Brenner himself had said that genuine, effective planning could only occur under conditions of democracy - what existed in the Soviet Union was arbitrary target-setting. Furthermore, as comrade Brenner had pointed out, Stalinism ruled *over* the working class and imposed brutal conditions on it - describing this monstrosity as a “workers’ state”, degenerated or otherwise, was a travesty of the truth. Even in terms of opportunist self-promotion it is hardly an effective way of advancing an attractive image of the kind of society we are striving to achieve.

Labour Representation Committee

Waiting and hoping

On Saturday November 14 the Labour Representation Committee held its annual general meeting, dubbed ‘Building the resistance’. Over 200 comrades attended and there were stalls for the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, Bookmarks, Socialist Appeal and the People’s Charter. Members of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty and The Commune group were also present distributing their papers.

The morning session was opened by Tony Benn, who compared what the LRC faced with the “historical” tasks of the suffragettes and Chartists. Conference heard speeches on why the left must unite and work together, although it was not clear what organisational form, if any, this would require.

John McDonnell recommended a campaign around the committee’s programme, because the “public are desperate for a real Labour Party”. Referring to a “six-month window of opportunity” before the general election, he said: “If we go and articulate these policies with confidence, we could retain a socialist representation in parliament and a Labour government”. He also promised: “If there is a leadership election, I will stand again.”

The afternoon began with a session on ‘Internationalism, peace and environment’, which featured Christian Dominguez of the United Confederation of Bolivian Campesino Workers and Sian Jones of the LRC and TUC Climate Change Campaign. Comrade Dominguez gave a passionate defence of the Bolivian government of Evo Morales, beginning his speech by reciting the president’s slogan, *Patria o muerte* (‘Country or death’). A peculiar start to a session on ‘internationalism’, but this indicated the ideological basis of the movement around Morales, a left-nationalist popular front.

This movement does base itself on the “mobilisation of the poorest sections of society”, as Dominguez asserted, and the fact that Bolivia’s new constitution recognises the indigenous groups which have been the most oppressed sections of Bolivian society is undoubtedly a progressive step. There has been a wave of resistance to US-imposed neoliberal capitalism across South America, also reflected in the mass movement around Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. But Marxists must highlight the fact that there is no national road to socialism, in the

I also commented on comrade Brenner’s statement that “a revolutionary party has to have democracy - otherwise you have a load of people parroting a line”. I pointed out that several left groups, of which Workers Power is a typical example, have been characterised by minorities “parroting a line” with which they actually disagree. That is because the sect version of ‘democratic centralism’ insists that members who oppose the line are obliged to suppress that fact in public. I said that, if the working class is to be the ruling class, it must become familiar with the arguments of its leaders and be able to take sides between them.

Unfortunately, as with most of the sessions, there was insufficient time for the platform speaker to reply and comrade Brenner could do no more than urge comrades to join Workers Power in the couple of minutes avail-

able to him.

And that, of course, is ultimately the answer for WP. Even the revolutionary party which eventually emerges from the anti-capitalist halfway house will be but Workers Power writ large. But this is a hopeless scenario. While no doubt WP will recruit ones and twos, why should thousands flock to it, let alone the many millions that are needed, rather than to any of the other sects, not least the much larger SWP and SPEW?

But there is something the revolutionary left can do to make a difference. It can begin the process of Marxist unity within a single party - a party based on genuine democratic centralism, where, on the one hand, every comrade and minority grouping agrees to work to fulfil agreed decisions and, on the other hand, they have the right to publicly state their views and to fight to become the majority ●

‘developing’ or the imperialist world. Comrade Dominguez hinted at this when he said the next task of the movement was “not limited to the borders of one nation”. Indeed regional - and global - unity of the working class must be strived for. A Communist Party of South America would be a huge leap forward for the working class of the continent.

In her speech, Sian Jones focussed on climate change, undoubtedly a real threat to the ability of future generations to continue life on this planet. Increasingly sections of the establishment are looking for ways to mitigate it, but the constant need for capital to accumulate, and the system’s massive reliance on fossil fuels, makes it unlikely that states will be able to force the huge cuts in emissions which scientists reckon are necessary to stave off an abrupt shift in global temperatures.

Comrade Jones correctly identified the ‘greenwash’ of corporations and the Labour Party, and was also right that there are no individual solutions. The comrade’s answer to the climate crisis was to begin with drumming up support for an early day motion calling for a million ‘green jobs’. This would include 250,000 in wind turbine factories.

Of course, the British state has practically bankrupted itself keeping capitalism afloat thanks to the economic crisis, and could not sustain the level of investment required for comrade Jones’s grand plan; and this poses the necessity for a socialist transformation of society. Capitalism’s need to accumulate cannot be permanently subordinated to social or environmental concerns; only an economy based on need, not profit, can balance human industry with the finite resources of our planet.

All of the resolutions to conference were passed, with the exception of the AWL’s, which nebulously called for a “workers’ plan ... geared around working class struggle and forthright socialist demands such as those adopted by the LRC conference in 2008”. Interestingly, however, a motion from the left-communist Commune group - which asked the LRC to recognise that “the state is not a neutral force concerned only with the welfare of society. The state is not a vehicle to achieve ‘socialism’ or can be relied upon to act as a protective shield against capital” - was passed.

A motion from the Socialist Youth

Network, the LRC’s youth wing, reaffirming the LRC’s affiliation to Hands Off the People of Iran, was carried almost unanimously. CPGB, LRC and other comrades have done some great work together for Hopi, including raising money for the Iranian workers’ movement.

The concluding remarks to end the day were delivered by Katy Clark, MP for North Ayrshire and Arran and a member of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, who claimed that the conference was a meeting of the “alternative leadership of the Labour Party” - an overstatement. The really intriguing thing about comrade Clark’s speech, though, was the belief, shared with not a few other Labour MPs, that the Labour leadership might still have a change of heart, or at least begin to present a leftist face.

So Brown’s touting of the Tobin tax on financial transactions was seen as a sign that “things are changing” and the government was moving left. The renationalisation of the East Coast rail line was also hailed as a victory for the left - nationalisation being equated with socialism, when it really means control by bureaucrats rather than capitalists. And never mind that this occurred not through pressure from below, or even pressure from within by the Socialist Campaign Group. The East Coast line simply could not be run at a profit, but is too important for the state to allow it to go under.

The reduction in the planned fleet of Trident nuclear submarines from four to three was likewise greeted as a welcome concession to the left. A more likely explanation is the fact that the programme looks to cost over £100 billion.

New Labour is the old guard and is “going into the opposition of the Labour Party”, we were told. In the midst of the biggest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the left was “failing to put the arguments forward”. The remedy? We’ve “got to make sure the SCG are elected” and, above all, keep the Tories out.

In truth the Labour left is hoping just to maintain its foothold in the party and in parliament. Right now, no-one is *openly* proposing much more than ‘wait and see until after the election’. Nevertheless, behind the scenes it is another matter. More and more comrades seem to be despairing of the Labour Party and vaguely hanker for a Labour Party mark two ●

Dave McAllister

RESPECT

No coalition with

Issues of left and right are not so clear-cut when it comes to Respect. Mike Macnair reports on its annual conference, held in Birmingham on Saturday November 14

Respect's annual conference was marked by somewhat confused debates on anti-fascist activity, and on the so far unnamed 'son of No2EU' electoral coalition. These have given rise to somewhat ill-tempered exchanges between the participants and among others in the 'blogosphere' in the last few days.¹

The conference also changed the name of the organisation from 'Respect - the Unity Coalition' to 'The Respect Party', altered the mode of election of the leadership, and passed a number of leftwing 'motherhood and apple pie' resolutions on international questions, and constructive resolutions on constitutional issues and on free public transport.

This report focuses mainly on the controversies. I have tried to give as much as possible of what was argued on the different sides, so that readers can form their own views of the arguments.

The official report of the conference says that 210 delegates attended² ('delegates' were, of course, any Respect members who had agreed to pay the conference fee, rather than people elected by branches). However, I counted around 100 present in the main hall in each of the morning and afternoon sessions, and in the one vote which was counted (to be discussed below) 113 votes were cast; but it may well be that people coming and going or in circulation outside the hall meant that numbers were higher than I saw. Clive Searle reported that Respect now has 850 members, with a significant growth in recruitment in the last months; it would be interesting to know whether these members are concentrated in east London and Birmingham or more widely spread.

At the beginning of the conference a decision was taken to elect the same number of national council (NC) members as there were nominees, avoiding the need for a contested election. The resulting committee of 47 is over-large from a group of 850, but, of course, the *actual* leadership will be some body delegated from the NC.

As if to reaffirm this point, almost the last decision taken at the end of the conference was to adopt for the future a variant of the Socialist Workers Party's method of election of a 'party council', with 40% to be elected by the conference and 60% by regional meetings. Clive Searle moved the proposal on behalf of Manchester Respect with classic SWP arguments: election by conference would tend to favour "people who talk a lot", while "people who do a lot" do not get elected.

In reality, though, most political work consists of 'talking a lot' - on the doorstep, on stalls, in trade union meetings, in public meetings, in discussions with colleagues and neighbours. People who "do a lot" turn out to be, as the SWP experience of this form of election reveals ... apparatus yes-men and women. Moreover, a regionally-elected NC lacks the *clear* lines of authority which would allow it to overrule and remove, if necessary, the actual leadership. This was one of the few contentious votes, but the principle of local/regional election was not controverted: Southwark Respect merely proposed election by *branches* rather than regions. This



'Delegates' voted to build election profile

proposal was opposed by Ger Francis, Salma Yaqoob and Alan Thornett, on the ground of the very variable development of Respect branches across the country, and overwhelmingly defeated.

The conference started late, and the agenda had to be shuffled because George Galloway, who was supposed to introduce the first session, 'Resisting the cuts agenda', was stuck in traffic on the M1, so that the first item taken was the discussion on 'One society, many cultures' - in fact on fighting racism and Islamophobia - introduced by Salma Yaqoob. In general, the discussions were quite seriously cramped, with a small number of floor speakers restricted to three minutes.

Racism and fascism

Salma Yaqoob (as usual) started with the personal-political: her experience of growing demonisation of Muslims in the wake of the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, which brought her into politics, moving on to a recent expensive racist smear-job leaflet about her which has been circulated to white voters only in the Sparkbrook constituency; and from there to mainstream politicians exploiting the Islamophobic climate, while making mealy-mouthed efforts to dissociate themselves from the British National Party. Terrorist radicalisation in this country arose from British state terrorist operations overseas, rather than the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq reducing the threat of terrorism here. It was not just the English Defence League which had crawled out of the woodwork; mainstream politicians had whipped

up issues around immigration and foreigners, to the benefit of the British National Party. They refused to admit that it was *their* neoliberal economic policies which had led to the present crisis.

She argued that Respect's stance, in contrast, was to insist on telling the truth. We had told the truth about unjust wars abroad; now we had to tell the truth about immigration. Britain benefited from immigration; even Boris Johnson admitted that half a million illegal immigrants in London needed to be legitimised, since if they were deported the city would grind to a halt. Society is richer for diversity and pluralism. Respect believes in the solidarity of all human beings. There is a 13,000 waiting list for social housing in Birmingham, which breeds resentment. If we invested in social housing, in infrastructure, in the hard-working working class people of this country, we would strike racism at the root. "We will fight together," she concluded, "black, white, Asian, Christian, Muslim, Jew and atheist, for the betterment of all."

This was not a sharply contentious speech. However, the second floor speaker, Stuart Richardson of *Socialist Resistance*, focussed his attention on 'the anti-fascist struggle'. The context of the rise of the far right was the decline of the framework of working class politics; this made space for the demagogues of fascism. The EDL had come to Birmingham three times. The first time was unopposed. In early August, Asian youth had mobilised against them, but had been regrettably isolated. Unite Against Fascism had issued a statement calling for re-

sistance to the EDL. But when they came the third time UAF refused to mobilise, and called for a police ban. In fact, the only police ban was on a 'Birmingham United' meeting called by a local journalist, and the EDL were unopposed. The EDL needed to be opposed whenever they came. And - anticipating the second debate - unless there was a broad left coalition in the coming general election, there would be massive space for the growth of the far right.

Among several very varied non-contentious contributions from the floor, comrade Richardson's was opposed by a number of speakers, including Ger Francis and Kevin Ovenden, and by Salma Yaqoob in her reply to the debate. The gist of these arguments was that as a matter of tactics the EDL was aiming to cause a 'race riot', which could then be exploited to smear Asian/Muslim communities and win votes for the far right. In this situation the problem was how to *avoid* the youth getting into a ruck with the police; if this happened, said comrade Ovenden, it would not be people like comrade Richardson who ended up in jail. It was tactically necessary to call for police bans, precisely in order to avoid being seen to call for a ruck. If they came into Sparkbrook, said another speaker, a confrontation would be inevitable; but turning small demonstrations in Birmingham city centre into street fights was tactically wrong. Salma Yaqoob argued that we were fighting a propaganda war, not just a barney. The police had initially repeated the EDL lie that it was not a racist organisation, but had been forced to recant on this by UAF's tactics.

Various blogosphere commentators have described the conference as a shift to the right, and this debate was one of the supposed symptoms. In fact, it is less clear. Both sides in the debate - the supposed 'left' as well as the supposed 'right' - framed the 'anti-fascist issue' within the populist 'broadest possible coalition approach' of UAF. Within this framework, Stuart Richardson's argument was standard far-left, head-banging, 'no platform' politics. His opponents were certainly correct to say that going for a ruck with small EDL demonstrations in Birmingham city centre would have been bad tactics. The defence of Sparkbrook, if it had been posed, or the defence of a Harrow mosque - which actually happened - is a different matter. The point is that the left's and migrant communities' response to far-right mobilisations has to both be, and be seen by broad masses to be, clearly *defensive*.

The question of calling for police bans undoubtedly does place *Socialist Resistance* on the left of the discussion, as against Ovenden and co. The evidence of history, including recent history, is perfectly clear: police bans are used primarily to assist the far right against its opponents. For the left to call for them serves merely to legitimise the use of similar legal moves against the left. But then, of course, this is also a difference with ... the SWP.

At a more fundamental level, comrade Richardson's argument - connected both to the commitment to UAF, and to his views on 'son of No2EU' - is fundamentally mistaken. As Salma Yaqoob and others said, in order to confront far-right racism it is necessary to confront the myths about immigration promoted by the mainstream media and parties. And in order to confront these myths, it is necessary to fight for public services - housing, health, welfare - to meet the needs of *all*. It follows that a revival of "the framework of working class politics" or a broad left coalition which was *unwilling* to take on the immigration myths head-on and raise clear demands on production for need, not for profit, would not succeed in defeating the far right. In this respect Salma Yaqoob and co-thinkers have made a partial but fundamental step to the *left* of the standard Anti-Nazi League/UAF ideology. And so too has Abjol Miah, who spoke to the same point - the need to fight for public services in order to undercut racism - in the second debate.

Electoral strategy

The sharper debate came in the second session, 'Resisting the cuts agenda', actually about electoral strategy. The session was opened by Nick Wrack raising a point of order: an emergency motion he and others had proposed calling for support to the 'son of No2EU' coalition, had been ruled out of order. The point was deferred to after the lunch break (after George Galloway had introduced the session and there had been a brief question and answer session). It then took the form of Clive Searle giving a conference arrangements committee report, which argued that neither this motion, nor another on anti-fascism moved after the deadline, were genuine emergency motions on the basis

'son of No2EU'

of new circumstances.

Nick Wrack now moved reference back of the report. Left unity had been discussed over the last year, and comrades who favoured support for a project of this sort had been constantly told that nothing concrete had been agreed. Now something concrete *had* been agreed. This was a development since the deadline for motions, and therefore justified an emergency motion. The proposal for reference back was, however, defeated by 79 votes to 34.

From the technical or procedural point of view the conference arrangements committee was right. Nick Wrack and his co-thinkers could perfectly well have proposed before the deadline a motion supporting 'son of No2EU' on the assumption that the negotiators for this coalition might agree something. However, from the points of view of a *clear, therefore democratic* vote on the issues, the decision was wrong. The issue was central to the debate. When it came to the vote at the end of the session, however, both the motions which had been proposed on this issue were accepted *nem con*. It is reasonably clear that this would not have been the case if Nick Wrack and co's motion had been allowed to go to the vote. In this sense the decision to rule the motion out of order *obfuscated* the decision-making process: the vote on the reference-back is left to stand as an indirect proxy for the scale of support for the 'Wrackite' position.

George Galloway's introduction to the session displayed his usual rhetorical skills, targeted on New Labour, on anti-immigration, and on the all-party consensus for cuts - and also on the advocates of support for 'son of No2EU'. Respect has to offer an alternative, because none of the mainstream parties will; the problem, he argued, is how to do so *effectively*. Respect is back on its feet and has a good chance of getting three MPs elected: "It is not for us to sew together a coalition which can get 1.8% of the vote. We want a breakthrough into the big time." Long-standing membership of far-left organisations seems, he said, to be an obstacle to unity because comrades find it hard to break bad habits.

In the question and answer session, among other contributors, Stuart Richardson argued for a coalition; and for the possibility of mass strikes to stop the cuts, as in Ireland. George Barrett, from Barking, asked what help Respect could give to fighting the fascists in Barking. Another contributor asked what vote George would recommend where Respect was not standing. Kevin Ovenden asked what the impact on politics would be if Respect won three MPs.

These questions set the framework for George Galloway's reply. In the first place, he argued for a Labour vote to try to minimise the Tory landslide. The Tories are worse than Labour because they have no connection with working people, while Labour depends on the trade unions for funding. In Glasgow North East, Labour was running "as insurgents" against the Scottish National Party, and the candidate made himself sound leftwing like a Respect candidate; he was not to be believed, but it reflects pressures Labour is under. Secondly, Respect had to make a choice whether to aim to coalesce with small forces to its left, or with larger forces who are now Labour supporters; this was a strategic choice which needed to be

discussed through and settled.

In response to George Barrett, he said that the answer was practically no help could be given and this would remain the case unless Respect got a lot bigger and had more resources. To parachute a far-left candidate into Barking would, if anything, *increase* Griffin's chances of success. Stuart Richardson, he said, was living in a fantasy world in relation to mass strikes against cuts. Respect had no leading trade unionists in a position to call for strikes, and in any case the unions had been so weakened that they would have difficulty sustaining such serious action. In some cases, like the NHS, what was needed was not strike action, but unity between workers and services users.

We should not call for a Labour vote across the board, Galloway said, but needed to consider the degree to which Labour candidates were implicated in government, and the degree of their venality, and also the likelihood that left candidates would win the seat rather than give the seat to the Tories. We should support Caroline Lucas (Green Party) in Brighton, and perhaps Peter Tatchell (also Green) in Oxford East. But we needed to avoid "auto-anti-Labourism" (nice to hear a phrase borrowed from this paper ... even if it was used in service of the *Morning Star's* line).

It was important to avoid illusions in the trade union movement, Galloway concluded; just as EP Thompson showed how the British working class was made, today it has been unmade as a class. We should keep nostalgia for mass strikes or storming the Winter Palace at home, and develop new ideas for a new world. Respect has, he repeated, a real chance of three MPs. If it achieves this goal it will become the magnet around which the left coalesces.

Debate

The afternoon session, after a speech by fraternal speaker Andrew Murray of the Stop the War Coalition, saw a continuation of this debate. Kevin Ovenden moved a motion from the outgoing NC, urging that the main aim is to win three MPs in the target seats, but beyond this the importance of flexibility; the Greens have agreed to stand down in Sparkbrook in favour of Salma Yaqoob; we could support, for example, the People's Party in Blaenau Gwent, Val Wise in Preston, or David Nellist in Coventry. Alan Thornett, moving a motion from Southwark, was carefully ambiguous on the disputed issues: though Respect needed to reach out to its right, he said, it was also necessary to collaborate with others to our left to build up a system of socialist candidates. We should not *only* support candidates who could win: for example, even if Dave Nellist could not win, we should support him against Bob Ainsworth. At the last resort we should vote Labour. And it was right for Respect to stand in its own name.

Ian Donovan, moving another motion on alliances, spoke in effect for the emergency motion not taken (to which he was a signatory). 'Son of No2EU' was more serious than comrade Galloway had suggested: the Communist Party of Britain was not a sect, and comrade Galloway writes for the *Morning Star*. The general secretaries of three trade unions were on the platform at the RMT conference. This was a partial break by the trade unions from Labour, and leftists should approach it "sympathetically".

Ger Francis said that comrades were presenting a divide between those for and those against unity. The question was, rather, what sort of unity. The advocates of 'son of No2EU' had wanted Respect to stand in the Euro elections (in fact, they wanted Respect to support No2EU in those elections). In contrast, by choosing not to stand then, Respect had prepared the way for a similar action by the Greens in Sparkbrook. 'Son of No2EU' was exaggerated: all three general secretaries on the platform had been speaking in a personal capacity. The scheme was too close to the old Socialist Alliance, which got marginal votes.

Nick Wrack said that no-one was denigrating Respect or advocating that Respect not stand in its own name. But we need "a new party which brings together all strands of working class opinion against New Labour". Respect candidates will only reach perhaps 2-3 million of an electorate of 20-30 million. Comrades were underestimating 'son of No2EU': these were not small, unpopular organisations. Many former Labour voters *will not* vote Labour. What alternative do we offer them? Salma Yaqoob said that the argument was about what sort of unity. By standing down in the Euro elections Respect showed the Greens we were able to work with others. Nick had opposed that.

Fred Leplat from *Socialist Resistance* argued for the need to collaborate with 'son of No2EU'. It was a big step to have two trade union general secretaries and a leftwing daily saying they would back candidates to the left of Labour. It was like what was happening in Europe with *Die Linke*. John Nicholson from Manchester said that unity required an offer of trust. That was what Respect had done with the Greens in the Euro elections. 'Son of No2EU' was the opposite: "You do not build up trust by announcing an unnamed coalition shortly before an election and after having refused to work with others in No2EU."

Curiously, George Galloway's reply to the debate was held until after the votes had been taken (mostly, as I said, *nem con*) and a message of support read out from Peter Cranie, the defeated Green candidate in the North West Euro constituency. Comrade Galloway's reply was quite sharply polemical. He argued that No2EU had "objectively helped Griffin into the European parliament". Now there was another coalition being set up with no name, which would adopt the same schematic approach to elections. He is against it. There is a clear choice of priorities: if everything is a priority, nothing is. Respect should focus on its target constituencies, not divert resources to building a broader coalition.

It is true, he said, that he writes for the *Morning Star*, but the Communist Party of Britain is electorally marginal and an electoral liability. He does not want to be in a coalition with communist and Trotskyist groups. He doubts that Brian Caton will be able to swing his members in the Prison Officers Association, who are not exactly leftwingers; or that the RMT or FBU will back the coalition when it comes to the crunch. Even if it gets off the ground, in the vast majority of constituencies the coalition will not be a serious contender, and the right answer will be to vote Labour. At all costs we need to avoid the possibility of being seen to help the Tories to a landslide victory. We have to be able

to say after the election: we stood where we were strong, and in a few constituencies on this or that principle against the sitting Labour MP, but in the main we did what we could to stop the Tories.

I spoke briefly to Nick Wrack in the tea break. He said - as Ian Donovan, and some *Socialist Resistance* supporters, also did - that there was an underlying issue of direction. Was the orientation of Respect to be to a 'left' including the Greens, or, on the other hand, to a working class movement? 'Son of No2EU' meant some very tentative steps towards a trade union break with Labour; it was important not to 'diss' these steps, but to encourage them.

A move to the right?

Was this a left-right debate and did it, as some blogosphere commentators suggest, amount to a move to the right? It is in my opinion much more ambiguous, and it is necessary to disentangle the different threads. In the first place, neither Galloway's underlying position that Labour is preferable to the Tories nor his and his co-thinkers' willingness to reach stand-down agreements with the Greens if possible is a novelty. Respect has *always* been a project for a 'left' defined in non-class or cross-class terms. So this is not a *move* to the right.

If anything, the arguments of Galloway, Yaqoob and Miah at this conference were posed *more* in terms of the working class and of collectivism than they were in previous years. (The cause is probably the crash and the threat of massive cuts to public services, which has forced everyone - even sections of the right - to think to some extent in these terms.)

Secondly, he and other platform and floor speakers showed considerable willingness to take on anti-immigration arguments directly and upfront. At the early Respect conferences, Galloway argued explicitly against opposition to immigration controls and I have no idea whether he has actually changed his view on this question (probably not). But the pro-migrant *emphasis* represents a substantial shift to the left. If it is followed in the run-up to the general election, and if the as-yet-unknown political platform of 'son of No2EU' is *anything* like that of No2EU itself, Respect will be well to the left of it on this front, on constitutional issues and on internationalism.

Thirdly, in my personal opinion Galloway's judgment of the British political dynamics in the run-up to the coming general election and of the likely success of No2EU is much more realistic than that of the advocates of support for 'son of No2EU'. The next general election *will* be fought under conditions of a realistic prospect of a Tory victory, and that *will* squeeze any 'left of Labour' vote, (as happened in 1979), precisely because - though Galloway did not use this expression - Labour remains a 'bourgeois workers' party'. 'Son of No2EU' remains - a little more than four months before the last possible date for an election - without a name, a political platform, target constituencies or candidates selected. It would take a miracle for it to make a serious impact. That said, Galloway and his co-thinkers' hopes for Respect winning three MPs are *also* probably overstated: the squeeze on 'left of Labour' votes will hit them, too.

In a sense the core issue is, on the one hand, the arguments of the

'Wrackites' that 'son of No2EU' represents a *class* movement because of its trade union basis; and, on the other, Galloway's arguments, casually thrown into his reply to questions, about an "unmaking of the British working class"; and connected, but sitting on one side, the issue of stand-down agreements with the Greens.

The 'Wrackite' argument is probably unsound. If 'son of No2EU' really involved trade unions turning out large numbers of rank and file activists as canvassers, fundraisers and local activists of the new project, we could really speak of a mass working class movement. No2EU itself, however, involved nothing of the sort. It would be surprising if it had, since the trade unions have never *directly* mobilised much more than money in support of the Labour Party - the grunt work being done originally by the affiliated socialist groups, later by the constituency and ward parties as a sort of socialist group.

Conversely, while in one sense Galloway is correct to talk of an "unmaking" - that is, the decay from within of the still formally and numerically imposing institutions of the working class - his argument is, like that of the Eurocommunists from which it is derived, overstated. Class is still a large feature of lived experience in Britain and one which has real influence on practical politics; and workers in industry and infrastructure, though fewer than they once were, retain very substantial numbers and are to a considerable extent organised in trade unions. It is this fact, which actually *underlies* the political dynamics of the general election, which Galloway throws at his opponents.

This in turn affects the issue of the Greens. The Greens are, quite simply, a semi-leftist petty bourgeois party: meaning by that that their *financial and activist base* is among professionals and small businesspeople. This is reflected in their conduct in local government office, which tends to be similar to that of the Liberal Democrats.

This does not imply that stand-down agreements with the Greens are unprincipled. On the contrary: it would be a perfectly principled tactic for a Communist Party, in order to overcome undemocratic hurdles to electoral representation, to enter into stand-down agreements with leftish petty bourgeois parties, as long as these agreements did not involve 'mixing the banners' or pretending that class did not matter.

Respect is, of course, not a Communist Party, but - as constructed - a cross-class, left-populist formation. But, paradoxically, the debate at its 2009 conference shows the 'right wing' in some ways closer to the idea of a Communist Party than the 'left wing'. The reason is that the 'right wing' recognises that Labour is in some degraded sense still a workers' party, and hence is groping towards a *policy* alternative to Labour. Meanwhile the 'left wing', believing Labour has ceased to be a 'bourgeois workers' party', is hoping to reinvent Labour on the basis of a trade union coalition without any real policy alternative to Labour ●

Notes

1. Eg, on Liam Mac Uaid's blog: <http://liammacuaid.wordpress.com/2009/11/15/respect-conference-2/>; on Andy Newman's *Socialist Unity* site: www.socialistunity.com/?p=4884; on Dave Osler's *Dave's Part*: www.davidosler.com/2009/11/respect_dead_end_for_the_serio.html.
2. www.therespectparty.net/breakingnews.php?id=767.

SWP

The fight gets ugly

Last year, the dispute between the majority faction of the Socialist Workers Party central committee and John Rees and his allies erupted, and in the aftermath all manner of smaller complaints began to arise; questions about the political basis of Respect, the party regime and much more.

At the time, the CC feigned approval for the “upsurge in democracy” of the 2008 pre-conference period, all the while attempting to head it off from seriously threatening the basis of the leadership’s entrenchment. The CC even proposed the election of a cosy little ‘democracy commission’, which would pretend to consider improvements in SWP democracy, and produce recommendations for the CC to pretend to take seriously.

This year, Rees and co have upped their game somewhat - their intervention is more political (comparatively speaking), and more organised. They even have a formally constituted faction, which the SWP constitution generously allows for the duration of the three-month pre-conference discussion period. Yet this time it is clear the CC majority has lost its enthusiasm for democratic practice, and has been busily exerting its bureaucratic powers to further marginalise the Reesites. The fight has begun to get ugly.

Of course, this attitude is partly understandable - it seems that Rees is readying for life outside the SWP in the medium term; the ostensible political differences, though real, remain those of tactical nuance, which have become retrospectively elaborated, and the bitterness of the dispute is wholly disproportionate to them. Yet the CC have responded with suspensions and expulsions alongside evasive polemics. The method is tried and tested: turn to organisational means so as to avoid the outbreak of generalised political debate.

In the first stages of the dispute, the CC suspended the membership of two comrades from the School of Oriental and African Studies, James Meadway and Claire Solomon. These comrades had the temerity to organise a series of meetings on their own initiative, under the title ‘Mutiny’. This appears to be a characteristically SWPish venture, attempting to get various ‘new layers’ of an ‘anti-capitalist’ bent in a room with a few tent-pole speakers ... and a number of SWP comrades, of course.

Unfortunately for comrades Solomon and Meadway, they happened to carry out this admirable burst of initiative *after* throwing their lot in with Rees. Thus the ‘Mutiny’ meeting was ‘discovered’ by the party police to be an attempt to build a ‘parallel organisation’. And now a third Rees supporter has fallen foul of the machine - Alex Snowden, an activist in Tyneside, has been expelled for “factionalising” - a frankly bizarre charge, given that he belongs to an officially-permitted faction.

In a piece on his expulsion, which appears on the *Socialist Unity* blog, Snowden alleges that he had been the target of sustained harassment by some members locally. His complaint to the SWP disputes committee resulted somewhat perversely in his own suspension. The ‘evidence’ against him consisted of “two private emails between members”¹.

The details of these sordid manoeuvres are paraded by the Reesites in the latest *Pre-conference Bulletin* (known as *Internal Bulletin* No2), which contains an entire section on current disputes committee cases.

“We do not normally publish contributions about ongoing cases the disputes committee is dealing with,” begins the section intro. Nevertheless, “a faction has been declared and therefore we have decided to publish the complaints. The CC refutes the allegations and will respond to the complaints in *IB* No3 after the cases have been dealt with.”

There are three such complaints published: three comrades (identified only by their first names) weigh in to defend Snowden, and two others to defend the Mutiny project and the ‘SOAS Two’. The third complaint has not resulted in formal disciplinary action - Ady Cousins, who ran a pro-SWP website, *Counterfire*, was called before leaders Alex Callinicos and Martin Smith on the basis that *Counterfire* was raising ‘concerns’ over party discipline. He was ordered to shut it down immediately, along with all linked Twitter and YouTube accounts, and barred from starting any more websites without the express permission of the CC.

Cousins complied with all these requests, but the more disturbing thing for SWP oppositionists is that he too found himself confronted in the way of evidence with private emails he had sent. Also reprinted in *IB* No2 is a letter, signed by all the recipients of the offending email, denying any role in the leak. Comrade Cousins is concerned that his private communications have been “accessed illegally by a third party”.

This is a fairly sensational allegation and, while not wildly implausible, does not outweigh in the balance of probabilities a more prosaic leak from one of his 17 comrades, whatever their protestations. In any case, dirty tricks are in operation: either the CC has spies in the Left Platform camp (very likely), or they have engaged in some kind of black-ops operation hacking email accounts.

Or, their supporters might protest, the whole thing is an elaborate provocation by Rees supporters - yet the most obvious candidate for the charge of provocation is the CC itself. It certainly has an interest in Rees concluding his split *before* conference, which may this time see a highly charged debate (even if, as we have seen, a dispute over what appears to be relatively small differences), a debate that may shake its authority and would quite possibly bring to the surface many other, more important, political issues. The pattern of expulsions and suspensions - of secondary Rees allies (not nobodies in the party but not truly prominent figures either) - also points towards a cynical attempt to push Rees into jumping early. “Is this what democracy looks like?” the authors of one of the complaints rhetorically ask. Indeed.

Democracy

What *do* the majority think democracy looks like? A rather muddled picture is painted by John Molyneux in the current issue of *International Socialism*, the SWP’s theoretical quarterly.² Molyneux is well known as a ‘loyal oppositionist’ - he has argued previously that the internal regime has a deleterious effect on the organisation as a whole. The comrade was also heavily involved in the democracy commission, and it seems he has been neutralised by the CC (who used complaints about the frustration of democracy as a weapon against Rees last year).

His article is long and, it is fair to say, meandering. The theoretical core of

his argument, such as it is, is directed at the writings of Robert Michels, a sociologist and disciple of Max Weber. Michels was a supporter of the social democracy before World War I (and a fascist after it), and wrote an extensive analysis of the tendencies for leaderships to entrench themselves bureaucratically within political parties.

Michel’s argument was essentially that, the larger an organisation got, the more basic administration was needed to keep it going, and so the less it was possible for a direct democracy to obtain. Representative regimes were thus inevitable, and just as inevitably gave rise to a distinction between the representative and the represented. The former would tend to be the best and brightest, and the latter the ‘incompetent’. Between these two features, a permanent separation was unavoidable, and a democratic regime impossible.

Molyneux actually gives considerable ground to this reactionary position. Axiomatic for him is the position (whose ultimate source, paradoxically like much else in SWP orthodoxy, is Ernest Mandel) that isolation from the class struggle breeds sectarianism. Isolation, therefore, is the primary danger. The ‘Leninist’ vanguard party maintains the most democratic possible internal regime, but on the basis that membership is restricted to the most advanced and ‘serious’ activists, prepared to submit to discipline. This is “necessarily a minority of the class” - how to square the circle with avoiding isolation?

He uses an example from SWP history: “to have restricted the membership of the SWP [in the 1970s] to the criteria of commitment required by the Bolsheviks would, in our non-Bolshevik conditions, have reduced the party to the low hundreds at best and would anyway have been false ‘toy Bolshevism’, since such fanatical ‘revolutionaries’ would have lost the other key pillar of Leninism: the ability to ‘maintain the closest contact, and - if

you wish - merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people’ [the quotation is Lenin’s - JT]. Consequently circumstances obliged us to operate with a substantial proportion of members who were not sufficiently engaged to exercise democratic control over the party.”

We should not imagine the problem is completely unreal - the far left is in a disorganised and atomised state, and attracts as well as the hardest class fighters a fair cross-section of inexperienced activists, dilettantes and eccentrics. Many of these people are *not* suited to active political partisanship when they first come into contact with serious political organisations, and it is necessary to cultivate them outside the organisation before admitting them to membership.

In Molyneux’s example the SWP *internalised* this periphery. And its existence within the organisation actually functioned as a weapon for the apparatchiks against democratic norms. It alone wielded the right to decide who was or was not a legitimate source of political criticism. ‘Difficult’ oppositions could be decried as petty bourgeois dilettantes.

A more serious difficulty presents itself in the implied approach to cadre development. How exactly are we to harden these elements up to the point that they *are* allowed to vote at conferences? Molyneux says very little - but the communist approach must surely be to *incorporate* them into debates within the movement, to steel them in holding and defending political positions, and in self-critical reflection where necessary. To train people to intervene effectively in party life means throwing them into that culture.

This, needless to say, necessitates a vastly different culture to the one the SWP operates. Internal party debates - where genuine questions of security are not paramount - should take place openly, before the members, before the periphery and before the working class. They must become the property of the whole movement, so

the party can become a serious pole of attraction within that movement.

Debate also has to be *permanent*. That, of course, means an end to the ridiculous limitation of serious party-wide discussion to the pre-conference period. It also means an end to the ban on permanent factions, which simply guillotines debates after a routine show of hands. Settling questions is a living political matter, not a formality, and may take one conference or 10.

Molyneux has a lot of nothing to say about permanent factions. They were disastrous for the International Marxist Group in the 1970s, apparently, but its co-thinkers in the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire maintained unity among a whole host of permanent factions (including, it should be noted, the French co-thinkers of the SWP). The comrade throws up his hands in defeat: the real question, he says, lies elsewhere.

The truth is that the IMG’s decline had nothing to do with ‘permanent factions’, and everything to do with the unprincipled politics of that organisation, coupled with the manipulative means employed by the ‘centre’ faction (one of the only truly permanent factions in the group) to best its rivals. The IMG was parasitic on various official left patrons; it was these that pulled the factions apart most decisively in the end.

It is these politics - or variants thereof - that inform *both* principal factions of the current SWP dispute. They are, in the long run, incompatible with principled and democratic unity. The suppression of permanent factions, in the end, achieves nothing - it just makes unprincipled politics harder to shift, and ensures that disputes tend towards damaging splits. The SWP remains very much on course for one of those ●

James Turley

Notes

1. www.socialistunity.com/?p=4885.
2. *International Socialism* October: www.isj.org.uk/index.php?id=586&issue=124.



Smith and Callinicos gang up on Rees

Bring Loftus to account

There was one significant omission in Jim Moody's article on the sell-out of the postal strike by the Communication Workers Union leadership, which allowed CWU president Jane Loftus to come out of it looking rather good, when actually she has been an utter disgrace ('Militants condemn sell-out', November 12).

Loftus, a long-standing member of the Socialist Workers Party and therefore supposedly a revolutionary, is also a member of the CWU's postal executive committee (PEC), which voted unanimously on November 5 to accept the interim agreement and call off the strikes, just as the strength of the postal workers was starting to be realised. This goes completely against the position of Loftus's organisation. *Socialist Worker* has rightly stated that "Leaders of the postal workers' union were wrong to suspend strikes at Royal Mail last week ... There was no reason for the union to sign up to the agreement. The proposed escalation of strike action - that would have seen two 24-hour strikes in close succession last week - had widespread support within the union" (November 14).

Another *Socialist Worker* article by Cambridge CWU rep Paul Turnbull calls on postal workers to "restart the strikes immediately". Yet neither questions why Jane Loftus did not vote against this sell-out - indeed her name is not mentioned at all. Activists in the SWP and militants in the CWU need to ask what is going on here. The SWP's newspaper, *Socialist Worker*, is arguing one thing, while their highest placed member in the CWU is doing the exact opposite. Like other socialists all over the country, SWP activists put massive amounts of time and energy into supporting the postal workers and their strike. No wonder *Socialist Worker* might not want them to know that their own comrade on the CWU leadership colluded in undermining that hard work.

Many would expect better from a member of the SWP, but this kind of behaviour is not an aberration. Back in 2007 Loftus failed to speak out against the rotten deal which ended that dispute. The only PEC members who openly campaigned against the 2007 sell-out were Dave Warren and Phil Brown. Loftus also colluded with the bureaucracy by keeping their secrets and withholding vital information from the membership during closed-door negotiations with management. The SWP failed to use this information to warn strikers of the impending sell-out and call on workers to organise independently of the bureaucracy. Again, back in 2003-04 Loftus voted for the Major Change agreement, a management package that involved job cuts.

Loftus is certainly not alone, however. Her actions are reminiscent of those of Martin John and Sue Bond in the Public and Commercial Services union. Similarly, these were the SWP's leading comrades in a union with a left general secretary (Mark Serwotka) and leadership (dominated by the Socialist Party in England and Wales). The SWP has consistently downplayed (or kept silent about) any criticisms it may have of left union leaders such as these in order to try and draw them into supporting various SWP 'united fronts'. In the process the SWP's closest to them in the trade unions clearly bought into the 'awkward squad' hype and are in thrall to these bureaucrats.

There are plenty of perks to the job and other social pressures which weigh upon those who enter the upper echelons of the union structures. A revolutionary party should be constantly on guard and fighting against the effects of these pressures on its militants, yet the actions of the SWP leadership often do just the opposite of that. Their desire to get close to and win the approval of 'left' union leaders creates a culture of diplomatic silence and conciliationism, while what is necessary for accountability within the unions is open debate and rank and file independence from the bureaucracy.

As members of the PCS national execu-



CWU president addresses union rally

tive committee Martin John and Sue Bond had failed to support SWP policy within the union on a number of occasions, and then in 2005 they knowingly went against SWP directions and policy to vote with Serwotka and SPEW for a scandalous pension deal which sold away the rights of new entrants. Only after regular exposures of their actions (not least in the reports of CPGB member Lee Rock in the *Weekly Worker*), and growing complaints from other SWP members, was the leadership forced to take action against these renegades.

Initially *Socialist Worker* ignored the actions of its members on the PCS NEC, while condemning the deal as a betrayal of future generations of workers - sound familiar? Even after disciplinary action was begun Sue Bond got off very lightly with a letter of apology in which she stated: "I do regret the position our vote left comrades in, and the significant implications for the left in other public sector unions. I can certainly assure comrades that I have no intention of breaking party discipline in the future" (*Weekly Worker* November 17 2005). Martin John flounced out of the SWP the day before he was due to face a meeting of the SWP fraction within PCS. It was not until four weeks after the pensions deal was voted on that news of all this made it into *Socialist Worker*.

However, it is not just a few individual SWP members succumbing to the pressures of the bureaucracy. The SWP itself has consistently failed to use its positions of influence within unions to build genuine rank and file movements which are independent of the union bureaucracy. The SWP-sponsored occasional publication, *Post Worker*, does not openly take on the likes of general secretary Billy Hayes and his deputy Dave Ward when they act against the interests of their members. Rather, it regularly gives over significant space for them to promote themselves. It might as well be an official union publication.

SWP members may well wonder about the priorities of their leadership, when Alex

Snowden - a Reesite Left Platform supporter - has been expelled for "factionalism" (during the pre-conference period when temporary factions are allowed), yet Jane Loftus seems to have got off scot-free for a blatant act of treachery. Comrades in the SWP need to ensure that Jane Loftus is held to account and faces disciplinary action. She must be called before a fraction meeting of SWP comrades in the CWU and made to explain her actions. She must either recant and campaign openly against the acceptance of the interim agreement in line with SWP policy, or it is she who should face expulsion. Beyond this, major questions have to be asked about whether she can continue to be the SWP's leading representative within the CWU, given her track record. And all of this must be done openly with full reports in *Socialist Worker*.

I have been told that CWU executive members can only subsequently campaign against majority decisions if they immediately registered their dissent. If this is the case, then Loftus must be made to step down from the PEC in order to campaign within the CWU accordingly.

Prior to this latest sell-out, *Socialist Worker* quite correctly asked the question, "How do we fight when union leaders waver?" Matthew Cookson wrote: "The best way to take the struggle forward is to organise workers on a rank-and-file level. A strong organisation of this nature could support the officials as long as they were representing the union members, but could act independently the moment their leaders began to look for some way to settle their dispute unfavourably" (October 31).

Yes, but the actions of leading SWP members continually undermine and sabotage attempts at forging such rank and file organisation. Comrades in the SWP need to think much more deeply about the role their organisation plays within the unions. They must be free to use *Socialist Worker* as a tool to explore why it is their leading representatives in the unions end up acting against the interests of the working class ●

Dave Isaacson

Fighting fund

Looking good

November's fund is continuing to look good, with another £310 coming in over the last week.

Over two-thirds of that (£205) was made up by standing orders, including two whoppers (£100 from AM and £70 from MM). Thanks to all our SO donors, including all those who rarely get a personal mention - you are all very much appreciated, whether you are one of the big guns like AM and MM or one of the many who stump up a regular fiver.

Apart from those standing orders, I got a helping hand in the shape of a £70 gift from comrade TB. This didn't take the form of cash, but the provision of some much needed books. OK, so it's not new money, but it stopped us having to deplete our bank account by that amount - same difference.

Thanks also to comrade CM, who sent

us a nice £35 cheque with his letter for publication. In case you were wondering, comrade, the letter arrived too late for this week's paper, but it is first in the queue for next week!

Finally CWU militant DY donated £5 via PayPal in appreciation of our coverage of the postal dispute. He was the only one of 13,744 online readers to make a contribution last week.

Our total now stands at £819 towards the £1,000 we need for our November fighting fund - but how about a few more of you internet readers showing your appreciation? ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to Weekly Worker

What we fight for

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

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

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

■ Communists oppose the US-UK occupation of Iraq and stand against all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

■ All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

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weekly worker

Glasgow North East by-election

Nats and left take a beating

Thursday November 12 saw the Scottish National Party take a proper kicking in the Glasgow North East by-election. The election held to replace the former Commons speaker, Michael Martin, following his resignation during the expenses scandal earlier this year, was predicted to be a close contest between Labour and the SNP. The nationalists had hoped for a repeat of the victory in the neighbouring constituency and formerly safe Labour seat, Glasgow East, in the July 2008 by-election.

Yet first-time Labour candidate Willie Bain won with an overwhelming two-thirds majority - a devastating blow to the SNP. This reversal of fortunes calls into question Alex Salmond's prediction that the SNP can win 20 seats in the general election, while Labour hopes it represents a change in voters' attitudes that might see a recovery in time for a general election that must be held by no later than June 3 2010.

Glasgow North East is one of the safest Labour seats in the UK, but the Labour Party was not taking any chances. After receiving a kick up the backside from its traditionally loyal supporters in Glasgow East, Labour certainly could not afford to lose such a seat so close to a general election. It threw vast amounts of money and resources into the campaign, bringing in 450 activists from across the country to go out on the streets and get traditional Labour voters out to the polling stations.

While the result is a massive victory for Labour, it remains to be seen if the party can make a sufficient recovery in time for the 2010 general election. If David Cameron successfully leads the Tories to power, then Holyrood would not be the only place where Labour finds itself in opposition. With the prospect of a Conservative administration in Westminster with next to no support in Scotland and a pro-independence party heading the Scottish government, the national question could be at the forefront of British politics over the next few years.

The SNP would probably have had a more successful result had the by-election been called in August, as had initially been expected. Then, they would have been able to make more political capital out of the media furore surrounding the expenses scandal. As it was, the SNP's campaign got off to a rocky start - David Kerr, a former BBC journalist, was only selected after two previously nominated candidates had to step down in controversial circumstances; and there is disquiet among SNP ranks over suggestions that Kerr did not get full backing from his own party.

Furthermore, many SNP activists are reported to be angry at decisions that have been taken by their party's leadership, which are perceived to be anti-Glasgow, such as the scrapping of the Glasgow airport rail link. Former leader Gordon Wilson has openly criticised the SNP for having misplaced priorities - he claims the party has become too focussed on the Scottish parliament and is not devoting enough time to attacking Labour and winning support on the streets. It seems the



Gail and Tommy Sheridan: perjury case means no left unity platform

SNP's image is beginning to tarnish a little.

The Labour Party ran its campaign as an opposition party, portraying the SNP as Edinburgh-centric bureaucrats with no concern for the plight of impoverished Glasgow North East. Candidate Willie Bain adopted a left stance - talking about fighting poverty and putting more resources into child benefit - and made a point of being out on the picket lines in support of the postal workers.

Labour was one of only two parties to come away from the by-election in a stronger position. While the Nats suffered a crushing defeat, the Tories - in third place with 5.22% - came close to losing their deposit. Of course, the Conservative Party hardly expected to do well in this traditional Labour constituency. Similarly in the Glasgow East by-election the Tories achieved only 6.3%. The only other party to have emerged stronger was the British National Party, though this should not be exaggerated. BNP support went up from 3.5% in 2005 to 4.9% in a low turnout, but the increase in its actual vote was lower - from 920 to 1,013. Nevertheless, there seems to have been a real Nick Griffin effect in Scotland following his controversial appearance on BBC's *Question time* in October.

As for the far left, it was not a pret-

ty sight. Solidarity's Tommy Sheridan came off best with 3.86%, beating the Liberal Democrats into fifth place. The Socialist Labour Party did very badly indeed, gaining only 0.23% of the vote. This proves (if there was doubt in anyone's mind) that the respectable 14.2% polled by the SLP in 2005 resulted from a case of mistaken identity (or at least 14% of it did). Many people who put their cross next to 'Socialist Labour Party' had mistaken this for 'Scottish Labour Party' - Michael Martin stood as 'speaker' and, as is the tradition, was not opposed by the Tories and Lib Dems.

The Scottish Socialist Party received a humiliating 0.74%, down from 4.9% in 2005. Given that the combined left vote was appalling, the various organisations will now either have to undertake a sober assessment of the situation or put a hell of a lot of creativity into trying to spin this into something positive.

Interestingly, for the first time there is a significant difference between the results of the SSP and Solidarity - not that either has anything to write home about. Since Solidarity split from the SSP in 2006, the two organisations have been waging a battle to pull in the higher vote. Half a percent here or there has produced smugness on the one side and recrimination on

the other. In this case Solidarity's 'success' can be attributed entirely to the celebrity status of Sheridan himself, as compared with the SSP's unknown candidate, Kevin McVey (although it has to be said that before Sheridan's defamation case against the *News of the World* he surely would have expected at least double the support he got last week). When Solidarity stood Trisha McLeish in the Glasgow East by-election, the SSP and Solidarity gained a similar, meagre share of the vote.

The SSP's poor result has led to questions being raised within its ranks as to whether it is worth continuing to contest elections. While some claim that the response on the doorstep had been positive and had led to contacts and recruits, this was not reflected in the vote itself. Such poor results publicly demonstrate the SSP's demise as a viable organisation - once it could envisage recruiting a significant membership, court trade union affiliation and gain a respectable return in the polls.

The Socialist Workers Party will see the electoral failings of the left (and slight gains of the far right) as an argument for an electoral unity agreement across Britain. And, if Respect was anything to go by, the SWP would likely let the trade union officials, left reform-

ist personalities and petty bourgeois careerists set the political agenda rather than push for socialist politics to be brought to the fore.

Despite the split with John Rees, Lindsey German and Chris Nineham, this continues to be the case. Alex Callinicos recently tried to justify this on Facebook. The SWP as the SWP has opposed immigration controls and stands for open borders. Yet when it enters a "coalition of the broader left" such as Respect these principles go out of the window. They "would have been unacceptable" to those who came from "a non-revolutionary background". This apparently, "is the kind of compromise" that is "unavoidable" when one is trying to build a so-called "united front". Despite such miserable opportunism neither Bob Crow, Peter Taaffe, Robert Giffiths nor George Galloway sees the SWP as trustworthy.

In fact, because of the split in and collapse of the SSP, Scotland has been entirely marginalised when it comes to the wider politics of the far left. Sheridan and his remaining handful of followers, along with the International Socialists (the Committee for a Workers' International in Scotland), are praying for a trade union-inspired electoral coalition to rescue them by the time of the general election. Meanwhile, the SSP has refused to get involved in any left unity initiatives until the 'Sheridan issue is resolved' (in other words, if Sheridan has been jailed or otherwise removed as a key player). With the perjury case against Tommy and Gail delayed until the spring due to his change of lawyer, it is therefore very little chance of a left unity platform that includes the SSP in time for 2010.

However, with the left in such disarray and having conducted itself so badly over the past few years, it barely deserves the support of the working class. Unless there is meaningful unity around a partyist project based on Marxism, not the opportunist politics of separatism, the left in Scotland looks set to continue down the path to extinction ●

Sarah McDonald

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