

Workers ***ACTION***

No.15

March–April 2002

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Bush and Blair **– the evil axis**

- **Afghanistan – aid not bombs**
- **The original Assassins**
- **Hard times for asylum seekers**
- **Campaign against privatisation**
- **The contradictions of the
Socialist Alliance**
- **Defend the profane!**
- **Leeds United and racism**
- **Reviews, archive and more**

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**PO Box 7268
London E10 6TX**
workers.action@btinternet.com

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

Workers Action welcomes
articles for publication and
correspondence

Editorial team:
Charli Langford
Philip Marchant
Richard Price

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Editorial

Hands off Iraq!

Towards the end of January, US President George Bush's war cabinet decided that their policy of daily bombing and economic sanctions against Iraq was insufficient, and that it was now time to bring down the Iraqi government and install a friendly regime. According to reports in the press, an assault on Iraq involving up to 200,000 US troops will be mounted later this year.

The *Guardian* of February 14 contains a wealth of planning detail. Already the air force, army and navy headquarters are set up in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. Three joint military exercises involving Turkey, Israel and the US will occur within the next few months. The main concern of the military planners is that, since the aim this time would be to topple Saddam Hussein, the Iraqis, having nothing to lose, might use chemical and biological weapons against concentrations of US troops and the population of Israel. Consequently, a programme of intensive bombing of missile sites and anywhere else suspected of containing the potential to deliver weapons of mass destruction would precede any invasion. The CIA are reportedly training Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq and Shia forces in Kuwait – presumably these will not be 'illegal combatants' – and will also launch a campaign of sabotage.

The excuse for the war will be provided by the US demanding a more rigorous programme of weapons inspections than Iraq could possibly agree to when the United Nations reviews the current international sanctions against Iraq in May. A US intelligence source is quoted as saying that Bush 'will not take yes for an answer'.

Of course, the US – and the UK – have been conducting a low-intensity war with Iraq, mainly against radar facilities and anti-aircraft positions, for the last ten years, since the northern and southern no-fly zones were imposed following the 1991 war. But there is a world of difference between this and a mass ground invasion designed to overthrow the government.

With the war in Afghanistan out of the headlines, Bush clearly requires something more dramatic to demonstrate to the US people that he is pursuing his 'war against terrorism'. Rounding up those suspected of organising the September 11 attacks is a long, complicated and, some would say, near-impossible task. At any rate, it's essentially a police operation and not very photogenic. This is the reason for announcing now that Iraq has been selected as the next target.

The purpose of the war against Afghanistan has been to demonstrate to the rest of the world what lies in store for

them if they should resist US policy – just as the dropping of the atomic bombs in 1945 was a warning to the Soviet Union rather than a necessary element in the defeat of Japan. Bush's notorious 'axis of evil' speech and the \$45 billion increase in military spending are the ideological and practical preparations for the stepping up of US military intervention around the world against anyone who is less than wholly committed to the American way. Iraq, Iran and North Korea are merely the top of the list; there is no suggestion whatsoever that these states were involved in the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, but they are obstructing the full commercial exploitation of their resources by Western companies.

The enormous fire-power at the disposal of the US has enabled it to comprehensively rout the Taliban, which has proved less durable a force than many imagined. Mopping up operations continue, but with the installation of a new group of warlords who won't trouble the US by asking to see the evidence against bin Laden, the focus of the US war against terror is shifting from Afghanistan to Iraq. Has the war in Afghanistan been a success for the US? Superficially, yes, but in fact it makes terrorist attacks on US – and British – targets much more likely than before. And the US will find it increasingly difficult to maintain the support of its allies if it insists on preparing for an invasion of Iraq.

But, of course, the US can 'go it alone' if it wants. Its military budget is now 40 per cent of the world total, and equal to that of the next 19 biggest spenders put together. That's why the building of an effective anti-war movement in the US will be the critical task of the next period. In Britain and the rest of Europe, we can assist this process by building the broadest possible movement against war – be it a war in Afghanistan, Iraq or elsewhere. We must utilise the differences between the US and the European countries, which have less stomach for a conflagration in the Middle East, and campaign for our governments to break the coalition with Bush and end the sanctions against Iraq.

Which makes the 'Stop the War' campaign in Britain so important. Rather than packing up and going home, we need to be educating, agitating and organising against the possibility of far more extensive and bloody wars than the Afghan conflict. Bush and his cronies have kindly given us a few months' warning of their future plans. We need to use that space to build a huge, international opposition to further wars.

WA

Afghanistan needs aid not bombs

by Simon Deville

What have North Korea, Iran and Iraq got in common? Well Iran and Iraq share a border, but apart from that, not much else. Unless of course your name is George Bush, in which case they are the 'world's most dangerous regimes' which threaten the US with 'the world's most dangerous weapons'. Anyone who saw Dubya's State of the Union address will have seen a new US leader, emboldened by success in Afghanistan, not afraid of criticism or of appearing stark raving bonkers to the rest of the world. Was I alone in expecting him to proceed to talk about 'purity of essence' and the commie plot to fluoridate the water supply?

The first phase in the 'war on terrorism' has been a resounding success according to the US and British governments. While the stated aim at the outset of the war was to capture Osama bin Laden 'dead or alive', the removal of the Taliban government only became part of the equation when they asked for evidence that bin Laden was responsible for the September 11 suicide attacks. Now, the Taliban has been removed, pro-Western warlords have been put into government, and nobody has a clue where bin Laden is.

Despite this the war has been a success. The world's largest propagator and exporter of state terror, the United States, has edged closer to 'full spectrum dominance' – the US right wing's euphemism for world domination. This dream – or nightmare – can never be realised in its entirety, nor could it possibly lead to greater stability. However, in US terms the war makes absolute sense, at least in the short term. While the signs may show the US to be declining economically as the world superpower, this can be made up for in part by the US reasserting its global military dominance. Bush's support soars and the domestic economy benefits from a large dose of military Keynesianism – a massive rise in an already enormous military budget – to drag it out of recession.

What is more questionable, though, is what Tony Blair hopes to gain from his fawning support for the US military. While it may be in line with New Labour's general subservience to the rich and powerful, his stance has won him few friends internationally, with some of his actions, such as his visits to Syria and Pakistan, proving complete disasters. While a narrow majority here supports the war, there is substantial opposition as well. Even most proponents of the war support it grudgingly, believing it to be a necessary evil. Blair certainly hasn't been able to use the war to whip up a tide of national chauvinism, as is normally the case. Indeed the anti-war protests have proved to be the largest left-wing mobilisations in Britain for around a decade.

In human terms the war is an absolute disaster. Following three years of drought and failed crops, famine had already begun to hit Afghanistan. Then came the war, and the flow of aid stopped. The destruction of what little infrastructure was left has had a devastating impact, and the bombing of civilians continues to this day. The removal of a government that, for all its horrendous crimes, did ensure that the roads were free from banditry and that aid could get

through, has clearly added to the problems. It doesn't take a genius to work out that the famine must be far worse than was predicted before the war, and that thousands must be starving to death, particularly in the more remote parts of the country. This humanitarian disaster that Britain and the US have made many times worse is barely mentioned by the government of either country. How many thousands are likely to be killed or maimed over the next few years as a result of unexploded cluster bombs we can only guess at.

One of the reasons Bush may have singled out Iran as one of the most dangerous regimes in the world is that, despite its hostility to the Taliban, the Iranian government has been sending aid into parts of western Afghanistan, building roads and schools, and allowing refugees to enter its territory.

The treatment and status of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay by the US military has received a lot of media attention. Since tearing up the Kyoto agreement when it first took office, the Bush administration has insisted upon its right to do what the hell it likes, regardless of international law or agreements. Its invention of the 'illegal com-

STOP THE WAR COALITION

**STOP
BUSH
AND
BLAIR'S
WAR**



- Stop US torture of prisoners
- Hands off Somalia and Iraq
- Stop the bombing now

**DEMONSTRATE
SATURDAY 2 MARCH**
1pm, Hyde Park, London ● Supported by CND

batant' category to place the prisoners outside the jurisdiction of either the Geneva convention or of the US constitution is little more than a diplomatic nicety, while sticking two fingers up to the rule of law. Pro-war apologists for Blair have argued that he can have more influence over US foreign policy as a 'critical friend', but to date Blair's 'solidarity' has if anything simply encouraged Bush's unilateralism.

Others believed that the West would now be forced to be more critical of Israel. But barely a month after expressing support for some limited form of Palestinian independence, the US and Britain reverted to form and fell in behind Sharon's terror campaign. Sharon has declared war on the entire Palestinian Authority, pointing to the US war against the Taliban and al-Qaida as justification. Both Britain and the US have lectured Arafat on the need to 'rein in the terrorists', while Arafat himself is effectively under house arrest.

Elsewhere, the US has insisted upon both the Philippine and Yemeni governments repressing and torturing Islamic militants, and has threatened war with Sudan, Somalia and Iraq. The heightened tensions over the Afghanistan war have led to the escalation of the conflict over Kashmir, leaving India and Pakistan on the brink of war, their mutual border becoming the world's longest minefield. That this war has been described as a war to make the world safe from terrorism is baffling. In reality, it can only have increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks in the future.

The Stop the War Coalition, CND and others seized the initiative last year and organised two of the most successful demonstrations in a decade. However, it hasn't been possible to sustain a permanent level of hyper-activity. The traditional Christmas break and the false perception that the war is over have had a demobilising effect. It is vitally important that the anti-war movement re-focuses on building at grass-roots level in preparation for the national demonstration in central London on March 2.

Just as important is that Stop the War, Labour Against the War and others do the nitty-gritty work of winning over the labour movement from the bottom up in opposition to New Labour's war-mongering and the trade union leaders' complicity in this. Trade union leaders must be forced into unequivocal opposition, and must not be allowed to duck a fight on other fronts in the interests of 'national unity against terrorism' in the way they did at last year's TUC and Labour Party conferences. Trade union and Labour Party branches must demand that the government ends its support for the US war on terrorism and instead instigates a massive aid programme for the people of Afghanistan.

WA

The original Assassins

Nick Davies discovers more insights into the causes of terrorism and religious fanaticism in *The Assassins*, F.A. Ridley's classic study of the medieval Islamic sect, than in a clutch of new books

A visit to W.H. Smith's, where the shelves are groaning with new or hurriedly reissued titles on Islam, terrorism, or a combination of the two, tells us that publishing is one industry that is doing very nicely post-September 11. At least Yvonne Ridley had the honesty to admit that her book was written in six days. Some of the more blatantly tenth-rate bandwagon-jumpers make her *In the Hands of the Taliban* look like a labour of love.

Most of the better books are written from the vantage point of liberal scholarship or from the murky world where journalism meets intelligence. In line with the spirit of the times it is virtually impossible to find anywhere an analysis of Islam or terrorism, or both, from a socialist perspective. Surely for this it is not necessary to go back to a book written more than 60 years ago, and reissued in 1988, about events 900 years ago? F.A. Ridley's *The Assassins* might be such a book. It is an account of the original 'Assassins', whose name was a corruption of the Arabic *hashishiyyn* (referring to their drug of choice) and from whose *modus operandi* we get our word for political murderer. Ridley's book is also an analysis of the medieval Islamic world, of the dynamics of political and religious sects, and of terrorism.

The Assassins emerged in 1080 when their founder, Hasan-ibn-Sabah, fled Egypt after a dynastic power struggle within the Ismaili sect, which from the ninth century had established the powerful Fatimid state there. The state derived its authority, and its name, from its rulers' descent from Mohammed's daughter, and challenged the fairly theoretical writ of the Abbasid Caliph based in Baghdad. The Ismailis were a heretical offshoot of Shi'ism, which in turn had been, and still is, opposed to orthodox Sunni Islam. The Assassins established a Persian and a Syrian branch, carried out audacious and spectacular murders of opponents, and played their opponents, Muslim and Christian, off against each other, while operating from near-impregnable mountain fortresses which withstood all assault for 200 years.

At first glance, especially from a post-September 11 standpoint, the similarities

between the Assassins and al-Qaida seem almost too striking to be true. A member of a minority branch of Islam (Osama bin Laden is a member of the austere Wahabi sect) falls out with the rulers of his own country, takes to a mountain hideout from which he directs his followers to strike terror into his opponents, all of whom think they can use him for their own ends. Even the cocktail of fascination and terror with which the Western media treat bin Laden is mirrored in the entry into Crusader folklore of Sinan-u'd-Din Rashid, ruler of the Syrian branch of the Assassins from 1169-1193, whom the Europeans named, due to a picturesque mistranslation, 'the Old Man of the Mountains'.

However, Ridley's own not very successful analogies between the Fatimids and the Third International, and between the Assassins and the Fourth, act as a warning against such comparisons. In this case, a comparison of the Assassins with al-Qaida would be both banal and reactionary. Banal, because it would lump together two very different phenomena on the basis of what, superficially, they appear to have in common. The Assassins saw themselves as

Anti-war contacts

Stop the War Coalition
PO Box 3739, London E5 8EJ
www.stopwar.org.uk
tel: 07951 235 915
email: office@stopwar.org.uk

Labour Against the War
PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU
tel: 020 8985 6597
fax: 020 895 6785
email: latw@gn.apc.org
Affiliation/sponsorship of LATW is £10 for organisations, £5 for individuals

defenders of the intellectual achievements of the medieval Islamic world against the decadence of the Baghdad Caliphate, the philistinism of the Seljuk Turks (already acting as the Abbasids' minders) and the last of the great barbarian invasions, the Crusades from Western Europe. Their religious beliefs became so estranged from Islamic orthodoxy that they were regarded as heretical freethinkers; Ridley defines their ideology as 'philosophic nihilism'. The paradox is that this freethinking and intellectual sophistication were defended by deadly ruthlessness, iron discipline, and the unquestioning loyalty of the *fida'i*, or 'slayers' – 'scepticism protected by fanatics, free-thought subsisting in an age of faith, thanks to utter submission', as Ridley puts it.

Almost 1000 years later, on the other hand, a Saudi playboy turns petulant religious bigot with a grudge, and allies his organisations of gangsters and murderers with one of the most hideously repulsive regimes in recorded history, which ruled Afghanistan with summary executions and mutilations, and, in enslaving half the population, declared war on the progress that had been made in that country in terms of the liberation of women and the establishment of a secular, civil society.

It would be reactionary to compare the Assassins and al-Qaida because it would encourage the idea that there is a kind of Arab or Islamic 'essentialism', which more or less says that religious fanaticism and terrorism are what Arabs and Muslims tend to get up to, whether in the 12th century or the 21st. This essentialism is implicit in the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, after Samuel Huntington's book of that name, which has been latched onto by right-wing politicians and journalists on both sides of the Atlantic. These would-be guardians of Western tolerance and pluralism (as a justification for the pulverising of Afghan civilians) forget or ignore the fact that militant Islam owes its present strength to the crises of secular nationalism and socialism, crises which the Nasser-haters and the Ben Bella-haters in Washington, London and Paris did all they could to accelerate. They forget the 50-year struggle of the Palestinians against the Zionist state, the latter armed and supported by the 'civilised' West, a policy which acts as an efficient recruiting sergeant for Hamas and Islamic Jihad. They forget the years of deceit and exploitation necessitated by the West's addiction to Middle-Eastern oil. Most ironically, they forget the bankrolling of Islamic militants by the West in Afghanistan in the 1980s in order to destabilise the Soviet-backed PDPA regime, which, for all its faults, and there were many, did allow women to be educated, to work, and to walk uncovered

and unchaperoned without being battered.

Ridley places the Assassins and their methods in their social and political context: the decaying civilisation of the medieval Middle East. He makes the point that in a society dominated by religion – a theocracy such as the Caliphate – any movement of social or political revolt must take the form of religious sectarianism. Most importantly, he emphasises that individual, clandestine terror is historically the weapon of the weak against the strong, and that 'terrorist' is how the strong will always label their enemies if they fight back. To use an expression coined by the Jesuits, whose mentality, according to Ridley, bears a marked resemblance to that of the Assassins, 'the animal is wicked, it defends itself when attacked'. This is a virtual summation of the attitude of the US to its opponents, particularly in the Middle East.

It is almost a cliché that one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter, but in 1938, when this book first appeared, Ridley's remarks were particularly prescient. Subsequently, 'terrorists' from South Africa, Kenya, Algeria, Zimbabwe, and the Zionists from Palestine, all metamorphosed into 'statesmen' (but not the Pales-

tinian Arabs; they are still 'terrorists'). So much for the 'good' terrorists, but coming back to al-Qaida, does Ridley's description apply also to these 'bad' terrorists? Yes it does. While the mass murder of September 11 is something all socialists should condemn unconditionally as an attack on innocent people which does not advance the causes of socialism and anti-imperialism one iota, this judgement should not prevent us from seeing it, in the words of journalist Robert Fisk, as 'the wickedness and awesome cruelty of a crushed and humiliated people'.

Despite being written in a rather pedantic prose style and having a disconcerting typeface, this book is a refreshing antidote to recent arrivals such as *The New Jackals* and *Bin Laden: Behind the Mask of a Terrorist*. It's worth tracking down a copy.

WA

The Assassins by F.A. Ridley

Available from Porcupine
Bookcellar, 5 Caledonian Road
London N1 9DX
Price: £3.95 incl postage

Protest at Hollywood flag-waver

On February 13, Media Workers Against War organised a protest outside the Empire Cinema, Leicester Square, against the film *Black Hawk Down*, which is likely to become one of the biggest Hollywood hits of all time. MWAU issued the following press release:

Black Hawk Down is a grotesque misrepresentation of a grim truth. Thousands of Somalis, two-thirds of them women and children, lost their lives in the course of US and UN 'humanitarian' incursions into the country. The film focuses on 18 trained US military fighters who died during a bungled raid. Its release is timed to buoy up support for the aggressive, unilateral US military agenda currently threatening world stability. Even the most prudent of critics have suggested the film is a racist portrayal and makes for uncomfortable viewing. Media Workers Against War invites everyone to join in condemning this brutal depiction of fiction as fact. Never again should a world watch silently as millions of dollars are spent to glorify a slaughter of the poor.

- Between 6,000 and 10,000 Somalis were killed by US and UN troops from 1993 to 1995, according to UN figures.
- The entire Somali population receives \$191m aid per year; this film's budget was \$120m.
- Somali warlord Mohammed Farrah Aideed was hostile to US oil interests protected by his predecessor Siyaad Barre, who was ousted in 1991.
- The 1993 'humanitarian mission' was a pretence. Famine was abating, peace talks between warlords had begun. Instead of promoting peace, the US armed rival factions, refuelling a partisan war which was still continuing when the UN withdrew in 1995.
- This film pays a personal tribute to all 18 US soldiers killed. None of the Somali dead or wounded are named.
- According to the *New York Times*, this film 'converts the Somalis into a pack of snarling dark skinned beasts – intended or not, it reeks of glumly staged racism'.
- In October 2001, Hollywood declared itself committed to new initiatives in support of the war on terrorism. This film was made in consultation with the Pentagon.
- Somalia has been named by US officials as one of the potential future targets in the ongoing war on terrorism.

More information on *Black Hawk Down*, as well as reports and analysis on the 'war against terrorism' and the global resistance to it, can be found on the MWAU website: www.mwaw.org.

Hard times for asylum seekers

by Andrew Conroy

The White Paper outlining in detail the government's proposals on the future treatment of asylum seekers was published in early February. A media furore erupted over Blunkett's comments on arranged marriages, which are not part of the paper, but served to divert attention from the actual contents.

Vouchers replaced with something even worse

In place of food and clothing vouchers, asylum seekers will be issued with electronic identification cards. While this has been flagged up by sections of the media as a liberal move to scrap the hated voucher system, closer examination shows that there will be a significant increase in the harshness with which asylum seekers are treated. The current voucher system will not, in fact, be scrapped until autumn 2002, allowing the contract with Sodexo to run its course. The 'smart' ID cards will contain a lot more information on the holder, including photographs and fingerprints; they will continue all the existing problems with vouchers but will also be required for presentation to far more agencies than just supermarkets. There is also the concern that this is a 'dry run' for the introduction of such cards to wider sections of the population.

Asylum seekers will still not receive what little benefits they do in cash, nor will they be allowed to work, and the benefits are being raised only by the same proportion as income support is being raised, remaining at 70 per cent (about £40 per week) of income support.

Imprisonment *de facto*

While there is a welcome commitment that asylum seekers will no longer be held in mainstream prisons, the number of detention centres – effectively prisons specifically for asylum seekers – is to increase. The number of 'reception centres' will also grow. While these are said to be 'open', allowing people to come and go as they

please, asylum seekers will not receive support unless they stay overnight, making them effectively detention centres. On top of this, the sites have only just started being identified. All are in extremely out of the way places – for example, Scully on the Welsh coast near Barry, previously a psychiatric hospital that was closed down because it was 'too remote'. In most cases there is as yet no planning permission, itself a long process involving the consideration of local objections (for good and bad reasons). In the meantime many who might be held in open reception centres may well be held in the detention centres.

Destroying solidarity

Forced dispersal is to continue, despite the fact that the attacks and murder on Sighthill Estate in Glasgow last summer showed the disastrous effects of dumping large groups of asylum seekers in run down housing with no interaction with the local population.

Nor are these the only means being used

to discourage people from seeking asylum in Britain and to fast-track those who do succeed in getting here – increasingly 'fast-tracking' them *out* of the country. Since the introduction of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, various measures have been brought in which bring the 'right' to claim asylum more and more into question.

Government instructs immigration officials to be racist

The Immigration Service has been exempted from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to allow differential treatment of selected ethnic groups: Kurds, Roma, Albanians, Tamils, Pontic Greeks (Greeks from the Black Sea region), Somalis, Afghans, and ethnic Chinese with travel documents issued by Malaysia or Japan. All of these are essentially seen as coming from 'safe' areas and no longer have the right to see their cases examined individually as is supposed to be the case

Conference to defend asylum seekers

Manchester, Saturday 23 March

Arming activists with the arguments, building greater co-ordination across campaigns, working with refugees and migrants' organisations

Called by:

- Barbed Wire Britain
- Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers
- Network of Socialist Campaign Groups
- National Civil Rights Movement
- National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns

Contact and bookings:

Tel: 07905 566183

Email: info@defend-asylum.org

Mail: BCM Box 4289, London WC1X 3XX

under international convention. Clearly many of these people come from areas that are now, or were until recently, in the middle of wars and many suffer oppression as an ethnic group. The farce of this is shown by the fact that Iraqi Kurds now have their asylum claims rejected as a matter of course as coming from a safe country, namely Iraq, that Britain and the US continue to bomb routinely!

The blatant discrimination involved in this measure was underlined by British immigration officers being posted at Prague airport with the sole purpose of preventing any Roma flying to Britain.

Death threats and torture ignored

The Home Office has been deporting black members of the Zimbabwe opposition Movement for Democratic Change, despite the Foreign Office knowing full well that the Mugabe government is abusing and murdering oppositionists. Even MDC members previously beaten up by Mugabe's thugs have been returned. Recently there have been incidents of British Airways aircrew refusing to transport deportees to Zimbabwe and, since the beginning of February, a temporary stop has been put on these deportations, to be reviewed after the elections there. This is only a stop on deportations: Zimbabweans are still not being granted asylum, and it has become routine for the Home Office to say it does not believe asylum seekers (from Zimbabwe and other places) who show evidence of torture at the hands of their government.

Snatch squads

A further indication of the way in which deportation is being speeded up is that, from January 7, 2002, where an asylum case has been certified and the adjudicator dismisses the appeal and upholds the certificate, only the Home Secretary will be informed of the decision. This will allow the Home Secretary to send in the 'snatch squads' to serve the decision and arrest and detain the person so served. Solicitors or other representatives of the claimant will not be informed of the decision. These changes were sneaked in via new legislation over the Christmas break.

There has been increased use of snatch squads to seize asylum seekers who it has been decided to deport, and their intervention has led to the death of at least one asylum seeker.

Internment reintroduced

On top of all this, since September 11 asylum seekers have been pilloried as potential terrorists. 'Anti-terrorist' legislation is to be used to imprison those 'suspected of

involvement in terrorist activity' for up to 6 months without trial. Even before September 11, the government had introduced legislation criminalising a range of international organisations, such as the Kurdish PKK, that have support among émigré communities here. This legislation would have encompassed Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress during the

apartheid era.

All of this builds on the government's commitment to clear up the backlog of asylum cases, and as activists have argued, this is being done in ruthless fashion. One of the starkest indications of this is the government's commitment to a target of 30,000 deportations a year. No such target could be set if an individual's claim to asy-

MODEL RESOLUTION ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

This branch notes the horrific conditions which force asylum seekers to flee war-torn countries, as illustrated by the news coverage from the war in Afghanistan. It condemns the hypocrisy of the UK and other western governments in their exploitation of the refugee issue.

This branch further notes the Home Secretary's 29 October announcement of the phased scrapping of the voucher system for asylum, which resulted from the persistent campaigning of those opposing it.

The welcome announcement of the abolition of vouchers should not, however, deflect attention from the following areas of concern:

- the current voucher system will continue until autumn 2002, at 70% of income support - some £40 per week;
- the new ID cards for asylum seekers will be a form of electronic voucher, thus continuing the stigmatising effect of the voucher system;
- the ID cards, which contain fingerprint and photograph data, could be a test run for a national identity card scheme;
- asylum seekers will no longer be held in mainstream prisons, but the number of places in detention centres - in effect, special prisons for asylum seekers, will increase from 1,900 to 4,000;
- the new accommodation centres may offer many facilities that asylum seekers and their supporters have long argued for, but asylum seekers will be given no choice as to whether they stay in them - if they do not do so, they will receive no support, and
- forced dispersal will continue, with asylum seekers compelled to live in areas where they lack both family and community support.

This branch also recognises that the government's quotas for the removal of asylum seekers effectively breach the requirement of the 1951 Geneva Convention for each asylum claim to be treated on its individual merits. The government has also, since early April, given the Immigration Service the power to discriminate against particular ethnic groups, determining in advance that there can be no legitimate asylum claims from members of these groups. These government measures and proposals are in themselves racist and can only fuel 'popular' racism, while also forming part of a more general assault on civil liberties.

This branch therefore resolves to campaign for the following:

- the defence and extension of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the rights of asylum seekers;
- asylum seekers to receive cash benefits at the level of income support, and to have the right to work;
- the closure of detention centres, and for asylum seekers to have the right to choose whether to stay in open accommodation centres, with no loss of rights and support for those choosing not to, and
- an end to forced dispersal.

This branch agrees to submit a resolution on these lines to the union's next annual conference and will seek support for it from other branches.

We resolve to support, and encourage the union as a whole to support, all initiatives towards these ends, in particular we agree to support the National Assembly Against Racism's 'Speak Out Against Racism' campaign and the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers. We also agree to support, and encourage members to attend, the conference called by several organisations (National Civil Rights Movement, National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, Barbed Wire Britain, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers and Jewish Socialist Group) for 23 March 2002, with the aim of improving co-ordination between the many organisations working in support of refugee and asylum rights.

lum were being considered on its merits.

The government is effectively tearing up the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees to which it was a signatory.

The importance that the government attaches to this high-speed rejection and inhumane treatment of asylum seekers is shown by the fact that Robert Eagle, head of the National Asylum Support Service, was awarded a CBE in the 2002 New Year's Honours List.

A two-tier system

Alongside this overhaul of the asylum system, the government has also announced that it intends to introduce a 'green card' system to allow a certain number of immigrants in to work. While this is belated recognition that 'economic migration' can be beneficial to the ruling class of the receiving country, the intention is clearly to create a system whereby the 'good immigrant' is the one accepted in their home country as having skills needed in Britain and goes through all the proper channels, while the rest are demonised as 'bogus'. As well as undermining the right to asylum, this also fails to recognise the fact that the line between economic migration and asylum is

often a very fuzzy one indeed.

While the focus of opposition at the moment is rightly the government's asylum policies, socialists also have to call for the scrapping of all immigration laws. The government trumpets the merits of 'globalisation' for the movement of goods and multinational companies, but adamantly opposes any idea that there should be free movement of labour, not least because this would undermine the ability of those multinational companies to shift their operations to countries where wages are lower.

Balancing populist racism and pressure for asylum rights

The government's measures are a (totally failed) attempt to assuage both media-stoked racism against asylum seekers and campaigns against the inhumanity of their treatment. While not all asylum seekers are black, the overwhelming majority are, and it is against them that the racism is targeted. New Labour's instincts are to bow to the pressure of the section of the media that talks of 'floods' of 'bogus' asylum seekers (many of whom are characterised as terrorists in disguise), and calls for tough

measures to prevent them getting here, to keep them under lock and key while they are here and to deport them rapidly. Once in a rare while it is acknowledged that there are some who claim asylum legitimately.

New Labour have also had to recognise, reluctantly, that large sections of the population are appalled at the way asylum seekers are treated. This has been reflected in the opposition of nearly every major trade union and a number of campaigns, including the likes of Oxfam and Body Shop. Even the courts have not always been as compliant as the government would have liked, such as in the initial (since overturned) ruling that detention at Oakington was illegal. They have also run into legal difficulties with the proposal to fine carriers (lorry drivers, airlines etc) who unwittingly bring asylum seekers into the country, and they have had little success so far in attempts to persuade the French government to close down the Sangatte refugee centre, from which many refugees make desperate, and sometimes fatal, attempts to reach Britain.

Harsh, but vicious

The government's reaction has been to make tiny concessions to those campaigning in support of asylum seekers, while attempting to sell its measures as 'harsh but fair'. Thus, much of the campaigning to date has been focussed on the iniquitous voucher system, and the government has attempted to placate this by playing up the fact that it is abolishing vouchers, despite the fact that, in reality, it is only replacing them by their electronic equivalent. The new 'reception centres' will contain health and legal facilities, something to be welcomed in itself, but cannot detract from the fact that staying in them is essentially compulsory.

It has been rare indeed for government representatives to speak out in defence of asylum seekers and point out that many of them are fleeing horrific conditions, including torture and rape, or that the subsistence given them is way below income support. Far more often they have repeated the abuse heaped on refugees by the racist sections of the media. The police themselves released figures last year showing that racist attacks increased every time a politician made a major speech attacking asylum seekers.

As in so many other areas, the government's love affair with the private sector has encroached into the treatment of asylum seekers. Not only has Sodexo made a fortune from running the voucher system, but it has also been given the contract to run the new, bigger, Harmondsworth detention centre near Heathrow airport,

Yarl's Wood fire

As Workers Action goes to press, the first investigations of the Yarl's Wood fire are starting. We hope that the asylum seekers who are currently missing have absconded, rather than have died in the blaze. It seems that Group 4, who are contracted to run Yarl's Wood, are unsure how many prisoners they should have since much of the documentation and case evidence has been destroyed.

The Fire Brigades Union says that asylum seekers held at Yarl's Wood are still 'at risk' because there is no sprinkler system, no fire training for the Group 4 staff running the place, and no evacuation procedures. They have repeated their claim (of October 2000) that Yarl's Wood was 'a disaster waiting to happen.' Andy Gilchrist, FBU General Secretary said: 'The detainees that are remaining in Yarl's Wood should be immediately released on temporary admission for their own safety. It is clear that Group 4 have put their private profit before the lives of asylum seekers thereby treating them as second class citizens. Group 4 flatly refused to put a sprinkler system into these premises to cut their costs. This would not be allowed under any other circumstances.'

Some photographs of the wreckage suggest that the buildings were timber-framed, which would go some way to explaining the speed of spread of the fire. However, since timber framing is a relatively cheap construction method then questions are raised why the centre cost £80 million to build (ten times as much as the initial estimate). The three levels of steel door security also look rather like overkill in a timber frame building. The question why sprinklers were not installed is now also very high profile, especially since the fire brigade recommended such a system; it looks quite likely that the insurance companies will decline to pay up on the grounds that the fire brigade advice was not followed. This means that the cost of building this prison will be paid by workers through taxation not once but twice.

The local asylum campaign, backed by the national campaign, is calling for a public inquiry. The Fire Brigades Union National Executive have backed this call – their press release raises the questions they want answers to:

- Why are Group 4 allowed to refuse to fit a sprinkler system?
- Why were firefighting operations delayed for over an hour after the fire crews arrived?
- How much public money has been wasted due to improper fire precautions and procedures?
- What was the operational priority – detaining the asylum seekers or fighting the fire?

These demands must be backed by the labour movement.

where they initially (with government approval) planned to offer detainees the option of doing the cooking and cleaning for a pittance of a 'wage'. Dispersal has often been to run down housing owned by private landlords who have grabbed the opportunity to make a packet while treating residents abysmally.

Throughout, one of the government's intentions has been to prevent asylum seekers forging links either with those from their home country already settled here or with the indigenous population. For that reason it was an important breakthrough that, after the racist murder in Glasgow, sections of the local community and the dispersed asylum seekers got together to demand better facilities for all from Glasgow City Council.

Strengthening the opposition

Every aspect of the government's policy on asylum seekers has been challenged by many organisations, some national, some local and some around particular issues. Thus, there have been campaigns to close down detention centres as long as they have existed, the latest being around Yarl's Wood, the biggest, in Bedford. These campaigns now coordinate their activities as *Barbed Wire Britain*.

Activity has increased against the new surge in deportations, with airline passengers being leafleted to inform them of how they can prevent deportation going ahead on their flights. Plane crews are increasingly refusing to fly with deportees on board. Efforts are being made to build on this with the unions at major airports.

Pressure groups such as the Refugee Council, Oxfam, Amnesty International

and many others have also been arguing for the government to soften its treatment of asylum seekers. The Refugee Council has however, fallen into the trap of helping to administer the dispersal system (no doubt for the worthy reason of wanting to mitigate its effects).

Local campaigns exist in many towns, some linked to national organisations, some entirely independent. The focus of their campaigning has varied according to local circumstances, such as whether a detention centre exists, whether asylum seekers are dispersed to the area and so on. Most have campaigned against vouchers and taken the campaign to the streets to explain the real situation with asylum seekers. Many have built links of one kind or another with asylum seekers, often organising social events where asylum seekers can be made to feel welcome and meet local activists.

Some campaigns, such as that in Brent, North West London, have shown that it is possible over time to build up substantial support from local community organisations, trade unions and even Labour Parties. Clearly for a campaign to be successful against the government's asylum policies it has to reach out in this way.

There are some workplace campaigns against Sodexo (who run the catering facilities in many colleges, hospitals and local authorities) because of its role in administering the asylum system.

While most unions have conference policy against either several aspects of the government's asylum policy or the Asylum and Immigration Act as such they are, as with so many other policies, unwilling to seriously challenge the government over

this.

Bill Morris, General Secretary of the TGWU, has made the front running for union leaders, raising the treatment of asylum seekers on many occasions. However, when it has come to taking on the government he has backed down. For two years running the issue of asylum seekers has been voted one of only four resolutions to be debated at Labour Party conference, with Morris taking the lead. However, in 2000 he remitted the resolution after being given a commitment to a government review of the voucher scheme. When announced, the review was about the *working* of the voucher system, not whether it should exist at all. However, many campaigns and labour movement bodies did make submissions calling for it to be scrapped, and despite a commitment to publish all submissions the review was buried. Morris fell into the same trap again in 2001, agreeing to remit a very sharp resolution under pressure from other unions, in exchange for a commitment from Blunkett that he would be announcing a major overhaul of the asylum system. Morris's pledge that he trusted Blunkett looks rather silly in the light of what Blunkett's package actually contains.

The immediate task in the labour movement is to explain that the new proposals are certainly no 'liberalisation', but a backward step and to reaffirm opposition to the government's asylum policies (see the model resolution).

But we also have to move the unions on from paper opposition to active opposition, with articles in union journals explaining why the policy should be opposed, by highlighting particular cases, and by encouraging members to become involved in campaigning against these policies.

Too often, the efforts of the different campaigns around the rights of asylum seekers have been weakened by a lack of coordination, different actions being called around the same issue at different times, a lack of exchange of information etc. While it would be utopian to believe it possible to form one united national campaign around the issue, greater coordination is not only necessary, but also a real possibility. To this end several organisations have come together to call a conference on March 23 both to discuss the new policy and to find ways of working together. National trade unions are being approached to support the conference, and activists are encouraged to take this up, getting labour movement bodies to support and send delegates.

WA

Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers Close down Yarl's Wood Saturday 30 March, 12.00-1.30pm

The Bedford campaign to stop arbitrary detentions at Yarl's Wood, the government's latest detention camp for asylum seekers, has called for a demonstration at the camp. It is also asking protesters to demonstrate in Bedford town centre from 2.00-4.00pm against the government's attacks on asylum seekers.

For details, contact Emma Ginn:
07786 517379

Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, BCM Box 4289,
London WC1X 3XX
Phone 07941 566183

E-mail info@defend-asylum.org
Website www.defend-asylum.org

Time for a broad campaign against privatisation

by Simon Deville

The New Labour government has for the last five years deepened the neo-liberal offensive begun under the Tories. Whilst the Tories sold off the family silver – those sections of the nationalised industries most easily convertible into a quick profit such as telecoms, steel and the utilities – Labour is forcing through less obvious privatisations.

In the 1980s under Thatcher, privatisation gained fairly widespread support even from large sections of the working class. Thatcher championed the idea of a share-owning democracy where everyone became affluent. It may have been nonsense, but it was nonsense that won her popular support. For a short period, and for a certain section of the population, there was a material basis to this support. The fact that all the national assets were sold off at massively undervalued prices meant that those who bought shares were able to make a quick buck from the sell-offs. Alongside this, the Conservatives created a demand for housing by both putting a halt to any local authority house building programmes, and selling off existing housing stock, either to individuals or to large companies. At the same time, the income generated from the various sell-offs was able to give an, albeit short-term, boost to the economy. Through this strategy, the Tories were able to win enough support to take on and defeat the most militant section of the workers' movement and to destroy much of Britain's manufacturing base in the process.

While Blair has carried on where the Tories left off, it has to be remembered that the Tory project had run out of steam long before Labour came to power. The Conservative legacy has been one of crisis in the welfare state, after nearly two decades of under-funding of local authorities, education, health and the benefits system. Privatisation has continued under Labour on a local level, with local authorities privatising more and more of their services, only quietly, and piece by piece, starting with ancillary services such as cleaning and catering. Many ostensibly left-wing councillors have defended selling off such services under the Tories on the basis

that they were able to maintain funding for 'core' services despite cuts from central government budgets. While right-wing Labour apologists claim that the government hasn't actually privatised much, this hides the real picture of PFI, Best Value, housing stock transfers, etc, that are carried out by local authorities as a result of central government policy. The government may not have carried out many sell offs itself, but they have continued apace under New Labour.

Under the Tories, this 'dented shield' strategy pulled thousands of left activists to the right, justifying their actions by claiming that they were defending services as best they could until a Labour government was elected. After five years of Labour government, this argument is shown to be worse than useless, particularly since in Labour's first term they have spent less than the Tories did on the public sector. Labour leaders avoided making any progressive commitments before the election, hiding behind the mantra of 'fairness not favours'. The 'not favours' bit obviously does not apply to New Labour's friends in big business. The Blairites' claim – to avoid dogma and just to do 'what works' – is sharply contradicted by their practice.

PFI, PPP and Best Value have proved to be little more than get-rich-quick schemes for big business. Schools and hospitals are knocked down; the best real estate is sold off to property developers. Replacements are built that are then leased back to the public sector at vast profits. As if this wasn't enough incentive, the risk is effectively underwritten by central government. At a stroke a private company can make millions through re-financing a loan. Banks are happy to support such schemes at lower interest rates, safe in the knowledge that the government will not allow a school or hospital to go bankrupt. The only option the government is not prepared to consider is the most rational – publicly financed publicly owned projects.

An Ofsted report into schools in Islington criticised the authority not for its performance, but for its failure to privatise enough of its services. Time and again failing public services are made worse by privatising them, generating massive debt into the bar-

gain. Despite the rhetoric from the government about the importance of education, this hasn't prevented them from encouraging private sector involvement wherever they can, and regardless of the impact upon the education system. Citing Richard Hatcher of the University of Central England, George Monbiot argued in the *Guardian* recently that Britain is being used as a testing ground for private companies to take over public services throughout the world. 'While the UK's schools might be worth £25bn a year to potential "investors", the US system has been valued at \$700bn. Worldwide education is worth trillions. If the UK can seize an early and substantial share of this market, our economy will become, to all intents and purposes, recession proof.'

Other services such as the Royal Mail, while never of great interest to private companies in their entirety, are constantly being broken down into smaller units so that profitable sections can be sold off. Thus the public sector will be left with maintaining rural postal deliveries, for instance, while lucrative business mail in the large cities is taken over by private companies.

On the railways, Labour have not only defended privatisation to the hilt, they have tried their hardest to use this as a model to impose upon the London Underground, against the clear wishes of the overwhelming majority of Londoners, and against any economic rationale. Placing Railtrack under receivership and ending the massive public subsidies that have lined the pockets of its shareholders could have proved a hugely popular move. Unfortunately, Labour's commitment to the private sector has meant that even this has proved a source of embarrassment for the Labour leadership. Railtrack's literally disastrous handling of the rail infrastructure should have led to the obvious conclusion that investors demanding a return on their money are far from the best incentive to ensure safety on the railways. The response of the hapless Transport Secretary, Stephen Byers, has not only pissed off investors by failing to provide a bottomless pit of subsidies, but has also failed to make any political capital out of the affair by ruling out any form of renationalisation (at least

in what he has said so far – he may end up having grudgingly to accept just that). Instead he has spent his time trying to placate angry Railtrack shareholders and trying to develop a new way of handing the company back to the private sector.

In response to the numerous private sector failures, the government has announced what has been dubbed 'a Railtrack for the NHS'. While the Tories tried to convince us that the NHS was safe in their hands, New Labour wants to convince us that it will be safe in private hands. In the meantime, local managers will be given more control over budgets, with more local pay bargaining and so on. The pattern is familiar; the incentives will be to run everything at the bare minimum, contract out as much as possible, and drive down wages. As already happens within local government, central government policies could pressurise local managers to do the government's dirty work for them.

Until now the government has been spectacularly successful in serving the interests of big business. They have had an advantage over the Tories in that they have been able to rely upon the acquiescence of the trade union movement. Rather than confront trade union opposition head on, Labour simply pokes and prods to find any services that can be handed over piece by piece without facing a generalised resistance. But, increasingly, union leaderships have been forced to

adopt a more forthright opposition to the private sector encroachment. The build up to last year's TUC and Labour Party conferences saw leaders of the GMB, Unison and the TGWU all take issue with the direction of the government. While this may have been largely bluster, it was generated by a growing unease amongst union members. In the event there was a stand-down as the union leaders called for us to lay our differences aside 'out of respect for the dead' of the September 11 attacks in New York. The fact that the government didn't respectfully halt its privatisation programme appeared lost on many of the union leaders. While unions such as Unison have carried on campaigning, this has amounted (on a national level at least) to not much more than collecting post-cards that Dave Prentis has handed in to Number 10.

There have been some exceptions to the norm. The RMT union's strike action over pay on South West Trains has been able to make the most of the break-up of the network, playing one company against the other. This tactic has been successful in making the most of the weakness of the train bosses, while at the same time highlighting the lunacy of privatisation. Elsewhere, the Campaign to Defend Council Housing has won the backing of national trade unions and won some major victories in defeating attempts to sell off housing stock. The situation is now

ripe for the labour movement to build a more generalised campaign against privatisation and to start to knock back the neo-liberal offensive. What is needed is a movement that can unite the existing campaigns and start reaching out to much broader forces. There have been a number of attempts to launch 'broad' initiatives of this kind in the last few months, although each has ended up little more than the property of one or other left grouping.

Currently the Socialist Alliance is building its own conference, which it claims is for 'all trade unionists'. But since it links the fight against privatisation to the struggle to end any influence the trade unions might still have over the Labour government, it is almost impossible for anyone to support this initiative who is not already a supporter of the Alliance.

What is needed is an initiative fully open to the whole of the labour movement, and which has the support of at least a few national unions and wide support amongst regions, branches and existing campaigns. Given that the issues involved are already paper policy in most of the labour movement, this is not an impossible task, but it does require the left to work together to build such an initiative. The left has time and again proved the stupidity of making secondary questions such as political affiliations in elections the defining feature of its campaigning, at the expense of attempting to mobilise the movement as a whole around issues that there is general agreement on. If the left were able to work together not just in public campaigning but in taking a struggle throughout the labour movement as well, it could play a crucial role in turning around the tide of politics in Britain. **WA**

Busworkers victimised

Bus driver Gerry Downing has been sacked for organising two petitions among his fellow workers at Metroline's Cricklewood bus garage with the aim of defending a victimised colleague.

The petitions, one to the management and the other to the union, were to protest at the transfer to another garage of Hash Jiwa, the newly-elected chair of the Cricklewood garage TGWU branch. Hash Jiwa was the first black or Asian ever to be elected as a TGWU branch officer at the garage, where for decades the majority of workers have been black and Asian. The present workforce of approximately 270 is about 40 per cent Muslim.

Three days after being elected chair on January 30, Hash Jiwa had a minor argument with a supervisor, which led to him being suspended and then transferred to Harlesden garage. In a letter which appeared on Cricklewood garage's union notice board before Hash Jiwa's appeal against transfer had been considered, a TGWU official described the circumstances of his departure as 'unfortunate' and announced that the post of branch chair would be taken by the defeated candidate.

Hash Jiwa's appeal was lost and it was at this point that Downing and others organised the petitions. The petition to the TGWU, which was signed by 109 members, complained about the letter on the noticeboard.

On February 8, Downing was suspended and charged with 'misrepresentation of drivers' names on a petition with detrimental intent to another member of staff' and 'participating in the compilation of an unauthorised petition regarding employment matters'. At the hearing, the first charge was deemed to have been 'proved beyond doubt', despite the fact that all but one of the drivers who were consulted admitted to signing the petition. On the second charge, the TGWU branch secretary gave evidence that it was union procedure for petitions to go through the committee and the branch, and that therefore this was an 'unauthorised petition'.

Downing's protests that this contravened Section 10 of the Human Rights Act, that it was entirely an internal union matter, and that he was being charged with petitioning his union which had nothing to do with Metroline, were brushed aside. He was sacked on February 19.

For further details e-mail Gerry Downing at GerDowning@aol.com

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Confused signs over economy

by Jonathan Joseph

It is widely accepted that the world economy is entering into recession and that the British economy, like other leading economies, will suffer a downturn. Yet despite such predictions, experts continue to be baffled by consumer spending levels which show no sign of abating. The Chancellor's fighting talk of large-scale government spending to bring NHS spending in line with the European average also indicates a confidence that the British economy can see its way through a recession.

Economists had predicted that 2001 would be a year of steady growth. Instead, we witnessed the most serious downturn in the world economy since the oil crisis of 1974. The world's largest economies are all in recession, with the US and Japan badly hit. September 11 has compounded the crisis. The year ended with dramatic events in Argentina as a consequence of foreign debt.

A major cause of the recession has been the bursting of the hi-tech bubble and collapse of the so-called new economy. This has subsequently led to a fall in world stock markets. The events of September 11 have dashed any hopes that the world economy will recover in 2002. The IMF has warned that in the wake of September 11 a global economic slump is on the cards with higher unemployment and uncertain stock markets.

In Britain the fears are that the labour market has reached its peak and that unemployment will rise significantly for the first time in nine years. The recession will be worst felt in the weak manufacturing sector, particularly in the North West and East Midlands. This points to evidence of the growing North-South divide while recent figures have also shown a widening gap between male and female pay.

However, the Bank of England's quarterly inflation report in November claimed Britain had only a 1 in 10 chance of suffering serious recession. This upbeat assessment is based on the fact that Britain is still the fastest growing major economy.

And in particular, buoyant retail sales continue to puzzle analysts. In October, they fell as expected, for the first time in 18 months, but only by 0.1 per cent. November's figures were up 0.3 per cent. Following Christmas, retailers have reported the fastest growth in sales volumes since the late 1980s, confirming that the consumer spending surge is continuing.

Still, the so-called experts are not sure whether this means we are in line for inflation or deflation. For the first time since the 1930s, the major economies face a deflationary threat and experts have been alarmed by evidence of falling prices in many sectors of the economy. Deflation is a problem because when prices are falling, consumers tend to delay their purchases, waiting for goods and services to become cheaper, leading to sluggish activity in the whole economy. This clearly does not seem to be a problem in Britain at the moment, but it is a problem in other countries and it may become a problem in Britain later in the year.

It is difficult to know exactly what is going on with public finances. Some predictions are for serious shortfall. Brown needs to decide the state of the British economy and on the basis of this make spending plans. From what is being suggested, it seems that the Chancellor believes the British economy is in good shape and that any downturn will be short-lived, with the UK economy recovering by 2003. Britain, it is argued, has weathered the crisis well, better than any previous recession, and is in a better position than any other advanced economy. This runs contrary to the expectation that the British economy would be most exposed to a US downturn, especially with its reliance on financial and technology sectors.

One report has claimed that although manufacturing output has fallen by 1.1 per cent, the economy has been bolstered by a 0.7 per cent rise in government spending and a 1.1 per cent rise in spending by households. (*Financial Times*, December 20, 2001) This suggests that consumer spending has been the biggest factor in in-

flating the UK economy, albeit at the cost of a widening trade gap. The problem for the British economy is that it cannot rely on continuing sales. If consumer spending cannot be sustained, Britain is in fact highly vulnerable to world recession given its close integration into the world economy and its reliance on finance and hi-tech sectors. That is why Brown is considering raising government spending.

If the government is to bring NHS funding up to European levels, talk is of tax rises of 10 per cent. This is clearly not going to happen. But some increase in government spending on health and the railways is not out of the question. This is not because of any principled commitment, but is a combination of opportunism in face of public anger and economic management.

The situation in Britain should not be viewed in isolation. Around the world, the reality of the crisis and the lack of influence interest rates can have may force governments to think the unthinkable and return to some small form of Keynesian policy to stimulate demand. This seems at the moment to be much less of a problem in Britain than elsewhere. In Japan, where interest rates are virtually zero, the government has engaged in needless building projects to try and stimulate a recovery. In the US, tax and interest rate cuts alone may not be sufficient to stem the crisis. Monetarist policy is revealing its limitations.

The talk is that Britain can survive the crisis. But this is largely based on current levels of consumer spending. As the year goes on this will fall because of interest rate rises and higher unemployment. Then the British economy will not look so safe – in fact the British economy is *more* vulnerable than most because of the larger than average financial and hi-tech sectors. That is why Brown may use government spending to try and steer the economy out of danger, and why talk of government spending may have some substance. Then again, this presumes that the government has some clear economic strategy. But can we believe that the government of domes, Railtrack and ministerial rivalries really has such strategic nous?

Socialist Alliance meets its own contradictions

On December 1, the Socialist Party walked out of the Socialist Alliance. **Neil Murray** looks at the issues involved

The walkout by the Socialist Party was hardly news. It had announced in advance that if the constitution put forward by the Socialist Workers Party was adopted it would leave the Alliance. Relations between the Socialist Party and the rest of the Alliance, the SWP in particular, had been pretty sour since the run-up to the general election last year.

Despite a general acceptance that local Socialist Alliances should select their candidates and run a common campaign, the Socialist Party had announced where it would be running candidates, not subjecting them to any selection process and producing its own material. This was repeated when there were by-elections in the London Borough of Hackney for two council seats, when the Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Party ran competing candidates.

The Socialist Party wanted this right to decide its candidates independently enshrined in the Socialist Alliance constitution, whereas all other forces wanted a greater or lesser degree of centralisation. However, the causes of this rupture lie more in the nature and *modus operandi* of the Alliance than in the antics of a particular component.

From origins to electoral fetishism

Local Socialist Alliances first came into being not long after the 1997 general election, promoted by the Socialist Party and independents such as the Walsall Democratic Labour Party (whose own origins lie in the expulsion of a group of leading Labour councillors) and others who had left the Labour Party over the years in disgust at its rightward moving policies.

Unlike the Socialist Labour Party, which had stood in the 1997 election after Scargill's split from the Labour Party, most of those who went on to become part of the Socialist Alliance called for a critical Labour vote in one form or another.

Initially the Socialist Alliances were primarily campaigning bodies, without a central focus on elections, and even included some people still active in the Labour Party. However, it became increasingly obvious

that, for some, elections were to be the key issue, and they began to push this more and more.

It has become a saying in the Socialist Alliances that opposition to Blair and his policies 'has to have an electoral dimension', although this is always asserted, never explained. The first occasion on which this 'electoral dimension' came to the fore was in the elections to the European parliament in June 1999. The 'closed list' system was being used for the first time, and there was much discontent about how the Labour Party had drawn up its lists, pushing several of the more left candidates (such as those who had opposed the ditching of Clause IV) into unelectable positions on the list. Ken Coates, the sitting Labour MEP, had been expelled for saying he might well stand as an independent.

Many involved in the Socialist Alliance saw this as their big chance to assert themselves electorally, and attempts were made to put together regional alliances with lists of candidates. In London much of the far left was drawn into the discussion, and for the first time the SWP got involved. However, not for the first time, this came up against the intransigence of Scargill.

Scargill has made it a point of 'principle' that the SLP should not work with other forces, whether in elections or campaigns of any kind. He is as sectarian towards the far left as he is towards the Labour Party. When it proved impossible to draw the SLP into the London region electoral campaign for the European elections, and it was clear that Scargill himself was going to head the SLP's London list, the SWP dropped the idea of the Socialist Alliance standing, and the other organisations involved more or less reluctantly fell in behind them.

This first major attempt on the election field was not an overwhelming success. The Alliance list did best in the West Midlands, where it was headed by ex-MP Dave Nellist, but even there it was well behind Christine Oddy, a former Labour Member of the European Parliament who stood as an independent rather than be in an unelectable position on the party list, and

who obtained a respectable percentage (no doubt drawing on the votes of many disaffected Labour Party members and supporters).

Despite this poor showing, the idea of Socialist Alliances as somehow the main challenge to Blair had become set in the minds of much of the far left. With the first elections for London mayor and the Greater London Assembly on the horizon for May 2000, the London Socialist Alliance started to take itself seriously, and this time the SWP really was on board.

The long wait to see who would be Labour's candidate for mayor was eventually decided when Ken Livingstone was expelled from the Labour Party for putting himself forward as an independent in opposition to the official candidate, Frank Dobson. The Socialist Alliance felt it could capitalise on the discontent this caused in the London labour movement and the wider electorate. However, again they were not given a free run by others on the left. The SLP ran again, and the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation decided that it should move from being just that, a campaign attempting to draw in broad forces opposed to the government's public-private plans for the London Underground, to standing candidates in the GLA elections. Despite pressure from the London Socialist Alliance, both persisted in this course. An indication of how the forces of the Socialist Alliance see the world was the fact that in trying to persuade CATP not to stand, their opposition was not on the basis that this undermined their ability to forge a campaign to defeat Tube privatisation, but that they should become part of the Socialist Alliance.

The Socialist Alliance called for support for Livingstone as mayor, but their calls for him to stand a slate of left labour movement (even Labour Party) candidates and a commitment to support them if he did, were never fought for. While Livingstone himself rejected the idea out of hand, a real campaign around this proposal in the London unions and among Labour Party members could have had a real resonance, but it remained on paper, indicating that the

forces of the Socialist Alliance were more interested in standing their own candidates than actually building the resistance to Blair.

In the event, given that Livingstone won the mayoral election and disaffection with the Labour Party over democracy and Tube privatisation was running high, the Socialist Alliance's average vote in the GLA elections of 2.9 per cent in the constituency section and 1.6 per cent in the list section was neither high, nor significantly better than that of the CATP, which got an average of 1.07 per cent in the list section. While in a couple of electoral divisions the Alliance achieved higher results (constituency section votes of 7.0 per cent in North East and 6.2 per cent in Lambeth and Southwark), overall the result did it no favours.

Problems between the Socialist Party and the rest of the London Socialist Alliance started to come to the fore around the GLA elections. Initially the SP decided to support the CATP candidates, despite being part of the London SA, but eventually it decided to call for a vote for either, despite having a supporter on the CATP's central list of candidates!

As on every other occasion, this poor showing did not deter the forces of the SA in the slightest from their view that they 'had' to stand candidates in elections. Rather, they began to gear themselves up for the 2001 general election. New Socialist Alliances were formed where they hadn't existed before, and selected candidates, even where they consisted only of a few members of far left groups, and a national structure began to emerge, centred on the half-dozen left groups which formed the core of the Alliance (SWP, SP, Alliance for Workers Liberty, International Socialist Group, Workers Power, Communist Party of Great Britain). In a few areas they did manage to capitalise on discontent in the Labour Party, drawing in support (and candidates) from those appalled at the selection procedures and/or the policies being promoted. The most high profile of these was Liz Davies, the former Labour Party NEC member, who announced shortly before the election that she was leaving the Labour Party to join the Alliance. In St Helens South disgust at the selection of Shaun Woodward, an ex-Tory MP, led to a surge of support. However, by and large, candidates and support were drawn from the 'usual suspects'.

In the run-up to the general election the SWP declared that the target for the Socialist Alliance was 5 per cent of the vote. When the actual vote turned out to be 1.75 per cent not an eyelid was blinked, instead it was all declared some kind of great suc-

cess, although some were slightly more reticent.

What little 'success' the Socialist Alliance has had in elections has been mainly where they have stood a sitting councillor who has left the Labour Party, or the likes of Dave Nellist in Coventry, who has a high local profile, not least because he used to be an MP. But even in these cases time has led to a waning of support, as in the case of the Walsall Democratic Labour Party, which has gone from having several councillors to none, with election results not much different to Alliance candidates elsewhere. Most of the Alliance results, in both local and parliamentary by-elections, have been even worse than those above. In the Ipswich by-election in November 2001, for instance, the Socialist Alliance got 152 votes (0.55 per cent), half what they got at the general election (305, 0.78 per cent) with the same candidate. This by-election result is even worse when you take into account that the SLP stood in the general election, obtaining 217 votes, but didn't put up a candidate in the by-election.

It cannot be said that the Alliance's electoral challenge has taken place in unfavourable circumstances. On the contrary, the discontent over the list system in the European elections, the dislike of the way Livingstone was treated in the London elections, and the fact that Blair was expected to (and did) win the 2001 general election by a landslide could all be said to have aided the Alliance. Also, the increasingly high level of abstention makes their votes look higher as a proportion, and by-elections tend to favour votes for 'fringe' candidates. With all these factors working in their favour, the extremely low votes for the Socialist Alliance suggest they have a major problem.

Short on analysis, long on rhetoric

Despite all these election results showing that the working class is not queuing up to support the Socialist Alliance, this fact impinges little on the consciousness of those involved. Rather, 'onward and upward' seems to be the motto, a belief that sheer effort will overcome this hurdle. While there were arguments within the Alliance over the conduct of the general election campaign – the SWP, for instance, arguing that door-to-door canvassing was a waste of time and that street stalls were the thing to attract support – these hardly address the main problem.

The unfortunate fact is that working class consciousness in Britain is at a lower-level than for decades. Blair's dominance of the Labour Party, and the subservience of most union leaders to this, is not simply a prod-

uct of Machiavellian manoeuvres, but the outcome of years of setbacks. It is not just that Thatcher defeated the miners and other key sections of the working class, but the trade union leaderships did little to prevent this, and the left was unable to. At each stage of defeats the Labour and trade union bureaucracy capitalised on this by moving to the right. The collapse of Eastern Europe, seen by many, however wrongly, as some form of socialism, also contributed to a feeling that there was no alternative to rampant free market capitalism.

The effect on the rank and file of the movement has been devastating. Trade union membership fell (though it has now stabilised and is starting to slowly climb again), strikes have been bumping along at all-time low levels for years and participation in the labour movement, whether trade union or Labour Party, has been low. While socialists can take heart from opinion polls on issues like nationalisation of essential services etc, this is clearly several stages removed from a feeling that the working class itself can *do* something about it.

The current furore in the media over what is, in fact, a small number of strikes on the railways and a potential one on the post is more an indication of the extent to which industrial action has been *absent* for many years than a great upturn in the class struggle. Lengthy and heroic struggles by such as the Liverpool dockers do not alter the fact that two sectors (post and rail) have dominated the strike statistics for years. Until the two recent demonstrations against the 'war against terrorism' in Afghanistan, demonstrations had been tiny for years.

The belief that these problems can be overcome simply by planting a red flag and believing the working class will gather round it is one of the problems at the heart of the Socialist Alliance project. Those around the Socialist Alliance are following the course plotted by Scargill after the defeat of Clause IV in the Labour Party – a belief that to form a new party of the working class it is sufficient to declare it. They have learnt nothing from Scargill's failure and descent into a rump, but rather are hell-bent on repeating his mistakes.

United Front or ultimatum?

One of the common threads between the practice of the SLP and the Socialist Alliance is how they relate to those who do not support them. While the SLP has the more crass version, there is much in common between the two.

For socialists it should be rudimentary that the chief task is to bring together the broadest possible forces of the labour

movement to fight around particular aims, whether it be renationalisation of the railways, defence of asylum seekers, or whatever. The prime reason for this is simply that such broad campaigns have the greatest chance of winning. Socialists can then use the opportunity to raise their politics within the campaign and attempt to convince participants that they have the best policies for winning.

As mentioned above, the SLP's approach has been to rule out joint activity with other forces, but while the Socialist Alliance's approach has been more subtle, it essentially amounts to the same thing. The Alliance has been reluctant to engage in campaigns as the Alliance, not least because the SWP is opposed to the idea, arguing that the Alliance exists only for fighting elections. However, since the general election two initiatives taken by the Alliance show the problem in how it relates to the rest of the movement.

For several years now there has been a lobby and demonstration at Labour Party conference, initiated by the SWP but generally called by a union branch or branches. This year it was approached differently and called by the Socialist Alliance, the Green Party and Globalise Resistance. Given the demonstration was initially around the issue of privatisation, it would have been even easier than in previous years to get it called by trade unions, not only at branch, but also regional and even possibly national level. The fact that this does not seem to have occurred to the organisers says volumes about their political approach. The opportunity to involve thousands more trade unionists and even Labour Party members, was spurned in favour of a sectarian declaration that 'we are the only opposition to Blair'.

The Socialist Alliance has now called a trade union conference 'open to all trade unionists' for March 16, for which they are

seeking sponsorship from union bodies. There are many issues facing trades unionists under this government, and many around which, given the right approach, it should be possible to build a sizeable campaign. Not least of these is privatisation, where there is a crying need for a trade union based campaign uniting all those prepared to fight PFI, PPP and other privatisations. The Socialist Alliance conference has indeed been called around privatisation, but in such a way that cuts it off from building an effective campaign. Apart from calling it as a 'Socialist Alliance conference', thereby immediately putting off trade unionists who do not accept the Socialist Alliance's claim to lead this struggle, the issue of privatisation has been very much subordinated to the issue of the future of union political funds. What is advertised as a 'debate' around the future of the funds is posed in very limited terms, accepting in advance that participants want to see funds used to support Socialist Alliance candidates, the only debate being how to get there. Any concept that there could be useful discussion about how to make union representatives on Labour Party bodies accountable to union policy is seemingly ruled out in advance. Again, what could have been a positive initiative is turned into a sectarian one, solely aimed at building the Alliance.

Numerous examples also exist of the same approach from Socialist Alliance supporters at the local level, from treating campaigns as their private property to be wheeled out as and when they feel like it, to the outright sectarianism of 'inviting' Labour Party members to leave anti-war demonstrations.

A little history goes a long way

Given the dominance of 'Marxists' in the Alliance, it might have been expected that they could learn a little from the history of the British labour movement, particularly as some of them have personal experience of some relevance. Previous experiments to build a new party (whether revolutionary or left-reformist) which would displace the Labour Party for the prime allegiance of the working class have come to grief precisely around the issue of how they relate to the existing labour movement. The SLP is only the most recent example, but there have been many others, some much bigger, which have failed abysmally.

The Communist Party, after an early phase when it participated in the Labour Party and seriously attempted to build united fronts, descended into third-period Stalinism, where it labelled the Labour Party 'social fascist', and thus consigned itself to irrelevance. The Independent La-

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bour Party, after splitting from the Labour Party in 1932 over a secondary issue, refused to relate in any positive way to those who had not 'seen the light' and joined it, provoking a rapid decline from a position where it had 37 MPs at the time of the split, to four, all in the Glasgow area, following the 1935 election in which it stood 17 candidates. The Socialist Labour League, with some implantation in the unions and Labour Party, formed an 'open' party, the Workers Revolutionary Party, in 1973, which became known as a madly sectarian organisation dreaming of imminent revolution (led by itself, of course) before its collapse.

More recently, Militant, now the Socialist Party, had several MPs and councillors when it was in the Labour Party, but after some were witch-hunted it decided to stand candidates against the Labour Party, provoking many more expulsions, and then left en masse in the belief that the Poll Tax movement and 'open' existence would lead to rapid growth. Instead, it has declined to a shadow of its former self.

Clearly, the forces of the Socialist Alliance have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing from past experiences.

Could the Alliance have 'succeeded'?

There used to be a response to the question 'could the SLP have done differently?' which went along the lines that 'if Arthur Scargill wasn't Arthur Scargill'. But the answer goes much deeper. There is no 'iron law of history' which says that an attempt to set up a new socialist party *has* to be linked to a sectarian approach to the rest of the labour movement. But things come pretty close.

If the aim of socialists is not just to form a larger left grouping, but to actually encourage the fight for socialism, then a healthy approach to the rest of the labour movement is essential. But historical experience in Britain shows that once an organisation decides to cut its ties and claim to be 'the alternative' itself, then it also adopts a sectarian approach.

The Alliance, and its component parts, has always stated its intention of winning over independents and Labour Party members. While it has recruited small numbers, its whole approach militates against convincing larger numbers. Indeed, the call to Labour Party members to simply leave and join the Socialist Alliance (frequently repeated) actually weakens the opposition to Blair, as does the emphasis on weakening or breaking the link between the unions and the Labour Party.

To back up its rhetoric about being a growing force posing the only alternative,

the Alliance systematically downplays the real state of politics in the labour movement. Emphasis is made on the gains made by the left in union elections in recent years. Without decrying these (indeed we welcome them), it is also necessary to get these in perspective. Mark Serwotka's victory as general secretary of the PCS (against, incidentally, the initial opposition of the Socialist Party) was fantastic, but it should not be forgotten that he is massively outvoted on the National Executive, to the extent that they have muzzled him in speaking out against the war. There are union executives (such as the telecoms executive of the CWU) where the left has had control for years, but this has not resulted in some great upsurge in struggle.

Debates at union conferences over the political fund have often been misrepresented. The Unison conference decision, for instance, to review its political fund, was often reported as a step towards funding left candidates, although this is unlikely in the extreme. The GMB appears to have decided to be selective in which Labour Party candidates it funds in the May 2002 council elections, but this is a very long way from deciding to support non-Labour candidates.

When it comes to the Labour Party, the forces of the Alliance continually emphasise the damage that has been done over the years to party democracy and policy. Only the Socialist Party has consistently argued that this has amounted to a qualitative transformation into a straightforward bosses' party, but it is hard to distinguish it from the others in terms of the practical conclusions they draw.

Only a fool would deny that serious change has taken place in the Labour Party, both in terms of the destruction of democratic channels and the love affair with big business. However, this has to be weighed against the fact that not only are many important unions still affiliated (with 50 per cent of the votes at party conference and places on the National Executive and National Policy Forum), but that party members regularly oppose the leadership in, for instance, elections to the constituency places on the National Executive. Stating this is not to paint the Labour Party in rosy colours, but to recognise reality.

The area of the trade unions is where the approach of Alliance supporters in fact weakens the left most. Not only are they unwilling to stand for election to Labour Party bodies to push union policies, but their continual emphasis on the future of the political funds ducks the fight over the accountability of union representatives within the Labour Party.

For a new party to work it would need to

draw in significant forces from the unions and Labour Party; indeed, it would need to be part of a major split within the Labour Party. The Socialist Alliance could only work if it won over those splitting forces, diluting the influence of the left groups. But the whole methodology of the Alliance, discouraging any fight within the Labour Party and encouraging people to leave Labour piecemeal, is an adoption of the tactics least likely to encourage such a split. The Alliance has effectively condemned itself to be an arena of left group infighting to recruit the small number of independents involved.

After December 1

It would be silly in the extreme to predict the collapse of the Socialist Alliance after the SP walkout on December 1. Some in the Alliance see it as having a positive effect, clearing out a disruptive tendency, and no doubt some of its work will run more smoothly. Organisations with disastrous politics do not simply disappear; the SLP still stumbles on despite being a rump around personal supporters of Scargill, occasionally getting better election results than the Socialist Alliance. Probably the best example of all is the ultra-sectarian Socialist Party of Great Britain (now also called the Socialist Party), which has continued in its own irrelevant way for over 100 years. But we can be certain that, without a fundamental change in political approach, the Socialist Alliance will not emerge from the shadows to be a serious force in working class politics. **WA**

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Blair proposes an increased role for religious sects

Defend the profane!

by Charli Langford

Last June, BNP leader Nick Griffin claimed after the riots in Bradford and Oldham that these towns had 'a Muslim problem'. Ordinarily you would have expected him to refer to a particular race, but today's thinking fascist has realised that further racial integration and strong propaganda against racism means that mere mention of race no longer conjures up the xenophobia it used to.

Britain is among the least religious of societies. People may tick CofE on a census or medical consent form but *Religious Trends* (a Christian publication, despite the ecumenical name) reports a mere seven per cent of the population attending church on Sunday. The editor admits that 'claims that Britain is a Christian nation will finally have to be given up'. The British Social Attitudes Survey reports that people who said they had no religion went up from 31 to 45 per cent between 1983 and 1998.

The predominantly Islamic Arab states contain most of the global oil reserves, which has led to oppression by more powerful states. Secular Arab nationalism has failed to throw off this oppression; hence religion-based nationalism has gained strength. This Islamic opposition to the activities of the US, Britain and other Western powers has led to some hostility to Islam. Racists use this to generate hatred of those who trace their families back to the Islamic countries – in Britain usually not the Saudis or Kuwaitis but far poorer Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants.

There are strong reasons why such immigrants retain their religion. It becomes an important part of their identity, and much of the social support coming from within the community is mediated through the mosques. Political difference within the community is often related to which mosque you attend. The incidence of secularism is estimated to be 5 to 10 per cent. Since only a small number of people convert to Islam, there is a strong correlation in Britain between being Muslim and being Pakistani or Bangladeshi.

Anti-Islamic feeling

The attack on the World Trade Centre in September served Griffin well. There was a huge rise in anti-Islamic feeling, whipped up not by the BNP but by the government and practically all of the media. Muslim leaders were called upon to support the US coalition in the war in Afghanistan. Khalid Mahmood, the Labour MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, illustrates well the demands made. Writing in the *Observer* of November 11, he refers to 'the five myths Muslims must deny', and then proceeds to demolish one straw argument (that the war was an attack on Islam), and to maliciously misunderstand four other issues. He claims the air strikes were against the al-Qaida network (so why were the vast majority of deaths of non-combatants?), and that Muslims were advised by bin Laden's number two to avoid aeroplanes and high buildings (unsubstantiated). He says there were five debates on the war in parliament (but how many votes?) and that Muslim concerns over Kashmir and Bangladesh were addressed by Blair and Bush talking about a Palestinian state and Colin Powell describing Kashmir as central to resolving the India-Pakistan conflict (as if a few words after decades of silence could resolve these problems). He then goes on to praise Britain's record on integration (which is 'good' only because the rest of Europe is even worse), and to praise 'our ally', Pakistan's unelected leader General Musharraf.

The point is not whether Mahmood genuinely believes all this, whether he is being diplomatic in order to further his career, or whether he just feels intensely pressured. The point is that Muslims, more than anyone else, are being challenged as disloyal if they fail to agree with Blair's political line. For a Muslim, support for bombing the innocent inhabitants of Afghanistan – or Somalia, or Iraq, depending on Bush's next accusation – is the New Labour version of the Tebbit 'cricket test'.

Religious hatred laws

In the context of both the far right and the government attacking Muslims (where

Muslim is almost a synonym for Asian or African immigrant), the Labour Party announced at its 2001 conference that it would complement the laws against incitement to racial hatred with corresponding laws against incitement to religious hatred.

These laws were to be part of last year's anti-terrorism act. However, they were rejected by the House of Lords and the government had to decide whether to insist on the relevant clauses going in – which could have delayed or even killed off the whole bill – or to pass the bill as amended. They chose the latter and the bill was passed on December 14, with the promise that the religious hatred legislation would be re-introduced later in this parliament.

At first sight, a law against religious hatred is a good idea. But religion is very different from race. Race is a fundamental and unchangeable part of a person's identity and there is no scope for arguing that one race is inferior to another. Religion, although it has some links with identity as a badge of community solidarity, is primarily a belief system and each individual has the choice of adopting or rejecting it. There is also scope for arguing that the tenets of one belief system are better or worse than those of another. Society is required to tolerate people of all races, but very few people would argue that society should accept – taking an extreme example – a religion that promotes human sacrifice.

This example may be far-fetched, but where should the line be drawn? Genital mutilation? Forced marriage? Institutionalised inferiority for women? The three main religions in Britain today have preached the inferiority of women for the whole of their existence. In a few days' time, the crown appointments commission will be drawing up a shortlist of bishops, one of whom will be chosen by the prime minister to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the global followers of the Anglican sect. The commissioners have been chosen to represent a broad sweep of opinion and include opponents and supporters of women priests. Take that last sentence; substitute 'black' for 'women' and ask yourself if it is racist.

There already exists generalised protection against incitement to hatred, no matter what the basis. The proposed laws against religious hatred are modelled on those existing on racial hatred and would, among other effects, make it an offence to publish or distribute threatening, abusive or insulting material which is likely to stir up religious hatred, even if that is not the intention. Since there is no telling exactly what 'likely to stir up' means, this is effectively a gag on criticism of religions.

But the debate goes further. Many people are opposed to religion in itself, rather than specific religions. One particular argument is that since religion is based upon unprovables such as the existence of a god and whether there is an afterlife, any moral code derived from it based upon the will of the god and the criteria for the afterlife is therefore not logically defensible. And since religiously inspired moral codes have been used historically as tools by the unscrupulous to gain the support of credulous and unthinking people for almost all the questionable things that nations and/or individuals do, that religion is therefore a force for evil in the world.

Abraham's legacy

An example: Tony Blair said at the Labour Party conference that 'Jews, Muslims and Christians are all children of Abraham', and he is right – all three religions recognise their common ancestry in Abraham, the great leader and exemplar. What was Abraham's great example? It was to be so submissive to god that he was willing to burn his son to death at god's whim. A poor parent, in my book, and not very bright in failing to recognise that his god was clearly a sadistic psychopath. But Abraham's legacy lives on – the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God teaches that the sick are possessed by demons which must be driven out; unfortunately for Victoria Climbié, her carers were members. Judging by the last writings of Mohamed Atta, the pilot of one of the aircraft that crashed into the World Trade Centre, he also took Abraham's view.

Would it be permissible to publish the previous paragraph if the law on religious hatred had gone through? Almost certainly not – it is definitely 'likely to incite religious hatred' against the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. The Arabic word Islam means literally 'submission to the will of god', so Muslims might claim that the paragraph is likely to incite hatred against them by ridiculing the fundamental tenet of their religion. They might not win, but the case would drag on for ages, lawyers would make huge profits and the magazine would go bankrupt. More likely,

no shop would sell the magazine for fear of prosecution. Yet the points being made are completely reasonable and defensible. In the Climbié case, a law against religious hatred might make it legally impossible to publish the prosecution arguments. In short, a law on religious hatred would cut against the democratic discussion of social issues.

Blair has also suggested extending the blasphemy laws, which currently only apply to Christianity, to include the other main religions. Since there is little point in extending a law unless it is to be used, this is obviously intended as an ancillary to the projected religious hatred laws and as having the same purpose.

Takeover of social services?

One major effect of any laws which prevent democratic discussion of religious issues will be to assist New Labour in one of their most worrying plans – the drawing of religious sects into the provision of social services.

On March 29, 2001, Blair addressed the Christian Socialist Movement, which had invited along Jews, Sikhs and Muslims for the occasion. The 'faith groups' were told that their role was 'legitimate and important'. Blair explicitly praised church schools, but he listed areas where religious involvement could increase as 'health projects, youth work, provision for the elderly, the homeless, work with offenders and ex-offenders, local regeneration schemes and many other social activities'.

The majority of religious sects have made their agenda plain. They complain that they often miss out on funding, particularly from the national lottery, because their work is aimed at their co-religionists rather than at the community as a whole, and they seek exemption from the human rights legislation in order to employ co-religionists. Such concerns may be understandable, though not defensible, in the case of, say, a Muslim charity working to help the poorest in society who often don't know their entitlements; for a Church of England school serving a prosperous suburb different arguments apply.

One can see why politicians are interested in this idea. Why bother to fund expensive professionals to staff the social services when the jobs can be done by religiously-inspired volunteers more concerned with the piling up of spiritual capital for their afterlives? It would undermine the unions too since such people would have no interest in joining a union. After all, what would be the point of industrial action – to put demands on god for a better afterlife? What do we want? More *houris*! When do we want them? When we're dead!

The proposal to encourage religious groups to work with 'offenders' is extremely worrying. Already the National Secular Society knows of cases where refusal to attend prayers has been cited as a factor in refusing parole to prison inmates. And the big question about allowing religious groups to increase their work with the homeless is will you be more likely to acquire a home if you convert, or pretend to convert, to the religion of the sect providing the homes? The answer is obvious: even if no direct discrimination occurs, there will be indirect discrimination in that converting to the sect is likely to be seen as taking life more seriously, as becoming a 'more deserving case'. Similar concerns about religious bias come into play in all the other areas of social provision.

Tony Blair has so far talked with Christians, Jews, Sikhs and Muslims about religion-based social provision. But if there is a measure of state funding, what other religions will be permitted to operate in this arena? Obscure Christian sects? Wiccans? Moonies? Satanists? Scientologists? What are the criteria for being accepted as a genuine religion? Will the government fall foul of the religious hatred laws?

As well as the worries about distortions and discriminations that will be incorporated into social provision by handing chunks of it over to the sects representing a small minority of society, there is also the danger is 'Mother Teresa syndrome'. Mother Teresa was not a great fan of modern medical techniques, nor was she at all concerned with fundraising. Her belief was that 'god will provide'. When god did so, which happened roughly as often as chance would predict, all was well. But on the far more frequent occasions when god failed to provide, her patients died. Mother Teresa didn't mind; who was she to question the decisions of god? In his mercy he took away most of her patients to a better place – which perhaps is the fate Tony Blair envisages for the recipients of his religiously-based social provision.

Socialists have an answer to all this. Rather than extending blasphemy laws to protect further religions (and then wrangling about which religions to include), we should level the playing field by removing the protection currently enjoyed by Christianity. There has to be complete separation of church and state. This doesn't mean that religious belief should be outlawed; people should have complete freedom to adopt whatever belief system they fancy, no matter how inconsistent. But all belief systems – and that includes philosophies and scientific theories – would have to accept criticism of their tenets. **WA**

Leeds United and racism

by Nick Davies

When Lee Bowyer and Jonathan Woodgate walked smirking out of the front entrance of Hull Crown Court last December, the media reaction was interesting. There was a palpable air of disappointment as the papers had to spike their ready-to-roll 'Celeb goes to prison' stories (basically the same ones they did for Jeffrey Archer and Jonathan King with a few of the names changed). There was plenty of the *Daily Mail* 'why oh why?' stuff about footballers earning too much, drinking too much, not being good role models, being part of the yob culture, etc. The papers were able, at last, to run all the stories they had about Woodgate setting £20 notes alight in his local pub and Bowyer trashing a burger bar when he played for Charlton Athletic.

Only in a distant fourth place, and principally among the broadsheet papers, was there any discussion about what to many people was the obvious racism in an incident which put an Asian student, Sarfraz Najeib, in hospital. In their defence, the media would say that the prosecution offered no evidence that this was a racially motivated attack, and the judge made no direction that it be dealt with as such. The prosecution might have regarded this as a complicating extra hurdle standing in the way of a conviction, and it only became known after the case had finished that Bowyer has form for this sort of thing. In the burger bar incident he apparently announced that he did not want to be served 'by a Paki'. Given that one of Najeib's attackers shouted 'Do you want some, Paki?', the Disappearing Racist Attack ranks as one of the strangest crime mystery stories of recent times. At the end of the day, the widespread impression, particularly among the Asian communities in West Yorkshire, was that an Asian was badly beaten up and two highly-paid, white, Leeds United footballers got away with it, Woodgate being convicted of the lesser charge of affray only.

Leeds United and racism go back a long way. There is some anecdotal evidence of

a Mosleyite presence at Elland Road in the 1930s and '40s. In the 1980s, racist activity inside and outside the ground, in the form of chanting, paper selling and attacks on black and Asian supporters of opposing teams, was at its height. That the situation there has improved to the extent that it has is due to the determination, and courage, of anti-racist supporters and fanzine editors. The club itself has felt compelled to do something to clean up its act, improving its community relations, and having an Asian player on the books. Having black players at the club of the stature of Lucas Radebe and Tony Yeboah obviously helped. Even so, despite Leeds and the surrounding towns such as Wakefield, Batley and Dewsbury having large Asian populations, there is scarcely an Asian face to be seen at Elland Road on match days, and even for a white, male, away supporter the atmosphere can be horrible. Nor are Leeds the only culprits. Although there are no more bananas and monkey noises at football grounds, Everton's small but vocal racist contingent is well known. There is still open racism at many smaller clubs, and the supporters of many clubs situated in areas with a large Asian population are overwhelmingly white. Clearly, the Kick Racism Out of Football campaign still has a way to go.

When anti-racists among the Leeds supporters heard what Woodgate and Bowyer had been up to that night, they must have held their heads in their hands. The response of the club can't have made them feel any better. The fact that Woodgate and Bowyer were allowed to carry on playing during the run-up to the trial sent out a signal, particularly to the racists in the Leeds support, that the club was standing by them, that this kind of thing was OK. Manager David O'Leary has obvious skills as a football tactician and motivator, but public relations is clearly not one of his talents. To him, 'loyalty' to his players means contesting every red and yellow card, even those involving Alan Smith, and before he's seen the video. He took this siege mentality several stages further with his protests that the two trials disrupted training sessions and

the self-righteous ramblings in his book *Leeds United On Trial*, in which everyone and anyone outside Elland Road with an 'agenda' is apparently out to bring the club down. The fact that O'Leary condemned the antics of his two players, that the club fined them four weeks' wages and ordered them to do extra community work smacks, in the light of what had gone before, of a panicky public relations U-turn or, possibly, a recognition that despite the verdicts, they were guilty all along. After all, Bowyer was acquitted, and, so his argument ran, why should the club punish him at all?

Football clubs are not open or accountable organisations. They are businesses and their chairmen are businessmen, often very rich, who regard the club either as a personal vanity project or as a part of their business portfolio. As a supporter, the best you can realistically hope for is a chairman who is a reasonably competent businessman and who cares about the club. Even so, they are conservative with a small 'c', and usually with a big one as well. Football managers are generally of the same conservative cast of mind. They concentrate on the 'football side', viewing the whole world through the prism of what is going to help the team win matches, and help them keep their jobs.

As for the players, exploited and underpaid 40 years ago when they travelled home from matches on the same buses as the supporters, today even the lesser talents in the Premier League can expect to be millionaires. They live in the gin, Jag and triple garage belt, a million miles from the daily experiences of the supporters. A bit of charity work is OK, but nothing 'political'; otherwise, stick to playing football. But, to adapt a phrase used by the cricket writer and Marxist C.L.R. James, what do they know of football who only football know? When the real world intruded, briefly, into fortress Leeds United, it would have been naïve, probably, to expect any other reaction from the club. The same would apply to similar incidents at most other clubs, so long as the clubs, and the players, are alienated from the communities they claim to serve.

Racism in Danish politics

by Mick Woods

It's only a week since I finished an article for *Labour Left Briefing*, where I stressed that the Liberal-Conservative minority government elected last November lacked 'room to manoeuvre'. Like my good friend Neil Murray wrote in *Workers Action* No.14, I suspect that I maybe 'bent the stick' a bit further than was wise, and maybe it snapped. I must apologise to all readers of *Briefing* and polish my crystal ball a little harder next time. This time I was definitely wrong.

In any case, three days after I hit the 'send' button, the Danish government published a list of proposals for further restriction of the right to immigrate/be accepted as a refugee or be united with your partner/reunited with your family. Despite the obviously racist nature of the proposals, the mainstream opposition in Denmark and the EU has remained surprisingly silent. The same cannot be said for the mainstream political parties in the rest of Scandinavia who have poured scorn on the government's proposals and accused them of pandering to the populist racists of the Danish Peoples' Party (DF). DF described themselves as being 'moderately positive' about the government's proposals – I would actually guess that they were 'over the moon' about them.

The dog that didn't bark

The silence of the EU and its component quangos has been deafening. Since the 'case of Austria' was investigated by a committee of 'the European good and the great', the EU has been most hesitant to get involved in the internal affairs of member countries, for example the right-wing Berlusconi government in Italy supported by Mussolini nostalgists and the Northern League. The expert committee found that Austria in fact had a better record of admitting and integrating immigrants than many of the 'liberal' north-European nations who had started the hoo-ha in the first place. In fact the whole 'sanction thing' with regard to Austria had nothing to do with the EU, but a lot to do with European

Social Democracy and the French Gaullists. To the limited extent that they wished to, or tried to, fight racism they deserved our critical support *but*, given the totally ineffective way they went about it, they deserved our total contempt. In the end it proved a humiliating defeat for them, and an embarrassment for the EU that got dragged into the sorry spectacle.

What's on the table?

The main proposals put forward by the government amount to the following:

1. To institute a 'Green Card' system to attract qualified workers in areas where there is a shortage. This is much like the US system, which gives no right of residence. In any case, Iraqi farmers need not apply.

2. To limit partner entry to those over 24 (formerly 18). The government argues that this is to remedy forced/arranged marriages!

3. To restrict the right of parents to immigrate to join family in Denmark.

4. To create a discriminatory level of social security for immigrants and refugees in the first seven years of their stay in Denmark. This is to some extent ameliorated by allowing immigrants/refugees a slightly higher earning allowance whilst on social security – this will presumably help fill jobs in the low-paid and casual sectors, such as cleaning.

5. That Denmark only accepts refugees as defined by the relevant UN conventions, not, as formerly, the category of *de facto* refugees – for example, gays from Iran, victims of domestic violence from Sri Lanka and so on.

6. Limitations on holidays in the land one fled from – for example, if one fled from Srebrenica in 1995, one would need special permission to visit Bosnia unless one wished to have problems with the immigration services.

The election

The big winners in the election were the Liberals (Venstre) and DF. Both ran disgustingly racist campaigns and both took a step further right after September 11. The most extreme racist party, the Progress

Party, led by the senile Mogens Glistrup, bombed out of parliament with 0.6 per cent of the vote. Four years ago Glistrup was re-admitted to the party and this caused their four MPs to leave. If Glistrup is a senile racist idiot, then Pia Kjaersgaard of the DF is not far behind. Kjaersgaard described Islam at a recent DF conference as 'not a religion, but terrorism'.

The Social Democrats (SD) were the first to turn up the racist heat, during the Euro-referendum in 2000. The then Home Secretary, Karen Jespersen (ex Left-Socialist), proposed that refugees suspected of criminal activity be sent to a 'deserted island' (presumably within Danish waters). This opened the 'Pandora's box' of racism that the capitalist parties have fed on ever since. Interestingly enough, DF kept a low profile during the referendum and let SD make the racist running.

DF's increased vote in the election is depressing but no great shock. There have been populist/racist parties in the Danish parliament since 1973. They were much weaker from 1987 to 1998 but were still getting enough votes for parliamentary representation (two per cent plus). This time they were able to attract a large protest vote from disillusioned Social Democrats who felt that DF (and even Venstre) were more in touch with the need for an efficient welfare state to match the high level of taxation in Denmark.

To a great extent the questions of welfare and racism were mixed up in the election and the capitalist parties had, at least, the 'right' spin. Whether one can improve things and freeze, or reduce, taxes is another question, of course. In any case, the subliminal message that it was immigrants 'fucking up our nice, cosy, little society' worked. But for how long can it work?

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Catholic guilt – the Vatican, fascism and the Holocaust

Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII

By John Cornwell

Viking, 1999, 430pp, £20

Reviewed by Richard Price

This book had a strange genesis. The author, a Cambridge academic expert in Vatican affairs writing from within the Catholic tradition, had intended a sympathetic biography of his subject Eugenio Pacelli, who as Pope Pius XII from 1939-58 was the most influential churchman of his generation. Writing to request access to the Vatican's vast archives, he stressed he was 'on the side of my subject'. (p.x) The outcome of his detailed researches is a chilling indictment, accusing Pacelli of, among other things, 'collusion with tyranny and ultimately violence' (p.xi) in his cold indifference to the fate of European Jews in the Holocaust.

By the time Cornwell came to write this book, Pacelli's reputation was already far from unsullied.¹ Several other books and a controversial play in the 1960s had made similar allegations, while accusations have been made periodically that the Vatican colluded in spiriting Nazi war criminals out of Europe at the end of the war. The power of Cornwell's book rests on the extensive research he has carried out in the belly of the Vatican beast.

Pacelli was born in 1876 into a family of Church lawyers. Catholicism was on the defensive after the Risorgimento. The loss of the Papal States, seized by Victor Emmanuel II in 1870, made the Pope a 'prisoner in the Vatican'. He refused to recognise the united Italian state and rejected any settlement with it. In the 1870s, the newly unified German Empire under Bismarck launched the anti-Catholic Kulturkampf, and there was widespread hostility to Catholicism in the wake of the Dreyfus affair in France. Although anti-semitism was unpopular in Italy – the Risorgimento had pulled down the walls of the Roman ghetto and proclaimed legal equality for Jews – it had a strong base in the Vatican hierarchy. By the late nineteenth century the traditional charge of Catholicism – that the Jews had brought down a curse upon their people because of their 'stubbornness' in refusing to acknowledge the Messiah – found support in the

development of modern anti-semitism across Europe.

Papal authoritarianism

In the spirit of a new counter-reformation, the papacy sought to reassert its authority by promoting the doctrine of papal infallibility. Pius X mounted a vigorous anti-Modernist campaign to combat all attempts to adapt Catholicism to the modern world, which culminated in the Anti-Modernist Oath of 1910. Under Benedict XV, elected in 1914, the Code of Canon Law would further codify papal authority and infallibility.

But the Vatican's concerns were far from being exclusively spiritual. Running in tandem with its internal authoritarianism was a foreign policy that aimed to extend its temporal power. By the age of 25, Pacelli was already marked out for fast track promotion in the Vatican machine, and he became the leading proponent of the policy of Church-state treaties, which were designed to give the Church a privileged position within the major European states.

Already deeply conservative, Pacelli's formative political experiences took place when he was Papal nuncio in strongly Catholic Bavaria during the short-lived Munich Soviet Republic of 1918-19. He described the leader of the revolutionary government, Max Levien in the following terms: 'This Levien is a young man, of about thirty or thirty-five, also Russian and a Jew. Pale, dirty, with drugged eyes, hoarse voice, vulgar, repulsive, with a face that is both intelligent and sly.' (p.75) Munich was, Pacelli informed the Vatican, suffering 'under a harsh Jewish-Russian revolutionary tyranny'. (p.78) The efforts of two members of the Red Brigade militia to requisition Pacelli's official limousine were the ultimate indignity, apparently causing him nightmares for the rest of his life! Pacelli's sympathies lay with the proto-fascists of the Freikorps, who overthrew the revolutionary government and instituted a White Terror resulting in numerous summary executions.

Germany remained top of the agenda of Vatican foreign policy. Not only did it have over 20 million Catholics, but through the Catholic Centre Party it was able to directly influence the government policy of one of Europe's major powers. The Centre Party

was a key player in post-war politics, providing five of the Weimar Republic's ten chancellors, and the Vatican repeatedly urged it not to form coalitions with the godless Social Democrats. Catholicism in Germany underwent something of a resurgence in the 1920s. By 1930, it was estimated that there were 23 million Catholics in Germany – 35 per cent of the population – making it the largest social institution in Germany. The Catholic Youth alone numbered 1.3 million.

Negotiations for a Concordat with the state government of Bavaria began in November 1920. Pacelli astonished ministers with the extent of his demands. On the schools question alone, 'he insisted that the state would be bound by any and all proposals of the local bishop regarding teachers of religion, and that the state would be obliged to fire such teachers if the bishop so demanded. Meanwhile, the state would be required to meet all financial obligations and at the same time guarantee the application of canon law to the faithful.' (p.92) The treaty with Bavaria was finally signed in January 1924, and it was followed by a further Concordat with largely Protestant Prussia in 1929.

The Vatican and Mussolini

Meanwhile the Vatican's relations with Mussolini's Italy were steadily growing warmer, and in February 1929 the Lateran Treaty was signed. Under its terms, the Fascist state recognised the sovereignty of the Vatican and recognised Catholicism as 'the sole religion of the state' – a status that gave it important financial and legal privileges. In return, the Vatican recognised the Italian state. From Mussolini's standpoint, at least as important was the Vatican's tacit political support, and the voluntary dissolution of most of the institutions of political Catholicism – the Popular Party, the Catholic trade unions and cooperatives. In local elections that followed a month after the signing of the Treaty, priests urged support for the fascists, while Pius XI (elected in 1922) described Mussolini as 'a man sent by Providence'. (p.114)

In an article written at the time of the Lateran Treaty, an as yet minor politician on the far right in Germany noted with satisfaction the developments in Italy and contrasted them with political Catholicism in Germany. 'The fact that the Curia is now

making its peace with Fascism', wrote Adolf Hitler, 'shows that the Vatican trusts the new political realities far more than did the former liberal democracy with which it could not come to terms . . . By trying to preach that democracy is still in the best interests of German Catholics, the Centre Party . . . is placing itself in stark contradiction to the spirit of the treaty signed today by the Holy See.' (p.115)

From 1930-32, Germany was ruled by a coalition headed by the Centre Party's Heinrich Brüning. Brüning is familiar to readers of Trotsky's writings on fascism in Germany as the leader of the first of three increasingly right-wing Bonapartist governments that preceded Hitler. As unemployment soared from 3 million in 1930 to 5.6 million by the end of 1931, the 'Hunger Chancellor' as he became known adopted drastic deflationary measures, raising taxes for those in work, cutting unemployment benefit, and ruling by emergency decree. To that extent, the commitment of the Centre Party to democracy was already shaky, and it helped prepare the ground for Hitler – something Cornwell barely acknowledges in his focus upon the role of Pacelli.

As Hitler's support began to take off, the Catholic bishops hovered between criticising Nazi ideology and uneasily accommodating to it. To Pacelli – by now Cardinal Secretary of State and effectively number two in the Vatican – Nazism was a potentially useful counterweight to atheistic Communism. The big prize for Rome remained a Reich Concordat with the whole of Germany, and all other considerations were subordinated to this goal. Yet almost all the Centre Party leaders had little enthusiasm for the project, which they saw as politically divisive.

In August 1931, Brüning met Pacelli, and was lectured on the need to 'form a right-wing administration [presumably including the Nazis] precisely in order to achieve a Reich Concordat'. (p.121) Brüning later wrote that for Pacelli: 'All successes could only be attained by papal diplomacy. The system of concordats led him and the Vatican to despise democracy and the parliamentary system . . . Rigid governments, rigid centralization, and rigid treaties were supposed to introduce an era of stable order, an era of peace and quiet.' (p.124)

In diplomacy it takes two to tango. Hitler was well aware from studying German history that tackling German Catholicism head on was a potentially dangerous diversion which had weakened Bismarck and created bitter north-south tensions. Better to neutralise it, better still to press it into service. When the Concordat was signed he would greet it as creating 'an area of trust that was particularly significant in the developing struggle against international Jewry'. (p.7)

Another key player in Pacelli's German

policy was Ludwig Kaas, a priest, Reichstag deputy and Centre Party leader since 1928. For the three years prior to Hitler coming to power Kaas neglected his parliamentary duties and shuttled backwards and forwards between Berlin and Rome, working closely with Pacelli on the proposed Concordat. Kaas acted as Pacelli's tool inside the Centre Party, pushing the idea of co-operation with the Nazis against Brüning, who was increasingly opposed to the whole Concordat policy. In the spring of 1932, Pacelli gave another clear indication of where his sympathies lay by appointing as bishop of Freiburg, over the heads of the diocese, Konrad Gröber – a right-winger who would become known as the 'Brown Bishop' for his Nazi fellow travelling.

Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, but lacked fully dictatorial powers until after the elections of March that year. Almost immediately after the elections, which had been conducted amidst massive intimidation, Hitler made it clear that he would only sign the Concordat if the Centre Party agreed to support an Enabling Act giving the Nazis absolute power. Kaas, acting under Pacelli's orders, made it his business to pull the Centre Party into line. Cornwell sums up Pacelli's position: 'The Centre Party, in Pacelli's view, had to go. But before its final dissolution, the circumstance of its continued existence . . . offered a bargaining counter in his negotiations with Hitler.' (p.143)

The Centre Party commits suicide

What Cornwell calls 'the immense tragedy of the abdication of political Catholicism' (p.197) was in the event more of an ugly farce. When the Centre Party's 78-strong parliamentary group came to debate the Enabling Act on March 23, only 14 deputies (including Brüning) called for opposition. But this minority allowed itself to be swayed by calls for unity and eventually the whole group marched back into the Chamber and voted to make Hitler a dictator.

While the left-wing opponents of the Nazis were being rounded up, the Protestant churches issued a statement conciliatory towards the new regime on March 26 and the Catholic bishops followed with a similar one two days later. On April 1 the boycott of Jewish businesses began – without a murmur from the Vatican, although it was fully informed. When Brownshirts viciously attacked a religious procession of 25,000 Catholic youth in Munich in June, Pacelli's ally Cardinal Faulhaber wrote to the Bavarian bishops urging them to cancel any further public activity on the part of Catholic youth associations. On July 4, the Centre Party formally disbanded. Sixteen days later the Concordat was signed.

The point is not that German Catholicism was monolithic in its acquiescence to the

Nazis – there were of course courageous opponents, including a number of priests. Even Brüning had belated second thoughts about the capitulation of the Centre Party, and called for resistance.

But at the level of its leadership, however, the record was dismal. When the Concordat was ratified in September 1933, the Horst Wessel Song was sung in Berlin Cathedral. Even before the Nuremberg Laws were passed, priests provided the Nazi authorities with evidence of racial origins through marriage and baptismal records that helped identify Jews. Indeed the sole preoccupation of the hierarchy seems to have been to request the regime cease persecuting Jewish converts to Catholicism. Even when, in the course of the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, a number of oppositional Catholic laity were murdered, the bishops remained silent.

Despite this, the totalitarian nature of Nazism made it almost inevitable that opposition currents would develop among the rank and file of both the Protestant and Catholic churches. When such movements did emerge, it provoked a wide-ranging debate among the German Trotskyists as to the attitude revolutionaries should take to such developments.² Trotsky's contribution to the discussion is a model of non-sectarian clarity:

'Of course, supporting the church is out of the question. For us it can only be a question of whether or not we support the political struggle of Catholics and Protestants to remain Catholics and Protestants and to act as such. The answer to this question is yes. It goes without saying that we do not in the process commit ourselves to supporting religion and the church, but rather emphasise, insofar as possible, our opposition to religion and the church.

' . . . Slogans like "Separation of church and state" and "Separation of school and church" are of course correct in themselves and should be raised also when the opportunity arises. But these slogans don't really hit the nail on the head. For what is at issue is the right of Catholics and Protestants to consume their religious opium without having their existence threatened or prejudiced – regardless of whether the church as such is separated from the state. It is first of all a matter of freedom of conscience, then of equal rights, regardless of faith (pagan, Catholic, Protestant, etc.), then of the right to form organisations (Catholic youth organisations, etc.).

' . . . The task is simply to find real and effective ways and means to intervene in the struggle to encourage and extend the religious-democratic opposition and to lend aid to the young Catholics – especially the workers – in their struggle (and not to the Nazi police, which wants to "destroy" the church organisations), etc.'³

(However, although Trotsky was alive to the *potential* of the church question, he clearly had little patience with a hypothetical debate rolling on interminably. By September 1935, he told his German co-thinkers that he considered that 'there has been far too much debate' on the issue.⁴)

Such limited potential as there was for opposition within Catholicism was kept in check when in 1935-36 the Nazis launched a number of trials of members of Catholic religious orders for sexually abusing minors. Not until March 1937 was there a public criticism of the regime. Even then, the papal encyclical read from pulpits made no clear condemnation of the Nazis, did not defend Jews and contented itself solely with a defence of Catholics as Catholics.

For Cornwell, the 'tragedy' of German Catholicism lies in its betrayal by the Vatican. He cites two examples where Catholic opposition did cause the regime to abandon or substantially modify its plans. The first instance concerned the attempt to remove crucifixes from schools in 1936; the second was over the euthanasia programme in 1941. From these examples, he concludes that the active opposition of Catholicism would have made Hitler's Final Solution impossible.

The Pope and the dictators

The trouble with such a proposition is not only that it can't be proved, but also that it rests upon the assumption that the Vatican was capable of acting as a progressive democratic force – at a time when it gave every indication to the contrary. In September 1936, for instance, we find Pius XI denouncing the 'Satanic enterprise' of Marxism as responsible for the Spanish Civil War, and blessing Franco's forces for defending 'the rights and honour of God against a wild explosion of forces so savage and so cruel as to be well-nigh incredible'. (p.175) On the eve of the Second World War, we find Pacelli – newly crowned Pius XII – addressing Hitler in the following terms: 'To the Illustrious Herr Adolf Hitler, Führer and Chancellor of the German Reich! Here at the beginning of Our Pontificate We wish to assure you that We remain devoted to the spiritual welfare of the German people entrusted to your leadership.' (p.208) When Republican Spain was finally defeated in the spring of 1939, Pacelli sent a telegram to Franco congratulating him for giving Spain a 'Catholic victory', and two weeks later, in a message to Spanish bishops, he urged them to uphold 'the principles taught by the Church and proclaimed with such nobility by the Generalissimo: namely justice for crime and benevolent generosity for those who have been misled'. (p.223) Franco would later be awarded the Vatican's highest honour – the Supreme Order of Christ. Meanwhile the Vatican remained silent about Mussolini's

bloody adventures in Abyssinia, Libya and Albania.

When Germany threatened Poland with invasion, Pacelli urged Poland to accept the ultimatum. He adopted an even more indulgent attitude towards Ante Pavelic's fascist Ustashe regime in Croatia, which he saw as a bulwark against Communism. Pacelli saw it as a clash between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs and hoped for mass conversions among those the Ustashe terrorised. Indeed, Catholic Franciscan priests took part in a number of massacres of Serbs and Jews.

There is no doubt that the Vatican, through its wide network of contacts and informants and officials in Eastern Europe, was reliably and well informed about the Holocaust from the spring of 1942 onwards. But Pacelli failed to lift a finger in defence of the Jews, or even verbally criticise Nazism. The furthest he went was to refer in a broadcast on Christmas Day, 1942 to the 'hundreds of thousands, who without any fault of their own, sometimes only by reason of their nationality or race, are marked down for death or gradual extinction'. (p.268) But the reference was deliberately oblique, made no explicit mention of either the Nazis or the Jews, and came at the end of a lengthy broadcast. Beyond that, there was only silence.

Within Germany, the Catholic bishops confined themselves to pleading for Jewish-Christian converts not to have to wear the yellow star. Only the Dutch bishops appear to have protested against Jewish deportations. (To the Netherlands also fell the distinction of being the only country in Nazi-occupied Europe in which workers staged a general strike.) While 42,000 Jews were being deported from France to Auschwitz, Pacelli, according to an eyewitness, 'warmly praised the work of the Marshal [Pétain] and took a keen interest in government actions that are a sign of the fortunate renewal of religious life in France'. (p.288) When in October 1943 the deportation of Rome's Jewish community finally took place – on the doorstep of the Vatican – Pacelli once again remained silent.

Pacelli's priorities lay elsewhere; he was concerned that the Allies might bombard Rome. When the Allies took Rome, he asked the British ambassador to the Vatican to request that Allied contingents entering the city should not contain any black troops. (p.319) Two decades before he had repeated lies about black French troops in the Rhineland being responsible for routinely raping German women and children – even after the allegations had been investigated and disproved. (p.94)

Defending 'Christian civilisation'

Surprisingly, Cornwell finds insufficient evidence to convict the Vatican of co-ordinating

an Odessa-type network to get Nazi war criminals out of Europe at the end of the war. This, however, has been contradicted by a recent in-depth study of how Juan Perón's regime brought Nazis to Argentina. A review of this new work summarises the evidence as follows: 'Even more enthusiastic than Perón were the prelates of the Catholic Church in Argentina, Spain, France, Belgium and the Vatican itself. Nazi criminals and collaborators from all over Europe, survivors of Catholicism's flirtation with the far right in the 1930s, were privileged recipients of Vatican support, and provided with flights to Buenos Aires.'⁵

Pacelli's vision for post-war Italy was a corporate state on the Spanish model. He had to make do with Christian Democrats, backed by the US and Mussolini's old enemies, the Mafia. He described the 1948 general election as a battle for 'Christian civilisation', and mobilised the Church to combat the Communist Party-Socialist Party menace. His social policy remained as reactionary as ever. He declared Catholicism and communism incompatible, abolished the worker priests (for fear they become too close to their flocks), and rounded upon modernism, communism, birth control and jazz. He upheld liturgical uniformity, promoted obscurantism of all sorts, and especially the cult of Mary, and praised chastity.

None of Pacelli's crimes – sins of omission as well as of commission – have prevented his supporters from embarking on the process of beatification – the drawn out submissions that lead eventually to canonisation and sainthood. As a writer from within the Catholic tradition, you suspect Cornwell's motive in writing the book is primarily to put a spanner in the beatification works. But for all his ponderous prose and occasional naivety, this is a valuable trawl in some very murky waters. **WA**

Notes

¹ One of the most acute contemporary observers on the relationship between the Vatican and fascism was the late Frank Ridley in his books *The Papacy and Fascism* (1937) and *The Jesuits: A Study in Counter Revolution* (1938).

² M. Dewar, *The Quiet Revolutionary*, Bookmarks, 1989, pp.157-8

³ L. Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, Pathfinder, 1977, pp.80-83

⁴ Ibid, p.112

⁵ R. Gott, 'Open Door to Evil', review of *The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina* by Uki Gofii, *Guardian*, January 26, 2002

Revolutionary defeatism and the war against Afghanistan

In the last issue of Workers Action, we published an article by Richard Price entitled 'Imperialist War and "Revolutionary Defeatism"'. Yossi Rad, of the Socialist Workers League of Palestine, has criticised the article and our position on the imperialist attack on Afghanistan. Below, we print an extract from a document by Yossi, a comment in support of our article by David Walters of San Francisco, and four items from the e-mail discussion between them. The promised follow-up article by Richard Price examining the Marxist position on wars between imperialist countries and colonial or semi-colonial countries, which we hope will serve as an answer to the comrades of the SWL, will now appear in the next issue of Workers Action.

From the introduction to Yossi Rad's document 'On the policy of revolutionary defeatism':

During the imperialist attacks on Afghanistan, the policy of Workers Action was not for the revolutionary defeat of the US and its own British bourgeoisie, and at the same time for the revolutionary defence of Afghanistan, along the lines of the Movement for the Refoundation of the Fourth International that includes the Socialist Workers League of Palestine (see the Rome Declaration at www.po.org.ar). The headline of Workers Action ['Stop the war! Neither imperialism nor fundamentalism'] equated the imperialists with Afghanistan under Taliban rule. In our opinion there is a close connection between this typically centrist line and Richard Price's article on revolutionary defeatism.

Richard Price's article is well written, but its contents cannot but create confusion for the revolutionary movement. Richard's main argument is: 'It's not hard to arrive at the conclusion that the sharp distinction Lenin drew between his [Lenin's] "defeatist" position and the positions of other left internationalists was polemical rather than practical.' In other words, that the issue of calling or not calling for the revolutionary defeat of an imperialist country in a war is not essential.

It is more than strange that, at a time when an imperialist war against a semi-colonial country in need of support from socialists was taking place, Richard Price was dealing with another kind of war, an imperialist war on all sides. Were he dealing with the question of the development of revolutionary policies in response to changes in the relationship of forces in a given situation, as any Marxist would do, rather than using ahistorical formal logic as his tool of reasoning, he would have discovered that it wasn't Lenin, or Trotsky after Lenin's death, who was confused, but only Richard Price himself.

From David Walters to Workers Action:

Tell Richard this is one of the most thorough and enlightening essays on the subject of revolutionary defeatism I've ever read. Well done indeed.

I think it places something of a historical/theoretical challenge to the proponents of the Rome Declaration, especially on one of the most salient points of Richard's article, the issue of turning such a 'revolutionary defeatist' position into agitation – that is, toward the masses, particularly the 'masses' that have virtually no internationalist/social-democratic background which, after all, both Trotsky and Lenin, despite their differences, functioned in.

On the other hand, the Rome Declaration addresses the issue at hand, the war by the US against the people of Afghanistan. Richard's article, written – can I presume? – in the aftermath of 9/11, does not address the revolutionary perspective in *this* situation we face today; the Rome Declaration does, despite my differences with it.

[Richard Price's article was prepared after September 11, but is a redrafting and amplification of his introduction to Roman Rosdolsky's *Lenin and the First World War*, published by Workers Action as a pamphlet in 1999, and thus is more closely concerned with inter-imperialist war rather than the US/UK war against Afghanistan – Eds.]

From Yossi Rad, in the internet Trotskyist Discussion Forum:

The pressure in the imperialist countries is so strong that even ultra sectarian groups like the Spartacists have been capitulating. They refuse to defend Afghanistan!

The slogans 'revolutionary defeat for the imperialists' and 'revolutionary defence of Afghanistan' are not agitationals, they are a perspective and propaganda. With regard to agitation, with small changes we stand on the transitional programme of 1938.

[Yossi appended the text of 'The struggle against imperialism and war' from *The Tran-*

sitional Programme to this message. The next paragraph explains why some of the demands in that text are not included in his list – Eds.]

The USSR does not exist, and the main victims of racial hate in the US and Europe that we must defend are not the Jews, but Arabs and Muslims. The section about the referendum is not actual, and the call for votes at 18, I believe, is reality.

In the USA our tasks are:

As agitation we must call, for example, for:

- Not one penny, not one man.
- Strikes and other actions to prevent war material from reaching Afghanistan.
- Expropriate the war industries under workers' control.
- Open the books, self-defence.
- Soldiers' committees in the army.
- The Afghans are our brothers and sisters, the capitalists with Bush are the enemy.

Making propaganda against the class enemy at home:

- The US defeat is the lesser evil.
- Disarm the bourgeoisie, arm the working class.
- Revolutionary defeat – turn the war into civil war.

This is very different from the perspective of 'bring the boys home', or 'peace', or 'stop the war' or whatever nonsense pacifist slogan the middle class left wants to raise.

From David Walters, in the internet Trotskyist Discussion Forum:

I hope this longish response will be appreciated by all. I respond in detail because of my respect of the participants, particularly the SWL comrades who have to exist politically under terrible circumstances.

[Yossi wrote: The pressure in the imperialist countries is so strong that even ultra sectarian groups like the Spartacists have been capitulating. They refuse to defend Afghanistan!]

By point of reference this is interesting, but they never 'defended' anything, since for them 'defence' meant issuing leaflets. De-

fence was an abstraction. They couldn't defend themselves out of a wet brown paper bag. Ergo, reviewing their positions on politics amounts to discussing the physics of fluid dynamics on a ship rapidly sinking into the water with the participants of the discussion. Still, for those of us who follow such outfits, it's interesting they've abandoned their historic position on this.

[Yossi: The slogans 'revolutionary defeat for the imperialists' and 'revolutionary defence of Afghanistan' are not agitational, they are a perspective and propaganda. With regard to agitation, with small changes we stand on the transitional programme of 1938.]

I agree. But, to add some spice to this discussion, suppose, for example, the Taliban actually did support and help in the destruction of the WTC on 9/11? This attack was a reactionary attack, some believe supported by the US government itself in order to allow imperialism, US imperialism, to reassert itself. The logic is that we defend the Taliban against the US attack – wouldn't one get into a situation of defending the actions of the Taliban then, vis-à-vis its accused terrorism against workers in New York? Just a thought. I think this hasn't been discussed enough, that is, 'military support'. But to the meat of your argument . . .

[Yossi: The USSR does not exist, and the main victims of racial hate in the US and Europe that we must defend are not the Jews, but Arabs and Muslims. The section about the referendum is not actual, and the call for votes at 18, I believe, is reality.]

I'm not sure, Yossi, exactly what you mean by this. In the US the racial hatred is exactly directed against the 10 million Muslims here. This is why both major anti-war coalitions include the demand on the US to end its attacks on Muslims specifically and immigrants in general. You are correct, the voting age here is 18, won, in large part, due to the anti-war movement of 30 years ago, and for the same reasons, actually, as laid out in the *Transitional Programme*. On another issue, the 10 million Jews here are part of the white ethnic divide in the US, albeit the most affluent, considered 'white' for all intents and purposes, but there are still strong anti-Semitic undertones in society, the topic for another discussion.

Lenin and the First World War

by Roman Rosdolsky

is available for £1.95 from Prinkipo Press, PO Box 7268, London E10 6TX. Add post and packing – each copy 50p (UK), £1.00 (Europe), £1.50 (Rest of the World)

[Yossi: In the USA our tasks are: . . .]

The above demands, ripped out of the *Transitional Programme*, unfermented by the actual class struggle, do not adequately address the issues at hand for Trotskyists here. They do not take into account the consciousness of the class, which, after all, is how these demands were formulated, to act as a bridge between their present consciousness and taking on the state and bureaucrats. So let me add something, partly context, partly an understanding of class consciousness in the US today.

The primary task, or objective, would be to build a revolutionary party. Part of the problem of this discussion is that this is notably absent, as there is no revolutionary party, and even, for the American participants of this discussion, no one group we all belong to. I know you know this; it's not meant as a criticism, but it's something that I fall prey to often; in these discussions on the Internet, we're talking among people with extremely different traditions and methods, not as part of an internal party discussion.

Each of the above demands you lay out has to be actually used in a serious way. One of the contributions, in my opinion, that the Lambertists made on a theoretical level was an analysis of the Labour Party slogan and how it was used – or not used – by the SWP(US) under Cannon in the 1930s and 40s. Like a few others on the left they supported, sincerely, the formation of the Labour Party. So, for a period of 14 years, when the class, or a large minority of the class, was really open to the idea of independent political action, they 'raised' the slogan on all their banners – but did no actual organising for it, and took sectarian positions towards those groups that sought to use the LP idea concretely. Thus, the 'slogan' was correct, the actual implementation was negated by the inaction of the Party who couldn't see themselves actually making initiatives around it.

So, I want to go through each one of the slogans you raise and comment on them. I know you probably threw them together rather quickly, but they are a good measure of an 'orthodox' perspective.

1. Not one penny, not one man.

It's OK, a little weak in the US context. This has to do with the context of how funding is provided to the US military, which is more complex than the usual 'voting for war credits'. The best part of this demand is that it can be used to expose so called 'anti-war' Democrats/liberals who would argue against war but vote for the defence budget when they have a chance to do so. However, reflecting 'official', to use Trotsky's term, public opinion, there are no anti-war Democrats or Republicans – they are all in favour of war.

2. Strikes and other actions to prevent war material from reaching Afghanistan.

This is simply not an agitational slogan. It's the same as calling for a general strike when the tactical and strategic conditions don't meet the criteria for one; in other words, it's ultra-left, way beyond where American workers are at. Is it a propaganda slogan? Yes, in that when the consciousness of our class embraces an anti-war level, it's appropriate to raise. But this slogan goes to the heart of the problems with your method – you are projecting onto the class a consciousness that is completely absent, namely, a mass, even a large minority, of our class that is against the war but looking for methods to organise under, with whom this slogan would find resonance. It is simply too early, way too early, to raise this slogan in any serious way outside a propaganda venue and with other anti-war activists already committed to ending the war.

3. Expropriate the war industries under workers' control.

The problem with this slogan is the same as the one above. There is simply no way to organise around a slogan that is completely side-ways to American workers who've expressed no interest in even milder social-democratic solutions, let alone ones with a revolutionary content such as workers' control.

4. Open the books, self-defence.

How do you tie this to the war? Does it change workers' perspectives towards how they view the government, their boss or the war against the Afghan people?

5. Soldiers' committees in the army.

This one is appropriate under almost any circumstances. However, keep in mind that US GIs are not conscripts (all are volunteers, there is no draft anymore), thus it's a harder demand to raise. Actually, it's not a demand but an organising perspective. Secondly, you don't state 'why' soldiers should form committees – it is left hanging without context. During the proletarian military policy of the SWP, it was actually used, in a way, as a *pro-war* slogan – to carry out the war against the fascists, but under union control, that sort of thing. This is a different political context. During Vietnam, the SWP/YSA organised along these lines to push anti-war sentiment and organised troops against the war, including some demonstrations by active duty GIs. Certainly more appropriate later in a longer, drawn-out war, and certainly if the draft is implemented again (which, ironically, is something Trotskyists historically *support!* – not oppose).

6. The Afghans are our brothers and sisters, the capitalists with Bush are the enemy.

OK. It could be reformulated a little. I would support this as a slogan, but it would have to

be given some local context, tying it to something specific about Bush's rotten policies domestically. Ironically, it's necessary to distinguish between the Taliban and the Afghans themselves, even if the issue of defending the Afghan people means an alliance, such as that has any real substance, with the only sector of the Afghan people actually fighting US imperialism: the Taliban themselves. It goes back to, not 'official public opinion' as Trotsky lambasts, but again the general pro-war perspective of the people here. Like Trotsky's slogan of 'let the people vote on war' (the Ludlow Amendment), raised *prior* to December 7, 1941 (Pearl Harbour). It would have been ridiculous to raise this after the Japanese attack – it would have been passed with 99 per cent of the vote and have vindicated the war effort by pro-war capitalists.

The slogan Yossi does not raise, which I hope is not indicative of his 'anti-peace slogan' stance, is the slogan for 'ending the war'. His opposition to this and other slogans is self-defeating in my opinion and, in fact, a-historical, showing a lack of understanding of the successful US anti-war movement, which was one of the best examples of how Trotskyists mobilised people to end an imperialist, counter-revolutionary war that resulted in a victory for the struggle. It's the other half of this discussion, really.

In my mind, what I want to see is a successful movement that will end in a victory of the Afghan people – at least against imperialism. Most of the slogans raised agitationaly by Yossi fail to meet this criterion. If I'm an Afghan seriously wanting the bombs to stop falling, I couldn't care less how they stopped falling. I only care that they stop. I want something that hinders the US war effort. Do the slogans Yossi raises seriously address this? I don't think so.

From David Walters, in the internet Trotskyist Discussion Forum:

I think Yossi is wrong, or half right. The biggest flaw of his argument is that it does *not* deal with Trotsky's perspective towards World War Two! In this you see the 'art' of politics, as opposed to a dogmatic reflection of Lenin's position. While maintaining a revolutionary defeatist position on the war, he recognised the special character of fascism, that it was certainly something new to the mix. However, he never argued that the US SWP should agitationaly adopt this position – in fact, prior to the war Trotsky's position would be classified by Yossi as . . . *pacifist*! Trotsky argued that the SWP should champion US Congressman Ludlow's [constitutional amendment] to let the American people vote on war. Certainly a 'peace' position. The SWP's own propaganda was essentially 'pacifist', to use Yossi's incorrect application of the term.

The proof, by negative example of this, is G. Munis's attack on both Cannon and Trotsky for abandoning the 'revolutionary defeatist' line. It's an interesting discussion.

Also, more specifically, a 'military alliance' with the Taliban is still an abstraction. It means nothing and educates no one about imperialism. Support to all those that defend the sovereignty of Afghanistan is something else and means taking an 'Afghan' defencist position, something I'm very much in tune with. I raise this because I have my doubts about the Taliban as a group supposedly actually 'defending' Afghanistan as opposed to defending only themselves. . . .

From David Walters, in the internet Trotskyist Discussion Forum:

If I disagree with Yossi's assessment of Richard's article it's that Richard is trying to cover up for some sort of Kautskyism. I don't find this at all, even though it's the first part of a longer article. I think Richard has done a valuable service by raising some very real issues, at least historically, with the traditional Leninist programme on war. It shows that even for the internationalists among the social democracy (Lenin, Trotsky) things simply were *not* that clear, albeit they all opposed the war (World War One). But we can discuss forever the meaning of Richard's article, which would be of interest, no doubt, but the degree that it sheds light on the direction for the current situation is debatable.

I agree with Yossi that we have to wait for Richard's second part to assess his view on Afghanistan. Yossi's view that there are divisions among Trotskyists that span the gamut of views is very true on this war. For me, if you give an inch to imperialism . . . you've crossed a class line. But this doesn't address the Rome Declaration, the other half of this particular discussion. We have to look at what it is the tendency around the Partido Obrero and the SWL are saying and advocating – and if it has any significance in the 'first world' beyond small Trotskyist groups.

Revolutionary defeatism has to have *meaning* beyond declaring it. When Lenin raised it, it was part of an overall debate in a specific milieu: the international social democracy. The Bolsheviks actually participated and organised 'end the war' rallies towards 1916. In 1917 it was 'land, peace and bread', hardly a call to the barricades. But they maintained their theoretical positions towards turning the imperialist war into a civil war, if only to distinguish themselves from the national chauvinists inside and outside of the workers' movement. They were able to carry through on this after February, but their actual activities on the ground were far from what Lenin advocated in Zurich or other cities outside of Russia, far from it.

So what does Yossi's view, and that of the Rome Declaration, hold for workers in the

belly of the beast? I'm afraid at this time it doesn't [hold anything]. It provides no organising perspective whatsoever for Trotskyists in the anti-war movement or the workers' movement in general other than 'explaining', analytically, what the war is about. Convincing them that [they should have] 'an alliance' with the Taliban, military or otherwise, after they supposedly condoned the attack on the WTC, is a bit of a stretch – not to mention somewhat dangerous – in the US.

Secondly, for me, 'revolutionary defeatism' means ending the war, it means hindering the ability of US imperialism to wage war on the people of Afghanistan, it means, in essence, building an anti-war movement with labour in the lead. Anything else is a distraction and, in the end, an obstacle to revolutionary defeatism. I have experience of this in the anti-war movement in the US during the Vietnam war. The people who had the most useless line were those waving NLF flags and 'solidarising' with the Vietcong and North Vietnam. They did nothing to end the war. It was those that convinced the American people the war was wrong, brought them out into the streets in their millions and shut down the universities that helped defeat imperialism. Were there mistakes made? Obviously, big ones, but the 'peace' perspective was the only revolutionary one – because it contributed to the success of the revolution in Vietnam.

Book Bargains

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

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

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Palestinian Trotskyism and the origins of the Israeli state – two documents

Introduction by Richard Price

The legacy of the events of 1947–48 that led to the creation of the state of Israel reverberates throughout Middle Eastern and world politics to this day, most obviously in the events of the second Intifada and the collapse of the 'Peace Process'. These two documents by the Palestinian Trotskyists, written during this fateful period, have a special interest for socialists, for weak as their forces were, the Trotskyists stood almost alone in the workers' movement against a tidal wave of chauvinism and nationalism on all sides in advocating an internationalist solution. In stark contrast, every current of socialist- and Labour-Zionism was gathered in to the project of creating the Zionist state at the expense of the dispossessed Palestinians. Internationally, social democracy and Stalinism lined up to support the Israeli state, as did – for contradictory reasons – both the United States and the Soviet Union.

The main strategic lines of analysis contained in these documents have withstood the test of time – that a Zionist state would be a military outpost of Western imperialism in the Middle East; that it would have 'inevitable expansionist tendencies' and would be in a permanent state of war with

its neighbours; that imperialism was cynically using the refugees streaming in from post-Holocaust Europe for its own purposes; that partition would strengthen both Zionist and Arab reaction. The appeal for unity between Jewish and Arab workers is all the more impressive when you consider that the Palestinian Trotskyists were almost entirely Jewish in composition and forced to intervene mainly in a Jewish community inflamed by chauvinism.

These documents only strike a few false notes. The idea that a Zionist state would be 'at the mercy of the imperialists' who might in the future 'leave [it] to its fate' sounds a little unreal, given the vast subsidies poured into Israel since 1948 by the US. The view that partition was aimed directly at the emergence of a joint Arab-Jewish working class struggle seems little supported by the evidence, except in a very few places.

In quite a few circles the idea has persisted that the 1947 partition plan proposed by UN resolution 181 was a reasonable offer that the Palestinians spurned. In fact, the proposed Jewish state would have occupied 54 per cent of the land area of Palestine (although Jews in 1947 represented only a third of the population of Palestine) with privileged access to the main seaports and the best land and water supplies.

In this light, the statement that: 'This war [in 1948] on neither side can be said to bear a progressive character' seems perplexing. Indeed, because of the wars of 1967 and 1973, much of the left has assumed that in 1948 the duty of revolutionaries was on the side of the Arab forces. In fact, as Nathan Weinstock argues forcefully: 'As for the Jewish-Arab war of 1948, it was not, as might be concluded from a superficial examination, a conflict between the Arab national movement and political Zionism. "These [Arab] armies were not, however, playing an independent role for the achievement of Arab independence in Palestine, but rather serving British interests, through the puppet regimes of Farouk, Abdallah and Nuri Said. The war was used by these regimes to divert the internal anti-imperialist struggle (especially in Egypt and Iraq) into an imperialist-sponsored Holy War. The conduct of the war exposed the utter corruption of these regimes and hastened their downfall." Or, as the magazine *Tricontinental* put it, "The military defeat of the Arab armies 'trained' by Britain, led by men like the famous Glubb Pasha and paid by kings who subjected their own people to slavery, was full of lessons. The wind of change began to blow."'¹¹

Further reading: Little has been published in Britain on Palestinian Trotskyism apart from some early writings of Tony Cliff, notably 'Imperialism in the Middle East', first published in three parts in *Workers International News* in 1945–46. The best overview of political developments in Palestine from the British Mandate to the founding of the state of Israel is Nathan Weinstock's *Zionism: False Messiah* (Pluto, 1989). Lenni Brenner's *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (Lawrence Hill, 1983) surveys the international politics of Zionism from the 1920s to the 1940s, while his *The Iron Wall: Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir* (Zed Books, 1984) looks in depth at the Zionist right wing. A selection of Trotsky's writings is contained in *Leon Trotsky on the Jewish Question* (Pathfinder, 1980). The most recent detailed study of Palestine under the British Mandate, written from a liberal Israeli position, is Tom Segev's *One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (Abacus, 2001).

Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism

Alfred Rosmer

Boris Souvarine, Emile Fabrol and Antoine Clavez

With an introduction by Al Richardson

Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism highlights the role of Alfred Rosmer in the early opposition to Stalinism inside the Comintern and the French Communist Party, from which he was expelled in 1924. The book includes translations of recent articles from the French theoretical journal *Prométhée* as well as extracts from Rosmer's own oppositional magazine *La Révolution prolétarienne* from the 1920s, in which he and his allies deal with the bureaucratisation of the Communist Party and Stalin's victory over the Old Bolsheviks. The final chapters, entitled *On the Planet Without a Visa*, were written by Rosmer, a close acquaintance of Trotsky for 35 years, in the early 1950s to complete Trotsky's autobiography *My Life*. They cover the years of exile until his death in Mexico in 1940 and incorporate Trotsky's own words to describe his personal fortunes and the essence of his thought.

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Against partition!

(Revolutionary Communist League, September 1947)

Originally published in Hebrew in *Kol Ham'amad* (Voice of the Class – the journal of the Revolutionary Communist League, Palestinian Section of the Fourth International), No. 31, September 1947²

The members of the UN committee showed 'understanding' and 'did a wonderful job in a very short time'. With these words the Jewish Agency's representative, Golda Meir, endorsed the partition proposal. Most of the Zionist parties agreed with them, with certain reservations regarding the 'form' of the solution.

The American Foreign Secretary Marshall also shared this opinion. It is well known, however, that the fate of persecuted peoples is not usually the main concern of the American Foreign Secretary. So his reaction might well cause apprehension among those who believed in the good intentions of the UN committee.

What does the UN proposal give to the Jews? At first sight, everything: an immigration quota of 150,000 and more; political independence; about two-thirds of Palestine; three big ports and almost all the coastline. That is more than what the optimists among the Jewish Agency members dared to ask for.

Isn't this 'understanding' and 'friendliness' a bit suspicious? Why did the representatives of Canada, Holland and Sweden, who have close ties with the Anglo-Saxon powers, vote for this proposal? And why did the representatives of Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay, whose policies are dictated from Washington, vote for it? All the Zionist periodicals, as well as the semi-Zionist ones (the Communist Party of Palestine organs) refused to pose this question. And of course they did not answer it.

But that is precisely the determining question. More important than the contents of the proposal are the motives of those who submitted it. Let us make no mistake! Behind the – in Marshall's words – 'neutral' countries, stand the powers that are most interested in this issue. The calculations that produced the partition proposal are precisely the same ones that brought about the partition of India.

What are these calculations? In our period, the period of social revolutions and revolts of enslaved peoples, imperialism rules by means of two main methods: ruthless and brutal repression (as in Indonesia, Indochina and Greece), or by breaking the class war through national conflicts. The second way is cheaper and safer, and enables imperialism to hide behind the curtains.

Until now, imperialism has successfully employed *divide et impera*³ methods in this country, by using Zionist immigration as a divisive factor. In this way, national tensions were created, which, to a large extent, directed the anger caused by imperialism

among the Arab masses in Palestine and the Middle East against the Jews. But recently this method ceased to produce the desired effects. In spite of national tensions, a strong and combative Arab working class developed in the country. A new chapter in the history of Palestine opened when Arab and Jewish workers co-operated in large-scale strikes, in order to force the imperialist exploiters to make concessions. And the failure of the latest attempt to force the inhabitants of Palestine into a new whirlpool of mutual bloodshed by means of provocations taught the imperialists a new lesson. Now they drew the conclusion: if you refuse to fight each other, we will put you in such an economic and political position that you will be forced to do so! That is the real content of the partition proposal.

Will the partition proposal perhaps materialise the Jewish people's dream of political independence? The 'independence' of the Jewish state will boil down to choosing, in a 'free' and 'independent' way, between two options: either to starve or sell itself to imperialism. Foreign trade – both imports and exports – remains as before under control of imperialism. The key sectors of the economy – oil, electricity and minerals – remain in the hands of foreign monopolies. And profits will continue to flow into the pockets of foreign capitalists.

A Jewish statelet in the heart of the Middle East can be an excellent tool in the hands of the imperialist states. Isolated from the Arab masses, this state will be defenceless and completely at the mercy of the imperialists. And they will use it in order to fortify their positions, while at the same time lecturing the Arab states about the 'Jewish danger' – i.e., the threat represented by the inevitable expansionist tendencies of the tiny Jewish state. And one day, when tensions reach their highest point, the imperialist 'friends' will leave the Jewish state to its fate.

The Arabs will also receive 'political independence'. Partition will bring about the creation of a backward feudal Arab state, a sort of Trans-Jordan west of the Jordan River. In this way they hope to isolate and paralyse the Arab proletariat in the Haifa area, an important strategic centre with oil refineries, as well as to divide and paralyse the class struggle of all the workers of Palestine.

What about the 'salvation of the refugees from the concentration camps'? Imperialism created the problem of the refugees from the concentration camps when it closed the gates of all countries to them. The fate of refugees is its responsibility. Imperialism is not phil-

anthropic. If it sends the refugees as a 'gift' to Palestine, it will do it for one reason only: to use them for its own purposes.

The partition proposal, apparently so 'favourable' to the Jews, contains several aspects that are highly desirable from the point of view of imperialism: 1) The concessions to Zionism will be used as a bait in order to get the approval of the Jewish majority; 2) It includes several provocations, such as the incorporation of Jaffa into the Jewish state and the denial of any port to the Arab state, which infuriate the Arabs; 3) These provocations enable Great Britain to appear as a 'friend of the Arabs', which will 'struggle' for a second, more just partition. This in turn will help them [i.e. the Arabs] swallow the bitter pill. In other words, we have here a pre-arranged division of labour.

To sum up: the proposal of the UN committee is a solution neither for the Jews nor for the Arabs; it is a solution pure and exclusively for the imperialist countries. The Zionist policy-makers avidly seized the bone imperialism threw to them. And the 'left-wing' Zionist critics, in the name of removing the mask from the imperialists' game, half-heartedly attack the partition proposal, and call for . . . a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine! A bi-national state according to the *Hashomer Hatzair* (Young Guard) proposal is just a fig-leaf for the right of the Jews to impose on the Arabs – without their consent and against their will – Jewish immigration and Zionist policies.

What about the Communist Party of Palestine? It is apparently waiting for a 'just' UN solution. In any case, it continues to sow illusions in the UN, and in that sense helps to hide and implement the imperialist programmes.

Against all this, we say: Let us not fall into the trap! The solution of the Jewish question, like the solution of the problems of the country, will not come 'from above', from the UN or from any other imperialist institution. No 'struggle', 'terror', or moral 'pressure' will make imperialism abandon its vital interests in the region (oil stocks paid 60 per cent dividends this year!).

In order to solve the Jewish question, in order to free ourselves from the burden of imperialism, there is only one way: the united class struggle with our Arab brothers – a war which is an inseparable link in the anti-imperialist war of the oppressed masses in the entire Arab East and the entire world.

The force of imperialism lies in partition – our force in international class unity.

Against the stream

(Revolutionary Communist League, 1948)

Published in *Fourth International*, journal of the Socialist Workers Party (USA), May 1948⁵

The following editorial is translated from *Kol Ham'amaad* (Voice of the Class), Hebrew organ of the Revolutionary Communist League of Palestine, Section of the Fourth International. It exposes the reactionary role of the United Nations' partition plan, which stifles the rising tide of class struggle in Palestine, blurs class lines and creates an atmosphere of antagonistic 'national unity' in both of the national communities in Palestine. As we can see from the editorial, the CP of Palestine has not escaped the nationalist hysteria in both camps, and has split into two national parties.

Only the Palestinian Trotskyists have maintained the Socialist position by calling upon Jewish and Arab workers to break away from the class enemies within their ranks and conduct their independent struggle against imperialism. Despite the present high tide of chauvinism accompanying the new 'Hebrew' state set up by *Haganah*⁶ arms on one side, and the invasion of the Arab 'Liberation' army on the other, the internationalist working class programme put forward by the Trotskyists will alone provide the means of solving the Palestine problem.

Editor of *Fourth International*

Politicians and diplomats are still trying to find a formula for the disastrous situation into which Palestine has been plunged by the UNO deciding upon partition. Is this a 'breach of international peace' or are we merely dealing with 'hostile acts'? As far as we are concerned there is no point in this distinction. We are daily witnessing the killing or maiming of men and women, old and young, Jew or Arab. As always, the working masses and the poor suffer most.

Not so very long ago the Arab and Jewish workers were united in strikes against a foreign oppressor. This common struggle has been put to an end. Today the workers are being incited to kill each other. The inciters have succeeded.

'The British want to frustrate partition by means of Arab terrorism,' explain the Zionists. As if this communal strife were not the very instrument by which partition is brought about! It was easy for the imperialists to foresee that and well may they be satisfied with the course of events.

What axe have Bevin-Churchill to grind?

Britain was a loser in the last world war. She has lost the bulk of her foreign assets. Her industry is lagging behind. Building up her productive apparatus requires dollars and manpower.

'Keeping order' in Palestine costs England over £35 million per year, an amount which exceeds the profit she can extort from this country. Partition will release her from her financial obligations, enable her to employ her soldiers in the productive process while her source of income will remain intact. But this is not all. By partition a wedge is driven between the Arab and Jewish worker. The Zionist state with its provocative lines of demarcation will bring about the blossoming forth of irredentist movements on both sides, there will be fighting for an 'Arab Palestine' and for a Jewish state within the historic frontiers of Eretz Israel (Israel's Land). As a result, the chauvinistic atmosphere thus created will poison the Arab world in the Middle East and throttle the anti-imperialist fight of the masses, while Zionists and Arab feudalists will vie for imperialist favours.

The price Britain has to pay for the advantages gained by partition is to renounce her ruling monopoly in this country. On the other hand, Wall Street has to come out into the open and contribute its share toward the foul business of safeguarding imperialist positions. This, of course, blackens the 'democratic' reputation of the dollar state while at the same time it adds to the prestige of Great Britain. Partition, therefore, is a compromise between the imperialist robbers arising from a changed power constellation.

The function of the UNO

If the Anglo-American imperialists had forced this 'solution' on Palestine on their own, the rotten game would have been self evident to the whole Arab East. However, they dodged – the problem was passed on to the UNO. The function of the UNO was to sweeten the bitter dish cooked in the imperialist cuisine, dressing it, in Bevin's words, with the twaddle of the 'conscience of the world that has passed judgement'.

Exactly. And the diplomats of the lesser countries danced to the tune of the dollar flute, repeating the 'public opinion of the world'. And the peculiar cast of this performance enables Great Britain to appear as the Guardian Angel overflowing with sympathy for both sides.

And the Soviet Union? Why did not her representative call the UNO game the swindle it really is? Apparently the present foreign policy of the Soviet Union is not concerned with the struggle of the colonial masses. And as the Palestine question is a second-rate affair for the 'Big' [Powers] the Soviet diplomats saw fit to dwell upon what Stalin had said about 'the Soviet Union being ready to meet America and Britain halfway', economic and social differences notwithstanding.

This is how the UNO has 'solved' the Palestinian problem. Yet it is the same unsavoury dish that has been set for India, Greece and Indo-China.

What do Jews stand to gain by partition?

The Zionists were overcome with a sense of triumph when offered the bone by the UNO cooks. 'Our work, our righteous cause has won . . . before the forum of the nations.'

The Zionists have been in the habit of asking for 'justice' from the enemies of the Jewish people ever since Herzl: from the Tsar, the German Kaiser, the British Imperialists and Wall Street. Now they saw their chance. Wall Street is distributing loans and 'political independence'. Of course, not for nothing. The price has to be paid in blood.

The Jewish state, this gift of Truman's and Bevin's, gives the Zionists' capitalist economy a respite. This economy rests upon very flimsy foundations. Its products cannot compete on the world market. Its only hope is the internal market from which the Arab goods are debarred. Thus the problem of Jewish immigration has come to be a problem of life or death. The continuous flow of immigrants who come with the remnants of their possessions tends to increase the circulation of goods, allows the bourgeois producers to dispose of their expensive wares. Mass immigration would also be very useful as a means to force

down wages which 'weigh so heavily' upon the Jewish industry. A state inevitably engaged in military conflicts would mean orders from the 'Hebrew Army', a source of 'Hebrew' profits not to be underestimated at all. A state would mean thousands of snug berths for veteran Zionist functionaries.

Who is going to foot the bill?

The workers and the poor – they will have to pay the steep prices following the ban on Arab goods. They will break down under the yoke of numberless taxes, direct and indirect. They will have to cover the deficit of the Jewish state. They are living in the open, having no roof over their heads, while their institutions have 'more important business' to attend to.

The Jewish worker, having been separated from his Arab colleague and prevented from fighting a common class strug-

gle, will be at the mercy of his class enemies, imperialism and the Zionist bourgeoisie. It will be easy to arouse him against his proletarian ally, the Arab worker, 'who is depriving him of jobs and depressing the level of wages' (a method that has not failed in the past!). Not in vain has Weitzmann said that 'the Jewish state will stem Communist influence'. As compensation the Jewish worker is given the privilege of dying a hero's death on the altar of the Hebrew state.

And what promises does the Jewish state hold out? Does it really mean a step forward toward the solution of the Jewish question?

Partition was not meant to solve Jewish misery nor is it likely to do so. This dwarf of a state that is too small to absorb the Jewish masses cannot even solve the problems of its citizens. The Hebrew state can only infest the Arab East with anti-

Semitism and may well turn out – as Trotsky said – a bloody trap for hundreds of thousands of Jews.⁷

Partition is grist to the mill of the Arab reactionaries

The leaders of the Arab League reacted to the decision on partition with speeches full of threats and passion. As a matter of fact, a Zionist state is to them a godsend from Allah. Calling up the worker and *fellah*⁸ for the 'holy war to save Palestine' is supposed to stifle their cries for bread, land and freedom – another time-honoured method of diverting an embittered people against the Jewish and communist danger.

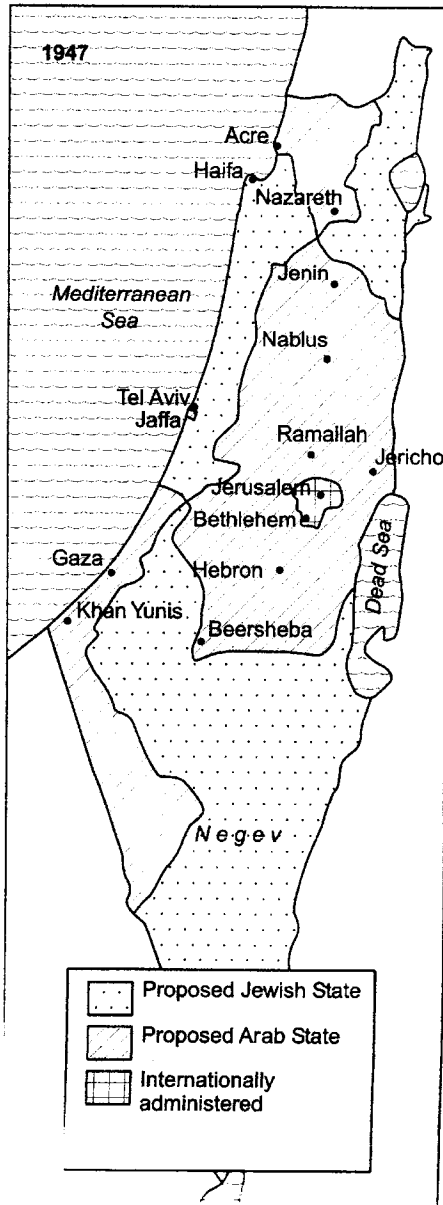
In Palestine, feudal rule has of late begun to lose ground. During the war the Arab working class has grown in numbers and political consciousness. Jewish and Arab workers stood up against the foreign oppressor, against whom they together went on strikes.⁹ A strong leftist trade union had come into existence; and the 'Workers Association of the Arabs of Palestine' had been well on the way of freeing itself from the influence of the Husseinis¹⁰. The murder of its leader, Sami Taha¹¹, committed by hirelings of the Arab Higher Committee, could not restrain this development. But where the Husseinis failed, the decision of the imperialist agency, the UNO succeeded. The partition decision stifled the class struggle of the Palestine workers. The prospect of being at the hands of the Zionist 'conquerors of soil and labour' is arousing fear and anxiety among the Arab workers and *fellahs*. Nationalist war slogans fall on fertile soil, and feudal murderers see their chance. Thus the policy of partition enables the feudalists to turn back the wheels of history.

A first summary

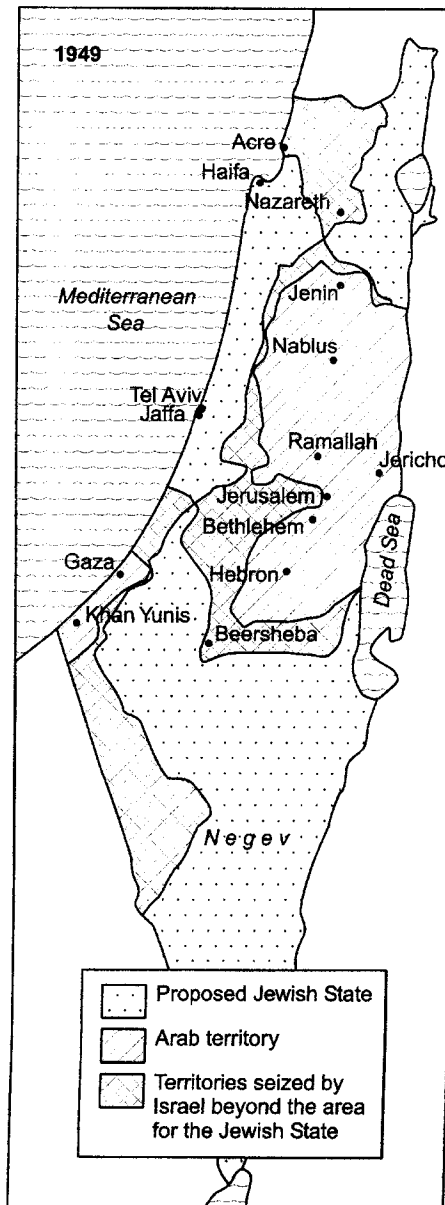
The early fruit of the partition policy: Jews and Arabs are drowned in a sea of chauvinist enthusiasm. Triumph on the one hand, rage and exasperation on the other. Communists are being murdered; pogroms against Jews instigated; a tit-for-tat of murder and provocation. The 'strafing expeditions' of the *Haganah* are oiling the propaganda machine of the Arab patriots in their campaign to enlist the masses for more bloodshed. The military conflict and the smashing to pieces of the workers' movements are a boon to the chauvinist extremists in both camps.

What about the Jewish 'Communists'?

The patriotic wave makes sitting on the fence very uncomfortable. The Zionist 'Socialist' parties soon 'corrected' their anti-



United Nations Partition Plan



Armistice Line

imperialist phrases and stubborn 'resistance' against 'cutting up the country into pieces' and gave way to full and enthusiastic support of the imperialist partition policy. That was a trifling matter, a question of merely changing Zionist tactics.

Yet the Communist Party of Palestine might have been expected to take up a different position. Have they not repeatedly warned against the fatal results bound to come with the establishment of a Jewish state? 'Partition must needs be disastrous for Jew and Arab alike . . . partition is an imperialist scheme intended to give British rule a new lease of life . . .' (evidence given by the PCP before the Anglo-American Commission of Enquiry on March 25, 1946). The secretary of the party loyally stuck to this attitude as late as July 1947 when he said before the UNO commission: 'We oppose the partition scheme point blank, as this scheme is detrimental to the interests of the two peoples.' However, after this scheme had been pulled off with the support of the Soviet representatives, *Kol Ha'Am* (the Stalinist central organ) hastened to declare that 'democracy and justice have won the day'. (!) And overnight there appeared a newly baptised party: the name of Communist Party of Palestine was changed to Communist Party of Eretz Israel (Communist Party of the Hebrew Land). Thus even the last vestige of contact with the Arab population was broken off. The gap that still separated them from Zionism was finally bridged. Instead of being the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle of the Arab and Jewish masses, the Palestine Communist Party became the 'Communist' tail of the 'left' Zionists – precisely in an hour when Zionism shows to everyone its counter-revolutionary face, its blatant servility to imperialism. Thus the Communist Party itself held up all its previous exposure of imperialist and Zionist deceptions to ridicule.

Why have they become bankrupt?

The policy of the Palestine Communist Party lacks a consistent line. The policy of the PCP reflects both the needs deriving from the class struggle of the Jewish worker in Palestine and the needs of Soviet foreign policy. The needs of the class struggle, however, require a consistent international policy – the negation of Zionism, of its discrimination between Arab and Jew. On the other hand, the need to adjust the party line to the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Soviet Union calls for an 'elastic' policy, one that lacks backbone. As a result we find the notorious shilly-shallying and zig-zagging, which has harnessed the PCP now to the Zionist wagon. The fifth wheel!

And the Arab 'Communists'?

The Arab Stalinists, the 'National Liberation League', fared no better than their Jewish counterparts. They were in a pretty fix, having to justify the Russian support of the Jewish state. The Arab workers could not be expected to accept this line – not by a long shot. They understood the meddling of Soviet diplomacy for what it was: breaking up the Palestine workers' unity and a treacherous blow. After the pro-partition declaration of Zarakin, the National Liberation League people found themselves surrounded by scorn and hostility.

The policy of the Soviet Union has undermined the position of the League among the Arab toilers. Thus it opened a door to the reactionary, chauvinist campaign against the 'red danger'. At present, the National Liberation League stands for peace and it is busy exposing the provocative role played by the British government. But since it had cried out for 'national unity' (with the feudal Husseinis, the principal instigators of war in recent years), its present attitude fails to convince. But the National Liberation League did convince the Arab workers that the driving force behind its policy is not the interest of the Palestine proletariat, but that of the Kremlin.

A war of defence?

The two camps today mobilise the masses under the mask of 'self-defence'. 'We have been attacked, let us defend ourselves!', say the Zionists. 'Let us ward off the danger of a Jewish conquest!', declares the Arab Higher Committee. Where does the truth lie?

War is the continuation of politics by other means. The war led by the Arab feudalists is but the continuation of their reactionary war on the worker and the *fellah* who are striving to shake off oppression and exploitation. For the feudal *effendis*¹² 'Salvation of Palestine' means safeguarding their revenues at the expense of the *fellahin*, maintaining their autocratic rule in town and country, smashing the proletarian organisations and international class solidarity.

The war waged by the Zionists is the continuation of their expansionist policy based on discrimination between the two peoples: they defend *kibbush avoda* (boycott of Arab labour), *kibbush adama* (boycott of the *fellah*), boycott of Arab goods, 'Hebrew rule'. The military conflict is a direct result of the Zionist conquerors.

This war on neither side can be said to bear a progressive character. The war does not release progressive forces or do away with social and economic obstacles in the

path of the development of the two nations. Quite the opposite is true. It tends to obscure class antagonisms and to open the door to nationalist excesses. It weakens the proletariat and strengthens imperialism in both camps.

What is to be done?

Each side is 'anti-imperialist' to the bone, busily detecting the reactionary – in the opposing camp. And imperialism is always seen – helping the other side. But this kind of exposure is oil on the imperialist fire. For the inveigling policy of imperialism is based upon agents and agencies within both camps. Therefore, we say to the Palestinian people, in reply to the patriotic warmongers: Make this war between Jews and Arabs, which serves the end of imperialism, the common war of both nations against imperialism!

This is the only solution which can guarantee a real peace. This must be our goal, which must be achieved without concessions to the chauvinist mood prevailing at present among the masses.

How can that be done?

'The main enemy is in our own country!' – this was what Karl Liebknecht had to say to the workers when imperialists and social democrats were inciting them to the slaughter of their fellow workers in other countries. In this spirit we say to the Jewish and Arab workers: the enemy is in your own camp!

Jewish workers! Get rid of the Zionist provocateurs that tell you to sacrifice yourself on the altar of the state!

Arab worker and *fellah*! Get rid of the chauvinist provocateurs that are getting you into a mess of blood for their own sake and pocket.

Workers of the two peoples, unite in a common front against imperialism and its agents!

The problem worrying everyone at present is the problem of security. Jewish workers ask: 'How to protect our lives? Shouldn't we support the *Haganah*?' And the Arab workers and *fellahin* ask: 'Ought we not to join the *Najjadah*¹³, the *Futuwa*¹⁴ to defend ourselves against the Zionists' attacks?'

A distinction must be made between the practical and political sides of this question. We cannot prevent mobilisations and do not therefore tell workers to refuse to mobilise. But it is our duty to denounce the reactionary character of the chauvinist organisations, even in their own house. The only way to peace between the two peoples of this country is to turn their guns against the instigators of murder in both camps.

Instead of the abstract 'anti-imperialist' phrases of the social-patriots which cover up their servility to imperialism, we are showing a practical way to fight against the foreign oppressor: unmasking its local agents, undermining their influence; so that the Arab worker and *fellah* will understand that the military campaign against the Jews helps to bring about partition and helps only the feudalists and imperialists, while it is fought on his back and paid for with his blood; so that the Jewish worker recognises at last the illusion of Zionism and understands that he will not be free and safe as long as he has not done away with national discrimination, isolationism and imperialist loyalty.

We have to keep up contact between the workers of both peoples at whatever place of work that this can still be done in order to prevent provocative acts and to safeguard the lives of the workers at work and on the roads. Let us forge revolutionary cadres. In this burning hell of chauvinism we have to hold up the banner of international brotherhood.

Against the stream!

World capitalism in decline tries to survive by inflating imaginary national conflicts, trampling down the masses and brutalising them. In the long run that remedy will fail. The masses will have learned their lesson through suffering. They will get to know their enemy: monopolistic capitalism that is hiding behind its local ruling agency. With the class struggle becoming more intensive all over the world and in particular in the Arab countries, the end of the fratricidal war in this country is bound to come.

The patriotic wave today is sweeping everyone lacking the principles of international communism off his feet. Revolutionary activity at this juncture requires patience, persistence and far-sightedness. It is a way full of danger and difficulties. But it is the only way out of this patriotic mire. Well may we remember the words of Lenin which, spoken in a similar situation, apply also to ours:

'We are not charlatans . . . We must base ourselves on the consciousness of the masses. Even if it is necessary to remain in a minority, be it so. We must not be afraid to be in a minority. We will carry on the work of criticism in order to free the masses from deceit . . . Our line will prove right . . . All the oppressed will come to us. They have no other way out.'

Notes

¹ N. Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah*, Pluto, 1989, p.244

² This version is based upon a translation from the Hebrew by the Socialist Workers League (Palestine), with a number of modifications of style where they seemed appropriate, and with footnotes added. It also appears on the website of Reds (Die Roten), www.marxists.de

³ *Divide et impera* – Divide and rule

⁴ *Hashomer-Hatzair* (Young Guard) – Socialist Zionist youth organisation, founded during the First World War. Like other Zionist groupings, it organised internationally, but advocated political action only within Palestine. Although it was affiliated, along with the ILP and the POUM, to the London Bureau in the 1930s, it supported the boycott of Arab labour and produce. During the Second World War, it collaborated with the British Mandate authorities against the right-wing *Irgun* militia. Its programme was for a bi-national state, and opposed partition, but only insofar as it saw unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine as leading to a Jewish state. Heavily influenced by Stalinism, it dropped its bi-nationalism under the impact of the Soviet Union's support for partition, and subsequent recognition of the Israeli state. In January 1948, it fused with *Achdut-Haavodah* to form *Mapam* – the left flank of Labour-Zionism.

⁵ This article also appears on the websites of the Internationalist Group, League for the Fourth International, and Reds (Die Roten). For this version, we have made minor stylistic changes and added explanatory footnotes.

⁶ *Haganah* (Defence) – Zionist militia formed by arch right-wing Zionist, Vladimir Jabotinsky and the social democratic *Achdut-Haavodah* in December 1919 from veterans of the Jewish Legion – the 'Mule Corps' which fought on the side of Britain in the First World War. Initially known as *Hashomer*, it was a semi-clandestine force formed to defend Jewish settlements from Arab attack. After Jabotinsky and the Zionist Revisionists split from mainstream Zionism in 1931, it was controlled by the Labour-Zionists. During the Arab Revolt of 1936-9, its members were enrolled as 'native' police, its units trained and armed by the British under Orde Wingate, and it carried out armed raids upon Palestinian villages. During the Second World War, it collaborated with the British in a number of military missions against Vichy French targets and against the *Irgun* and *Stern* groups. After the war, now

40,000-strong, the *Haganah* formed an on-off military alliance with these right-wing groups against the British. In late 1947, it adopted a policy of ruthless reprisals to terrorise the Arab population. In March 1948, it renewed its military alliance with the *Irgun*, one month before the latter carried out the infamous massacre of Deir Yassin. In May that year, the *Haganah* became the major component of the newly formed Israeli army.

⁷ 'The attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine can now be seen for what it is, a tragic mockery of the Jewish people. Interested in winning the sympathy of the Arabs who are more numerous than the Jews, the British government has sharply altered its policy towards the Jews, and has actually renounced its promise to help them found their "own home" in a foreign land. The future development of military events may well transform Palestine into a bloody trap for several hundred thousand Jews. Never was it so clear as it is today that the salvation of the Jewish people is bound inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system.' (L. Trotsky, *On the Jewish Question*, Pathfinder, 1980, p.12)

⁸ *fellah, fellahin* – The Palestinian rural poor, viciously exploited by semi-feudal landlords under the Ottoman Empire, and subsequently boycotted by the enclosed economy of Zionist colonisation.

⁹ On December 31, 1947, the Stern Gang bombed the Haifa oil refinery – one of the few places where Arab and Jewish workers worked alongside each other – killing six Arab workers, and injuring dozens of others. Nineteen Jewish workers were subsequently murdered in reprisals.

¹⁰ *Husseinis* – Wealthy *effendi* clan which played a leading – and reactionary – role in Palestinian politics under the British mandate.

¹¹ Sami Taha – Trade union leader in the Haifa Bay area who advocated a Palestinian state based upon Arab-Jewish co-operation, who was murdered in September 1947 by agents of the Mufti.

¹² *Effendis* – A narrow stratum of rich Palestinians, who were city-based absentee landlords and derived their wealth from their estates and from money lending.

¹³ *Najjadah* – Main bourgeois-led Palestinian Arab militia

¹⁴ *Futawa* – Smaller Palestinian militia, led by the *Husseinis*

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