Workers ACTION

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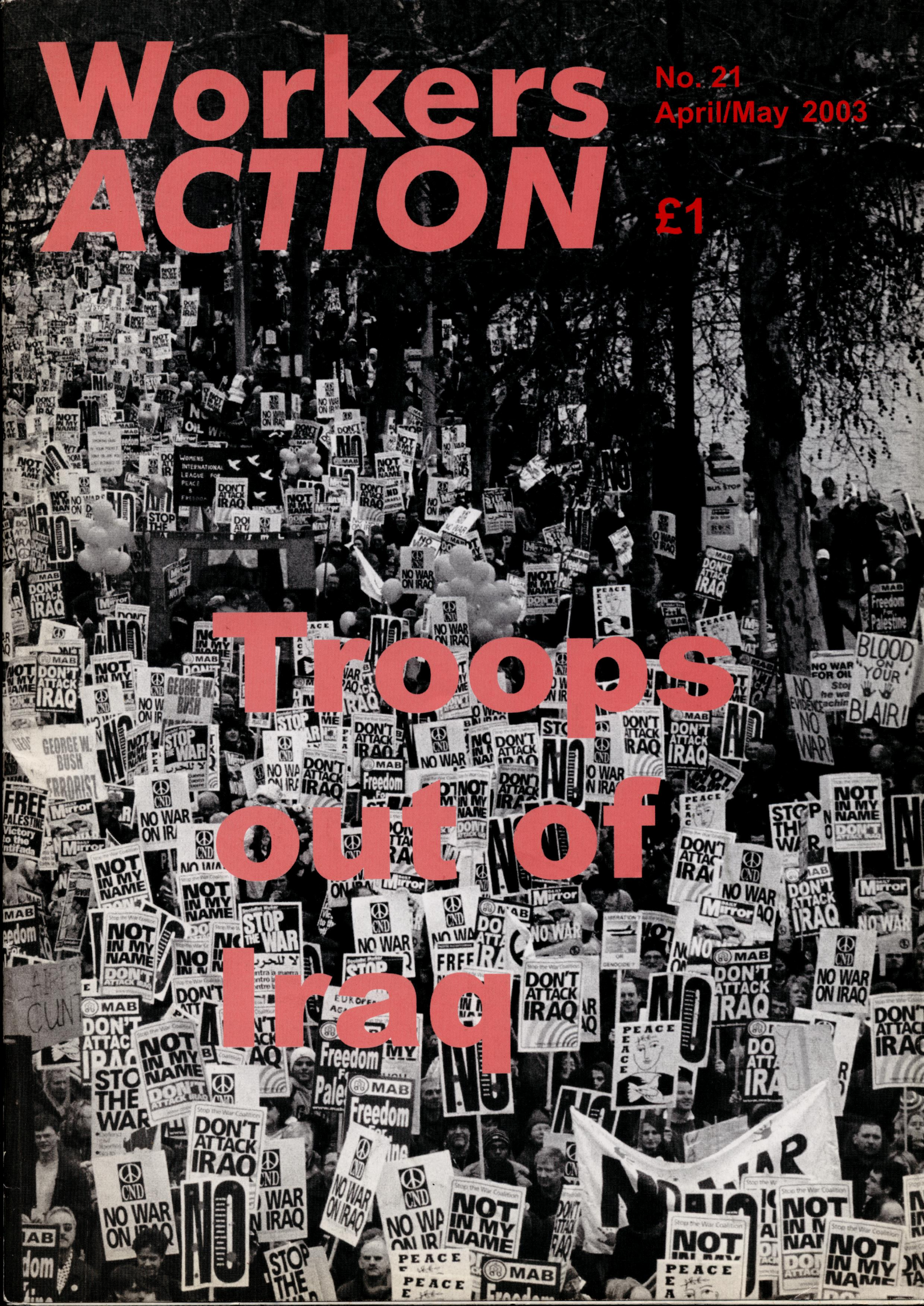

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No. 21 April/May 2003

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Cover: Anti-war demonstration, London, February 15
Photo: Molly Cooper

Workers Action – what we stand for

Workers Action is a Marxist tendency in the labour movement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Editorial

Troops out of Iraq!

The criminal invasion of Iraq by US and British forces is under way. However long the war lasts one thing is certain, the people of Iraq will not be free at the end. The beleaguered population will find themselves under US military occupation until such time as a US-friendly dictatorship is established.

Another safe bet is that Tony Blair will not have a 'good' war, at the end of which all his problems will be resolved. His craven support for the Bush administration has done significant, possibly fatal damage to his credibility within the Labour Party, the UK population, Europe, and probably also the US. His strategy for the last few months lies in tatters.

Blair is absolutely convinced of his powers of persuasion and the righteousness of his views on pretty much everything. Following September 11, 2001, he saw a vacancy for a world statesman and, though too modest for shameless self-promotion, immediately offered to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with George Bush.

A year and a half ago the reaction to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre allowed the US to gather an unprecedented alliance of governments around it under the guise of a 'war on terrorism'. The US administration jumped at the chance to unite world opinion against the states that it had in its sights – with Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and North Korea at the top of its list.

Many were convinced of the argument about Afghanistan. The Taliban regime had done little to win friends on an international level, it did harbour many central figures within the al-Qaida network and, apart from the desire to build an oil pipeline from Uzbekistan, it was of little strategic value to any other country. But some of the other countries making up the 'axis of evil' were a different matter. It rang alarm bells that the US government was embarking on a course of aggressive military intervention around the world.

This is where Blair stepped in. Behind his offer to support Bush was a plan to promote himself by rallying a sceptical world behind US aggression. Thus Britain's usual role of being the US stooge within Europe would place Blair at the centre of world attention. On the face of it, it seemed plausible, as the UN generally will accept whatever the US demands, however grudgingly. It certainly has placed Blair at the centre of world attention, though one can't help thinking that it's not in the way that he would have chosen.

Some have commented that Margaret Thatcher would have automatically sided with the US, and wouldn't have cared less what the EU or the UN thought. If Blair had done that it would have been far less damaging. Instead he has convinced the US to hold back a war for months, assuring them that he would be able to deliver support from the UN Security Council. He is now widely seen as the individual who staked everything and failed to convince the EU, the UN, Nato or even his own party of the need to support a US-led war of aggression. Blair's strategy throughout couldn't have failed more dramatically or more publicly. He has helped to create the most significant split within world opinion since the cold war, and has united the largest anti-war movement in the history of humanity. In the absence of any real allies to defend him, Blair has resorted to enlisting the support of his 'Christian conscience' and 'history' to be his judge.

While Blair's supporters argue that a short, 'successful' war will show Blair to be a great statesman who has risked everything for his convictions, they really are grasping at straws. From his reputation as 'Teflon Tony' a few months ago, he has now re-invented himself as the man with the anti-Midas touch. Everything he touches seems to go wrong. Blair's angry condemnation of the 'execution' of two British soldiers and his subsequent retraction and apology may have seemed a spin too far. But within days of this he appeared on Arab TV to claim that it was an Iraqi missile that killed 15 Iraqi civilians in a Baghdad marketplace, after the serial numbers of the US missile had been widely published in the media throughout the world. There is little that can happen now that won't mean Blair emerges much weaker than he was before.

Many within the US administration are quite happy for the UN, Nato and the EU to become weakened and divided, though this is unlikely to be Blair's position. For many right-wing US Republicans, being bound by international agreement and the rule of law is merely an annoyance that gets in the way of US hegemony. Throughout the last 50 years the United States has done pretty much what it wanted on the world stage, though the perceived military power of the Soviet Union did act as a restraining influence to an extent. With the US left as the world's only superpower, many right-wingers have begun to question the need for the US to be subject to any international legal framework. Already, Congress has passed a bill enabling it to send military forces to the international court in the Hague should any US citizens be tried for war crimes. The Bush administration has torn up the Kyoto agreement and reneged on its commitment

to non-proliferation treaties.

It doesn't take a genius to join up the dots, but for anyone who needs help figuring it out, many central figures of the Bush administration have published their plans for world domination on the internet.

In September 2000, the right-wing think tank 'Project for a New American Century' published a report called *Rebuilding American Defences*. The project, supported by Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Jeb Bush and many other figures central to the US administration, argues for the US to extensively assert its world military dominance: 'At no time in history has the international security order been as conducive to American interests and ideals. The challenge for the coming century is to preserve and enhance this "American Peace".' The report outlines what it considers to be the key tasks in establishing this 'American Peace', including:

Defence of the American homeland; fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theatre wars; perform 'constabulary' duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions; transform the US forces to exploit the 'revolution in military affairs'.

It goes on to argue for a massive increase in military spending, adding a further $15-$20 billion to the annual budget, for the control of space and cyberspace and for the creation of a new military service, the 'US Space Force'. Whilst all this might have seemed fanciful, 9/11 gave the right wing an ideal chance to implement their most bizarre plans.

Now Bush has given up even paying lip service to international legitimacy. In the build-up to war, Bush always said that the US goal was regime change, whilst diplomatic wrangling within Nato and the UN was purely about disarmament. Throughout the process, Bush and all senior members of his administration have made it clear that they would do what they liked, with or without the support of other countries. The British government is attempting to blame the French for the failure of diplomacy, but diplomacy was pretty much doomed to fail from the time the US made it clear that it didn't care what the outcome of that diplomacy was since it was going to war anyway.

The megalomaniacs that control the White House may be able to start wars and colonial invasions, but none of them has the power to control the results of such a policy. The new far right in Washington aims to destabilise the Middle East, impose a US-friendly government in Iraq, then proceed to do the same to Syria, Iran and anywhere else that might stand in the way of US goals in the region, leaving Israel as the regional power that maintains order. The problem with all this is that it relies on the population of the Middle East fitting in with their plans. We have already seen that the Iraqi population have been somewhat less than enthusiastic about their 'liberation'. Indeed, the colonial invasion is proving a rallying point for resistance across the Arab and Islamic world.

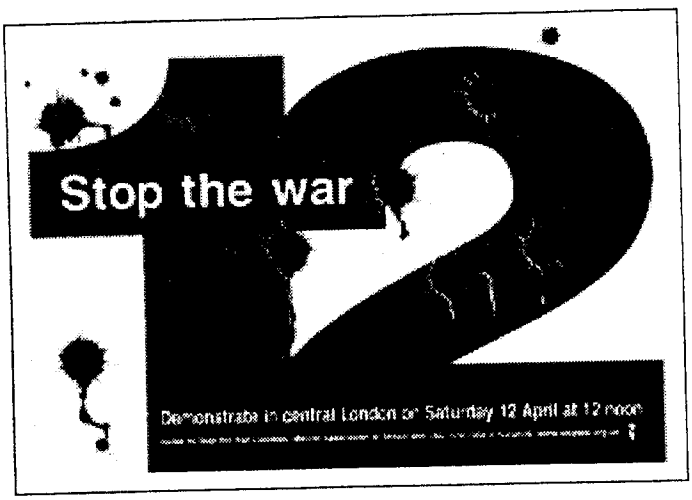
The central reason that Britain was forced to abandon its colonies was that, as societies develop, it becomes less possible to rule by brute force. It might be possible to rule a small, economically weak country by military force, as with Israel's domination of the West Bank and Gaza, though that in itself is hardly without its problems. But to attempt to re-colonise Iraq and then go on to sort out a number of other countries is pure fantasy. The Britain and the US will almost certainly win the war. They will then be left in a quagmire, unable to sustain the occupation, and unable to leave for fear of exposing how weak their position really is.

We shouldn't be despondent in the face of the enormous military might of the US. In the process of this falling out of thieves, we have also seen the creation of a phenomenal political power across the globe that can start to challenge US imperialism. The anti-war demonstrations on February 15 have had an enormous impact throughout the world, and have opened up a new era in politics.

Whilst many have pointed out that this imperialist war will actually increase tensions and make Islamic terrorism more likely, the anti-war mobilisations are having the opposite effect. After February 15, the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the organisation that for years kidnapped any Westerners left in Beirut, said that Muslims needed to re-evaluate their attitude to Westerners. A year ago there were numerous Islamic groups on anti-war demonstration marching as segregated blocks. On the demonstrations in Britain, Muslim contingents have visibly become more and more integrated over the months as the demonstrations have become larger and larger. That is not to say that desperate people won't be driven to desperate measures, but the demonstrations are showing to a wider audience of oppressed people across the world who is and who is not their enemy.

Equally, the anti-war movement has attracted significant new layers of young people who see that political activity can make a difference. The movement amongst school pupils is the first time we have seen anything like it in at least a generation.

To create a mass movement such as this, that is not just in one or two countries but genuinely spreads across the globe, and is strongest in countries where the government is in support of the war, is without parallel. For ordinary people to be able to work simultaneously on all continents to defend the people of Iraq can lay the foundation stones of a world movement capable of posing a real challenge to imperialism and to capitalism. The 'anti-globalisation' movement, important as it has been, has up to now been rather unfocused, divided and propagandist. Now, opposition to the war has given a sharp focus and has built a world movement with a genuinely mass base. **WA**



Who opposed arming Iraq?

In February 1987, a number of MPs signed a strongly worded Early Day Motion, which condemned the sale of arms to Iraq by the Thatcher government. Who signed it? Dave Nellist, Ron Brown and Dennis Skinner, among others vilified, marginalised and purged by the Blairites. How many of the present Cabinet, whose consciences so urgently dictate that we must go to war to rid the world of Saddam Hussein and his weapons, were prepared to put their names to this motion? Not a single one.

Comment

'Stop the war' or 'Defend Iraq'?

Faced with the invasion of Iraq, the primary task of socialists in Britain was clear – it was to help develop the anti-war movement, with the central aim of bringing the war to a halt as soon as possible. With the victory of US and British forces looking to be in a matter of days rather than weeks, and the prospect of a lengthy occupation of the country, our main activity must be to fight for the withdrawal of those forces. Beyond that, we should give whatever support is possible to socialist and anti-imperialist forces in the country, and demand that the Western trade union movement assists the rebirth of independent trade unions in Iraq.

Although support for the anti-war movement remains impressive and substantial, the forces of the left are relatively weak. By intervening in the movement, and giving it leadership, the left has already demonstrated that it can influence far wider forces than its usual periphery. By directing this influence towards the labour movement, and linking up with a far broader current of opposition, it can have a decisive role.

Although our main responsibility lies in Britain, inevitably the issue arises as to what our attitude is towards the military conflict in Iraq. Should socialists have called for the defence of Iraq, or even for the victory of Iraq? Those who make such calls hark back to classical Marxist texts such as Lenin and Zinoviev's *Socialism and War*:

'For example, if tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on Russia, and so on, these would be "just", and "defensive" wars, irrespective of who would be the first to attack; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependant and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory "Great" Powers.'

The real problem with transposing this and other quotations from the Marxists classics doesn't lie in the noble sentiments expressed by Lenin and Zinoviev. Rather it is the completely different context. Marxist tactics in relation to the anti-colonial and nationalist struggles of the twentieth century assumed the existence of nationalist movements espousing progressive demands with a strong popular base of support among workers and peasants.

Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party has no such progressive demands or popular base. As the fighting has shown, the only forces to put up consistent and determined resistance are those who owe their privileges directly to the regime – Ba'ath Party cadres, the Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard, and the fedayeen. There is little evidence that any other section of the population has much inclination to defend the regime.

The Iraqi leadership indicated well before the coalition attack began that it would rely on a strategy of drawing US and British forces into street fighting in the cities, and turn Iraq into 'another Vietnam'. Even on its own terms, this strategy has been woefully poor. Tanks deployed in desert areas were easily picked off by air strikes. Bridges across the Tigris and the Euphrates weren't blown up. The main highways into Baghdad were lightly defended and not mined.

At the beginning of the war, Iraq's regular army was said to number 160,000. By April 5, over 8,000 Iraqi soldiers had surrendered. Even allowing for thousands of casualties, where were the rest? Many more, it appears, have simply deserted, taken off their uniforms and melted away. Reports of some Iraqi exiles returning to fight, and of 4,000 Arab volunteers for suicide bombing cannot hide the reality that this is not seen as a 'national' struggle by large numbers of Iraqis.

To be sure, the degree of opposition coalition forces encountered took its military planners aback. Talk of the fighting being over within a few days was quickly revised. Some on the left then

War chest

George Bush has demanded a total war budget of $77 billion (£51 billion) to pay for the war against Iraq. The breakdown is as follows, and shows some interesting priorities:

Military operations	$44bn
Aid to Israel	$10bn
Reserves call-up	$10bn
Munitions	$6.5bn
Reconstruction	$1.7bn
Coastguard	$1.5bn
Aid to Jordan	$1bn
Aid to Egypt	$1bn
Humanitarian aid	$750m
FBI	$500m
Aid to Afghanistan	$400m

Meanwhile, the Royal United Services Institute says that the war in Iraq could cost Britain £5bn, three times as much as the Chancellor has allowed, while according to Deloitte and Touche it could plunge Britain £12bn deeper into debt.

Anti-war contacts

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Affiliation/sponsorship of LATW is £10 for organisations, £5 for individuals

swung to the opposite extreme. Vietnam syndrome would set in; Baghdad would become another Stalingrad. Emboldened by George Galloway sounding off, the SWP issued posters calling on protestors in its typically ambiguous way to 'support the resistance'.

Proponents of the 'Defend Iraq' line will no doubt argue that the purpose of a military bloc between anti-imperialists and the Ba'athist regime would be to defend the country rather than the regime. But while a hypothetical military bloc is comparatively easy to build from the safety of London, any group of Iraqi socialists who approached Ba'athist high command would suffer the same fate as Iraq's once powerful Communist Party and its trade unions. A repeat of China in 1937, when Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang, which had butchered thousands of workers in putting down the 1925-27 revolution, was obliged to form a military alliance with the Chinese Communist Party against the Japanese onslaught, has never been a remote possibility in Iraq.

Sometimes those on the left who are inclined to grand strategy argue in favour of anti-imperialist united fronts with the likes of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein from the standpoint that a defeat for US imperialism is in the interests of the world working class. Abstractly, of course, such a proposition is true. Nevertheless, Marxists don't proceed simply from what is desirable. In relation to war, they take account of the likely military prospects, and of the consciousness of the masses.

Some of these latter-day Marxists seem to have forgotten that Frederick Engels, the co-founder of Marxism, took a keen interest in military affairs – sufficiently keen to be nicknamed 'The General'. A dose of Engels's realism is needed today. In a war between the United States and Britain on the one hand, and Iraq on the other, Iraq's poorly equipped and demoralised forces never stood any chance of success.

For the past three decades, the left has repeated the mantra that each coming struggle could become 'another Vietnam'. In the Vietnam war, the Communist Party headed an anti-imperialist liberation struggle that had broad support among the masses, and represented a continuity of struggle for national independence going back over decades. Its forces were able to offset US technical and aerial superiority by mastering the dense jungle terrain.

In Iraq, the Ba'athist regime is based on a narrow caste and is widely hated, most of the terrain is completely open, and the balance of forces overwhelmingly weighted in favour of the US and British armies. Saddam's only hope of prolonging the fighting was that his elite Republican Guard would defend Baghdad, street by street. But this 'best case scenario' for Saddam would in all likelihood be a disaster for the civilian inhabitants, and would result in large numbers of civilian casualties.

Many reports speak of the Iraqi population being sullen in the face of its 'liberation'. Civilians display mistrust, fear and hatred towards the invaders. Little wonder after years of sanctions, weeks of terrifying bombardment and a desperate shortage of food and water. But it would be a mistake to see this as evidence of support for the regime, except among a minority. Given the nature of the regime, it is not surprising that others – another minority – have cautiously welcomed the invaders. The truth is that most Iraqis are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Those Iraqis not connected to the regime who want to defend their country against invasion deserve our solidarity. When the invasion becomes an occupation it is likely that opposition to the very forces responsible for starving the country for 12 years will develop on a much wider basis. In this context, we applaud those left-wing Iraqi oppositionists, such as the Worker Communist Party of Iran and Iraq, who opposed both the Ba'athist regime and a US/British attack.

But those on the international left who call upon Iraqi soldiers to 'stand and fight' have learned little from the war in 1991. Then, in spite of its huge size on paper, and the reputation of the Republican Guard, the Iraqi army folded within days. When Iraqi conscripts fled northwards towards Basra, the Allies, who held back from removing Saddam from power, incinerated thousands of soldiers using air-fuel bombs. Since then, the Iraqi army has declined both in numbers and in technical capability, while US forces have even more fearsome weapons.

Given the inevitable military catastrophe awaiting Saddam's regime, the best course of action for Iraqi soldiers, workers and peasants is to attempt to take advantage of the situation when the regime begins to crumble. Better to deal with the secret police and other Saddam loyalists than to be mown down by the forces of the coalition.

Whatever happens, the US and Britain will not be able to maintain a permanent garrison in Iraq. After the military struggle, social struggles will emerge, as Western interests look to gain control of Iraq's oil wealth, and privatise its economy. By forming soldiers' and workers' committees, the Iraqi people can attempt to fight for control of their own future – against the Ba'athist dictatorship, and against a post-Saddam regime installed by the American and British occupation army.

WA

Prize-winning protest

Hats – or should it be baseball caps? – off to Michael Moore for hitting the spot in the most memorable protest ever at the Oscar ceremony.

'We live in fictitious times,' he said when picking up the award for best documentary feature for Bowling for Columbine. 'We live in a time with fictitious election results that elect fictitious presidents. We live in a time when we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons.

'Whether it is the fiction of duct tape or the fiction of orange alerts, we are against this war, Mr Bush. Shame on you, Mr Bush! Shame on you!', he shouted as the orchestra struck up to drown him out.

When he went backstage, Moore was unrepentant. He told reporters: 'I'm an American, and you don't leave your citizenship when you enter the doors of the Kodak Theatre. What's great about this country is that you can speak your mind.' He pointed out that far from being appalled, many of those present had stood up to applaud him. 'I say tonight I put America in a good light. I showed how vital it is to have free speech in our country and all Americans have the right to stand up for what they believe in,' he said.

Build the Labour opposition

Neil Murray

The campaign against the war has been incredible – the biggest demonstration in British history, the biggest wartime demonstration (at five days' notice!), the biggest parliamentary revolt since it meant anything, and a new generation drawn into political activity.

We didn't succeed in stopping them going to war, although not for want of trying. The slaughter goes on, and although progress has been slower than many expected and mobilisations against the war continue, the overwhelming superiority of US weapons means that the real question is not 'who wins', but how many deaths, how quickly, and what sort of a mess will Iraq be in when it's over?

No-one who has participated in demonstrations over the last 20 years, including against previous wars, could have failed to be astounded by the exponential growth of the anti-war movement and the size and impact of its protests. From fairly small beginnings, the movement exploded, reflecting the level of opposition to the war in opinion polls, sprouting protests in small towns and Scottish islands which had never seen their like before, and shaking up the political situation.

The heroes of the movement have been school students, who, largely on their own initiative, have taken up the 'no war' cry and organised walkouts, city centre protests and participated in large numbers in organised demonstrations. Together with action taken by college students, it marks the end of the long, dark night of Thatcher's children – the passing over of a generation which did not become politically active in significant numbers. Politicians have repeatedly claimed that they want young people involved in politics, but of course they didn't mean this kind of involvement. Instead we have seen condemnation, charges of truancy, arrests and school authorities calling the police, locking gates (and fire doors!) and suspending and giving detention to those who defied their authority.

Could we have stopped it?

Tony Blair was always determined to link up with George Bush Jnr and go to war against Iraq. The question is whether the movement could have prevented this, forcing Blair at least to pull back, if not Bush. While the level of opposition in the US was also high, it did not reach the same levels as in Britain, and with the lack of any kind of workers' party, did not have a parliamentary expression.

Protests against the Falklands war in 1982 and against the first Gulf war in 1991 were tiny compared with the present movement. But to prevent Blair going to war – given his determination – would have required an extraordinary level of opposition, combining protest and parliamentary opposition. While we reached unseen heights, we never quite got that far.

The parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition helped build each other. Without the scale of demonstrations on February 15 (not just in London and Glasgow, but world-wide), it is unlikely that the rebellion in parliament would have been as large. On the other hand, several MPs (from the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and George Galloway) were at the heart of the anti-war movement from the start and played an important part in building it.

Overall, the Stop the War Coalition acted imaginatively, reacting positively to new levels of support and building new alliances, such as with the Muslim Association of Britain. Without downplaying the demonstrations, direct action and street protests, the key to actually stopping Blair's war plans lay with the labour movement. If Blair was not going to be moved by the unprecedented level of street protest, then he had to be forced to recognise the damage to his political career and the 'economy' which proceeding with the war would cause. The scale of the revolt by Labour MPs would have to be so large that it would force Blair to back down, and/or there would have to be strike action on a scale he could not ignore.

Parliamentary revolt

Opposition to the proposed war in parliament began on a small scale, among the 'usual suspects' who opposed the war whatever justification of 'second resolutions' was obtained. It grew considerably when it became obvious that such justification did not really matter to Bush, and Blair only wanted it as cover for a decision to go to war anyway. This 'second wave' of parliamentary opposition (which included the Liberal Democrats, but who are now, opportunist as ever, 'supporting our boys') showed all their illusions in the United Nations, still arguing when they rebelled a second time that they would have supported the war if it had obtained UN support, as if a second resolution obtained by bullying and blackmailing the smaller countries currently represented on the Security Council would have legitimised the action.

Regardless of these reservations about its limitations, the level of revolt in parliament was amazing by any standards, reaching not quite half of the Parliamentary Labour Party, with Blair losing a Cabinet minister, junior ministers and ministerial aides in the process. It had Blair worried enough to impose a three-line whip, resort to extreme arm-twisting (with even the unelected Cherie Blair ringing women MPs to plead with them to 'stand by her husband').

With the decision to proceed to war having been made (though not yet enacted), Blair hoped the second major revolt, on March 18, would be smaller. Despite a small number of MPs returning to the loyalist fold, this did not happen – most resignations took place before this second vote and the new MPs rebelling outweighed those backtracking.

Blair expected Robin Cook's resignation before the final vote; what he couldn't have hoped for (though, no doubt, went out of his way to secure) was Clare Short's farcical performance. Having gone as public as possible in describing Blair's push to war as 'reckless' and stated categorically that she would resign if Britain went to war without UN backing, she did a complete about-turn on the basis of vague promises about the 'roadmap' to a solution of the Palestine/Israel conflict and UN involvement in the reconstruction of Iraq (and, no doubt, her love of the trappings of office). While all this made her look a total idiot in the eyes of everyone, whether pro- or anti-war (which she herself acknowledged), hers was an important scalp for Blair. If she had resigned, there is little doubt the parliamentary revolt would have reached levels that made it difficult for Blair to proceed. Blair will probably show his gratitude by ditching Short in his next reshuffle.

Opposition in the unions

Almost from the start, several national trade unions (including Natfhe, CWU, RMT, Aslef and the FBU) announced their support for the Stop the War Coalition. This was due to the personal conviction of their general secretaries, backed up by

their national executives. Some of these unions made their position known to their members, though never too prominently or effectively. Even when holding a view passionately, general secretaries are not well-practised in convincing their members to act, not least because they might hold them to account over them in the future.

Of course, some of the largest unions, such as TGWU and Amicus, have been strangely silent on the war. Roger Lyons, general secretary of the MSF section of Amicus, sent out a letter as late as the week of March 17 banning branches and regions from affiliating to the Stop the War Coalition.

Five supportive unions, representing 750,000 members, did push for a recall congress of the TUC on the basis of its Rule 8(k), adopted in the aftermath of the First World War, which states: 'In order that the trade union movement may do everything which lies in its power to prevent future wars, the General Council shall, in the event of there being a danger of an outbreak of war, call a special Congress to decide on industrial action, such Congress to be called, if possible, before war is declared.' This was kicked into touch by the general council, deferring a decision and sticking to the line that war was only permissible with a second UN resolution, despite deploring Bush's rush to war. After war was started the general council came out with the line that 'while many trade unionists will want to continue to show their opposition to the war, the public will expect us to give support to our soldiers'.

Elsewhere in Europe the picture was a little different, and the European TUC actually called for 15-minute work stoppages on March 14 to protest against the threat of war. Ignored by the British TUC and its affiliated unions, this call was followed in several countries, Greece even experiencing a four-hour general strike when war broke out.

With the failure of the TUC to act, it was down to individual unions to organise action against the war. Several did call for protest action, and gave the impression they were calling for strike action, only, in most cases, to backtrack rapidly. The worst, perhaps, was Billy Hayes, general secretary of the CWU, who made a strong speech at the 'People's Parliament' on March 12, saying: 'When war breaks out we want to see as many CWU members as possible out on the streets protesting against this war . . . isn't it about time that the TUC said "On the day war breaks out, every trade unionist should get in the street?".' This was understood by all present to mean strike action. Yet Hayes never made any serious effort to convey this message to CWU members, and later put out a press release saying, 'Billy expects any such actions to be organised at about six o'clock in the evening, and he is not calling for members to take illegal industrial action.' He even had the kindness to inform Royal Mail management of this, thus making it virtually impossible for postal workers to take action. Other general secretaries opposed to the war did not go so far; Dave Prentis of Unison, for instance, merely pointed out in a factual statement that industrial action would be unlawful.

Getting industrial action against the war (first mooted by Tony Benn last year) was never going to be easy in the best of circumstances. Even with the support of the national union (and even the TUC!), such action would be unlawful (as is all 'political' strike action under the anti-union laws which the government refuses to repeal), laying local representatives open to victimisation and national unions which encouraged or supported such action liable to the seizure of their funds. Most unions are committed to the repeal of these laws, but few are willing to challenge them, even in the case of war. This made the call for a 'global general strike' exceptionally silly, since it was either an encouragement for people to walk out individually, or, in fact, was totally ignored as being impracticable.

However, this inability to win significant strike action at the height of anti-war feeling did expose a weakness of the left and the shallowness of its roots in the unions. Too much credence was placed on the declarations of union leaders, without backing it up with activity in the unions and workplaces to win the argument against war and for strike action. 'Union work' is too often seen as securing union positions and branch (and national conference) policy without the more arduous task of taking the arguments to the rank and file. Few local anti-war groups targeted workplaces for leaflets and meetings.

Faced with the reality that strike action without the support of the national union would only be possible if it involved the active participation of a large majority of the workforce (able to fight off attempted victimisations), it is hardly surprising that action, in the end, was restricted almost exclusively to schools, colleges and some local government workplaces, with lunchtime protest meetings organised by others. The left is not to be condemned for not exposing its forces to mass victimisation, but has to draw lessons about how it functions in the unions.

The fight in the Labour Party

Since war against Iraq was first proposed, opposition within the Labour Party has grown. At last year's Labour Party conference a leadership-backed resolution (the least they could get away with) supporting 'war within international law' was only passed by 60-40 against one opposing war (the same margin, with the same policy difference, as at TUC congress two weeks earlier).

Since its formation in October 2001, Labour Against the War has been building up support among MPs, branches, CLPs and affiliated trade unions. In the last few months there have been many reports of Labour Party bodies (many in areas not known for their opposition) passing resolutions against the war and condemning Blair. In many cases such opposition has moved on from passing resolutions to active participation in protests and demonstrations. Pressure from these CLPs undoubtedly helped boost the number of anti-war MPs, not least through the threat that they might be deselected if they did not show any backbone.

There has been some criticism of LATW for mainly consisting of the 'usual suspects' – the Campaign Group of MPs and the known left. Apart from the fact that many of the branches and CLPs affiliating are not among the usual suspects, this criticism comes down to a failure to involve that 'second wave' of MPs who voted for the amendments in parliament, and some 'Old Labourites' such as Glenda Jackson and Peter Kilfoyle, who have opposed the war from the start. Efforts need to be made to draw in the likes of Kilfoyle and Jackson, but we cannot underestimate the political gulf that exists between the Campaign Group and many other MPs, even critical ones. Glenda Jackson was invited to speak at the Labour Against the War conference on March 29, but declined. Building trust between the two groups will take time. It is difficult to see how the 'second wave' could be involved while they were still arguing that war would be all right if a second resolution were passed by the UN. If it had been, they would either have simply faded away or, alternatively, wrecked Labour Against the War. Nor should it be forgotten that many of them voted for both the anti-war amendment *and* the substantive resolution on March 18. Now war is underway, of course, it is a different matter and every effort should be made to bring them on board, although without doubt many will take the attitude that we must now support the war effort.

Some sections of the Labour Party have

rightly taken up the call for a recall Labour Party conference to determine policy on the war, in the strong belief that Blair has proceeded in the face of opposition by a large minority, if not a majority, of party members. Unfortunately, to have any chance of becoming a reality, such a move will have to gain the support of major unions, which they are ducking at the moment. Indeed, the actions of union representatives on Labour's NEC has been one of the weakest spots of the anti-war movement – at the January meeting not a single union representative was prepared to support the anti-war resolution.

Blair out?

A slogan taken up by much of the anti-war movement, including the 'People's Assembly', has been 'Blair out!'. Rather more limited than the vague 'regime change' favoured by some on the left, it at least recognises the reality that the most that can be achieved at the moment is a change of Labour Party leadership, and that Blair alone has been largely responsible for Britain's support for Bush's war drive. Those who argue this is insufficient have a duty to say what they would replace the present government by, and how.

Yet, if Blair is not willing to bow to the pressure of massive demonstrations, and strike action on any scale was unachievable, then the only way he can be forced out is by action in the Labour Party.

Many anti-war MPs and some sections of the party opposed to the war have been horrified at the fact that some of the Campaign Groups and some anti-war CLPs have raised the need for a challenge to Blair's leadership. Yet it is ultimately the only consistent way to stop his war lust. Indeed, if the anti-war forces in the party had managed to achieve their aim of getting a majority of Labour MPs to vote against the war, Blair would more than likely have had to resign (or form a national government). Blair himself said, in the run up to March 18, 'Back me or sack me', and Robin Cook, in his resignation speech, while praising Blair, called on MPs to vote to stop the drive to war – if they had succeeded, Blair's position would have been untenable.

Many say that Blair will now go 'in the fullness of time'. Maybe, but that allows for the Blairites to organise a smooth transition, the last thing that is needed. A drive is needed to force Blair out. A combination of pushing for a change of policy on war and for a leadership challenge is needed.

Others say that forcing Blair out would only see him replaced by Gordon Brown or some other member of the Cabinet who bears equal responsibility for the war policy. Perhaps, although if it came to an election the left would undoubtedly put up a better candidate, and even if Brown, for example, were to replace him, the very fact of forcing Blair out would mean that his successor had to pay more attention to the concerns of the party and union rank and file than has been the case to date. It would be a significant defeat for the 'New Labour' project.

The technical hurdles for forcing a leadership election when Labour is in government are immense – conference, by a majority, has to pass a resolution calling for such an election, and any candidate has to have the backing of 82 MPs. Yet neither of these, nor winning a change of policy, are impossible if the forces are actively fighting for them, and Blair might go sooner if he realises the way the tide is turning. Many more MPs now have the taste of rebellion, as seen over the issue of 'foundation hospitals', and they should be pushed to generalise that opposition.

However, as the saying goes, there is more than one way to skin a cat. Unity needs to be maintained between those forces in the party *opposed to the war*. If the question of a challenge to Blair's leadership is a barrier to that (and it patently is), then it should not be part of the platform of Labour Against the War. Instead, the emphasis has to be on building opposition to the war (and future ones in Bush's 'crusade against terrorism') at all levels in the party and the unions, with an attempt to win that policy at conference, or a special conference if that can be achieved. In fact, were this to be done, there would be *more* chance of getting rid of Blair than if it is seen as an aim from the start. Winning the policy would mean Blair had three options: accepting the decision of conference (extremely unlikely); resigning; or ignoring it, in which case a leadership challenge becomes an immediate issue for all the anti-war forces.

Winning the policy will be hard enough: getting a majority of CLPs and affiliated unions to back anti-war resolutions, and getting delegates to stick by them against the inevitable smooth-talking and arm-twisting. Winning the same support for an immediate challenge to Blair would, unfortunately, be impossible, particularly as some of the most anti-war unions are opposed to such a course.

The Labour Against the War conference on March 29, attended by about 380 delegates, was a show of strength by party and union anti-war forces. However, it mainly reflected the *left* anti-war forces in the party rather than the wider opposition. This was shown primarily in the way the question of a leadership challenge dominated discussion, whether from those opposed to it being part of LATW's platform or those in favour. An indicative vote showed a majority (roughly two-thirds) in favour of such a policy. If LATW is to grow and organise wider opposition to the war in the party, then it needs to recognise reality and adjust its priorities accordingly.

The alternative to any fight over the war is to follow the advice of Peter Hain, now posing as the Cabinet's token lefty, who argues we should support Blair over war while pushing for a greater emphasis on policies such as the redistribution of wealth. Yet Blair would be *strengthened* in his other policies if he gets away with his performance over Iraq.

Where now for the anti-war movement?

War against Iraq is only the latest instalment of Bush's drive for military (and economic) dominance of the globe. Both the British and US governments have been explicit that they will move on to their next victim once Iraq is subdued. Blair's hope that he would have a 'good war' – that it would be over quickly with as little bloodshed as possible and the news would be able to show Iraqis dancing in the streets welcoming the British and US troops – is encountering more problems than were envisaged. It is clear that the spin doctors swallowed their own line that all Iraqis would welcome the invasion, neglecting the fact that many who have no love for Saddam Hussein resent their country being occupied.

We have to continue to oppose this war

Keep that card!

Many Labour Party members have torn up their membership cards – or threatened to – in horror at Blair's drive to war. Many union members are threatening to withdraw their political levy and are talking of disaffiliation from the Labour Party.

Yet there is an ongoing fight in the party over its future course. Does Blair escape with a bloody nose from his encounter with the anti-war movement and rebel MPs, or do we hold him to account? Those most opposed to the war have the most responsibility to challenge him, not walk away.

Blair and his acolytes would like nothing better than for all those opposed to his policies, in particular, the war, to leave and enter the political wilderness. Better to stay and challenge him, and above all get organised!

as long as it goes on, calling for the withdrawal of the troops. The statements from Robin Cook, before his retraction, calling for withdrawal, and from George Galloway, calling on soldiers to refuse to serve in an illegal war, should be supported. We also have to oppose the US/UK plans for the 'post-war reconstruction' of Iraq, involving an American governor, or at best a puppet Iraqi government. The anti-war forces have a duty to support those in Iraq who will argue for democracy, including for the right of self-determination for the Kurds, for the right to form free trade unions, etc.

While continuing to oppose this war, we also have to prepare for the next. Some of the public opposition to this war has melted away through a misguided 'patriotism' (although the longer and bloodier the conflict, the more likely it is to re-emerge). But it is likely to come to the fore again when Bush decides on his next target.

For the movement to be stronger next time around, is needs to firm up and deepen the alliances made in the course of the campaign, but it also means the left winning people to an analysis which draws the connection between imperialist war and imperialist policies more generally, convincing people of the need for *class* politics and that such wars will only ultimately be abolished when we have abolished capitalism.

Left organisations will undoubtedly recruit out of the anti-war movement (although not necessarily in the permanent numbers they hope), but that recruitment has to be linked to drawing lessons from our failure to stop this war – a turn to consistent work in the unions and workplaces, and a recognition that the Labour Party is a significant, if difficult, terrain for the battle against Blair.

Within the Labour Party (the CLPs *and* the affiliated unions), the weak forces of the left have to organise themselves to attract those drawing wider lessons from the fight over the war. We have to make the connections with party democracy, with policy issues like the anti-union laws, the attacks on asylum seekers, privatisation and public sector pay (the firefighters!), drawing in those who have become critical over the war into building a left force within the party which can challenge the whole range of New Labour policies. Part of the reason why delegates wanted LATW to adopt a policy of challenging Blair was undoubtedly the weakness of left organisation in the party. But this needs to be rectified by building that left, not substituting LATW for it. **WA**

People's Assembly

Unrepresentative and disorganised

The People's Assembly for Peace, to give it its full title, was held on March 12 at Westminster Central Hall, London, across the road from the Houses of Parliament. Billed as a 'people's parliament' to keep up the momentum created by the huge February 15 anti-war demonstration, it was more of an anti-climax.

The most inspirational speeches were by the numerous school children who had organised their own walk-out and were going to take part in another walk-out on March 19. Union general secretaries Bob Crow (RMT), Billy Hayes (CWU) and Paul Mackney (Natfhe), and an Aslef assistant general secretary, called for walk-outs on the day that the war started. But at best they were talking about a walk-out of 15 minutes, and even then nothing was done to organise it. There was a very moving contribution from a Falklands veteran.

The Stop the War Coalition had said there would be 3,000 people present at the assembly. There were, in fact, just about 1,000, and it was badly organised. Motions were put to the assembly for voting immediately after they were moved. Many of the motions weren't available for distribution and had to be read out. Others were only provided just before the vote was taken.

There were only a small number of Labour Party Speakers – all of them MPs. I tried to speak three times but was not chosen, even though I was a delegate of a bona fide trade union body (unlike some that could be mentioned). Alan Simpson MP didn't mention the Labour Against the War conference on March 29, despite being one of its main organisers.

The trade union speakers were mostly full-time officials, although Fred Leplat spoke on behalf of Unison London region, and called for a new political party to challenge Blair – which is most certainly not London region policy. Most Unison members I recognised were either SWP or Socialist Party members, and there was not much in the way of ordinary union activists.

Certain groups present were very keen on the sound of their own voices – particularly Workers Power and the Socialist Party, who moved ridiculous amendments to the declaration and were 'resolution happy'. Speakers from the Socialist Party introduced themselves as representing that party, rather than a trade union or other body, with the exception of Dave Nellist.

Only two amendments to the assembly declaration were passed – one moved by ISG/*Socialist Resistance* which deleted a bit that seemed to give full support to France's position and another adding a call for Blair to be sacked if war was declared.

Andrew Berry
Deputy Secretary, Islington Unison (in a personal capacity)

We've been here before

Nick Davies looks at Britain's shameful history of brutality and colonial exploitation in Iraq

Until 1918, Iraq, then known as Mesopotamia, was part of the Ottoman Empire. As long as the Ottoman Empire was seen by the British as a useful ally in thwarting Russian ambitions, British propaganda was happy to extol the virtues of plucky 'Johnny Turk'. But when, at the start of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire found itself on the opposing side to the British, the cry of the propaganda machine became 'The Turk must go!' and a whole number of ghastly tales of Turkish brutality, many wholly untrue, were fed to the tame editors of the popular press. The British suddenly had a burning desire to 'liberate' Mesopotamia from Ottoman oppression, partly because of its strategic position at the head of the Arabian Gulf and on the frontier with Persia, but principally because of its huge oil reserves.

Although the various ethnic and religious communities which inhabited Mesopotamia – Sunni Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, Kurds, Assyrians and Jews – had never seen themselves as part of a single nation, the British, in 1920, created one, Iraq, and ran it under a League of Nations mandate. Against the clearly expressed wishes of its inhabitants, the League of Nations kept the Kurdish inhabitants of Mosul in Iraq, not Turkey, so that its oil reserves could be under British control. At the same time, the people of Syria, who expressed no wish for the former Ottoman province to be divided, were parcelled up by British and French imperialism into Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan.

Despite the divide-and-rule policies pursued by the British, *all* the people of Iraq rose up in revolt. The Kurds, for their trouble, were subject by the Royal Air Force to one of the first ever systematic aerial bombardments of a civilian population, and were also attacked with chemical weapons: poison gas. (Clearly, the testing of state-of-the-art military hardware on Iraqi civilians is becoming a habit.) Even the *Times* asked how long Britain would impose on the Iraqis 'an elaborate and expensive administration which they never asked for and do not want'. Gertrude Bell, the assistant to Sir Percy Cox, chief political officer of the 'liberator' of Iraq, Sir Stanley Maude, declared, without irony, that 'we cannot leave the country in the chaos we have created'. The imposition of a British puppet regime cost an estimated 98,000 Iraqi lives. Many more were to be killed in the revolts which flared up during the 1920s and 30s. Blair is not the first Labour prime minister to have the blood of Iraqi civilians on his hands. During 1924 and from 1929 to 1931 it was a Labour government which was trying to gas and bomb Iraqis into submission.

Once the natives had been subdued by their 'liberators', the creation of a puppet state was completed when the son of Sherif Hussein bin Ali of Mecca was parachuted in as King Feisal I. This was no doubt to console his dad who had been told by the British during the First World War that a British victory over Turkey would give the Arabs independence and unity. (This promise was made at about the same time as the British were promising Palestine to the Zionists.) In case he got jealous, Feisal's brother was given Transjordan. Formal independence for Iraq followed in 1930.

Over the next 28 years, Feisal and his descendants, aided by the pro-British prime minister Nuri es-Said, acted with unimpeachable loyalty towards their British guardians and paymasters. Their rule was buttressed by landowning sheikhs, selected for their loyalty to the British, and on the basis of this new landowning class, tribal structures which had been on the way out under the Ottoman Empire were actually strengthened. Occasionally this British-made apparatus needed helping out. When, in 1940, a nationalist government came to power, based on the military and inspired, in part, by the 1936 Palestinian *intifida*, the British came to the aid of the king, hanging four prominent members of the government, as a warning to the others no doubt. During the early years of the cold war, the British had little difficulty in persuading the Iraqi monarchy that its natural enemy was the USSR and so Iraq joined the Baghdad Pact, a kind of south-west Asian satellite of Nato.

In 1958, only three years after the British felt confident enough to close down the last of its military bases, the Iraqi people decided that they wanted a say in the running of their country and effected a regime change of their own, which left the statue of the 'liberator', Stanley Maude, torn down, and the bodies of King Feisal II and Nuri es-Said dismembered. **WA**

The degeneration of Ba'athism

Nick Davies

As Saddam Hussein and his entourage crouch in their Baghdad bunker, waiting for whatever the US military-industrial complex throws at them, they might look back at 1979 as the year when everything started to go wrong for the Ba'ath party and its project of building a modern, stable and powerful Iraqi state.

In 1979, the Ba'ath party had been in power for 11 years, following ten years of unstable military rule after the overthrow of the monarchy. In that time it had used Iraq's oil wealth to modernise dramatically the infrastructure of the state, creating health and education systems which were probably the best in the Arab world. Women had the right to an education, to a job, and to participate in public life generally. By the end of the 1970s women constituted 46 per cent of all teachers, 29 per cent of all doctors, 46 per cent of all dentists and 70 per cent of all pharmacists. The Ba'athist regime had followed Algeria and Libya in nationalising its oil industry, and it had embarked on a programme of industrial development. Most importantly, the regime had carried through a serious programme of land reform that improved the lot of the peasant farmers considerably. The newly-created welfare state improved living standards for the urban working class and urban poor as well.

The regime handled the ethnic and religious divisions in Iraq with a surprising amount of sophistication, offering the Kurds in the north better terms than any previous Iraqi government had contemplated: an autonomous region with its own parliament, official status for the Kurdish language, and Kurdish language schools (although not full self-determination nor control by the Kurds over their own oil fields). Significantly, these concessions were rejected by the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, himself a powerful landowner, whose prime motivation appeared to be fear of the regime's land reforms.

The Ba'ath party was denounced by the main Islamic party, the Dawah, on the grounds that it was atheistic (the founder of the Ba'ath party, Michel Aflaq, was a Syrian Christian), that it admired the USSR, and allowed such laxities as the public consumption of alcohol. The Ba'athists combined repression against Muslim critics of the regime with increased spending on religious buildings and shrines, as well as increased spending on social projects in the Shi'ite south. A recognition of the cultural centrality of Islam (in line with Ba'athist ideology) was combined with a defence of secularism in public life, and tolerance towards the Christian minority. The Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz, is in fact a Chaldean Christian.

This is not to say that everything in the garden was lovely, however. Economic development and an improvement in living standards were combined with varying degrees of repression, including imprisonment, torture and execution. In theory, the Ba'athist regime was based on popular sovereignty and representative democracy, and although in the beginning the regime had a degree of popular support, this was never really allowed to operate, due to a more or less permanent state of emergency. Instead, power lay with the Revolutionary Command Council, which ruled by decree. Even when there were attempts to organise local, elected councils, there was a stifling control over who could or could not stand.

But after ten years of military rule, preceded by 30 years of a reactionary monarchy propped up by the British, it is hardly surprising that participatory democracy and civil society had shallow roots in a country and society as fragmented as Iraq, or that the instruments of political integration were the army and the party apparatus. The regime was conscious of the relative narrowness of its base. The roots of Ba'athism were neither in the urban capitalist class nor the working class but among intellectuals, state employees and merchants, particularly those from Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's birthplace. The regime was worried about the threat from Kurdish separatism, and worried about the threat from the Shi'ite south where not only the Dawah but also the very large Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) had a bigger base than the Ba'athists. The Ba'athist regime had a zigzagging relationship with the ICP, based in part on the state of Baghdad's relationship with the USSR. The Ba'athists legalised the ICP in 1963, tried to persuade it to join the government, but then dished out even more savage repression against it. The principal political difference between the two parties appears to date back to the early 1960s, when the ICP lacked enthusiasm for joining the short-lived United Arab Republic involving Egypt and Syria. The gathering together of all Arabs in a single independent state was a founding principle of Ba'athism, although this was hampered, to say the least, by the hostility between the two branches of the Ba'ath party in the states where it has been in power, Iraq and Syria. In tacit recognition of the immense practical and political problems involved in the unification process, the Iraqi Ba'athists instead embarked on the project of creating a powerful, cohesive state, the better to provide political leadership in the Arab world.

So what happened in 1979? Firstly, Saddam Hussein became president. On the one hand, this was not such a profound change in that Saddam had been general secretary of the Ba'ath party, and had been otherwise prominent in the regime for many years. Tariq Ali talks in *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* about a 'gangster wing' of the Ba'ath party. While Saddam Hussein is a gangster, he had been at the heart of the regime for so long that it is fair to assume that he was as much in favour of building hospitals as torture chambers. However, the ascent to the presidency of Saddam Hussein was the signal for the start of a grotesque cult of the personality, which strengthened the repressive, absolutist tendencies in the regime.

Also in 1979, there was an absolutely crucial, pivotal event: the Iranian revolution. At a stroke this removed the cornerstone of the USA's system of alliances in that part of the Middle East. It also destabilised Iraq's most feared enemy which had provided support to Kurdish guerrillas in the north until 1975, and whose military strength had constantly forced Iraq back onto the defensive. It gave rise to a regime which claimed leadership of the Muslim-inhabited world and thus threatened the hegemony of the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, also enemies of the Ba'athists. However, there was also the danger posed by the religious appeal of the Iranian revolution to the Shi'ites of southern Iraq. The Iraqi Ba'athists saw the obvious opportunity – to take advantage of the turmoil in Iran to establish military dominance in the Gulf region, and thus forestall any threat to Iraq's integrity posed by militant Shi'ism, and at the same time, become Iran's replacement as the USA's client state in the region, giving the regime access to loans and trading arrangements to build up its military strength, and to develop Iraq's industrial and technological base.

Of course, we know what actually did happen: the first prong of this strategy was a brilliant success. The USA could not resist the anti-Communist, anti-Iran Saddam Hussein, and armed him to the teeth with all sorts of horrible weapons, no doubt on the understanding that they be used only against Iranians and Kurds. We know the result of the other half of the strategy: the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 – a barbaric, futile adventure, which did not achieve its military objectives, and involved both massive loss of life and the squandering of resources. The failed gamble of the invasion of Iran was followed by another, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, itself a result of Iraq's debt problems following the end of the war and a quarrel over oil quotas with the Kuwaiti ruling family.

Saddam Hussein believed that in invading Kuwait he was acting with, if not the approval, certainly the agreement of the USA. It is ostensibly for the Iraqi regime's breach of the cease-fire terms at the end of the war over Kuwait that thousands of Iraqis will be killed in Bush and Blair's war. The liberal and not-so-liberal justifiers of the war against Iraq call Saddam Hussein a tyrant and a gangster, and cite numerous abuses of human rights by the Ba'athist regime. There is no doubt at all that the majority of these allegations are true (although the 'Kuwaiti babies thrown out of incubators' stories from the first Gulf war demonstrate that when the CIA tells horror stories about Iraq, it is tempting sometimes to give the regime the benefit of the doubt). However, Saddam Hussein's atrocious human rights record is not why the USA and its allies wish to destroy him. Saddam's real crimes were that he misjudged the master-servant relationship which exists between the USA and its local henchmen, and that he and the Ba'ath party attempted to assert Iraq's economic, military and political independence of imperialism.

The rise and fall of Iraqi Ba'athism tells us two things. Firstly, it reminds us of the problems and difficulties when a party or movement with a limited social base attempts to force-march the economic development of a given country from a low level, without allowing the democratic participation of the workers and rural poor. The only way in which the resulting tensions can be contained is by more repression, as when Saddam Hussein turned on the Kurds, and then, in the 1990s, combined terror with reaction in adding the inscription 'God is Great' to the Iraqi flag, and implementing a limited form of *sharia*, in an opportunistic attempt to appeal to conservative Muslims. When, inevitably, the whole project brings the state and the regime into conflict with the priorities of imperialism, then 'democratic' imperialism can employ a liberal justification for overthrowing it. And replacing it with what, exactly?

This bring us on to the second lesson to be learned from the rise and fall of Iraqi Ba'athism, which is that now, since the end of the cold war and the rise of the WTO, there is no longer the same, albeit limited, space for a government to marshal the resources of a country for the benefit of its population. In Venezuela, the government of Hugo Chavez is called 'Castro-communist' for having the effrontery to attempt to impose some sort of equitable taxation system and utilise the country's oil wealth in order to put right the grotesque inequalities which exist there. Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athists nationalised the Iraqi oil industry. That means that it is run by Iraqis and not from the boardroom of Exxon. Anyone who believes Colin Powell when he says that Iraq's oil will be kept in a trust for the Iraqi people should take a reality check. The least surprising news to emerge recently was that only US companies are to be offered major contracts in the reconstruction of Iraq, and one outfit with its snout firmly in the trough is Dick Cheney's Haliburton.

We can shed no tears for Saddam Hussein or his henchman, but the people of Iraq have been reduced by years of war, sanctions and air strikes from, in the words of a Humanitarian Panel established by the UN Security Council, 'relative affluence to massive poverty'. The slaughter, destruction, and environmental damage caused by sanctions and war put the bloodthirsty activities of Saddam Hussein in the shade. In so far as the country will be rebuilt at all, that process will be tailored to suit not the Iraqi people, but US corporations and the strategic interests of the US government. For ornament's sake, a puppet president on the CIA payroll will sit in Baghdad and play at running the country. That is what bringing 'democracy' to Iraq will mean. **WA**

Turkey threatens the Kurds

Nick Davies

George W. Bush's 'coalition of the willing' has certainly taken some putting together. Eavesdropping, bribery, threats and intimidation have been the order of the day, and this was only the allies! Nowhere did the USA's coalition-building come more unstuck than in Turkey.

Turkey is a longstanding member of Nato and an ally of the USA. In Washington it was taken for granted that Turkey would allow the US military in, to establish a northern front against Iraq. The increasingly irrelevant Nato was split when France, Germany and Belgium refused to agree to measures taken by the USA to 'defend' Turkey. Defend Turkey from what, exactly? The anti-Bush camp in western Europe correctly saw that preparations for war with Iraq which, for their own reasons, they did not support, and which their own voters were also against, were being dressed up as 'defence'. Moreover, most people in Turkey were showing a marked reluctance to be 'defended' by the USA. Public opinion in Turkey is overwhelmingly against a war with Iraq, partly because it is seen as an attack on another Muslim country, and also because of the obvious fear of the political and economic impact of war in a neighbouring country.

The USA tried to hurry things along by dangling its chequebook in front of the noses of the Turkish government. Although the Turkish economy is depressed, the Turkish government proved surprisingly expensive. Various figures were bandied about, from $15 billion to $26 billion. Whichever figure was correct, it was a lot of money. The government agreed to deployment, subject to the ratification of parliament, which, it was assumed, would act as a rubber stamp. But parliament failed by a mere six votes to ratify with the required majority, and indicated that any further vote on deployment would be dealt with at its leisure.

These developments have caused tension between the Turkish parliament, the government, and the military. The last election was won by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which projects itself as a 'moderate' and 'democratic' Muslim party, and is anxious for brownie points from the USA and the EU. Its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has only just been allowed to take office as prime minister after winning a by-election. He was previously banned from parliament because of a conviction for inciting race-hatred. The army, although firmly on the right in Turkish politics, sees itself as the guardian of Turkey's secular constitution. It got rid of the previous Islamic-leaning government, headed by Necmettin Erbakan of the now defunct Welfare party, in 1997. It supports a war, having no scruples at all about a conflict with another Muslim state, or about public opinion, for that matter. In a stand-off between the pro-war army and the pro-USA prime minister on one hand and the parliament on the other, there could only be one winner. Or could there?

In fact, the parliament left most of the USA's military requirements unfulfilled, passing instead a fall-back motion, allowing the use of Turkish airspace to US aircraft flying in from Europe to Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. This allows the US to open up the all-important second front, but does not allow the US to use Turkish bases, even for refuelling. US ground troops will not be able to cross into northern Iraq from Turkey. The question was, would the USA let such constitutional niceties stand in the way of effective deployment? Ships carrying equipment have been moored off the southern Turkish port of Iskenderun, which has been the scene of demonstrations by Turkish socialists and anti-war campaigners. In the end, the USA couldn't face the prospect of its ships bobbing about off the Turkish coast indefinitely, announcing that the US army 4th infantry division would go to Iraq via the Gulf. Turkey will have to do without the financial aid, which was dependent on full deployment, but then, if governments don't do what the US tells them to, they end up poor, as well as 'irrelevant'.

A major complication is that successive Turkish governments' policy towards the Kurds in Turkey has been as repressive as that of Saddam Hussein towards the Kurds in Iraq, or possibly more so. Having spent years in a bloody campaign against the Kurds' struggle for national self-determination, the last thing any Turkish government wanted was a measure of self-determination for Kurds anywhere else. While this was not promised by the USA, the Turkish government was worried that it might be extracted by the Kurdish factions in northern Iraq, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), as the price for co-operation with the invaders. For his part, Massoud Barzani of the (KDP) has declared that the Kurds are better off under Saddam than under Turkey. He warned of 'serious consequences' if the Turkish army tried to take advantage of a vacuum by moving into Iraqi Kurdistan, saying that he hoped the Kurds would not be betrayed by Washington.

The Kurds were obviously concerned that the price for the use of Turkish bases near the Iraqi border would be extra leeway for the Turks in Iraqi Kurdistan. The French senator Aymeri de Montesquieu quoted Bush's envoy Zalmay Khalilzad as saying that 'the Americans won't let them [the Turks] enter more than a few kilometres into Kurdistan'. However, the then prime minister, Abdullah Gul, stated, ominously, that: 'At the moment, we do not intend to enter northern Iraq unilaterally . . . But at the end of the day, Turkey is an independent country and it will make its own decision [depending] on what its interests require.' Within 36 hours of the vote in parliament there were rumours of a Turkish incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan. The USA, terrified that its strategy would unravel even further, warned the Turkish government that any incursion would attract its extreme displeasure. In the meantime, the prospect remains of the promises and inducements held out by the USA to the Kurds coming home to roost in bloody and chaotic fashion. But from the point of view of the Turkish government, why should it not invade? If its ally and the planet's self-appointed policeman can invade anywhere it likes in the name of the 'war against terror' or 'self-defence', why can't its hitherto loyal ally?

Part of the US's project is to advocate Turkey's entry into the EU. Having its Nato ally in the EU would make sense from a strategic point of view. This would also involve resolving the festering crisis over Cyprus, with the aim of bringing a united Cyprus into the EU (the Greek part has already been promised entry). This explains the attention given by UN secretary-general Kofi Annan to organising talks around a reunification blueprint involving a Cypriot confederation headed by a weak central government. Last December, just before the EU's Copenhagen summit which dealt with enlargement, US deputy secretary of defence Paul Wolfowitz addressed the International Institute of Strategic Studies, explicitly linking the questions of Turkish entry into the EU and Cypriot reunification as being in the US's strategic interests. However, the EU leaders hadn't read the script, refusing Turkey's application, partly because of its human rights record (although now that it has abolished the death

penalty, Turkey can argue that its human rights are better than are those of the USA, and certainly Texas!). As for Cyprus, the majorities in both communities were for reunification, and in particular, the inhabitants of Turkish northern Cyprus have become tired of their money-laundering mini-state. Reunification of Cyprus is something that socialists should be in favour of, whether the US is in favour of it or not, but, as it happened, Rauf Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot leader, didn't like the idea of his little bailiwick being dismantled, and he dug his heels in, with the result that US strategy has unravelled even further. However, the unravelling of American strategy regarding Turkey could only bring limited cheer. The old saying is that war represents the failure of diplomacy. However, in the USA's 'new world order', the purpose of diplomacy, as we have seen, is merely to legitimise wars which it intends to fight come what may.

We hope that socialists, trade unionists and anti-war activists in Turkey declare that Turkey is not 'for sale', and continue to protest against any assistance being provided to the USA. There needs to be a clear line drawn against anti-Kurdish Turkish nationalism, which may be motivating some opposition to the war. This will bring the Turkish left and anti-war movement into conflict with the army. However, recent events show that there is the potential to undermine the US drive towards dominance in the Middle East in a country which is one of its staunchest allies. **WA**

The Kurdish dimension

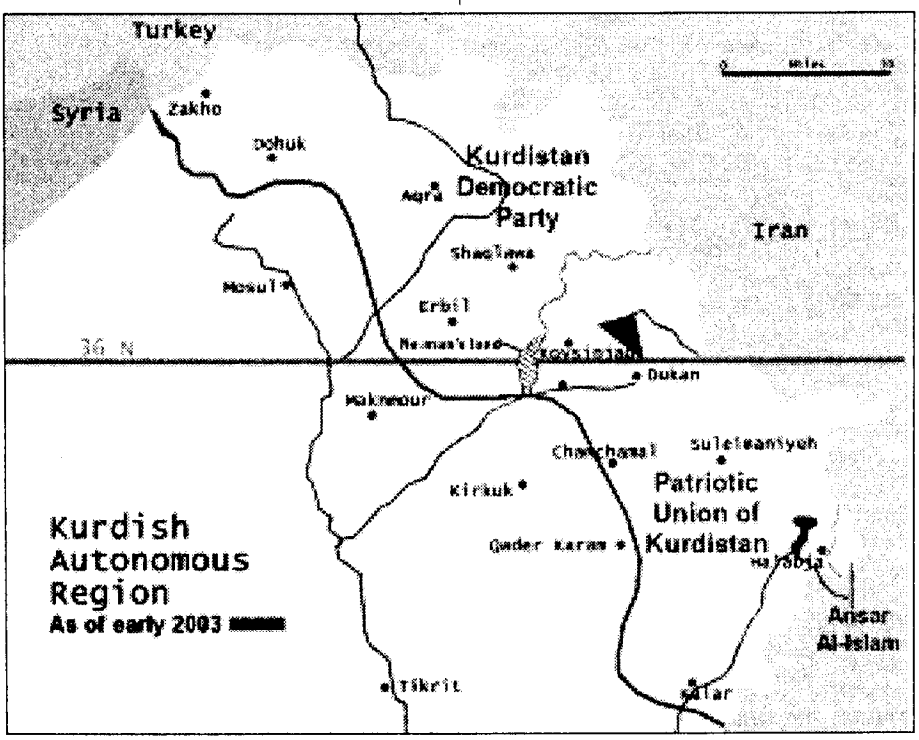
Richard Price looks at the struggle for control of Iraqi Kurdistan

The likelihood of a large-scale Turkish invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan has receded – temporarily at least – and with it the prospect of a 'war within a war' between Turkey and the Kurdish groups which support the US-led invasion. Heavy diplomatic pressure from the US combined, no doubt, with a degree of bribery has so far kept Turkish troops out, and avoided further undermining US efforts to open a second front against Saddam Hussein in northern Iraq.

The decision of the Turkish parliament to refuse the United States rights to send land forces across the Turkish-Iraqi border, while authorising the sending in of several thousand of its own troops into Iraqi Kurdistan was a significant blow to US plans on the eve of war. The original US plan had involved the use of 62,000 troops in return for which Turkey stood to benefit from a $6 billion 'aid-for-access' plan. Had US troops been allowed to cross the border, the plan would have also allowed Turkish forces to take up positions inside Iraq.

The plan was aborted under pressure from Turkish public opinion, which remains overwhelmingly opposed to the war against Iraq. Although the US had been prepared to authorise a Turkish presence in Iraqi Kurdistan in a junior role, an incursion by the Turkish army acting alone would have almost certainly led to conflict with the Kurdish forces the US plans to use against Saddam.

Turkey has justified its repeated threats to invade Iraqi Kurdistan on three counts: for 'humanitarian purposes'; to prevent an exodus of refugees; and to counteract the 'terrorist activity' of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), whose base lies in Turkish Kurdistan, from re-establishing itself in the border region. Many Kurds, however, suspect it has broader motives. For years, Turkish spokesmen have warned that they will act against the creation of anything that resembles a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq, particularly if it gains control of the major oil fields near Kirkuk. Iraqi Kurdistan also has substantial water resources as well as uranium deposits. In the weeks running up to the outbreak of war, both the US and British governments put considerable effort into pushing the line that the war had nothing to do with oil. At least part of the inspiration for this seems to have come from the CIA, which has recently published a report claiming that water rather than oil is the most important resource in Kurdistan. The appearance of the report gives a spurious legitimacy to the neo-conservative agenda emanating from the White House.



The significance of Kurdistan

The Kurds are the world's largest stateless nation. Iraq's other neighbours with Kurdish minorities, including Iran and Syria, are also worried by US involvement in Kurdistan, and by the spectre of demands for a state to unite all Kurds. The estimated distribution of Kurds in the Middle East is as follows:

Country	Estimated number	Percent of population
Armenia	70,000	2
Azerbaijan	200,000	2.8
Georgia	40,000	0.9
Iran	5m	8
Iraq	3.5m–4.8m	15–20
Syria	1m	8
Turkey	13m–15m	20

What happens to Kirkuk does appear to be one of the key issues in a post-Saddam settlement. The districts of Kirkuk, Khanaqin and Sinjar were once predominantly Kurdish areas, but the policy of 'Arabisation', which stretches back to the 1930s, and was accelerated by the

Ba'athists from the 1970s onwards, has forcibly changed the demographics of the region that lies to the south of the Kurdish enclave created after the last Gulf war. According to one estimate, over 100,000 Kurds have been evicted and forced northwards in the last decade alone, while as many as 250,000 Iraqi Arabs have been brought northwards by the Ba'athist regime to Kirkuk. In the period immediately prior to the war, several thousand more Kurds left Kirkuk. The central purpose of the Arabisation policy in recent decades has been to secure the oil fields by an influx of Arab settlers. Kurds occupying fertile agricultural land have also been forced out.

Both main Kurdish parties – the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – propose a Kurdish administration within a federal Iraq, and for Kirkuk to be its capital. In addition to the threat posed by Turkey, the likelihood of evicted Kurds seeking to reclaim their former homes and property looks certain to fuel Kurdish-Arab tensions in Kirkuk.

The potential conflict between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds threatens to undermine the sustained effort that the CIA has put into co-ordinating anti-Saddam forces in Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly over the last six months. Although the PUK controls the smaller eastern part of the enclave, it appears to be currently more closely aligned to US policy than the KDP. At different times, the PUK, which was founded in 1976 by former KDP member Jalal Talabani, has also reached 'understandings' with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and . . . Saddam Hussein. Barham Salih, a senior leader of the PUK and prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, had the following to say in an article published – appropriately enough – in the *Wall Street Journal* of March 21:

'On Wednesday it was announced that the *peshmerga*, the Kurdish resistance fighters . . . will be under US command. In truth, we have been co-operating with the US for many months, preparing for the possibility that Saddam Hussein would defiantly subject the Iraqi people to yet another war [sic] . . . Elections and minority rights will be fragile if we do not cut out the financial heart of Iraqi fascism, the state-controlled oil sector, or fail to reform the armed forces. Oil needs to be de-monopolised and then privatised . . . In our rebuilding, as in our liberation, we will need US support.'

So much, then, for the PUK's signature on the statement signed in Ankara by eight Iraqi opposition groups two days earlier, which blithely spoke of 'using the natural resources of Iraq as a national asset and for the Iraqi people as a whole, to strengthen the national economy'. Another signatory, the Iraqi National Congress, an umbrella group of Iraqi oppositionists, which some claim received as much as $100 million in covert US funding during the 1990s, is on record as supporting the creation of a US consortium to run Iraq's oil fields after Saddam. INC leader Ahmed Chalabi told the *Washington Post* last year: 'American companies will have a big shot at Iraqi oil.' Meanwhile, Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think-tank with close links to the Bush administration, published a 'road map' for the privatisation of Iraqi oil. It envisages the industry being split into three regions – the largely Shi'ite south, the central region around Baghdad, and Iraqi Kurdistan. Cohen's proposal would cut France, Russia and China out of the spoils.

The struggle for self-determination

The current pro-American alignment of the main Kurdish groups is the latest in a long series of alliances that have compromised the historic struggle for Kurdish self-determination. The KDP was founded in 1946 as a 'Marxist-Leninist inspired' party, shortly before Mustafa Barzani and 500 Kurdish fighters withdrew to the Soviet Union after the collapse of the short-lived Mahabad Republic in Iranian Kurdistan.

The murky history of the CIA's involvement in Iraq stretches back over five decades. In 1958, a group of nationalist army officers led by General Abdul Karim-Kassem overthrew King Faisal II and the pro-British regime of Nuri Said. Kassem welcomed Barzani back in 1958 as a national hero. Relations soured when Kassem rejected Kurdish autonomy and turned on the Kurds in 1960, and in 1961 the KDP began military resistance to Baghdad. Some sources place Barzani's links with the CIA to this period.

Although the CIA had initially believed the new regime to be 'containable', it quickly began to distrust the upsurge of radical nationalism. After five years of plotting, a CIA-backed coup overthrew Kassem in 1963, with the young Saddam Hussein – already a prominent figure on the right wing of the Ba'ath Party – playing a significant part in the murder of 7,000 Iraqi communists. Between June and November 1963, there was renewed fighting, which ended when the new president, Abdul Salam Aref, dismissed the Ba'athists from the government, and concluded a cease-fire with Barzani. War between the central government and the Kurds flared up again between March 1965 and June 1966, when military reversals for the Iraqi army led to a new cease-fire.

In July 1968, Saddam Hussein led the Ba'athists to seize power and a fourth war ensued between April 1969 and March 1970. In August 1969, Barzani is alleged to have received $14 million from the CIA. After lengthy negotiations, a new constitution was drawn up, enshrining extensive autonomous rights for the Kurds. This unstable arrangement, dogged by arguments over the boundaries of the Kurdish region, attempts by the central government to impose its own nominees to dominate the Kurdish Legislative Assembly, and continuing army and police repression of Kurds, broke down in 1974, and war broke out again.

By this point, Iraq had concluded a treaty with the Soviet Union, which up to this point had shown some sympathy for the Kurdish cause. The KDP in return accepted military aid from the Shah of Iran. (According to some accounts, it had received Iranian assistance since the mid-60s.) During this period, Israel also gave technical assistance, helped establish Kurdish radio stations and maintained a group of advisers in Kurdistan.

In 1975, however, Iran reached agreement with Iraq over a territorial dispute, and all aid from Iran and the US stopped. The Ba'athist regime was able to turn on the Kurds. Thousands were killed, and hundreds of thousands were forced to flee. On March 10, 1975, Barzani wrote to Henry Kissinger: 'Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way, with silence from everyone. We feel, your Excellency, that the United States has a moral and political responsibility towards our people, who have committed themselves to your country's policy.' Barzani died in the United States in 1979, aged 76, and the leadership of the KDP passed to his son, Massoud.

The period 1980-88 was dominated by the Iran-Iraq War. Having incited Saddam to attack Iran, the US pursued the Machiavellian policy of channelling the bulk of arms to Iraq, while covertly arming Iran with the assistance of Israel. The Ba'athists unleashed a fresh campaign of terror against Kurdish villages from 1984. This gathered momentum in 1987 as the Iran-Iraq war began to be scaled down. Iraqi Kurds had again sought the support of Iran during the war and Saddam was determined to wreak revenge. Using mustard gas and nerve agents, the Iraqi armed forces killed somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 people, including 5,000 gassed at Halabja on March 17, 1988. Throughout this period, the Kurds' erst-

while protector, the United States, was arming Saddam.

After the Gulf war

At the end of the first Gulf war, the CIA inspired uprisings of both Kurds in the north and Shi'ites in the south – and then stood back while Saddam crushed them. Nor was the subsequent creation of the Kurdish 'safe haven' protected by the northern no-fly zone all that it seemed, according to Kurdish journalist Husayn al-Kurdi: 'It was clear from the beginning that the "safe haven" was an operation to provide "cover" for CIA operations against Iraq and Turkish crackdowns on Kurds – not "comfort", as its official designation implied. A state of dependence was reinforced in which the "providers" could keep their Kurdish puppets on short strings.'

American plans for regime change in Iraq in the 1990s centred on two ploys: an insurrection, to be led by the Iraqi National Congress (INC) backed by Kurdish groups, and a palace coup to be organised by the Iraqi National Accord. In 1996, a CIA-backed INC-Kurdish uprising aimed at seizing Mosul and Kirkuk collapsed when the Clinton administration withdrew support at the last moment, preferring to back the palace coup which never arrived. The Iraqi army was able to enter the 'safe haven', and in a subsequent crackdown 130 oppositionists were executed.

By this stage, sold short once again by their US sponsors, the Kurdish opposition was beginning to fall apart. By 1994, the KDP had established a *modus vivendi* with the Ba'athist regime – it had become the chief conduit for oil smuggling. Convoys of lorries made their way though the KDP-controlled western sector of Kurdistan on their way to Turkey. The money made by the Iraqi government was channelled into the upkeep of the regime's elite forces. In August 1996, the KDP invited Baghdad to supply military assistance in its feud with the PUK, yet by September Barzani was once again appealing for American help because the Iraqi government was pressurising the KDP to accept an autonomy deal which gave overall control to Baghdad.

Fighting continued in 1997 between the KDP and the PUK. Meanwhile, Turkish forces entered Iraqi Kurdistan several times during the year to combat the PKK. In November, these parallel conflicts merged when Turkish air and ground forces joined the KDP to force the PUK and the PKK to return to the established intra-Kurdish ceasefire line. The fighting left over a thousand people dead, and tens of thousands more homeless. The KDP estimated that 58,000 of its supporters were expelled from Suleymaniyah and other PUK-controlled areas between October 1996 and October 1997, while the PUK claimed that 49,000 of its supporters were expelled from Irbil and other KDP-controlled areas between August 1996 and December 1997.

So much, then, for the image marketed in the west of the Kurdish enclave as an oasis of democratic pluralism. Nick Cohen, in an article in the *Observer* in November last year, launched a savage attack on the anti-war movement in Britain, accusing the left of opposing Kurdish self-determination because it found the Kurdish enclave an 'intolerable liberal experiment' in democracy. It is certainly true that a range of political groups, including the Iraqi Communist Party, operate in the enclave, and there is a diversity of press and media. Relations with smaller ethnic groups such as the Turkmen and Assyrians seem relatively calm. Under the protection of the northern no-fly zone, Kurds have not surprisingly felt more secure than at any time for decades. However, others have painted a less rosy picture, Husayn al-Kurdi accusing the PUK and KDP of possessing 'fearsome security agencies which carry out death squad-style repression against Kurds not to their political taste. Both parties have earned the disgust of Kurds with their gangster-like operations in the "safe haven" '. In any case, Cohen is completely wrong in his assessment of the Kurdish-US alliance. The CIA is on record as opposing self-determination. As one CIA director put it, 'You need to take territory from Iran, Turkey and Syria to put together such a region.'

The KDP's recent history of balancing between Iraq and Turkey seems to have made it not as enthusiastic about US military intervention in Kurdistan as its main rival, the PUK. As recently as January this year, Barzani announced that in a future war, the US would not mount military attacks on Baghdad from Kurdish areas.

The PUK markets itself as altogether more modern than the 'traditionalist' KDP. Its statements – which belie PUK leader Jalal Talabani's reputation as 'everybody's agent' – talk of a federal democratic Iraq, devolved government, pluralism and rights for minorities.

A relatively recent phenomenon has been the arrival of Islamic fundamentalism in an area which, although traditional, has maintained largely secular politics. The Ansar al-Islam group, said to consist of about 1,000 fighters, half of them Arab veterans of conflict in Afghanistan, established itself in a small mountainous enclave close to the Iranian border, 50 miles north of Kirkuk. It is said to be opposed to the secular politics of the Kurdish government, and has been linked by the PUK and the Bush administration to al-Qaida. On March 22, 70 cruise missiles were launched at Ansar al-Islam positions, and within days a PUK offensive, supported by US special forces and aircraft, had effectively destroyed its foothold. In the course of the operation, the PUK evidently fingered another small anti-Saddam Islamic militia, Komala, to the US, resulting in four cruise missiles killing between 60 and 150 people. Komala strenuously denies any links to al-Qaida, and the episode indicates that the PUK's idea of pluralism may in practice be very limited.

The opening of a second front in Iraqi Kurdistan has presented the US with major logistical and political problems. The original intention – to take Kirkuk and other northern towns and cities, and then put Baghdad under pressure – has been heavily undercut by Turkey's decision to refuse access. Although US special forces have been operating for several months, regular army units, their equipment and supplies, have had to be flown laboriously from the south. While seeking to make use of the 50,000 *peshmerga* under arms, American strategists are keen to prevent Kurdish forces from taking Kirkuk, for fear of alienating Turkey and provoking the kind of 'war within a war' it has tried so hard to prevent.

The failure of Iraqi soldiers to surrender or defect in large numbers has limited Kurdish advances, and the presence of Republican Guard units around Kirkuk suggests the battle for the city may well be bloody. However, large-scale bombardment of Iraqi positions by B52s suggests that an offensive on the northern front is likely to be sooner rather than later.

By pouring military aid and money into Kurdistan, the US appears to have bought off any lingering ambitions of an independent Kurdish state, and further divided Kurds in Iraq from those in Turkey, Iran and Syria. Although Kurds hope with some justification to achieve a significant measure of autonomy in a post-Saddam settlement, it looks almost certain it will be under the tutelage of a US military regime, keen to bury the subversive demand for Kurdish self-determination, and eager to get its hands on Iraqi Kurdistan's oil.

WA

Firefighters' dispute

FBU delegates ready to continue fight

Charli Langford

At the recall conference of the Fire Brigades Union in Brighton on March 19, delegates overwhelmingly rejected the employers' most recent pay offer against the recommendation of their own executive council.

The details of the pay offer were an overall 4 per cent backdated to November 2002, a further average 7 per cent rise in November 2003, and a further average 4.2 per cent in June 2004. The employers were demanding in return 'local risk management' – i.e., the employers would have the right to determine fire cover requirements. There was also 'the opportunity to work more flexibly . . . or the opportunity to work overtime on a voluntary basis'.

In pay terms this is in fact the same offer that the FBU EC rejected a week earlier, and has hardly changed from the government's midwinter offer. It is a lot worse than the 16 per cent no strings offer made by the employers last autumn before the government intervened to block it.

Andy Gilchrist, general secretary of the FBU, explained the EC change of mind as being because the system of negotiating the 'modernisation' strings had been modified to require consensus rather that consultation between union and employers, so the FBU would be able to block unacceptable job cuts proposals.

The firefighters have centred their demands on 'a professional wage for a professional service' – £30,000 per year – a scarcely adequate amount when measured against the costs of housing, food and basic living expenses. The current offer takes the standard pay to about £22,500 per year, or less that £25,000 in June 2004. Small wonder then, that the delegates rejected it.

In fact, the inadequacy of the offer is implicitly recognised by both employers and the union executive. The last of the 'frequently asked questions' on the documentation accompanying the offer is 'Will I still be able to do a second job?' – which is as good as an admission that the wage is too little to live on.

And as for consensus instead of consultation, delegates realise full well that this leaves the 'modernisation' – i.e., job cuts – door wide open. It is a recipe for death by a thousand small cuts rather than a hundred big ones.

The offer has now been put to the FBU membership accompanied by a letter from Andy Gilchrist which explains that: 'Conditional on receipt of this offer was that the Executive Council would agree to recommend the offer to the membership. This the Executive Council agreed to do . . . This document was considered by a Recall of Annual Conference held in Brighton on Wednesday 19th March 2003. The Recall Conference agreed by an overwhelming majority to recommend in the strongest terms possible that the membership of this Union reject this, the Employers' latest final offer. To facilitate this decision making process the Executive Council are arranging a further Recall of Conference to be held in two to three weeks' time . . . to receive the decision of the membership on this particular offer and to determine the further action necessary to progress our just claim on pay. It is crucially important that every Workplace Branch holds a meeting to discuss and consider this offer. It is therefore vital that all members make every effort to attend their respective Branch meeting to ensure their view is taken into account by those representing them at that further Recall of Conference. I repeat the Recall of Conference of the 19th March 2003 recommended that this offer be rejected by you the membership.'

This, of course, is a major gain for union democracy and something that other unions must learn from. It is different from the situation in many unions where the executive has the power to accept a deal on the members' behalf without any consultation.

John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, has stated that the employers' offer will not be improved and that, if necessary, he will introduce emergency legislation allowing him to impose a settlement. But he needs no new law to impose a pay rise or work practice changes – the purpose of a new law would be to give the government the ability to declare FBU industrial action illegal. Underlying this is the government's vulnerability to further strikes since their strikebreaking force is otherwise engaged in Iraq.

It is a measure of Prescott's vindictiveness that he found time to comment that any increase he imposed on the fire service would be lower than the increase rejected last week. This arrogant ex-trade unionist has shown himself an unmitigated bully before, in his physical assault on a protestor during the last general election campaign. He has stood full square behind Blair in his warmongering, and his comment on the resignation from the government of Lord Hunt ('never heard of him') over the prosecution of the war with Iraq shows his contempt for people with any principles. The RMT union has already stopped sponsoring him. He now threatens to use the ruling class legal establishment against trade unionists. The vile slur by Tory MP for North Essex Bernard Jenkin that the FBU are 'friends of Saddam' (this from a man who was PA to Leon Brittain when the British government was arming Saddam) is merely an explicit declaration of the sentiment Prescott wants to promote. It is time for a campaign in the Labour Party and affiliated unions to sack him.

But there is every chance that Prescott's intervention will backfire. His threat of imposing an increase even more paltry than the shameful offer on the table at present, while the government spends £3.5 billion on a war seen by well over half the population as unjust, is very likely to harden firefighters' views, and if the rank-and-file FBU members show even a fraction of the vehemence of the delegate conference then the ballot decision will be to reject the offer. Andy Gilchrist accepts that the logic of this is that further strikes will be called.

The TUC has so far made lukewarm statements of support while pressing for resolution of the dispute through Acas. Trade unionists must demand that the TUC fully supports the dispute and in particular must defend the FBU against Prescott's legislation. Solidarity work through the support groups needs to be restarted to maintain public support for the firefighters. The government must be stopped from using the war as an excuse to impose a settlement; the mass opposition to the war will make this task easier. But for this to happen, rank-and-file firefighters will have to reject the latest deal and the mid-April recall conference of the FBU will have to decide to continue industrial action. **WA**

The crisis in the child protection services

Mike Calvert looks at some of the implications for the social services of the Laming report into the death of Victoria Climbié

On February 25, 2000, 8-year-old Victoria Climbié died from hypothermia and over 200 injuries inflicted upon her by her 'carers', her aunt Marie-Therese Kouao and her aunt's partner Carl Manning. In January 2001, Manning and Kouao were both sentenced to life imprisonment.

It is not our intention to dwell on what happened or how, but to look at the future for a care system that was left in tatters as a result.

The report by Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié was published on January 28. Prior to its publication, Lord Laming promised that Victoria's death would mark a turning point in the care of vulnerable children. However, according to the NSPCC, at least one child is killed by a parent or family member or carer every week.

The government was shocked by the publicity surrounding these enquiries and also by a damning report into the various services that work with 'at risk' children which squarely placed the responsibility for these tragedies on an extreme lack of financial resources, properly trained staff, and co-ordination between agencies, which was undermining the child protection services in this country.

The report has suggested that far-reaching reforms of the child protection services are now necessary. It has even been suggested that the elected local authorities should be deprived of their responsibility for child protection, and that it should be given to a separate external agency, effectively privatising it. But 'outsourcing', as it is known, has come up against opposition, even from the government.

It has been pointed out by social care practitioners that the line between children in need of extra familial 'support' and children needing child 'protection' is often confused to say the least. The same children may at different times need both support and protection. It would be ludicrous, and also confusing for parents, for different agencies to deal with these different aspects of services to vulnerable children.

The government's current proposal is to set up 'children's trusts' to work with vulnerable children. These would be similar to those 'care trusts' that were set up last year to integrate health and social services for vulnerable adults. Essentially, these represent the 'NHS-isation' of local authority-run social services. One of the first has been the Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care Trust, and this has run into considerable early difficulties since it was launched in April 2002. There have been financial problems with the two social services departments being unwilling or unable to stump up the cash needed to run the trust, leaving it with a huge deficit, and with the role of approved social workers and the law, and who they are accountable to (i.e., the directors of their social services departments) not being clearly demarcated, etc.

One significant improvement would be that unlike care trusts which are led by the NHS, children's trusts would be based within local government and therefore – technically – would be accountable to local communities. However, the government has also said that children's trusts could include the involvement of the private sector.

A major problem in the system is that the lack of funding and adequate training in social services and social care, coupled with horrendously low pay, all lead to a climate of low morale and even desperation. The difficulties faced by Lisa Arthurworrey, the young, barely qualified social worker at the centre of the Climbié affair, is testament to that.

Whatever restructuring of child protection services takes place, there is an unbelievable recruitment and retention problem, particularly in London and other areas where housing costs are high. Many social work teams have more than 70 per cent vacancy levels. Islington Council recently told the trade unions that there are 120 vacancies in their children and families section alone! Despite a chronic national shortage of social workers, the only government action has been an advertising campaign and a new bursary system for social work students.

In fact, the government has compounded the problem with its policy of naming and shaming individuals which it deems are responsible at the sharp end, while allowing those like the senior managers to get out utterly unscathed, and in some cases to get promotions to fat-cat jobs in neighbouring boroughs.

Only a huge increase in resources going to social services, alongside measures to improve the pay, conditions and training of social care staff, will attract and retain people in this difficult area of work where burn-out rates are high.

The Laming report exposes the flaws in the child protection system not just in the London Borough of Haringey but across the country. The events cannot be put down to Lisa Arthurworrey being bad at her job, or the fact that two Christian fundamentalists thought Victoria was 'devil possessed'. It is far more probable that her death was due to lack of training of social work staff due to the underfunding of the social services department, poor handling of the case by the Tottenham police, and the general deprivation of the area.

Cutbacks and inadequate training are one thing; the decision to channel money into every budget but children and families taken by George Meehan, the council leader, and David Warwick, the chief executive, among others, only hindered things further. Another local issue is the widely-held view that the wealthier and more 'articulate' part of Haringey – Hornsey and Wood Green – gets much better treatment and more resources than Tottenham. All of these factors must be taken into account when looking for a way forward.

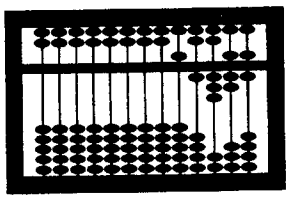
A strong feature of the Laming report was the manner in which it refused – unlike Haringey council – to scapegoat the workers at the sharp end. The following appeared on the *Guardian* website on January 29:

'The prime offender was Haringey council, whose senior officials persistently failed to hand over documents explaining the conduct of social workers responsible for Victoria's case in the final months of her life. They were accused by Neil Garnham QC, counsel to the inquiry, of "drip feeding" documents, providing them "at the 59th minute of the 11th hour", just before witnesses gave evidence. Lord Laming's patience cracked at the end of November 2001, when he summonsed Anne Bristow, director of social services, to appear with all the files relating to the case or face prosecution and possible imprisonment. The threat produced a further 630 documents, but not the whole set. As further material surfaced haphazardly from the authority's chaotic filing system, Lord Laming threatened to summons David Warwick, the chief executive. Mr Garnham said the council's failure to provide documents was evidence "either of gross incompetence or the deliberate attempt to frustrate the efforts of this inquiry to arrive at the truth".'

Lord Laming concludes: '. . . sadly the report is a vivid demonstration of poor practice within and between social services, the police and health agencies. It is also a stark reminder of the consequences of ineffective and inept management. It is the hope of the full inquiry team that the horror of what happened to Victoria will endure as a reproach to bad practice and be a beacon pointing the way to securing the safety and wellbeing of all children in our society.'

The major problems though are that the social care system itself is under-resourced nationally and terribly outdated. Social workers are demonised and then are scapegoated for the system failures, and management are allowed to get away, literally in this case, with murder. **WA**

FIGURING IT OUT



POPULATION: World fertility rates are steadily falling, according to a UN report. The average fertility rate across the world is predicted to fall to Western levels by 2050. By the middle of this century women across the globe are expected to bear an average of 1.85 children and world population is expected to be about 8 billion – 2 to 3 billion lower than previous estimates. In Britain, the average number of children born per woman has fallen from 2.04 in the early 1970s to 1.61 today.

HOUSING: Home repossessions in Britain have fallen to their lowest level for 20 years. 11,970 homes were repossessed last year – 0.11 per cent of all mortgages. House prices rose by 22 per cent in England and Wales in 2002, according to figures from the Land Registry. The cost of the average house in Britain is now £150,000.

POVERTY: A report published by the Child Poverty Action Group in February shows that poverty in Britain is highest among minority ethnic groups. Using a measure of poverty of below 60 per cent of average income, the report shows that one-third of people of Indian and Caribbean origin, half of people of Black African origin, and two-thirds of people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are living in poverty, compared with less than a quarter of the British population overall. Three-quarters of Bangladeshi children are growing up in poverty compared with only a quarter of white children. Employment rates among working age Bangladeshi adults are 35 per cent, compared with 75 per cent in the population as a whole. Young black men have unemployment rates twice the national average.

Meanwhile, official figures show that there has been a fall of 500,000 in the number of children officially in poverty since 1997. But according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the government is less than half way to meeting its target of lifting 1.1 million children out of poverty by 2005.

STRIKES: Strikes involving 940,000 workers led to a rise in strike days to 1,320,000 last year – the highest level for 12 years. This compares with 235,000 days in 1997 and 525,000 days in 2001.

LABOUR MARKET: In the year to the third quarter of 2002, 117,000 jobs were lost in the private sector, but over the same period public sector employment rose by 142,000. Employment in manufacturing is down 4 per cent on a year ago.

The average age of the British employee rose from 37.5 years to 39 years between 1991 and 2001. Within two years this is likely to go over 40.

The jobless total fell to a 27-year low in January and growth in employment was the fastest for 6 years. The number of people in work rose by 253,000 last year to reach a new record of 27,812,000.

Two-thirds of workers earn less than the average wage of £465 per week. The proportion earning less than the average has steadily grown, as high earners have increased their share of the cake. In the past decade the top 10 per cent of earners have seen their pay rise by 54 per cent while the bottom 10 per cent have seen their pay rise by 45 per cent. Britain is the most unequal country in the EU.

Women now make up nearly half the workforce in Britain. In 1900, there were five million working women, making up 29 per cent of the workforce. By 2000, the number of working women had risen to 13 million or 46 per cent of the workforce – the highest percentage on record.

'Empiricist'

More action over London weighting

Andrew Berry

The local government pay dispute over London weighting was revived in March after no action since the end of November. Unfortunately, since then the GMB union has withdrawn from the dispute. From March 3, Unison and TGWU members took selective action for a week in 18 out of 32 London councils, mainly in schools and libraries. Seventy schools across London closed for the week.

This action has at least provoked the Labour group into stating that it wanted to make an offer, but despite this at the joint meeting no offer was forthcoming. It has been suggested that despite the Labour group having a majority of one on the employers' side they are reluctant to use such a slim majority to settle the dispute. One explanation is that they fear that they will split the employers' side; other reports suggest that the Labour group is not fully united. This is taking place despite the fact that the Labour Party London Region Conference voted overwhelmingly that the Labour group should use its majority to settle the dispute and at the same time recognised the claim for £4,000 as reasonable.

The offer that was suggested but never formally put was for £200 extra for the very lowest paid, but £4 a week extra will not settle the dispute. However, it does underline the success of selective action. Unfortunately, at its last meeting the London region of Unison was not in a position to take further selective action due to funding problems and the fact that only a limited number of branches were prepared at that stage to take further selective action.

The London region has once again lost a battle with the national leadership to fund this dispute properly. The national executive's policy is only to fund national disputes. They funded Scotland taking selective action during its local government pay claim two years ago, although as far as Unison's rules are concerned Scotland is a 'region'. But probably this decision had more to do with the politics of the two regions – Scotland has always tended to vote with the leadership at conferences.

Despite this, Unison London region strategy remains the same: to take selective action and to take further all-out action when we can link up with other groups such as teachers, university and college staff, and postal workers, all of whom may be considering further action over London weighting. It is getting more and more difficult for the employers' side to justify its failure to make an offer when many public sector workers – hospital staff, firefighters and teachers, for example – have had offers of varying amounts for a cost of living allowance in London, all of them well above what council workers currently receive. In the light of there having been some shift by the employers, now is the time that we should be stepping up our selective action. While it was good to have 18 councils involved last time, we need this action to be spread across the whole of London and for the dispute to be properly funded. Then we can win. **WA**

Unison NEC elections

On April 22, ballot papers will be sent to all Unison members for elections to the 60-member National Executive Council. For the first time, regional reps, service group reps and national reps will be elected simultaneously.

This is the first NEC election since the founding of Unison United Left (UUL). There are 34 left candidates standing in nine (out of 13) Unison regions and in all service group areas with the exception of water and environment and police services. This is the largest ever group of left candidates. The base of the left has traditionally been in local government but now for the first time a left grouping is standing candidates in all four health seats and both higher education seats – these are the second and third largest service groups respectively.

This is a real test for the UUL, which currently has only six NEC places. Anything over 20 seats would make a major difference to the political direction of Unison. Currently, union elections – for general secretaries at least – have shown a marked preference for left candidates. Ballot forms are being mailed to members' homes and right-wingers are known to be concerned with getting their votes out in what is traditionally a low turnout election.

But all is not well with UUL. It seems that the Socialist Party is about to walk out on the excuse that 'the SWP has capitulated to the Labour left', citing as evidence the SWP's 'failure to campaign' for disaffiliation from the Labour Party. The cynical may see this as another example of the SP's refusal to work in any body it cannot control.

The effect of such a walkout would be to ensure the SWP's dominance in UUL, which would cause problems because the industrial tactics of the SP have in the past been far more grounded in the direct interests of Unison members than have the SWP's. Probably the clearest examples of this have been in the calling of recent strikes over London weighting, where the SWP has placed sole emphasis on having shared all-out strike days co-ordinated with other unions rather than all-out action (with other unions when possible) in conjunction with selective action in sectors and at times tuned to Unison's areas of strength.

We call on Unison members to vote for the following UUL and UUL-supported candidates:

National additional members:
Beatrice Belgrave – City of Plymouth
Raph Parkinson – Liverpool City
Eastern region:
Liz Brennan – Cambridge City
East Midlands region:
Jean Thorpe – Nottingham City
John Owen – Derbyshire County
Ann MacMillan Wood – Derbyshire Co.
Greater London region:
Fiona Monkman – Islington
Amanda Berger – Camden
Jon Rogers – Lambeth LG
Rosemary Plummer – Islington
Northern region:
Yunus Bakhsh – Newcastle City Health
Maria Alberts – Gateshead Health
North West region:
Frances Kelly – South Manchester Hospitals
Karen Reissmann – Manchester Community and Mental Health
Roger Bannister – Knowsley
Carol Dutton – Liverpool City
Southern region:
Jessie Russel – Southampton District
Mike Tucker – Southampton District
South West region:
Rachel Atherton – Gloucester City
Phil Jones – Gloucester City
West Midlands region:
Luke Henderson – Birmingham
Esmie Reid – Birmingham
Yorkshire and Humberside region:
Helen Jenner – Leeds LG
Cath McGurk – Kirklees LG
Doug Wright – Doncaster LG
Health Care service group:
Kate Ahrens – Leicestershire Health
Margaret Bean – North Glasgow Hospitals
Adrian O'Malley – Wakefield and Pontefract Hospitals
Mark New – Dudley Group of Hospitals
Higher Education service group:
Sam Birnie – London Guildhall University
Andrew Beech – Liverpool John Moores University
Local Government service group:
Caroline Johnson – Birmingham
Rahul Patel – Westminster
Glenn Kelly – Bromley
Transport service group:
Tony Wilson – GMPTE **WA**

Assembly elections

Where next for Welsh politics?

Daniel Morrissey

The National Assembly for Wales will shortly complete the final session of its first four-year term. On Thursday, May 1, its 60 members (or at least, those not stepping down) will face the electorate. For all the excitement that surrounded the referendum campaign in September 1997, it would be fair to say that the people of Wales have been distinctly underwhelmed by the institution in which so much hope was invested a few years ago. As I explained in the last issue of Workers Action, the body has been systematically undermined by the Blair government's determination to restrain any ambitions for a distinct Welsh political agenda and the Welsh Labour leadership has lacked the inclination and the nerve to challenge this. While the focus of Welsh politics has largely shifted from Westminster to Cardiff, it is principally the professional/administrative tiers who are engaged with the Assembly, rather than rank-and-file activists or politically conscious citizens. None of the four parties represented in the body has been able to enthuse or inspire the people of Wales and there is little realistic prospect of Welsh politics suddenly becoming more exciting after May 1. Nevertheless, there is a degree of interest to be derived from the election because of the considerable uncertainty about the voters' verdict on the last four years. With only its unique, inaugural election available for comparison, the Assembly is still too new for any confident predictions to be possible. And the political impact of the war against Iraq, particularly on the fortunes of the Labour Party, means that that uncertainty is considerably magnified.

Clear red water?

Welsh Labour activists and supporters who hoped that a Labour-led administration in Cardiff might make a clean break with Blairism have repeatedly been disappointed. With the exception of the Education Minister, Jane Davidson, who has acted resolutely on her opposition to selection, league tables and privatisation, the Assembly government has shown little evidence of any unifying policy agenda at all. Instead, it has approached government in a completely piecemeal fashion, and relied on soundbites, gimmicks and jibes at its opponents to conceal the paucity of its ambitions. Nevertheless, hopes have lingered that, if not political principle, then at least the electoral survival instinct would convince Rhodri Morgan and his colleagues that something more substantial was necessary. There was, therefore, keen interest when on December 11 Rhodri gave a lecture at Swansea University in which he sought to put 'clear red water' between his administration in Cardiff and the New Labour government in Westminster. The speech picked up a theme from an earlier address to the Wales TUC, in which Rhodri had talked about a 'Welsh way' of approaching public services – driven by socialist convictions, but applied pragmatically. In December he took this theme considerably further, claiming for his governmental programme 'ideological underpinnings' in the best traditions of the labour and socialist movement.

The main thrust of the speech was to project the key achievements of the Assembly government as making up an overall strategy – 'the creation of a new set of citizenship rights . . . which are as far as possible, free at the point of use, universal and unconditional' – and to promise to build on this if Welsh Labour wins a second term of office. Stripped of the rather grandiose language, this is basically a repackaging of the handful of Assembly initiatives which have made the most difference to people's lives, and for which Welsh Labour never fails to claim credit. These are: free school milk for children under seven; free nursery places for three year olds; free prescriptions for the under twenty-fives; free entry to museums and galleries and free bus travel for pensioners and the disabled. While this list falls a long way short of a comprehensive strategy for addressing Wales's many social and economic needs, it does represent a worthy, if modest, set of achievements, and in each case the decommodification of an important public service. Previously, Welsh Labour had always failed to link up these policies in this way, instead presenting them as 'one-off' giveaways. Rhodri's speech has belatedly remedied this, albeit under the pressure of an impending election, without which it is doubtful that he would have felt such a burning desire to point out an unacknowledged policy agenda that was supposedly there all along.

Hitherto, the Welsh Labour leadership, while containing few (if any) convinced Blairites, has been wary of risking an open rift with Westminster, sometimes hinting at 'Old Labour' inclinations, but having little of substance to show for this. But the danger of a repeat of Labour's poor showing in 1999 – or even worse – seems to have strengthened Rhodri's nerve and pushed him into revealing himself in all his glory as 'a socialist of the Welsh stripe'. In order to carry this through convincingly, however, he has to be able to show that he has something new to offer for the second term, rather than simply recapitulating the story so far. But the only concrete initiative unveiled in his 'clear red water' speech was the possibility of free access for children to local authority swimming pools (this is now being 'piloted' in certain council areas). Beyond this, he talked about the need to focus 'upon a small number of key policy objectives', and specified improving food and nutrition and raising economic activity levels. While the latter should certainly be seen as one of the central objectives of any Labour government worth the name, Rhodri's description of the approach to be followed is simply a string of vague and nebulous phrases – e.g., 'the engagement of the developmental contributions of community regeneration and cultural animateurs'. Part of the problem is that many of the levers of economic policy are beyond the reach of the devolved administration – yet Rhodri now dismisses the debate over further powers as the preserve of 'the narrow circles of political anorakism'.

Yet the significance of Rhodri's speech lies more in his willingness to distance himself from New Labour and situate himself in a clearly social-democratic tradition – talking about 'strengthening the collective voice of the citizen' and 'the powerful glue of social solidarity', and criticising 'the theory of marketisation'. This was implicitly acknowledged by the sharp dismissals of his speech by the leaders of the Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru – the former seeing an identifiable ideological enemy, the latter no doubt fearing a loss of his party's appeal to disillusioned Labour voters. Whatever Rhodri's intentions, he has opened up the possibility of a real debate within the Welsh Labour Party about the policies that the people of Wales really need – a debate in which socialists can and should

take the lead. There has so far been little response, however. To some extent, this is understandable, given the general preoccupation with the war, but it also demonstrates the extent to which Labour activists have lost the habit of discussing substantive politics. Rhodri himself has failed to enlarge on his theme, so far returning to the 'clear red water' concept only once – and then somewhat tangentially. And it is, unfortunately, probably significant that at the Welsh Labour Party conference on February 27-28 Rhodri made a banal, populist speech, full of clumsy pop-culture references and cheap jibes at Labour's opponents.

The prospects for an Assembly government further to the left if Labour wins an overall majority look even less rosy when one considers the human resources available. Practically all of the more independently-minded Labour backbenchers are leaving the Assembly, either voluntarily or under duress. Richard Edwards, the most prominent and consistent opponent of the 'war against terrorism', is stepping down due to health problems, while former Education Minister Tom Middlehurst and former Merseyside Assistant Chief Constable Alison Halford are effectively retiring.

In addition, recent weeks have seen the political demise of the two most high-profile Labour mavericks. John Marek, AM and previously MP for Wrexham, and one of the few Labour members publicly to criticise the Assembly government, has been deselected. As with every other sitting Labour AM, Marek originally won a trigger ballot which should have enabled him to avoid an open selection battle. Marek had made a number of enemies in his constituency, however, not least by criticising the Labour leadership of Wrexham Council, and there was a call for him to face disciplinary charges for bringing the party into disrepute. The bureaucracy seized on this, being particularly displeased with Marek after he sent a letter to a CWU official expressing the view that the union should withhold further funding from Labour until such time as the party adopted more pro-union policies. As a compromise solution, it was agreed that a second trigger-ballot be held. This time, Marek failed to get through, and in the ensuing selection contest he was beaten by 84 votes to 80 by his former political assistant, Lesley Griffiths. Marek complained to Welsh Labour of improper conduct by Griffiths's husband, a local councillor, but the complaint was turned down, and it is likely that he will stand as an independent candidate, and at one stage seemed likely to secure the support of the RMT.

And finally, Ron Davies, described with some justice as the 'architect of devolution', has left politics after the *Sun* printed photographic evidence of another 'moment of madness' at a well-known gay cruising site. Ron badly mishandled his response to the *Sun* article, changing his story within 24 hours. He thereby lost a lot of the initial sympathy that had been felt for him, and was ultimately left with little choice but to resign. He will be a major loss to Welsh politics, having remained almost the only Labour backbencher with both the intellectual capacity and the political independence to make an informed, constructive critique of Assembly government policies.

The newly selected candidates are, if anything, even less promising than the existing Group, and the only medium-term hope for a more left-wing leadership lies with a couple of members who are currently cabinet ministers or deputy ministers, and are therefore bound by collective responsibility to back the existing policies. However, socialists' role in the Labour Party should never involve pinning one's hopes on the best, or least bad, of our elected politicians. Instead, we must build support among party members for socialist *policies*, and maintain constant pressure on our 'leaders' to adopt and implement those policies. Part of the reason we have such poor leadership in the Welsh Labour Party is the lack of a strong, organised left over the last ten years or so. That is starting to change now, as a general revolt develops through the party over the war, the firefighters' dispute and the privatisation of public services. A revived and organised Welsh Labour left will have to work hard to hold all of our AMs and MPs to account, and to press socialist policies upon them.

Plaid Cymru: a socialist alternative?

The danger that the election presents for Welsh Labour is not just that longstanding Labour voters who are sick of Blairism will stay at home – although many certainly will. The party also faces a serious challenge from the left in the shape of Plaid Cymru. Plaid's constitution declares it to be a socialist party, but it does not, of course, seek the abolition of capitalism, but rather a set of modest reforms in the direction of greater social equality, collective provision of welfare and public services, etc. It undoubtedly won substantial support from former Labour voters in the 1999 Assembly election by presenting what was essentially an 'old Labour' platform, including commitments to re-establish the link between pensions and earnings, and to restore the full student grant. This allowed it to capture a number of seats in supposed Labour strongholds, thus denying Labour an overall majority. Moreover, it has continued to outflank Labour on the left in its responses to the crisis in the steel industry, the collapse of Railtrack and the controversy over PFI, as well as a range of other issues such as compensation for retired miners with industrial illnesses.

This policy stance has both reflected and reinforced the substantial growth in recent years of Plaid's electoral support and membership in the industrial (or post-industrial) South Wales valleys areas. Nevertheless, the party remains a broad coalition. The weight of its membership is in the predominantly rural, and more conservative, areas of North and West Wales, which partially explains the election as party leader of Ieuan Wyn Jones, the most right-wing of three candidates, in August 2000. But increasingly, the party is attracting the support of working class people in Wales on the basis that its policies serve their class interests. In recognition of this, Bob Crow of the RMT recently met Adam Price MP, effectively the leader of the Plaid Cymru left, to explore the possibility of the union giving financial support to Plaid.

Plaid's full manifesto for the forthcoming elections will not be published until early April, but, according to press reports, it contains 'a clear commitment to radical transformation of the economy and public services' and aims to create 'a fairer and more equal society'. The specific measures to be set out reportedly include:

1) An alternative to PFI, in the form of a Public Investment Trust.

2) Free eye tests and free dental checks for all and a commitment to tackle the crisis in the health service by increasing the number of doctors, nurses and beds.

3) An end to the internal market in education and an undertaking to abolish school tests at Key Stages two and three.

4) A promise to encourage the development of regional growth areas and the creation of a regional jobs plan, to spread economic well-being more justly throughout Wales.

The commitments on school tests, eye tests and dental checks do not represent anything novel but only the extension of measures already undertaken by Labour, and the pledge to sort out the health service is fairly meaningless unless it is backed up with hard facts and figures. But the commitment to public provision of public services, in place of PFI, and the promise of greater state intervention in the economy, are a significant improvement on

the approach of the current Assembly government – although they would have been entirely consistent with Labour policy as recently as the mid-1990s. In any case, it will not be primarily the detail of Plaid's manifesto pledges that determines its degree of electoral support, but rather the assessment that is made of its general political character and its credibility as an alternative Welsh government. And this, of course, will have as much to do with disappointment in Labour's performance than positive enthusiasm for Plaid.

The election and the war

The one pressing issue where Plaid currently seems almost certain to win support at the expense of Labour is the war. From the very beginning of the so-called 'war against terrorism', it has consistently called for restraint, opposing the attack on Afghanistan, when the other main parties in Wales were united in supporting the government. Its AMs, MPs and MEPs have been prominent in the anti-war movement, speaking at all the major demonstrations and, in the case of the MEPs, undertaking a 'peace mission' to Iraq. By contrast, Richard Edwards was the only Labour AM, and Llew Smith the only Welsh Labour MP, to oppose publicly the war in Afghanistan. Subsequently, anti-war sentiment in the party has strengthened and 16 Welsh Labour MPs rebelled against the government in the crucial vote on March 18. But although only two Labour AMs support Blair's line, the Labour Group – and therefore the Assembly government – has failed to take any collective position, beyond an anodyne statement in January, supporting 'our prime minister in looking at all ways possible to avoid war with Iraq', which became obsolete almost immediately. Labour's Assembly chief whip instructed AMs not to respond to a *Western Mail* survey of their views on the war, and many have continued to observe this 'gagging order'. As with many other issues, the failure of the Welsh Labour leadership to distance itself from Westminster on the war is not only a sign of political weakness, but an electoral liability.

At the time of writing it is impossible to predict the course of the war or, therefore, the extent of its impact on party politics. But even if the war is brief and claims few casualties, there will be many people in Wales who are already sufficiently disgusted by Blair's role that they will vote primarily *against* Labour on this one issue. A 'Vote 2 Stop the War' campaign has belatedly begun on the basis of advising people of constituency candidates' stance on the war, and standing its own slate of candidates in the regional 'top-up' lists. It seems unlikely to make a huge impact, but voters already have the choice of two mainstream anti-war parties – Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats – as well as the Greens, Welsh Socialist Alliance and Socialist Labour Party (whose leader, Arthur Scargill, is himself heading its South Wales East regional list).

The election and the devolution project

This election will be regarded as a judgement not only on the present Labour-led Assembly government, but on the whole project of devolution, and the shortcomings of the former will inevitably influence popular sentiment towards the latter. Yet, regardless of the present position, the establishment of the Assembly should be seen as an unqualified gain for the people of Wales. Its very existence represents an opportunity for the expression, at a political level, of the distinct national identity and culture of Wales, and a potential mechanism for the solution of the country's particular problems. Moreover, it opens up a democratic space within the machinery of the British state, within which popular struggles may be conducted. To this extent, the diffusion of power represented by devolution is simultaneously a weakening of the political control held at the centre of the state apparatus. The danger, however, is that the Assembly will remain simply an administrative structure, devoid of real political content. Neglected and even resented by its intended constituency, it could prove itself more useful to the Westminster government as a means of deflecting popular discontent, than to the people of Wales as a means of directing that discontent against the most deserving targets. This scenario becomes increasingly likely in the absence of the political will to realise the Assembly's potential.

To avoid this outcome would mean simultaneously using the Assembly's existing powers to the full and demanding more. Welsh Labour is currently doing neither of these things. Ron Davies famously declared that devolution was a process, not an event, and there are many within his party – including some of the current Cardiff Cabinet – who share his view that the Assembly's creation was merely the first step towards a more thoroughgoing form of self-government. But there are other leading Welsh Labour figures who have no appetite for further devolution, and condemn any moves in that direction as 'crypto-nationalist rubbish' (in the words of Huw Lewis, the right-wing Labour AM for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney). Supported by Paul Starling, political editor of the *Welsh Daily Mirror*, they counterpose a professed overriding concern for 'social justice' to any interest in a Welsh national project – yet these are, in practice, frequently the strongest supporters of the Blairite agenda. For now, an uneasy peace exists between the two sides, but the potential for more public divisions exists in the form of the Richard Commission on the Assembly's powers, set up by the Assembly government at the behest of the Lib Dems, and due to report in the autumn.

Meanwhile, Plaid Cymru has announced that if it gains control of the Assembly in May, it will initiate a two-year National Convention, involving all sections of society, which will draw up plans for a full parliament in Wales, to be established by 2007. This proposal is to be welcomed, recognising as it implicitly does that Wales needs the process of national debate that Scotland underwent prior to the finalisation of its own devolution proposals – in part through the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Such a process would be particularly welcome if it facilitated a positive engagement between socialists in the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru and other parties on the national question. Ultimately, the left must support the objective of a Welsh parliament with full legislative and tax-raising powers, both as a matter of principle and, in the present circumstances, as a bulwark against the neo-liberal policies of the Blair government.

Institutionalised coalition politics

In October 2000, while touring Labour Party meetings around Wales to justify his coalition with the Lib Dems, Rhodri confidently asserted that Labour would win an overall majority in two out of every three Welsh general elections; it was simply unfortunate that the first such election was not among the two-thirds. This claim has looked increasingly hollow since then, and another coalition seems the most likely outcome of the forthcoming elections. In an interview with the current affairs programme Dragon's Eye, immediately after Labour's Blackpool conference, Rhodri enraged Labour activists (and several of his own AMs) by suggesting that he might continue his coalition with the Lib Dems even if Labour *did* win an overall majority. While such an approach no doubt finds favour in Downing Street, it will win Rhodri few friends in the Welsh party, where the Lib Dems are almost universally disliked. And there are sound political reasons why a further Lib-Lab 'partnership government' should be strenuously opposed. In fairness, the junior coalition partner cannot be blamed

for the weakness of the Assembly government's programme: as argued above, there is little evidence that Labour would have had anything more substantial to offer if it had governed alone. But the long-run tendency inherent in Lib-Labism is to obstruct any inclination by Labour to put the interests of working people first, or to favour public control of services and economic enterprises as a matter of principle.

Yet Wales's (partially) proportional system seems likely to deliver coalitions – or else minority governments – more often than not. Socialists often see minority government as the more preferable option, to avoid undermining Labour's class independence, as it would be by a Lib-Lab administration. But it is simply not credible at the moment to argue that a minority Labour government would be a better option for the people of Wales than a coalition between Labour and Plaid Cymru. Plaid's increasingly working-class base, reflected in its social-democratic programme, would be more likely to pull Labour to the left.

This option was eloquently laid out by Adam Price MP in an article in *Tribune* on January 23. Welcoming Rhodri Morgan's 'clear red water' speech as massively significant for its commitment to equality of outcome and services free at the point of delivery, he argued that 'the most likely party to respond positively to a radical programme of government based on socialist principles would undoubtedly be Plaid'. Price described the Lib Dems as 'neo-liberals, opposed to government support for the coal industry, against wind farms if they are on their own doorsteps, supporters of a modified Private Finance Initiative, and viciously opportunistic opponents of the Fire Brigades Union'. 'There are,' he continued, 'two anti-socialist groupings in the Welsh Assembly, and two avowedly socialist parties, divided on the national question, but apparently united in their opposition to the government's market-driven approach. As we face down a common enemy, what unites us is far more important than anything that divides us.' He called, therefore, for a 'historic compromise between the two great currents of the Welsh Left, a radical red-green platform of progressive politics'. This is an initiative that deserves a positive response.

Socialists and the elections

All this leaves us with the question: what attitude should socialists take to these elections? Marxists, such as the supporters of Workers Action, have historically campaigned for the election of social-democratic parties like Labour, not because we have any confidence in their programme, but because they are identified as parties of the working class, within which they have enjoyed consistent and organised support. Putting such parties in office has created the hope and expectation of policies that will advance the interests of the working people. We have always argued within the organised working class that pressure must be maintained on the social democrats, once in government, to carry out their programme. However inadequate such programmes might be, they generally represent at least a small advance for the working class at the expense of the capitalist class, and the struggle for their implementation builds the confidence of working people to campaign for a bolder, more radical agenda.

In the context of the Assembly elections, however, the pursuit of such an approach is somewhat complicated. The first reason is that, under its present Blairite leadership, Labour has adopted policies which are not simply too timid, but are completely counterposed to the interests of working people. This applies indirectly to Welsh Labour, which although not enthusiastically Blairite, is bound by the same general policy framework. The task for socialists in the Labour Party is therefore to *oppose* the implementation of the party's programme, and to campaign for a comprehensive alternative agenda. This is a particularly difficult approach to popularise at election times, not least in Wales, where there is no realistic need to vote Labour in order to keep out the Tories. The second complication is that, in Wales, voters have the choice of *two* social-democratic parties, which are both strong contenders for government. One – Labour – has practically abandoned its social-democratic programme, at least until such time as it is willing or able to break free from the constraints of neoliberalism imposed on it by Westminster. Nevertheless, it retains strong organisational links with the unions and can still count on probably a plurality – though certainly not a majority – of politically conscious working class people. The other party – Plaid Cymru – has a programme that is more in keeping with the heritage of social democracy, but also a more diverse social base, including a smaller section of the working class, and as yet no formal links with the unions (although this may change).

Workers Action believes that the best place for socialists in Wales remains the Labour Party. This is primarily because the link with the unions presents a continuing opportunity to bring working class interests into party politics. However, we must recognise that the Welsh working class is increasingly divided, as people lose any confidence that Labour can solve their problems with its current policies and leadership. We must sharply oppose any sectarian attacks on Plaid Cymru and argue that while its leadership is not qualitatively better than Labour's, its better policies – against privatisation, for state economic intervention, and for a full parliament in Wales – should be supported. We should argue for joint work between socialists in Labour and Plaid around such concrete issues, and against the war. And in the likely event of no overall majority in Assembly, we should actively campaign for the Labour leadership to form a coalition with Plaid Cymru, not the Liberal Democrats.

Finally, it is obvious and necessary that supporting Labour's electoral campaign will be central to the activities of socialists in the Welsh Labour Party over the coming weeks. However, the additional member system (AMS) also presents an opportunity to cast a second vote for Plaid Cymru. The first past the post system, which determines the election of 40 of the 60 Assembly seats, disproportionately favours Labour. For this reason, it is extremely unlikely that the party will qualify for a 'top-up' seat from the regional lists, other than in Mid and West Wales. A Labour vote in the regional list ballot will in most cases, therefore, be wasted, whereas a vote for Plaid Cymru will make a difference to Plaid's fortunes and will also help to minimise the number of seats won by the Tories and Lib Dems. Socialists should therefore argue, wherever it is politically possible, for a first vote for Labour and a second for Plaid. **WA**

Not in our name

Dan Judelson explains why he helped set up Jews for Justice for Palestinians

The trouble with being Jewish – well, the trouble with being Jewish and on the left, anyway – is that so many people make the assumption that you are also a supporter of the state of Israel. Certainly, many people holding left or liberal opinions do seem to have acquired a bizarre political perspective that allows them to rail against injustice in many parts of the world but which sees Israel as an exception and its critics as anti-Semites. This last, of course, is also the cry of those who would like to elide the difference between the right to criticise repression and the act of being anti-Semitic. They say, you must be a self-hater. Aren't shibboleths facile? (To support the human rights of everyone *but* Israeli Jews is an equally indefensible viewpoint, of course.)

What's particularly difficult is to be on the left, Jewish, fundamentally opposed to many actions of the Israeli state, supportive of the Palestinians' absolute right to self-determination and still back, in some fashion, Israel's and, more specifically, the right of Israeli people to live in peace and security too. Just one of those opinions can cause all sorts of political headaches, but all combined . . . These are the issues confronting members of Jews for Justice for Palestinians.

Of course, any difficulties faced by JFJFP signatories pale in comparison with the brutal military repression the Israeli state uses to 'govern' the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Nor are we imprisoned, often repeatedly, for refusing to serve in the Israeli army, as several of the now more than 1,000 Israeli refuseniks have been.

The objectionable activities of the Israeli state are troubling enough, even in précis. They have to be troubling if you are Jewish, as the Israeli state claims to be acting on your behalf. Whatever it means to be Jewish, whether religious or secular, Zionist or internationalist, our Jewish identity is something we do not carry lightly. Indeed, one of our recent activities was a conference on many aspects of Jewish identity and the dilemmas it throws up, and it is a topic that is widely under discussion in the Jewish community. The hijacking of Jewish identity by Zionism and, more latterly, by Jewish orthodox groups simply emphasises the need for an alternative voice to be heard.

So, in February 2002, we formed a network of British Jews who oppose those Israeli policies that undermine the livelihoods and the human, civil and political rights of the Palestinian people. We refuse to let the Board of Deputies, even less the Chief Rabbi and, most especially, not successive Israeli governments, speak in our name. We believe that such actions are important in countering rising anti-Semitism and the frequently spurious claim that opposition to Israel's destructive policies is in itself anti-Semitic. In *fact, we claim just the opposite – that it is in* fact the actions of the Israeli state that damage the peace and security, not just of Palestinians, but of citizens of Israel itself.

I started this article by referring to the problems of being left and Jewish, but it is important to realise that being left is not as important to us as being Jewish. We are not members of JFJFP, but signatories – we have put each of our individual Jewish names to our statement of principles. Many signatories do consider themselves on the left, but plenty do not. We work together because of our opposition to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. We are a network and a forum in which people can find their own level of participation and engage in the activities which they find most relevant.

We believe that it is essential to organise to ensure that Jewish opinions critical of Israeli policy are heard in Britain. But we are naturally concerned about the Israeli and Palestinian people trapped in a spiral of violence and seek to work with peace groups from both communities. We try to extend support to Palestinians directly, by raising funds for Medical Aid for Palestinians and in a new initiative: we are attempting to import high quality Palestinian olive oil from the Occupied Territories to the UK.

This represents both a symbolic and concrete attempt to extend support to Palestinian farmers. Not only will we be creating a small outlet for their produce, but the campaign and marketing materials we use to promote the oil explain exactly how difficult it is to supply the oil when the Israeli government uproots the groves and drives the farmers off the land they have cultivated for so long. Leaflets explaining this were distributed at the last Zionist Federation trade fair at Alexandra Palace – until we were thrown out as we had not rented a stall.

Refusniks are perhaps in an ideal position to educate people that not all Israelis support the Occupation. As reservists and conscripts, they have a powerful message of conscientious objection to relay. Some Jewish audiences are more likely to listen to them than Palestinians. We work with three refusenik groups – Yesh Gvul ('There is a limit', a reservists' organisation formed in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon), Shministim ('The Seniors' – high school students, much like sixth formers in the UK, who represent first-time draftees who refuse to serve in the Israeli Defence Force) and Ometz Letsarev ('Courage to Refuse', a more recently formed and more centrist organisation). In November 2002, JFJFP and Just Peace UK organised a very successful tour by two Israeli refuseniks of England, Scotland and Wales. They spoke to Amnesty International groups, Palestinian groups, anti war groups and Jewish groups.

These have been the main focus if our ac*tivities in recent months, but we also sup*port International Solidarity Movement activities. We maintain a website (www.jfjfp.org) that publishes news of the conflict, campaigns and events and we produce web-based and printed information sheets on Israeli/Palestine relations. We participate in the Just Peace UK e-mail discussion group. We do not have an official line on issues beyond general support for the principles outlined here and support for the right of Israelis to live in freedom and security within Israel's 1967 borders.

Right now, we are discussing, along with other groups, what activities to mount in the event that Ariel Sharon uses the distraction of a war with Iraq to begin the 'transfer' – actually ethnic cleansing – of Palestinians. Responding to the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in China in 1989, Binyamin Netanyahu said that 'Israel should have exploited the repression . . . when world attention focused on that country, to carry out mass expulsions among the Arabs of the territories.' Sharon has already rejected a Jordanian request that he rule out transfer as a possibility in the event of any such conflict. Since the recent general election, Sharon has brought into power not just the National Religious Party which refuses to admit the right of Palestinians to their own state, but the National Union Party, which officially advocates transfer.

Illegal settlements in the Occupied Territories have already involved land confiscation and expulsions. Mass displacement occurred both in 1948 and 1967. 'Transfer' is worse: it means the wholesale, enforced movement of people from their homes. It would be a breach of the Geneva convention, unsurprisingly. Worst of all, it is also a terrifying indication that the government of Israel has lost its sense of history, if not its moral compass as well. Few Jews can fail to understand the horror of ethnic cleansing. Of all the crimes being committed in our name, this above all would require Jews to make their voice heard and deny Sharon and the Israeli government the legitimacy they claim to derive from representing us.

WA

Christopher Hill 1912-2003

'We still have much to learn from the seventeenth century'[1]

Following as it does that of Rodney Hilton last June, the death of Christopher Hill on February 23 at the age of 91 marks the passing of another important member of that remarkable levy of twentieth-century British Marxist historians (prominent in whose ranks stand, among others, Maurice Dobb, Eric Hobsbawm, Victor Kiernan, George Rudé, Dorothy Thompson, E.P. Thompson, Raphael Samuel, John Saville and Raymond Williams).[2] Hill, however, uniquely among this pantheon, was able to win an unprecedented hearing and an acceptance within mainstream academe on his own terms as a serious historian; unlike, for example, E.P. Thompson, who shunned the pursuit of academic glory, preferring in its place a lifelong commitment to active politics (for which he deservedly won the respect of generations of footsoldiers of the left), or Hobsbawm, whose florescent reputation these days is rather more of the Sunday-supplement variety. In fact, such was Hill's mainstream prestige within British – or rather English – academia that his interpretation on his speciality subject – seventeenth-century England, or, to put it another way, the English Revolution and civil war – although not nowadays accepted as the near orthodoxy it once was, is still for many entering the fray of debate around this period a necessary starting point, even if a starting point from which to develop a critique. Thus any assessment that is drawn up of Hill's intellectual career must take account of both of the elements that make up the double-handed description 'Marxist historian': how did Marxist theory affect Hill's work, and to what degree was he as a historian successful in developing a Marxist account of English-British history within a non-Marxist, if not actively anti-Marxist, academic milieu?

Born into a northern English Methodist family, Hill began to read history as an undergraduate at Balliol College, Oxford, where he was to remain, with the exception of one year in Moscow in 1935, and two years teaching in Cardiff, for his entire academic life, finally successfully standing for the position of Master, which he held from 1965 to 1978. By graduation, he had already joined the Communist Party: he was to remain a member until the exodus precipitated by the crisis of 1956, finally leaving in 1957.

In 1940, Hill published the short work *The English Revolution 1640*, in which he argued that:

> . . . the English Revolution of 1640-60 was a great social movement like the French Revolution of 1789. The state power protecting an old order that was essentially feudal was violently overthrown, power passed into the hands of a new class, and so the freer development of capitalism was made possible. The Civil War was a class war, in which the despotism of Charles I was defended by the reactionary forces of the established Church and conservative landlords. Parliament beat the King because it could appeal to the enthusiastic support of the trading and industrial classes in town and countryside, to the yeomen and progressive gentry, and to wider masses of the population whenever they were able by free discussion to understand what the struggle was really about.[3]

Who were these classes that fought the revolution, and what propelled them towards conflict?

> England in 1640 was still ruled by landlords and the relations of production were still partly feudal, but there was this vast and expanding capitalist sector, whose development the Crown and feudal landlords could not for ever hold in check. . . . So there were really three classes in conflict. As against the parasitic feudal landowners and speculative financiers, as against the government whose policy was to restrict and control industrial expansion, the interests of the new class of capitalist merchants and farmers were temporarily identical with those of the small peasantry and artisans and journeymen. But conflict between the two latter classes was bound to develop, since the expansion of capitalism involved the dissolution of the old agrarian and industrial relationships and the transformation of independent small masters and peasants into proletarians.[4]

Curiously, for he was never to state it again in such terms, this is the model of the English Revolution that Hill is remembered for. In substance, however, Hill was not saying anything dramatically new. The notion that the revolution had occurred as a result of prior economic development, and that its leading force had been a social layer in some sense capitalistic – the 'gentry' – had already been established by R.H. Tawney. Tawney, a Christian socialist and social democrat, had effectively laid down the outlines of what was to be known as the 'social interpretation' of the revolution, an interpretation which broke from the dominant interpretation of previous English historiography, chiselled out in the nineteenth century by S.R. Gardiner, and maintained in the twentieth by G.M. Trevelyan, that the revolution was purely an ideologico-political event. In his *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, written in 1912, Tawney had argued that the redistribution of monastic lands in the sixteenth century had unleashed an aggressive rural capitalism; the 'rise of the gentry' thus triggered was in turn in part predicated on a collapse in the fortunes of the aristocracy, who stood thus exposed and historically anachronistic. The Civil War was nothing more than a process of readjustment, a political settling of socio-economic accounts, whereby the imbalance between the declining aristocracy and rising gentry at the level of the state could be corrected, and it was this latter force, for good or ill (and for Tawney it was a mixture of the two), that had triumphed with the settlements of 1660 and 1689.

Thus in essence all that Hill had done that was new was to restate Tawney's social interpretation with explicit Marxist terminology. For Hill, what had happened in seventeenth-century England was specifically a *bourgeois* revolution, in which a social class based on capitalist social relations, temporarily allied with a more or less plebeian mass, pitched itself against and overthrew an outmoded, historically regressive class of feudal aristocrats. The comparison Hill made here with France was telling. Equally telling was Hill's assertion that:

> The seventeenth-century English revolution changed the organisation of society so as to make possible the full development of all the resources of that society. A transition to socialism will be necessary to win the same result in England [*sic*] today.[5]

Interestingly enough, Hill's essay was the subject of a most unfavourable review in the *New Statesman* at the hands of none other than George Orwell, who saw in Hill's account the heavy hand of what he, Orwell, called 'official Marxism' (and what many others would label 'Stalinism'). 'A "Marxist" analysis of any historical event tends to be a hurried snap judgement based on the principle of *cui bono?*, something rather like the "realism" of the saloon-bar cynic who always assumes the bishop is keeping a mistress and the trade union

leader is in the pay of the boss,' wrote Orwell.[6]

But the fundamental difficulty with Hill's (and Tawney's) interpretation is that, in the light of the wave of 'revisionist' historiography which it provoked, it was to be proved empirically false in practically every respect. Most damagingly, it has subsequently been impossible to sustain the notion that there existed two distinct social classes – of 'gentry' and 'nobles' – either prior to or during the revolution. What *can* be determined is the existence of a single socio-economic elite of large landowners, both ennobled and not – and there was much social traffic between the two categories – whose incomes came in major part from the leasing of property. Moreover, the upper layers of the elite did not suffer economically prior to the revolution in the way that it had been previously imagined: rather than there being a 'decline of the aristocracy', the last quarter of the sixteenth century and first half of the seventeenth was a period of agricultural improvement in which both rents and food prices rose to the benefit of the whole elite, be they 'nobles' or 'gentry'. It is fair to say that, after the assault of the revisionist historiography of the 1950s and 60s, the 'social interpretation', in both its social-democratic (Tawney) and Marxist (Hill) guises, lay in ruins.[7] Indeed, as Tawney himself was subsequently to comment on the Civil War: 'Was it a bourgeois revolution? Of course it was a bourgeois revolution. The trouble is the bourgeoisie was on both sides.'

What was Hill's response to this state of affairs? Curiously, it was one of effective retreat. Although a great deal of what he subsequently wrote is indeed of real value (taken on its own terms, his 1972 study of radical ideas within the revolutionary movement *The World Turned Upside Down* for example is a wonderfully fascinating book, even if it is true that, and this is symptomatic of Hill's difficulties, the ideas dealt with are done so if not outside of the realm of social consciousness then at least separated from their roots in the dynamics of the social – economic – relations that produced them), it lacks the earlier intention of explaining and interpreting the motor forces of the revolution: not only did Hill not restate the outline interpretation developed in *The English Revolution 1640*, he did not seek to develop it in the light of the revisionist critique either. He simply abandoned it; as he turned his attention away from the study of classes in the revolution, he concentrated on the role of ideas, with a special fixation on the conception of Puritanism ('The Civil War was largely fought by Puritans,' as he would subsequently write[8]). In fact, the closest that Hill would get to addressing the concerns he first raised in 1940 was during a BBC talk given in 1973:

> I certainly think it was a revolution . . . I would see the English Revolution of the seventeenth century as clearing the path for the sort of economic development which made the industrial revolution happen in England first. . . . I would think of what happened in the seventeenth century as being, in a Marxist sense, a bourgeois revolution. I don't think the two classes lined up to fight . . . There were members of all classes on both sides. But what I think I understand by a bourgeois revolution is not a revolution in which the bourgeoisie did the fighting . . . but a revolution whose outcome is the clearing of the decks for capitalism.[9]

However one takes this assessment (and for my money it is both circular and question-begging: that a bourgeois revolution 'clears the decks' for capitalism is surely to state the obvious, but why and how this would come about if the 'bourgeoisie' remained marginal to proceedings surely merits more discussion) it is clear that it marks a significant shift from the position of 1940. All the more strange, therefore, that – whatever other merit Hill's work may contain – he never successfully pursued this central problem of historical methodology.[10]

Croce once famously remarked that 'all history is contemporary history', and we can read more than one inference into this aphorism. It is noticeable that, with the exception of the *The English Revolution 1640* and his first major research work *Economic Problems of the Church* (1956), all of Hill's significant published work was undertaken after his break with the Communist Party. Could it not be the case that the unworkable model developed earlier was abandoned alongside his party membership; that Hill discarded the 'official Marxism' demanded by the party when he was no longer obliged to propagate it?

Even though unfortunately all we can do here is speculate as to the nature of Hill's thinking on this matter these are not idle questions. The failure of the 'social interpretation' of the English Revolution has had a deleterious effect not only on the study of history itself but on the reputation of Marxism as a serious tool of historical analysis. While the Tory Anglicans of the 1950s only sought to debunk the concept of social class as a tool of analysis of the English Revolution, the punk Thatcherite generation which followed (Conrad Russell and J.C.D Clarke in the van) has questioned whether the whole idea of an English 'Revolution' itself is a myth. Since it is clear that for both Hill and Tawney their interpretation of the past was also designed to serve as an analogy for the future the stakes raised by these debates are high. But it is also clear that any attempt to resurrect the notion that class struggle and social revolution are the levers of social change will necessarily have to begin with a rejection of the model of the English Revolution advanced by Hill. It is thus sad to conclude that while in its marginalia we can find useful and interesting insights, at the heart of Hill's work all we see is a gaping methodological void. Now this, for a Marxist historian, is indeed a most disappointing legacy.

Ed George

[1] Christopher Hill, *The English Revolution 1640*, London, 1955, 3rd edition, p.62.
[2] It is interesting to note – and sad that it has been largely unreported – that Hill's wife, Bridgit Hill, who died in August last year, was a respected and well-published historian in her own right. See her obituary in *The Guardian*, August 13, 2002.
[3] *The English Revolution 1640*, p.6.
[4] Ibid., pp.26-7.
[5] Ibid., p.19, n. 3.
[6] *The Observer*, March 9, 2003.
[7] It is not possible here to go into more of the details of these debates. For further reading both of the most satisfying summary accounts come from the pen of Robert Brenner: see the Postscript to his *Merchants and Revolution*, Cambridge, 1993, and the article 'Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism' in A.L. Beier et al (eds.), *The First Modern Society*, Cambridge, 1989.
[8] *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*, Oxford, 1965, p.314.
[9] *The Listener*, October 4, 1973, pp.448-9.
[10] Space precludes a textual analysis of the different characterisations of the revolution that Hill deployed, a task however already skilfully performed by Brian Manning in 'God, Hill and Marx', *International Socialism* 59, Summer 1993. **WA**

Peronists, priests and Nazis

The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina

By Uki Goñi

Granta, 2003, 410pp, £9.99

Richard Price

In 1999, Catholic historian John Cornwell published *Hitler's Pope*, a damning biography of Eugenio Pacelli, who as Pope Pius XII presided over the Vatican's indifference to and complicity with the Holocaust.* In an otherwise penetrating piece of research, Cornwell acquitted Pacelli on one key charge: 'There is no evidence, however, that Pacelli and the Vatican were implicated in an organization widely known as ODESSA, which is said to have funded and planned the escape to South America of a number of notorious Nazi criminals. It is certainly the case that figures such as Franz Stangl, the commandant of Treblinka, were assisted with false papers and hiding places in Rome by the Nazi sympathizer Bishop Alois Hudal. But efforts by reputable journalists to establish an ODESSA organization with links into the Vatican and Nazi gold funding have proved fruitless.'

In recent months, the Vatican has announced the opening of sections of previously restricted archives relating to Pius XII's wartime record, in an effort no doubt to smooth the path of his beatification.

Only three years after the publication of *Hitler's Pope*, the first edition of *The Real Odessa* in 2002 destroyed Cornwell's confident assertion. Uki Goñi's assiduous research among declassified US and European papers had finally and conclusively uncovered a 'real' Odessa that 'was much more than a tight organization with only nostalgic Nazis for members. It consisted of layered rings of non-Nazi factions: Vatican institutions, Allied intelligence agencies and secret Argentine organizations. It also overlapped at strategic points with French-speaking war criminals, Croatian Fascists and even with the SS men of the fictional Odessa, all in order to smuggle Hitler's evil minions to safety.' (p.xx) But while the first edition provided conclusive proof of the complicity of high ranking Catholic leaders in smuggling war criminals to Argentina, evidence of the direct complicity of Pacelli and Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Paul VI, as the author admits, 'walked on thin documentary ground'. (p.327)

For this revised paperback edition, however, Goñi has uncovered new evidence linking the Vatican directly to the Nazi smuggling operation run by Croatian war criminal Father Krunoslav Draganovic. Secret appeals by Pacelli on behalf of hardcore Nazis sentenced at Nuremberg and other post-war trials, together with petitions on behalf of some of the vilest Ustashi mass murderers – whose bestial crimes shocked even SS officers – serve to further undermine Pacelli's apologists.

The real achievement of this book is to tie together all the ends of a series of linked conspiracies that enabled leading Nazis, Ustashi, Belgian Rexists, and Slovak, Romanian, Polish and Hungarian collaborators to escape Europe, and link them conclusively with the post-war Argentinian regime of Juan Perón. This is all the more impressive given that he had to contend with the destruction of large sections of Argentinian records in two sinister 'bonfires' in 1955 and 1996.

Some on the left have previously believed that attempts to tar Perón with the Nazi brush were largely an Anglo-American propaganda effort in retaliation for Perón's efforts to free Argentina from British dominance. Argentina had done very well out of the Second World War, by exporting grain and meat to Britain, while covertly preparing a major trade deal with Germany, should it win the war. Goñi shows that Peronist agents played a key role in setting up an extensive escape network. Nazi officers saw in Peronism an expression of the new order they were striving for, while Perón's oddly contemporary-sounding 'third position' rhetoric drew heavily on the ideology of the European far right in the inter-war years, with its claim to find an authoritarian middle way between communism and plutocracy.

Perón came to power through a coup in June 1943, and a secret agreement for 'mutual collaboration' was concluded between Nazi Germany and the Argentinian military in the same year. Argentina had been slipping into the grip of Catholic reaction since the 1930s, an important element of which was a pervasive anti-semitism. Argentina's doors were closed to Jewish refugees as early as 1938, through the 'strictly confidential' Directive 11 to Argentinian diplomats, whose contents Goñi reveals for the first time. Goñi's grandfather, as consul in Bolivia in the 1940s, applied the directive strictly. Others sold documentation at extortionate rates. Argentina was used as a money laundering destination for Nazi loot during the war, and was heavily implicated in Nazi extortion of wealthy Jews in return for exit visas for their European relatives. With the close of the war, Argentinian embassies were already favourably disposed towards assisting the emigration from Europe of 'anti-communist elements' – shorthand for Axis war criminals. Perón won the 1946 presidential election with a campaign that was bankrolled by Ludwig Freude, a millionaire with close connections to German intelligence, who raised funds from other pro-Nazi businessmen.

With the assistance of the Catholic Church and Perón's Information Bureau, Pierre Daye, a Belgian Rexist, who had been condemned to death for collaboration *in absentia*, established the Society in Argentina for the Reception of Europeans (SARE). It was given semi-official status and allowed to accept landing permit applications. SARE enabled well over 100 French and Belgian collaborators to emigrate to Argentina. This first wave of pan-Catholic far rightists was the closest to Perón and his entourage. Goñi explains: '. . . the French collaborators, the Belgian Rexists and the Croatian Ustashi . . . reconciled Catholicism with Hitlerism, and as we have seen, the search for such a reconciliation was a prime motive during Argentina's dalliance with Hitler. Perón and the nationalists who surrounded him had more in common with the Christus Rex party of Pierre Daye than with the godless German Nazi party.' (p.322)

Nazi emigration to Argentina got going in earnest slightly later. Switzerland, which had closed its doors to Jews during the war, proved keen to help, through its fiercely anti-semitic president, Eduard von Steiger, and its chief of police, Heinrich Rothmund. Swiss consular officials in occupied Germany issued transit visas to the fugitives, helped them elude Allied controls on the German-Swiss border, and smoothed the path for them to be issued with Argentinian papers in Berne, from where they were flown out.

Not to be outdone, the Catholic Church provided large numbers of Ustashi and Nazi war criminals with hideouts in the Vatican City, in extra-territorial buildings and monasteries. The Red Cross played its part by issuing many of the fascist fugitives with Red Cross passports.

Allied military and intelligence services showed a mixture of first incompetence, and then, as the cold war set in, growing indifference to the traffic in war criminals, failing to arrest them, 'losing' them

once captured, or failing to pursue extradition proceedings with anything like the rigour these butchers deserved. A number of them including the infamous Father Draganovic then proceeded to work with US intelligence.

The final total of those who fled to Argentina will probably never be known, but ran well into four figures. Those who gained sanctuary courtesy of the combined efforts of Perón, the Catholic Church and the smuggling rings included such notorious figures as Adolf Eichmann, the chief architect of the Final Solution; Josef Mengele, wanted for multiple crimes at Auschwitz; Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka; Klaus Barbie, the 'Butcher of Lyon'; Erich Priebke, responsible for the murder of 335 Italian civilians at Ardeatine Caves in 1944; SS Major-General Hans Fischböck; Anti Pavelic, premier of the Ustasha puppet state of Croatia and responsible for the murder of hundreds of thousands of Serbs and Jews; Bruno Benzon, Croatian ambassador to Germany; Charles Lesca, sentenced to death *in absentia* for collaboration in France; and René Lagrou, the founder of the Flemish SS.

Once in Argentina, many were integrated into civil service or intelligence posts, or set up in business. Perón also recruited a number of top Nazi scientists to assist in developing a jet fighter programme, a field in which only the US and Britain were further ahead. Perón maintained what Goñi calls a 'Nazi court' and a bodyguard composed of Croatian Ustashi.

Sinister networks of transplanted fascists persisted in Argentina for many years, providing support for Perón during his return to power in the 1970s, and subsequently for the bloody Junta which ruled from 1976 to 1983. The bombing of the Israeli embassy in 1992 and the AMIA Jewish centre two years later remain unsolved, and may well have had a fascist connection.

Readers need to be prepared to wade through a fair amount of administrative detail, and the index is none too reliable. But overall this is an important and impressive book, giving, incidentally, much food for thought to Argentinian Trotskyism, whose historic splits have been influenced on more than one occasion by its attitude and orientation towards Peronism.

* J. Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope*, Viking, 1999. See R. Price, 'Catholic guilt – the Vatican, fascism and the Holocaust', *Workers Action* No.15, March-April 2002. **WA**

Trotsky in Paris during World War I

Recollections of a Comrade and Co-worker

Alfred Rosmer

Alfred Rosmer (1877-1964) was Leon Trotsky's closest collaborator during the First World War, and their friendship endured, despite political divergences, until Trotsky's assassination in 1940. Rosmer was thus uniquely placed in writing this account of Trotsky's political work in Paris from his arrival in November 1914 until his expulsion in September 1916 – the period covered in chapters 19 and 20 of Trotsky's *My Life*. In addition to its account of the various tendencies on the French left at the time, it is noteworthy in outlining not only Trotsky's principled opposition to the imperialist war, but also his tactical flexibility when it came to working effectively alongside Rosmer's revolutionary syndicalist comrades.

Rosmer is best known in this country for his book *Lenin's Moscow*, which recounts the period 1920-24, during which time he was a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, and participated in the second, third and fourth congresses of the Comintern. His most important work, *Le Mouvement Ouvrier Pendant la Guerre* – a two volume study of opposition in the French workers' movement during the First World War, which won praise from Trotsky – remains largely untranslated into English, although three chapters and an appendix from Volume 1 can be found in the collection of writings by Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer published in *Revolutionary History*, Volume 7, No.4. The publication in recent years of two volumes containing writings by Rosmer hopefully signals a rising interest in him among English-speaking readers.

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It was at the beginning of the First World War and in connection with it that we entered into contact with several Russian socialists, notably with Trotsky. 'We' was the editorial board of *La Vie Ouvrière* [*Workers' Life*], the syndicalist review founded in Paris in 1909 by Pierre Monatte. The rapprochement, which was to become so solid and lasting, occurred fortuitously; it was brought about by the publication of a letter from a Russian socialist to Gustave Hervé. If the contact was easy from the start and proved in the years that followed to withstand every test, it is because the accidental initial cause was joined by others, fundamental ones, which would soon have affected it in any case.

Up to the outbreak of the war, there had been no contact between us. Revolutionary syndicalists and socialists of the parties of the Second International followed two different paths. Even the joint demonstrations organised against the war danger when the peril became definite could not dispel the divergences that made them opponents; they scarcely diminished them. The revolutionary syndicalists pursued their activity and the realisation of their goals, immediate or distant, by the direct action of their organisations. They ignored or denounced the parliamentary operations of the Socialist Party whose leaders inspired no confidence in them.

To be sure, the Russian socialists were exempted from this all-round and conclusive condemnation. They were known to be of different mettle. It could not be denied that they were revolutionists, and the difference with them could only be over method. It was not they who could be reproached for using socialism in order to make a career. But in Paris, they lived apart, among themselves, forming an islet in the large city.

Rare were those, even among the French socialists, who knew Lenin during his sojourn in Paris and the Bolshevik school at Longjumeau. They had their papers, their meetings, their fierce controversies, and it is hardly exaggeration to say that what was known about them above all other things was that they were tough wranglers, merciless polemists.

The collapse of the Second International on August 4, 1914, was for them what the abdication of the Confederation Générale du Travail (General Labour Federation), the incarnation of revolutionary syndicalism, was for us. It must appear strange today, perhaps incredible: their parties, so differentiated from one another by conceptions and programme, reacted similarly, that is, they decomposed in the same fashion. The Bolshevik group of Paris did

not stand up any better than the others, Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionists. There were 'defencists' in all three parties, and since the Russians do nothing by halves, most of the 'defencists' went off to enlist in the French army.

In opposition to them, the resisters of the three parties felt themselves on the same foundation, united by conceptions which were thenceforward determinant essentials as to the origins and the meaning of the war, the defence of socialism and of the International. They had a printing shop at their disposal; they decided to publish a paper which would be a rallying point for all the faithful socialists. Their position was that of the revolutionary syndicalists who denounced the 'Sacred Union' to which the majority of the leadership of the CGT had rallied, and who maintained proletarian internationalism against them.

The two new groupings thus formed had to come together. Yet an interval was necessary. We had known Martov first of all by his letter to Gustave Hervé in which the position of the Russian socialists on the war was defined. But relations with him were confined to personal contact and private conversations. We had to await Trotsky, whose early arrival was announced by Martov.

Trotsky arrived in Paris alone, some time in the month of November, 1914. He took a room in the Hotel d'Odessa, at the corner of Rue d'Odessa and Boulevard Edgar-Quinet, in the vicinity of the Montparnasse Station. The war had caught him in Vienna where he had immediately become an undesirable enemy alien. Viktor Adler had facilitated his departure, and that of his wife and two sons. The family had made its first stop in Zurich, then Trotsky had left to scout out Paris, for that is where he wanted to take up residence. Immediately upon his arrival he went to the editorial office of the paper that the 'resisters' were publishing. Its name at the time was *Nashe Slovo* [*Our Word*] and it was a daily, for the Russian socialists performed the miracle of publishing a socialist daily against the war in wartime Paris, and they published it 'to the bitter end', limiting themselves only to changing the name when the French government decided to prohibit it.

One of the first effects of Trotsky's participation in the life of the paper and the group was to place on the order of the day the question of the liaison to establish with the French opposition. He himself was appointed to assure this liaison, along with Martov and a Polish socialist, Lapinski. The three of them were supposed to come to our office and participate in our Tuesday evening meetings. After that I often had occasion to see them, but our subsequent encounters have not weakened the very lively memory I still have of the first evening that found them among us. It was an event.

In that lugubrious first winter of the war, faced by the collapse of the Internationals, our thoughts were often sombre. Our regular meetings, limited to our own forces, cut down by the mobilisation, were an inestimable comfort. But that one took on an exceptional character: a friendly encounter between syndicalists and socialists, each very much attached to its respective doctrines. A war was needed for such a thing to be possible.

A young socialist writer, Raymond Lefebvre, who was to be killed by the war, has so exactly evoked these joint meetings that I should like to present here some extracts from his narrative:

> Right near the corner of Rue Grange-aux-Belles and the Quai Jemmapes, in Paris, a little grey shop still stood open in 1914, a Librairie du Travail [Labour Publishers]. . . . This shop closed on August 2. And yet, on certain evenings of the autumn, along about nine o'clock, police might have noted that a furtive life sparkled there, that conspirators slipped in one after the other. I participated in it more than once. No more was done than to poke dolefully the warmed-over remnants of the International; to draw up with a bitter memory the vast list of those who had failed; to catch glimpses, with useless clairvoyance, of how the exhausting struggle would last in which civilisation would be the only vanquished.
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> A sombre pride was left us. The pride of loyalty to the faith, the pride of resisting the inundation of the stupidity in which, Romain Rolland alone excepted, the mightiest minds were wallowing.
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> Rosmer, the poet Martinet, Trotsky, Guilbeaux, Merrheim and two or three others whose names I do not know – we were able, right in Paris, to be at once among the last Europeans of that fine intelligent Europe that the world had just lost forever and the first men of a future International about which we remained certain. We were the chain between the two centuries. Aye, those are proud souvenirs.

Let us return to that meeting at which Trotsky, Martov and Lapinski were with us for the first time. As was natural, the conversation remained general at the start, moving from one subject to another. Among our syndicalist friends, some, not many, were still hesitant. The sentimental reaction engendered among them by the aggression of semi-feudal Austria against little Servia, and enhanced by the German thrust through Belgium, disturbed them, and obscured in their minds the true and profound causes of the war. They were to move away from us later on, but they were present that evening, and one of them exclaimed, when the conversation got around more specifically to the war: 'But, after all, Austria is the one that jumped cravenly upon Servia!'

Then Trotsky spoke up. The liberal paper of Kiev *Kievskaya Mysl* [*Kievian Thought*], with which he had collaborated, had made him a war correspondent during the two Balkan wars. He was thus particularly well equipped for a reply. In the friendly tone that had marked the conversation from the beginning, he gave a luminous exposition of a situation that was complicated only in appearance. The Balkan peoples who had fought against one another were all victims of the diplomatic intrigues and manoeuvres of the Great Powers who regarded them as their pawns on the European chessboard. There was neither smugness nor pedantry in his remarks: an exceptionally well-informed comrade was dealing with a subject which circumstances had enabled him to know thoroughly, in its entirety and in its regional characteristics.

The conclusion forced itself upon us without any need to formulate it, with no room left for doubts and even less for a serious contradiction. All of us had the impression that our group had just gained a remarkable recruit. Our horizon widened. Our meetings were going to take on new life. We felt a great contentment.

Nevertheless, these encounters, so happily begun, had to come to a speedy end. Martov was a sort of official personage in his party. He represented the Menshevik faction of the Social-Democratic Labour Party of Russia in the International Socialist Bureau, the permanent organism of the Second International. His party, like the others, had been broken into three fragments by the war: a defencist section – the one that had supplied the enlisted volunteers; a vacillating centre; and an internationalist left.

Precisely because he belonged to the last tendency, Martov deemed that he must maintain a certain prudence, to do nothing that might seem to commit arbitrarily the party as a whole. Common work with us, who belonged to no socialist party, ran the risk of putting him in a difficult situation, of warranting criticisms by the leaders of the French Socialist Party who did not take kindly to his speeches – to them, he was not a comrade but a nuisance.

As for Trotsky, he had much more freedom of movement. He had broken with the Bolsheviks because he was hostile to

their principles of organisation, and with the Mensheviks because he condemned their politics. He was at the head of a group that had constituted itself around the conception of the 'permanent revolution', which he had worked out in part with Parvus. Very solidly Marxist, he was nonetheless not of those social-democrats for whom revolutionary syndicalism was a heresy to be condemned on every score; neither did the general strike frighten him off, for he already had one, a famous one, to his credit, that of 1905. In the discussions held in the *Nashe Slovo* group he defended warmly the liaison established with us and the possibility of joint work. His point of view, which Martov joined in without too much difficulty, carried.

No sooner had he arranged himself in wartime Paris – he already knew the city, having made brief visits to it on two occasions, but the state of war had created new complications – than Trotsky hastened to bring in his family. He had found a modest boarding house in the vicinity of Montsouris Park, at the top of La Glacière, at the entrance to Rue de l'Amiral-Mouchez. According to a stubborn but fairly harmless legend – infinitely worse ones were forged – he was always seen at a table of the Café de la Rotonde among the chess players.

There is a mix up here. It is Martov, a bohemian by taste and habit, who was a café frequenter. As for Trotsky, he was the very contrary of a bohemian and he liked neither the atmosphere nor the talk of the café: too much time lost.

The boarding house of Rue de l'Amiral-Mouchez was a very simple two-storied building. There were hardly a dozen boarders. The man and woman who managed it were a rare exception in the category of the usual businessmen. They became friends of the family, especially of the two boys. They continued to meet when the family had found regular lodgings. I went there once a week, generally on Sunday. One of our evenings was exceptionally stirring and I want to speak of it in some detail. Trotsky had asked us, Lapinski and me, to come to dinner and he had insisted that we come early. We had the explanation right away. 'I have invited,' he told us, 'a Belgian anarchist whom I met by chance a while ago. He is an extremely congenial person who, out of impulsiveness, it seems, has reacted violently against the German invaders. He has organised assaults against them in the Liège region, and fled just in time to escape being caught. His reports are therefore very interesting and very instructive. They help understand the Belgian resistance whose violent and spontaneous character has surprised everybody.* Besides, they also help understand how and why anarchists have been led to behave like frenzied patriots. Naturally, there is no point in discussing the war with him. That would get us nowhere. He has a lively, hot-headed character and, above all, he is not in a state of mind right now to discuss calmly with opponents.' We took our oath, Lapinski and I, to behave like men of the world, experts in the art of avoiding explosive subjects.

The dinner went off perfectly. The menu was simple even on gala evenings and there was no danger of either wines or spirits going to our heads. I knew our partner even though I had never met him during my trips to Belgium. I had read the recital of his activity and his writings. He was an attractive figure of Belgian anarchism, which had no few of them. The passage of Elisée Reclus through the New University of Brussels had left deep traces. When we reached Trotsky's room, I opened up the conversation by speaking of memories and friends we had in common. Trotsky and Lapinski spoke up in turn. Our conversation unfolded in an agreeable atmosphere of cordiality and we rejoiced in the thought that the evening would end as pleasantly as it had begun, when suddenly our partner blazed up. What had happened? We were unable to clear up what was to remain a mystery. Was it that our ideas about the war were poorly concealed beneath our uninflammable words? In any case, we had to endure the assault of our unbridled companion: we were Germanophiles, cravens, we were against the war out of cowardice, and the fidelity to internationalism that we proclaimed was nothing but a convenient pretext to mask the real reasons. . . . Reply had to be made, but the only result was that voices were raised to the point where the peaceful house was disturbed. We were all displeased.

Before his family came to join him, Trotsky had already organised two big trips in France. His paper did not ask him to go to the front and follow the armies. Besides, the accredited war correspondents did not see very much; they were reduced to spinning out more or less adroitly the official communiqués, and trench warfare marked a lull in the spectacular operations. What was interesting, however, was to cross the country, to question people, to converse with them in order to reveal the real feelings which conventional falsehood concealed under flashy heroism. Trotsky had first visited Marseille and moved down the coast to the Italian frontier. Then, planning to go toward the North, he asked me to accompany him, thinking that I could help him in the conversations with the English soldiers we were going to meet. One of our friends was then in Boulogne; that is where we decided to go first. Mobilised on the first day, he had since found himself completely isolated. He was avid for news, wanted to know what was happening at the rear, in the socialist and syndicalist general staffs. In the end he learned more from us than we from him. From the English, we did not gather very much. During our walk through the city, we had met a company of volunteers – England had not yet resigned herself to conscription. From place to place, a man – a pal – shouted out the question: 'Are you downhearted?' and, naturally, all of them responded with: 'No!' After the 'soup', we saw some of them playing ball in the street. They looked as little like soldiers as they could look and I could not refrain from saying to my companion: 'Too bad that they too are going to learn militarism and the brutishness of barracks life.' 'Not at all,' he riposted, 'it's a good thing for them to take their turn in going through it.' We saw others in the café to which we had gone to finish the evening with our friend. They belonged to the quartermaster's division and for them the war was not too tough. They had already taken on a fair load of beer; they uttered nothing but commonplaces.

The next day we were able to get as far as Calais, then the farthest point of the zone open to civilians. It had been foggy all day long and when we arrived there, night had already fallen; we had a time of it finding lodgings in a hotel. We had come close to the front, but there was nothing whatever to see there. Many of the inhabitants had left for the interior. The city was dead. We went to the offices of the local newspaper in the hope of finding someone from whom some authentic information could be gathered about the state of mind in a region near the front. All we met there was a pitiful chap, symbol of the misery of small provincial papers, further aggravated by the conditions imposed on the press by the war: censorship and compulsory bunkum. Our questions astonished him. The idea that he could tell us

* In the editorial office of l'Humanité in the evening of the attempt on the life of Jaurès, Merrheim had met the Belgian socialist Camille Huysmans, deputy and secretary of the Permanent Bureau of the Second International: 'What will you do,' he asked him, 'if the Germans break through across Belgium?' Marking his words with a descriptive gesture, Huysmans replied: 'A little corridor for them to pass through.'

anything interesting, us who came from Paris, produced a stupor in him that he did not try to conceal: 'You know more than we do,' he kept on repeating. But as to the threat, the possibility of a German push, he thought himself obliged to play the braggart: 'The "*boches*" don't scare us, we are not afraid of either their cannons or their planes.'

In the train that took us back to Paris, we had a young Belgian soldier with us for a while. He busied himself with notes, sketches and maps, raised his head, looked at us. It was plain that he was impatient to engage us in conversation. After a few words from us, he replied by telling us his story. He was in the artillery. His battery having been put out of commission by the Germans, he was sent to the rear to rest until further orders. Taking one of his sketches, he told us: 'Here's where our piece was when we were attacked. A first shell fell pretty far behind us; a second fell ahead, but the third hit right on the head. We had been betrayed!' This sudden substitution of the convenient conventional lie for the plain and simple reality made us think for a moment that we were dealing with a humorist. But nothing of the kind. Our good Belgian was perfectly serious, for, in order to edify us about the 'betrayal', he enumerated for us several exploits of the same kind which he had heard from comrades who had also been sent to the rear. War hatches lies spontaneously, being itself a big lie: it cannot present itself for what it is.

Early in 1915, changes took place in our two groups. A revision of the list of men who had not performed military service made it possible to send the best-known oppositionists into the armies. Monatte was soon mobilised; my turn came two months later. Among our Russian friends, there had been a break between Martov and the editorial board of *Nashe Slovo*. The war, protracted far beyond what the experts had foreseen and the soldiers had been made to believe, engendered important transformations in the state of mind of the draftees as well as the men and women at home. Discontentment became very active. The need to act, to do something progressively eliminated the confident passivity of the early Sacred Union. Martov felt himself bypassed, not so much perhaps so far as he was personally concerned, but with regard to the centre and in fact the majority of his party. Pretty vehement controversies brought him into conflict with Trotsky in particular, after which he decided to settle in Switzerland. A newcomer took his place in the delegation of *Nashe Slovo*: he was Dridzo-Lozovsky. Unlike his comrades, he had been involved pretty closely in the French trade union movement, having been secretary of a wholly exceptional kind of union, that of the capmakers, all of whose members were Jews. Our meetings were now held fairly often at his place; his wife was a dentist and her office was large enough for us to be at our ease.

The Parisian life of Trotsky was thenceforth well ordered. In the morning, he read the papers. A born journalist, loving, as he reports in his autobiography, to sniff the smell of printer's ink, of freshly moist proofs, he had easily oriented himself among the Parisian press, which was yet so different from what he had been used to in Vienna. The French newspapers of the time were extremely poor. The censorship hardly left them the freedom to embellish upon the official communiqués. The papers were thus, in form and substance, put together from the same pattern. For this reason, Trotsky found *l'Action Française* of the Maurrassian neo-royalists interesting. By the side of the not always harmless buffoonery of Léon Daudet, the 'doctrinary' snarling of Maurras sprawled over massive columns, while Louis Dimier cut up Germany into morsels every day – into serpent's fragments – before he quit the house and revealed its secrets. It maintained an incontestable originality, due in part to the fierce campaign that it conducted at the time against Clemenceau, which earned it favourable censorship treatment. He saw soon enough, however, what there really was behind this surface originality: 'Why, these interminable articles of Maurras,' he said to me, 'they're always the same thing, and the famous verve of Daudet is no doubt amusing only in peacetime.'

Toward eleven o'clock, he left the house to go to the *Nashe Slovo* printshop, where the editors would come together to discuss and prepare the paper. By their connections with their emigré comrades in Switzerland, England, Scandinavia, America, they were able to gather together, in those days of penury, an exceptional informational service which enabled them to understand better and interpret more exactly the events of each day. The commentaries were accompanied by discussions and important studies that the censor treated with a certain respect, doubtlessly judging that this paper, confined to a small circle of emigrés, represented no danger to the French. In the afternoon and evening, Trotsky wrote, or participated in the debates that the various Russian groups organised. He excelled in enlivening the debates. But he always found the time to occupy himself with the school work of the two boys who, having hardly had the time to start on French, attended a Russian school on the Boulevard Blanqui.

In the course of my visits, he initiated me into the life of the Russian parties and the lively controversies that agitated them. He, on his part, had nurtured them by the publication of an important brochure written in Zurich during his short sojourn, which appeared there in German under the title, *Der Krieg und die Internationale* [The War and the International]. This brochure had a strange fate. At the beginning of 1915, the German government ordered its confiscation. The court that sat in the case pronounced sentence upon the author for the crime of *lèse majesté*. It was to reappear three years later, in New York, in English, under a new title, *The Bolsheviki and World Peace*. An enterprising publisher had made a book out of it – there was no lack of substance for that – and Lincoln Steffens wrote an introduction to it. Appraising pretty accurately Trotsky's position toward the war, he wrote: 'Trotsky is not pro-German. . . . He is not pro-Allies; he is not even pro-Russian. He is not a patriot at all. He is for a class, the proletariat, the working class of all countries, and he is for his class only to get rid of classes.' But the most astonishing thing is that the book aroused a lively interest in another man, a much more important personage in American society of that day than Lincoln Steffens – President Woodrow Wilson, whose ambition it was to arbitrate the conflict. But for the peace that he intended to realise,

he came into collision with the ill-will of the Entente statesmen. So, while he could not, of course, approve of the entire contents of the book, he did find in the peace programme set up by the author several points of his own: no reparations; the right of every nation to self-determination; the United States of Europe – without monarchies, without standing armies, without ruling feudal castes, without secret diplomacy. All this was not of a kind to frighten off the liberal American intellectual who was more at home with it than were his compeers of Europe. He commented on the book, recommended it, made it a success. Trotsky was not to know about this interesting adventure until years later, but he was informed of it by the publisher himself, Charles Boni, who visited him in Prinkipo.

My visits to the boarding house on Rue de l'Amiral-Mouchez ended in the month of May, when I was mobilised and sent to the provinces. At the beginning of August, I was able to take advantage of a service provision to return to Paris, where I arrived just in time to participate in the last meeting at which we were to discuss and define the attitude of our delegate to the international conference that was soon to meet in Switzerland. Through Merrheim, I learned what had happened to the leadership of the CGT in my absence, and Trotsky recounted in detail the preparatory work of the conference. An Italian socialist deputy, Morgari, had come to Paris, credentialed by his party to sound out the leaders of the socialist party and get them to participate in the conference. At the same time, he was supposed to raise the question of an international conference in the Bureau of the Second International which claimed that it was already too late to convoke the representatives of its sections. He had had no success among the leaders of the French party, nor any more among those of the Second International. Vandervelde had dismissed him brutally, even boasting of preventing any attempt at an international socialist get-together.

For France to participate in the conference, it was evidently necessary to be content with oppositional groups which we would endeavour to make as representative as possible. Conferences of the socialist party and of the CGT had taken place. It was not possible to pretend any longer to ignore that oppositions existed. The most important of the trade union organisations was the *Fédération des metaux* [Metal Workers' Federation] and all told it already represented a third of the general federation's membership. In the socialist party, one of the most solid departmental federations, that of Haute-Vienne, had proceeded to distinguish itself publicly from the attitude of *l'Humanité* and the party leadership. Through the medium of Morgari, contacts were established between the Russian group of *Nashe Slovo*, the trade union opposition and the socialists of Haute-Vienne. Several joint meetings had been held; they remained without positive results. The deputies of the minority were satisfied with the moderate and harmless form of the opposition they had adopted. They feared before all else to make a gesture which would have opened them to the accusation of imperilling the unity of the party. The urgent arguments of the Russian socialists which should have been decisive for them did not succeed in pushing them ahead an inch toward a consistent attitude: throughout the war and afterward they never went further than Kautsky. So, nothing was gained from this side and since it was necessary above all to keep the enterprise secret, it was decided to be satisfied, so far as French representation was concerned, with two absolutely sure delegations: Merrheim, secretary of the *Fédération des metaux*, and Bourderon, an old militant of the socialist party who was in addition the secretary of a trade union federation, that of the coopers.

This last meeting which I was able to attend by chance was, intentionally, not large in numbers. Merrheim and Bourderon were there and, from the Russian side, Trotsky and Lozovsky. The resolution on which the syndicalist minority had united at the national [CGT] conference of August 15 was very clear in its opposition to the war, its denunciation of the Sacred Union, in its proclamation of the principles of revolutionary syndicalism; it remained vague about the specific action to be undertaken. Trotsky and even Lozovsky, who was always very moderate, insisted that it be supplemented by a fairly precise programme of action. But Merrheim and Bourderon replied invariably that they considered themselves bound by their own resolution and did not have the right to change it. In reality, both of them, highly prudent, aimed to reserve to themselves complete freedom of movement. A few days later, Merrheim, Bourderon and Trotsky left for Switzerland.

The secret had been well kept. Brief repercussions appeared in the papers when the conference had already concluded. Trotsky notified me of his return, making an appointment with me at the *Nashe Slovo* printshop. His family had just moved into a small house in Sèvres which a friend, the painter René Parece, being out for several months, had placed at its disposal. A long afternoon and part of the evening were needed to exhaust the report of the conference. Trotsky had followed its developments and incidents close at hand; he knew personally the score of men who had come together in the alpine hostelry of Zimmerwald; and he was the one assigned to draw up the text of the document on which there could be unanimous agreement. He was in a position to make the best and completest report. I must confine myself here to underscoring the two salient points of the debates which were very vehement at times. Lenin wanted the deputies present to commit themselves to voting against war credits upon their return home. He harassed mercilessly Ledebour who refused to make a definitive commitment, and he upset the Italians who, not yet having abandoned the hope of winning over Bernstein and Kautsky and starting up the machinery of the Second International again, absolutely refused to hear anything about a new International.

Even though Lenin was displeased at not having been able to carry his point of view, he gave his approval to the manifesto adopted at the end of the conference, and those who supported his thesis, forming the left wing of the conference, signed along with him. He entitled the article in which he analysed the debates and the reasons for his attitude, 'The First Step'. The Zimmerwald conference, such as it was, was one of the important events of the first world war, perhaps the most decisive one, for this 'first step' inevitably dictated others. It marked the reawakening of the labour and socialist movements; the scattered oppositions which had till then more or less ignored one another now had a centre for mutual contact. Each one now knew he was not alone, that he had comrades in France and in all the countries. There was the certitude that proletarian internationalism, betrayed or scoffed at, had not been wiped out of the consciousness of the workers.

It was alive and it would triumph. For confidence was reborn and with it the need to act. New groups were formed or came together: socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, foreshadowing the composition of the new International which was to emerge from the war.

In France, where the workers were particularly exploited, strikes broke out. Taking advantage of circumstances, the employers had imposed 'war wages'. The workers in the fashionable clothing houses were the first in the fight under the slogan, 'Down with war wages!' The employers had to give in. Then, what was infinitely more important, the agitation reached the munitions plants. The special manufacturing processes, notably in the case of shells, allowed the employment of ordinary labour and specialised labourers, and the employers resorted to female labour which they exploited relentlessly. Work was paid by the piece; speed-up production was pushed, but as soon as a certain wage was reached the employers reduced the base rate of pay, so that every day the workers exhausted themselves more and more physically only to get the same skimpy wage. A strike broke out in a plant of the Paris suburbs. Supported by the unions and by a solidarity movement in which the oppositional groupings participated, the women workers triumphed over the resistance and the threats of the government and the employers. The first trade union sections of women workers were created.

In Paris, following meetings at the Labour Exchange where Merrheim and Bourderon set forth the work and the conclusions of the Zimmerwald conference, the Committee for the Resumption of International Relations was constituted. Now the opposition had at its disposal a centre of information and action. The Committee published pamphlets and tracts and even though its material means were feeble, its mere existence disturbed the socialist and trade union leadership which hastened to disavow and denounce it. A similar movement developed throughout the country. The Bulletin published by the International Socialist Commission set up by the Zimmerwald Conference could soon publish a list of 25 organisations which had approved the manifesto and, as a consequence, the Commission decided to convoke a new conference which was able to meet during the last week of April.

Everything was now clearer, but for us the problem of direct participation was a hard one to solve. The government which had been accused of weakness and severely criticised by the fireside warriors, refused to grant passports to every one of those who might have represented us. The *Nashe Slovo* group, likewise unable to send one of its own people, proposed to us to prepare a common declaration and manifesto for the conference which would be published in the pre-conference Bulletin and would thus assure our participation. Trotsky was assigned to draw up the documents and when they were ready he asked me to come and discuss them with him. This time the preliminary declaration put the questions clearly. The events of the past five months had fully confirmed the conceptions expressed at Zimmerwald. Now it was necessary to move more resolutely along the road marked out. The problem of national defence had to be settled categorically without preoccupation with the existing military or diplomatic situation, and the accent was placed on the intensified revolutionary struggle of the working class against capitalism, for it was only in that way that the peace conception formulated in Zimmerwald could be realised. Our documents appeared in No.3 of the Commission's Bulletin, February 29, 1916; a complete English translation of it can be found in the work of Gankin and Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War* (Stanford University Press, pp.390-394). While I approved the draft worked out by Trotsky in everything that was essential, I asked him to make a change, to eliminate the passages concerning the 'centrists' (their leader in France was Jean Longuet). One of the consequences of Zimmerwald was to push these people to organise themselves because they wanted at all costs to distinguish themselves from it and at the same time to keep their hold, by means of an intermediate position, on as many as possible of the socialists who were ready to join it. Trotsky attacked them, denounced their ambiguous and timorous attitude. That did not shock me, quite the contrary, I would rather have added to it. We knew them well and had no illusions about them. But we had always so harshly forbidden them any intrusion into the trade union field which we defended jealously against them, against the efforts they tried to make to turn the unions off the right road, that we considered it natural, in return, not to mix into their internal dissension. Trotsky was not very happy about amputating his document in this fashion, but in our common work he always showed himself very understanding, defending his ideas as only he knew how but ready nevertheless for necessary conciliation. Thus the documents could appear under the double signature of *Nashe Slovo* and *Vie Ouvrière.*

Nevertheless, there were three Frenchmen at this second conference which likewise met in Switzerland, in Kienthal, from the 24th to the 30th of April, 1916; three deputies who made the trip in the greatest secrecy. They had no contact with the Committee for the Resumption of International Relations and did not seek to get any. They wanted to carry on their opposition in their own way, afraid to link themselves with more resolute and consistent elements. All three of them were teachers; Brizon, a high-school teacher, was the most capable and it was he who acted as their spokesman at the conferences. He was an impulsive, uneven, capricious person. On occasion, he could be utterly unendurable – which is precisely what happened from the very first sessions of the conference where he showed his disagreeable side and provoked unpleasant incidents. But with him the business ended better than it began: he was the one entrusted with drawing up the manifesto and, back in France, he did more than had been expected, voting against war credits the first chance he got, followed only by the other two pilgrims to Kienthal, defying the clamour, the insults and the threats of almost the entire Chamber, particularly of the majority socialists who were not among the least furious. Besides, he thereafter made a 'communist' use of the parliamentary tribune by reading off the newspaper articles which the censorship had prohibited and which were then to appear in the *Journal Officiel,* in the report of the debates. The Committee for the Resumption of International Relations immediately reprinted them in the form of tracts which fostered and expanded its propaganda.

The opposition became stronger, more conscious, more aggressive, while the situation of the governments of the belligerent countries worsened: at the beginning of 1916 there seemed to be no way out for them; the tiredness became more general; privation became harder and there was all the less inclination to accept it because there were no more illusions about the outcome of the war. Seeking to obtain a decision, Germany had unleashed a terrible offensive against Verdun. There it wore out its forces, but it also wore out those of France. As is customary, the fanatical patriots spoke of treason, manufactured newspaper novels, melodramatic stories to capture the attention of the peoples and to dupe them. Every morning they demanded that the government crack down upon the 'defeatists'.

I was then in Paris and I had resumed my visits to Trotsky and his family in their lodgings in the Gobelins where they had

moved when they had to leave the house in Sèvres. One evening, I found Trotsky sad and preoccupied. He participated regularly in the meetings of the Committee for the Resumption of International Relations. His remarks were highly regarded, all the more because they expressed the feelings of the great majority of the members who, like Trotsky, desired to expand the activity of the Committee on the outside. Toward this end, he had insisted at the last meeting of the Committee on the need of giving the Committee an organ, of publishing at least a Bulletin that would establish connections between Paris and the rest of the country. This proposition had irritated Merrheim, who had also fought against it and, carried away by anger, he had reproached Trotsky for 'lacking in tact'. Trotsky had not replied to this surprising accusation on the spot; he did not want to aggravate the incident, being certain that Merrheim would come off second best. What could be the meaning of this? Only that Trotsky, being a 'foreigner', was supposed to maintain more reserve than the other members of the Committee, to refrain from taking the initiative and to content himself with approval. But precisely because he was a 'foreigner', Trotsky was more exposed than anyone else, and events were soon to prove that.

At the meeting of the National Council of the Socialist Party on August 7, the majority had denounced the opposition in new language. Minister Sembat had declared: 'I consider it the duty of the majority to react against the propaganda that the minority is organising with tireless activity. We must not allow the continuation of this sort of corruption of the mind of the public in general and of socialists in particular.' Echoing him immediately, the man who then figured as the leader of the party, Renaudel, asserted: 'I have in my pockets letters from soldiers who write to me: "We are sent letters that give us the blues," they say; and this is no time for that.' The reactionary press, that is, the whole of the Parisian and provincial press, immediately picked up these words, adding the conclusion implicit in them but which the two 'socialists' had not dared formulate openly in a party conference: the government must gag the corruptors of the public mind. It was an appeal to repression and the preparation of it. Trotsky was to be its first victim.

Frightened by the mounting figure of its losses in men, France had decided to appeal to Russia and its 'inexhaustible reservoir' to send contingents of Russian soldiers to fight on the French front. The operation was to prove disastrous and shortly after the first disembarkments a grave incident occurred. Russian soldiers stationed in Marseille mutinied; their colonel, unable to mollify them by his eloquence, struck one of them, who turned on him and killed him.

According to the first accounts, the explanation of this tragic affair seemed simple. The Russian soldiers were subject to a severe discipline, they were absolutely forbidden to walk through the city, which was an all the more intolerable regulation when they could see other soldiers of all colours, English, Indian, black, move about freely after their day's military work. Irritation, added to expatriation, was more than enough to explain the fight.

However, disturbing signs appeared. The inquest had disclosed, said the newspapers, that the killer had copies of *Nashe Slovo* in his possession. Thereafter the affair took a different turn: Russian journalists who went into the matter particularly, established the fact that an active role had been played by an *agent provocateur.* All sorts of documents were then recollected. Gustave Hervé, then still a member of the Administrative Commission of the Socialist Party, had demanded of Ministy Malvy, since 1915, to throw out of France all the Russian refugees guilty of revolutionary internationalism. On the other hand, Professor Durkheim, chairman of the commission appointed by the government to take care of the Russian refugees, had informed their representative of the coming prohibition of *Nashe Slovo* and the expulsion of its editors. The hour of application had come: on September 15, 1916, the government suppressed *Nashe Slovo*; on September 16 it notified Trotsky of its decree on his expulsion.

The eve of the day set for the expulsion I went to Rue Oudry to greet Trotsky. He received me with a smile: 'I am not leaving,' he said. Minority socialist deputies had intervened with Briand, then president of the Council, and reminded him that no French government to date had consented to turn over a Russian revolutionist to the tsar. Briand denied any such plan; he granted a delay so that a country could be found to admit Trotsky. After he had given me these explanations, Trotsky added that his friends of *Nashe Slovo*, who had arranged a farewell party, had decided not to call it off. There could be no illusions about the outcome of the affair; it was only postponed. Natalia then joined us and we left for the Russian canteen on Rue Broca where the 'banquet' was to be held, with a Russian menu on which only tea was in abundance. Even though there was scarcely reason for rejoicing, good humour prevailed from start to finish and so late into the night that I had to leave before the end. The Russian revolutionists present that evening had all passed through stiff tests and the weightiest threat now seemed removed.

If there had been. any illusions, they would soon have been dispelled. From that time on, Trotsky was subjected to rigorous police surveillance. Police were installed in an empty shop at the mouth of the Rue Oudry from which no movement of Trotsky could escape their watch. However, Trotsky succeeded one day in outsmarting them. He had been summoned to the police prefecture for noon, and since he could not stand having the police trail him, he left the house before daybreak, resolved to wander around the city throughout the morning. At the stroke of noon, as he approached the office of the commissioner, he had time to perceive the tormented face of the policeman, upset at having let him escape. Shortly after this interlude, the order for his immediate expulsion arrived, this time definitively. That day, when I appeared at Rue Oudry, I found only Natalia and the two boys, who were preparing to leave for Spain; two new police agents, more important ones, had presented themselves that morning.

When Trotsky understood that the expulsion measure was definitive, he prepared a letter addressed to Jules Guesde. For the Russian socialists, Sembat was an amateur, a dilettante amused by the socialist game. But Jules Guesde had been a pioneer, he had known Marx. Up to the war, he had retained so much prestige in their eyes that all of them remained more or less 'Guesdists'. So it was to him that Trotsky wanted 'to express some ideas which will probably be of no use to you, but which may at least be useful *against* you'. Then, after having recited in detail the 'Marseille affair', the pretext for the repression, he wrote:

> At the beginning of the war, when generous promises were distributed with an open hand, your closest companion, Sembat, gave Russian journalists a glimpse of the most beneficial influence of the democratic Allies upon the internal regime of Russia. In addition, this was the supreme argument with which the government-socialists of France and Belgium sought, perseveringly, but unsuccessfully, to reconcile the Russian revolutionists with the tsar.
>
> Twenty-six months of constant military collaboration, of communion with the generalissimos, diplomats, parliamentarians, visits of Viviani and Thomas to Tsarskoye Selo, in a word, twenty-six months of uninterrupted 'influence'

of the Western democrats upon tsarism, have strengthened the most arrogant reaction in our country, modified only by administrative chaos, and have at the same time brought the internal regime of England and France extremely close to that of Russia. The generous promises of M. Sembat are cheaper, as you can see, than his coal. The hapless fate of the right of asylum thus appears only as a striking symptom of militaristic and police domination on both sides of the Channel.

. . . Is it possible for an honest socialist not to fight against you? You have transformed the Socialist Party into a docile choir accompanying the coryphées of capitalist banditry in an epoch when bourgeois society – whose mortal enemy you, Jules Guesde, once were – has disclosed its true nature through and through. Out of the events prepared by an entire period of world pillage, whose consequences we foretold more than once, out of all the blood spilled, out of all the suffering, the misfortunes, all the crimes, all the rapaciousness and felonies of the governments, you, Jules Guesde, draw but one single lesson for the French proletariat, namely, that Wilhelm II and Franz-Josef are criminals who, unlike Nicolas II and M. Poincaré, do not respect the rules of international law!

. . . The socialism of Babeuf, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Blanqui, the Commune, Jaurès and Jules Guesde – yes, of Jules Guesde too – finally found its Albert Thomas to deliberate with Romanov on the surest way of seizing Constantinople; its Marcel Sembat to parade his dilettante's I-don't-give-a-fig over the cadavers and ruins of French civilisation; and its Jules Guesde to train with the others behind the chariot of conqueror Briand.

And you thought, you hoped, that the French proletariat which, in this idealess and fruitless war, is being bled white by the crime of the ruling classes, will support silently to the end this shameful pact drawn between official socialism and its worst enemies. You were mistaken. An opposition arose. In spite of the state of siege and the furore of nationalism, which always preserves its same capitalist substance under divers forms, royalist, radical or socialist, the revolutionary opposition is advancing step by step and is winning ground every day.

Nashe Slovo, the paper you have strangled, lived and breathed in the atmosphere of reawakening French socialism. Ripped out of the Russian soil by the will of the counter-revolution that triumphed thanks to the aid of the French Stock Exchange – which you, Jules Guesde, are now serving – the *Nashe Slovo* group was happy to reflect, even as incompletely as your censorship allowed us, the voice of the French section of the new International, arising out of the midst of the horrors of the fratricidal war.

. . . Perhaps you draw consolation from the thought that we are few in number? Yet we are more numerous than think the policemen of all ranks. They do not perceive, in their professional myopia, that spirit of revolt that is rising in all the centres of suffering, that is spreading throughout France and all of Europe, in the workers' suburbs and the countryside, the shops and the trenches.

. . . Step down, Jules Guesde, from your military automobile, get out of the cage where the capitalist state has shut you up, and look about you a little. Perhaps fate will one last time take pity on your sorry old age and you will hear the muted sound of approaching events. We await them; we summon them; we prepare them. The fate of France would be too frightful if the Calvary of its working masses did not lead to a great revenge, *our* revenge, where there will be no place for you, Jules Guesde, nor for yours.

Expelled by you, I leave France with a profound faith in our triumph. Over your head, I sent a fraternal greeting to the French proletariat which is awakening to great destinies. Without you and against you, long live socialist France!

As to the influence that Trotsky exercised in France, outside of Russian circles, during the first two years of the First World War, I can give no better evidence of it than by reproducing here some passages from an address drawn up at the moment when, having been accused by Kerensky and his socialist ministers of being 'agents of the kaiser', Lenin had to hide in Finland and Trotsky was arrested and imprisoned. It was signed by militants and organisations belonging to the anarchist and syndicalist movements, among them: Hubert and Barthe, of the excavators' union, Péricat, of the Comité de Défense Syndicaliste, Decouzon, of the chemical products union, Millerat, secretary of the clothing union, Beauvais, for the ceramics workers' union, Vaulop, for the electrical workers' union, Barrion, for the Socialist Youth of the 13th Ward, the Comité d'Entente des Jeunesses Syndicalistes of the Seine, Gontier, of the bricklayers' union, Barday, for the chauffeurs' Action Group, Thuillier and Broutchoux, trade union militants.

> We did not await the triumph of the Russian Revolution to affirm to Lenin and to Trotsky and to the other Maximalist comrades our sympathy in order to protest against the slanders with which the entire press drenches them, especially *l'Humanité* through the voice of Renaudel, and *La Bataille* through that of Cornelissen. These men are surely great criminals; they do not play the socialist comedy; they have written as socialists, they have spoken as socialists, they act like socialists. Their extreme sincerity shows up pink socialism, hypocrisy and falsehood before the eyes of the socialist and sympathising masses of France. The masks are falling.
>
> . . . The revolutionary French proletariat will not be duped by the slanders. We know the men that are being insulted, who they are and what is their worth. Many of them, like Trotsky, lived among us. We admired their courage, their abnegation, their lack of self-interest.
>
> . . . The crime of these men lies in having remained faithful to their ideas, their convictions, to that programme of internationalist and socialist action which others, who now rage against them, acclaimed with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal.
>
> . . . They did not think that the change in governmental personnel of March, 1917, was sufficient reason to abandon these ideas and this programme. They wanted the Russian Revolution to realise: peace imposed by the workers, emancipation of the working class.

Four years later, describing the beginnings of the opposition in France, Amédée Dunois wrote *(Bulletin Communiste*, March 3, 1921):

> We knew Trotsky. He had just arrived in Paris. We were suffocating. Trotsky brought us the exhilarating air of the open spaces; he apprised us that the protests were everywhere legion, that treason affected only the general staffs and that socialism having remained alive the main question was to reconstitute the International.

If there is a bit of exaggeration in these lines as to the remarks ascribed to Trotsky on the subject of the oppositionists who, at the beginning, were nowhere legion, there is none in the scope of new strength that Trotsky brought us, our group in particular and the movement in general. His ascendancy among the revolutionists was to increase to the degree that we learned to know him from his writings and his actions, and also to the degree that we learned of his past activity, of his role in Russian socialism, in the revolution of 1905, of his audacious escape from the icy steppes where tsarism sought to confine him – of all those things about which he spoke only when he was questioned.

Paris, July 11, 1950 **WA**

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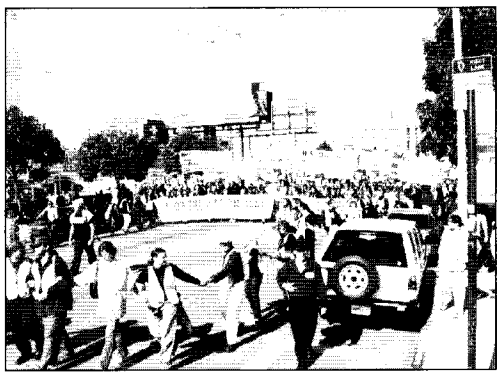

San Francisco, March 23

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NOT IN MY NAME
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NO WAR ON IRAQ
STOP THE WAR
Freedom For Palestine
NO
PEACE
MAB
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