Workers ACTION

No. 22
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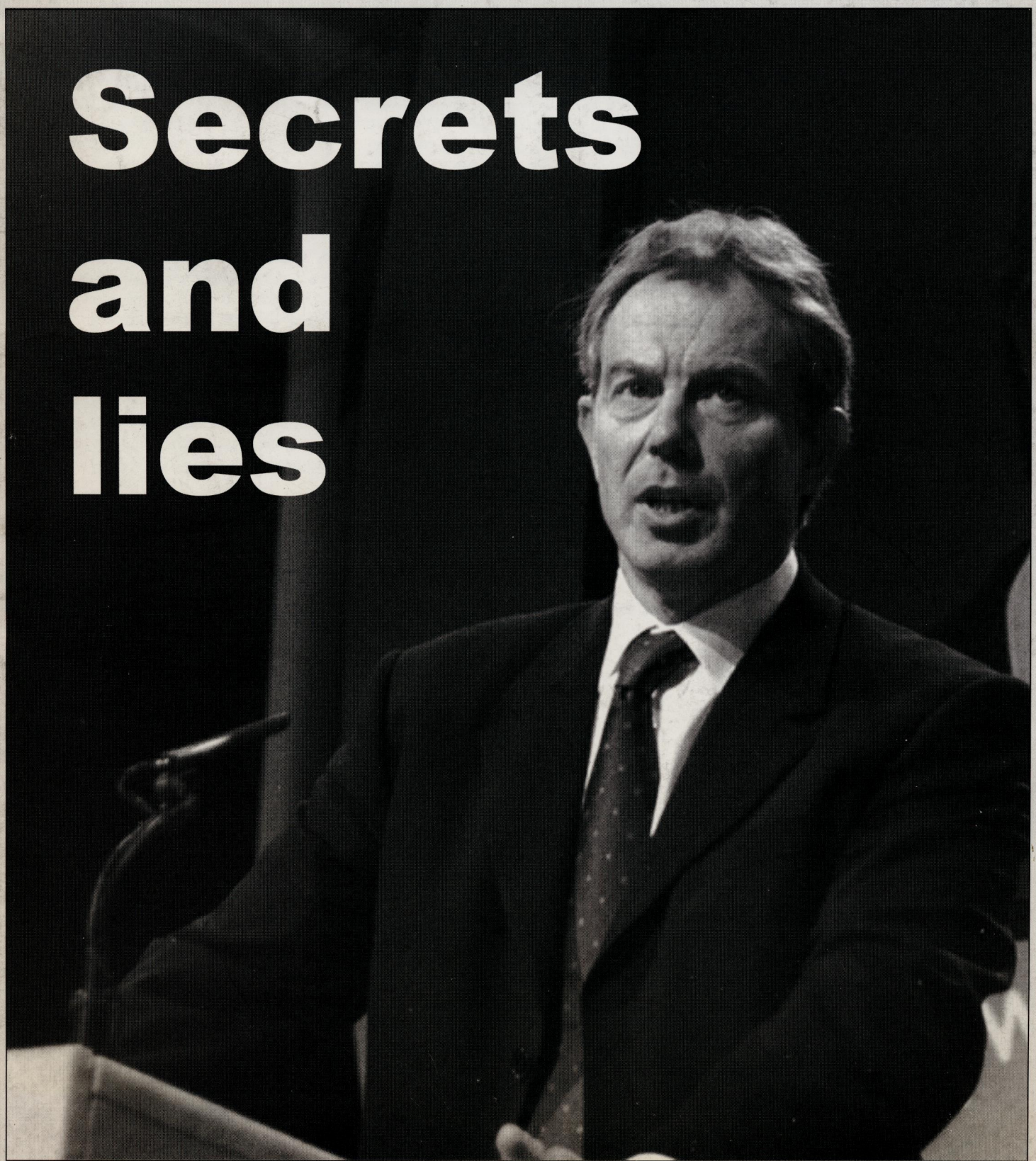

Secrets and lies

Workers ACTION

No. 22 Summer 2003

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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

Baghdad rebound

In the immediate aftermath of the war on Iraq, the government crisis appeared to be over, but now it is looking increasingly as if a number of issues will come back to haunt it. Following the US/UK invasion, both Tony Blair and Jack Straw announced that they would have resigned from the government had they not won support for the war in the House of Commons vote, and several other Blairite ministers hinted that they would have done likewise. Some in the anti-war movement have used these statements to demonstrate how close the movement came to stopping the war. While the anti-war movement clearly did force the largest parliamentary rebellion in history, a more realistic assessment is that Blair would never have allowed a vote in the first place if he had the slightest chance of losing. In recent weeks the government has been struggling against accusations that it made up, or at best embellished, the intelligence reports used to justify going to war. Despite the government's argument that it has rid the world of a dictator, this leaves it without a legal basis for the war.

After the event it was convenient for Blair and Straw to try and make themselves appear heroic and Churchillian, standing up for their 'principles' in the teeth of fierce opposition. For a few days this appeared to have worked, with Blair's personal ratings rising high in the opinion polls. What was referred to as Blair's 'Baghdad bounce' has been limited and short-lived, however. What these polls haven't shown is the extent to which there is a polarisation within society. Among certain sections of the population Blair was seen to have been right in setting his face against public opinion and supporting the war – the war was much shorter than the more pessimistic estimates, Baghdad in particular fell without much resistance and the brutal dictator had been toppled. There remains however, a large section of the population which still thinks the war was wrong, and that the reasons for going to war were less about weapons of mass destruction and more about grabbing Iraq's oil. Unfortunately for Blair, this includes large numbers of Labour Party members and voters.

Number 10 obviously calculated that the worst period would be the build-up to war, that once a war started some of the anti-war movement would collapse, and that with an early victory any continuing opposition would be marginalised. Things haven't quite panned out like this for a number of different reasons. For a start, the US and Britain haven't been welcomed as liberators in Iraq and it is likely that any emerging national liberation movement will keep Iraq focused in the public mind. More importantly, weapons of mass destruction have not been found – the longer the period without producing any evidence, the flimsier Blair's pretext for war seems.

Bush never entirely clarified his reasons for going to war – they ranged from Iraq's alleged links with al-Qaida, to removing a brutal dictator, to neutralising Saddam's alleged weapons of mass destruction. Domestically, the Republican administration had little need to explain its reasons. As far as many of Bush's core team are concerned, it's no business of the rest of the world if the US decides to invade another country, to lock up POWs indefinitely and torture and possibly execute them without trial in Guantánamo Bay, or to do whatever it chooses to do in pursuit of its own interests. Throughout negotiations with the UN Security Council, the US made it pretty clear that it would go to war regardless of how the Security Council voted.

Though there have been significant anti-war demonstrations in the US, there has not been anything like the level of opposition that European governments have faced. Despite there being absolutely no evidence to support it, there is still a widely held view in the US that Iraq was behind he September 11 attacks – a misconception that Bush has carefully encouraged. As a result of the strength of the right wing in the US, many key figures have been far more open about their attitude towards the war on Iraq, with Donald Rumsfeld admitting that weapons of mass destruction were little more than a pretext for war, and Paul Wolfowitz explaining that the reason that Iraq was dealt with differently to North Korea was that Iraq is 'swimming in oil'.

In Britain, the debate over the war has been completely different. Blair has repeatedly made a number of specific allegations that amounted to his case for international legality in launching a war on Iraq. In particular, the claim that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons ready for deployment within 45 minutes is causing problems for the government. If such weapons did exist, and if British and US intelligence was so accurate, surely the occupation forces would be able to go straight to them. After more than two months' occupation it is clear that anything produced at this point will either be on such a small scale that Iraq could never have posed a threat to anyone, or they will have been planted by the 'coalition' forces. The other specific allegation causing a headache for Blair is that Iraq tried to purchase nuclear materials from the Niger government. The document supplied to the weapons inspectors as proof of this was quickly proved to be a crude forgery. Despite this, Tony Blair has very publicly refused to withdraw this claim. Hans Blix has described US and British intelligence as being so bad as to have shocked him.

The issue has been revived following a *number of intelligence* leaks from Britain and the US, apparently from intelligence services annoyed at how their reports were being misrepresented by the government, often completely contradicting intelligence reports and presenting misinformation as coming from intelligence sources.

The reason the misinformation on WMDs is so important is that evidence of the government knowing that Iraq didn't pose a threat to its neighbours or the rest of the world would demonstrate clearly that it knowingly went to war without even a facade of legality, and is therefore guilty of war crimes.

Meanwhile, the re-colonisation of Iraq is already proving massively unpopular and the occupation forces are facing a growing number of attacks. This resistance is unlikely to go away and could well develop into a significant liberation movement. Already, the US has been forced to increase the numbers of troops several times, and now has over 160,000 in Iraq.

Throughout history there are numerous examples of foreign armies arriving in a country to be welcomed as liberators, but later facing a war of national liberation as the local population fights to drive their erstwhile liberators out. This has happened in the north of Ireland and has happened repeatedly, and to various different armies, in Lebanon. In Iraq, however much Iraqis may have detested the Ba'athist regime under Saddam Hussein, the US and British forces have been widely seen as an occupying army from the start. On an almost daily basis there are reports of occupying troops being killed, or of troops killing Iraqi civilians. The US has made little pretence of allowing any kind of Iraqi self-rule, with Rumsfeld declaring that they will work towards privatising state-owned industries, and will not allow any links with Iran to develop. Eager to have their share of the spoils, France, Germany and Russia have backed down from their opposition to the war to ensure a unanimous legitimisation of the occupation from the UN Security Council.

Even as the occupying force, there are a number of legal obligations on the US and Britain, not least to ensure the safety and well being of the population. Wide-scale looting was accepted and encouraged by the invading army, followed by what appears to have been an organised campaign of arson against any government buildings. Months after the end of the war, the occupiers are still unable to guarantee electricity, water, medicine and food supplies to the population. That there would be problems could have been easily predicted – 12 years of crippling sanctions left the Iraqi infrastructure devastated and the UN appeal in January for $123 million aid received just over a quarter of that sum by the end of March. It has become depressingly clear that despite years of preparation for war with Iraq, the US/UK 'coalition' made little preparation for what to do with the civilian population once it had won the war. Such actions as have been taken are to the detriment of the population – such as the disbanding of the army, leaving hundreds of thousands without work, and even leaving widows from the Iran/Iraq war without pensions.

While large amounts of CIA dollars were poured into Kurdish areas of northern Iraq throughout the sanctions regime, the US appears to have been completely taken by surprise that in the majority Shi'ite areas there might be demand for an Islamic government, or even one sympathetic to Iran. It is clear now that the US will impose its direct rule for some considerable time, the Iraqi population not being 'trustworthy' enough to ensure US interests will be protected.

In contrast to its lack of planning for the civilian infrastructure of Iraq, the US has been far more on the ball with regard to seizing the oil fields. Not only were the oilfields the only thing that the military appears to have had any plan to defend in Iraq, but the US is currently in the process of sealing the fate of Iraqi oil for years to come. In October 2002, at a time when Britain and the US were still pretending to be using diplomatic measures to resolve the dispute about 'weapons of mass destruction', Dick Cheney's company Haliburton was struggling, its share price having almost halved from the previous year, with rumours that it might be forced into bankruptcy. It was then that the US government negotiated a deal with the company worth $7 billion to take over the running of the Iraqi oil industry. This, along with several other lucrative contracts awarded to corporate friends of the Republican administration, will of course be paid for by the sale of Iraqi oil. Colin Powell's statement that Iraqi oil will be protected for the Iraqi people will have little meaning since the oil revenues will be used to pay off debts to US corporations for which the Iraqi people are not responsible.

The British government's actions over the war are not done and dusted, and these issues will come back as long as the occupation continues. And it looks set to continue for some time to come. There is little point in sitting back and waiting for parliament to hold the government to account, however. As welcome as the stance of individuals like Robin Cook has been, the government has an overwhelming majority made up of MPs who are, with a few significant exceptions, willing to vote whichever way they are told. This will only remain an issue if the labour movement and the broader anti-war movement can build on the basis of the illegal nature of the war, the government's illegality even within its own terms, and around opposition to the occupation. All individuals and organisations opposed to the war must broaden this understanding and strengthen the resolve of all those who campaigned against the war before it started.

At the same time, we cannot ignore parliament either. We are not on the brink of a revolutionary situation and ultimately any real censure of the government must be forced through parliament. Although Clare Short's argument that she voted for the war because she was duped by Blair may seem naive beyond the bounds of credibility, there almost certainly are a number of MPs who genuinely did believe the government and only now are starting to realise they might not have been told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We now need to work together to maximise pressure upon MPs to hold the government to account, and need to mobilise the ranks of the Labour Party membership and affiliated organisations to ensure that the war is still a central issue at Labour's annual conference this year. **WA**

Defend Iraqi refugee rights

Wednesday June 25
6.30pm-8.30pm

Grimmond Room
Portcullis House, Westminster

Speakers:
John McDonnell MP
John Rees, Stop the War Coalition
Dashty Jamal, International Federation of Iraqi Refugees
Bob Tennant, Secretary GLATUC
Sawsan Salim, Kurdistan Refugee Women's Organisation
Milena Buyum, National Assembly Against Racism
Bahram Soroosh, International Federation of Iranian Refugees

Called by the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees

For further information, contact Dashty Jamal on 07734 704742 or Reza Moradi on 07931 866985

War on asylum seekers: the latest form of racism

Pete Firmin

Not a day goes by without a further attack by the media on asylum seekers, nor without some statement by the government as to how they are 'cracking down' on them.

While Britain is supposedly a multi-ethnic country with a raft of laws outlawing racism and discrimination, 'asylum seeker' has become a code word for 'foreigner', and comments that would not be made directly about black people in general can safely be directed at asylum seekers. Yet most asylum seekers are black, and the language used has direct parallels with that used against previous generations of immigrants – 'swamping', 'bringers of disease', 'criminals', etc.

The attacks are not led by the media, and even less by the far right, but by the Labour government, which has picked up where the Tories left off in both restricting the right to seek asylum and making life as difficult as possible for those who do exercise that right.

Britain is a signatory to the Geneva Convention of 1951 and subsequent protocols which provide protection for individual refugees, who are defined as 'any person who owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'. The convention also contains a strong prohibition on sending back refugees to places where they fear prosecution.

However, the convention leaves a lot of flexibility to governments to interpret it so as to admit or (more frequently) exclude particular individuals and groups of people. Refugees are increasingly expected, against the spirit of the convention and the guidelines of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, to provide 'proof' that their fear of prosecution is well founded. Despite the fact that the government exploits these loopholes more and more, both Jack Straw and David Blunkett, successive home secretaries, have talked of 'revising' the convention to escape its commitments.

When the government draws up 'white lists' of countries from which no asylum claims will be accepted, it breaches the convention's proclamation that asylum is an *individual* right. Similarly when it announces 'targets' for the deportation of a certain number of asylum seekers per year, it is denying the right of each individual to have their case considered on its merits.

The government has increasingly clamped down on the ability of asylum seekers even to reach this country to claim asylum, posting immigration officers at air and sea ports abroad. Agencies dealing with asylum seekers argue that it is now virtually impossible for asylum seekers to actually reach this country 'legally'; hence the increase in trafficking and in the numbers who attempt to smuggle themselves in to Britain in lorries, trains and planes.

Nor is there a great 'welcome' for those asylum seekers who do, despite the odds, manage to get here. Increasing numbers are detained while their asylum claims are assessed (including young children), and those not detained are forcibly dispersed to areas where they have no contacts, little legal advice and are faced with the hostility of locals. The government is attempting to stop those who do not apply for asylum immediately from receiving any benefits, which are set anyway at a level well below income support, the minimum which it is reckoned people need to live on. In addition, asylum seekers are banned from working while their claim is assessed, so that many resort either to undocumented working, leaving them open to super-exploitation by unscrupulous employers, or to begging, which has them pilloried by the populist press.

Asylum claims themselves are hardly treated seriously, with claimants having to fill out a massive form in English (a language they often don't understand), being asked for proof of persecution (torturers don't usually provide certificates saying what they have done to their victims) and proof of identification (something those fleeing a hostile state do not easily get). What evidence there is (such as of torture, provided by the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture) is often questioned or ignored. The flippancy with which asylum claims are treated was highlighted recently by Iranian refugee Abas Amini in Nottingham, who took the drastic step of sewing up his mouth and eyes. He had been granted asylum, but the Home Office decided to appeal on the grounds that it had not sent a lawyer to the hearing, despite the fact that it is trying to clamp down on the right of asylum claimants to appeal against judgement. In fact, this was the fifth time his hearing had been set, having to be cancelled three times because the Home Office sent the wrong translator. The court threw out the government's attempt to appeal and, after initial hesitation, he allowed the stitches to be removed, but his case was not untypical of how such claims are treated.

Asylum seekers who come from countries where it is widely accepted that there is massive state persecution of any opposition do not fare any better. It took a media outcry to stop the deportation of oppositionists to Zimbabwe, even though Britain was taking sanctions against the Mugabe government and the media was

full of his brutal treatment of the Movement for Democratic Change. The fate of some of those deported into the hands of Mugabe's police is still not known. At times this becomes almost farcical, such as when the Home Office decided that it was 'safe' for Iraqis to be returned, even though it could not in fact return them! Nor, of course, does the government recognise the connection between where it chooses to fight wars and the increase in those seeking asylum from those countries.

Once you start down the road of demonising asylum seekers, you continually have to find new ways of showing how 'tough' you are. Thus, a few days before the elections in May a group of asylum seekers was forcibly deported to Afghanistan even though the government's own advice is that this is not a safe country and those travelling outside Kabul should take an armed guard with them.

The government plays the 'numbers game' along with those sections of the media which every day produce their latest asylum 'horror' story. Hence the recent triumphant announcement that it had reduced by half the number of asylum claims. This is in fact totally meaningless, indicating either that the government was preventing people from claiming asylum – in contravention of the Geneva Convention – or that the numbers seeking asylum had simply dropped. Yet anything is seized on to show that the government is 'getting to grips' with the 'problem'.

The Home Affairs Select Committee played its part in the 'numbers game' when its report on 'removals' was latched onto by the populist media for its statement that the increase in the number of asylum seekers in the UK – from 4,223 in 1982 to 110,700 in 2002 – is 'unacceptable'. They argued: 'If allowed to continue unchecked, it could overwhelm the capacity of the receiving countries to cope, leading inevitably to social unrest. It could also, and there are signs this may already be happening, lead to a growing political backlash which will in turn lead to the election of extremist parties with extreme solutions.' As the *Glasgow Herald* headlined its report, 'Who needs the BNP when you've got New Labour?'.

It is precisely such reports and the actions and statements of the government which give the green light to the 'political backlash'. When the government says asylum seekers are a problem, then it is hardly surprising that sections of the media follow this up, or that people in some areas see the opening of a local hostel for asylum seekers as a 'problem', not least when there is no explanation by the Home Office as to why asylum seekers are here or why the hostel is necessary. The BNP has said many times that the *Daily Express* and Blunkett are their 'best recruiters', providing the propaganda which the fascists build on. Large demonstrations and campaigns have taken place against the opening of hostels and racist attacks are on the rise.

Some sections of the mainstream media – notably the *Independent* and the *Guardian/Observer* – make a serious effort to counteract the myths that circulate about asylum seekers. However, this was rather spoiled in the *Observer*'s case by its recent decision to run an article on its front page headlined 'Immigrants behind crime wave', reporting Chris Fox, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, as saying that much crime was due to asylum seekers and that numbers had reached 'tidal wave' proportions. This despite the fact that frequent statements from the police have, in fact, denied that asylum seekers are responsible for crime, and that, on the contrary, they are more often its victims.

Claims that the asylum system is 'in crisis' are only true if we accept that the numbers arriving are somehow 'unacceptable'. Yet they are small compared either to the total population of Britain or in comparison with the number of asylum seekers taken in by many other countries.

Much is made of the fact that many asylum seekers are 'bogus', having no real claim to persecution, and are in fact 'economic migrants'. Aside from the fact that the government's procedures make it impossible to tell (it does not, for instance, give figures for the number of asylum seekers whose claims are allowed on appeal, only those whose initial claim is accepted, giving a totally false picture), there is of course a grey area between seeking asylum and economic migration, but the way to deal with it would be to adopt an 'open borders' policy – scrapping all immigration controls. Such controls in themselves, and the arguments used to back them up, fuel racism.

The left and the unions are, of course, opposed to racism and at least to the most pernicious aspects of government asylum policy. Yet too often in the unions, like much else, this remains at the level of national policy without any serious attempt to counteract hostility among the membership. And too much of the left contents itself with articles denouncing racism and the government without getting its hands dirty with actual campaigning against them. Yet time and again it has been shown that if the arguments are made, then large sections of the labour movement, including the Labour Party, can be won to a position of opposition to the government's asylum policy. Unless such campaigning – linked to public campaigning to counteract the myths surrounding asylum – is stepped up, then the level of racism and the growth of the BNP will not be halted. **WA**

Justice for the Yarl's Wood defendants!

Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire is Europe's largest detention centre for asylum seekers – holding 900 men, women and children.

On February 14, 2002, Group 4 staff at Yarl's Wood manhandled a 55-year-old woman, pinned her to the ground, dragged her along the floor, then covered the window so other detainees couldn't see what was happening. The staff fled at the first sign of outrage from detainees. When a fire started, Group 4 denied access to police and firefighters until it was uncontrollable, but abandoned the detainees and left them to find their way out through the darkness, smoke and locked exits. The Home Office had decided not to install sprinklers in Yarl's Wood.

Thirteen detainees – some of whom were held for a year without being accused of any crime – have been charged with violent disorder and arson. Some of them were part of a detainees' committee which was attempting to gain improvements like adequate bed covers and cleaner conditions. The trial started on April 23, fourteen months after the fire, and is expected to last 12 to 16 weeks. Many defence witnesses have been deported.

What you can do:

- Raise the issue in your union, political organisation, etc.
- Write to the DPP, David Calvert-Smith QC, Crown Prosecution Service Headquarters, 50 Ludgate Hill, London EC4M 7EX, to demand that the charges are dropped and that there be a public enquiry into the events of February 14.
- Send donations to sustain the defendants and the campaign. Cheques should be made payable to 'Stop Arbitrary Detentions at Yarl's Wood' and marked 'Defendants Trial Support' on the back.
- Attend the Monday morning protests (9am-10am) outside Harrow Crown Court, Hailsham Drive, Harrow (nearest station Harrow and Wealdstone on the Bakerloo line and the Euston-Watford line).

For more information, contact the Campaign for Justice in the Yarl's Wood Trial, PO Box 304, Bedford MK42 9WX. Tel: 07786 517379. E-mail: sady_campaign@yahoo.co.uk

Murder by Appointment

The interim report of the investigation led by Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens into collusion between the British security forces and loyalist paramilitaries in the north of Ireland was published in April. **Charli Langford** takes a look at its findings

Sometime in late September 1987, Brian Nelson, the British agent who ran the West Belfast brigade of the loyalist Ulster Defence Association, found out that some of his operatives were close to identifying the British agent who effectively ran the IRA. Nelson's response was to finger Francisco Notarantonio as a more important IRA activist. Notarantonio – who had last been active in politics at the end of the Second World War – was shot dead in his bed on October 9, 1987.

Terry McDaid was shot dead on May 10, 1988. He was not politically active, but his brother Declan was a leading republican. Nelson had given the killers the wrong address. In 1989, a British army corporal and a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment were given 18-month suspended sentences after pleading guilty to giving documents to loyalists.

Liam McKee was killed on June 24, 1989. He was a name in Nelson's files. In 1992, another Ulster Defence Regiment soldier received a life sentence for passing information on McKee to the UDA.

On February 12, 1989, Patrick Finucane – a prominent civil rights solicitor who had defended many IRA members – was shot dead. Nelson provided the UDA with video footage of Finucane to help the assassins recognise their target. Another British agent, Ken Barrett, admitted on *Panorama* in 2002 that he had shot Finucane. Billy Stobie, the UDA man who provided the gun used to kill Finucane, was a British agent. He told his handler where the gun that was later used to kill Finucane was hidden. A third, currently unnamed, informer was also involved in the killing. All three claim that their police and army handlers took no steps to protect or warn Finucane.

On April 17 this year, a 15-page resumé of the Stevens report on collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and the 'security forces' – the police and the British army – was published. The full report of the four-year investigation runs to 3,000 pages and has an additional 176 attachments. There is clearly a huge amount still concealed – partly, it is said, to avoid prejudicing the trials of any individuals prosecuted as a result of it. Partly, no doubt, to protect secret military techniques and senior personnel. But what little has been released has been dynamite:

> 1.3: My Enquiries have highlighted collusion, the wilful failure to keep records, the absence of accountability, the withholding of intelligence and evidence, and the extreme of agents being involved in murder. . . .
>
> 2.18: A further aspect of my Enquiry was how the RUC dealt with threat intelligence. This included examination and intelligence of RUC records to determine whether both sides of the community were dealt with in equal measure. They were not.
>
> 3.1: Throughout my three Enquiries I recognised that I was being obstructed. This obstruction was cultural in nature and widespread within parts of the Army and the RUC.

The 'obstruction' Stevens faced included having his headquarters and all the documentation it contained being burned down. The report describes how some witnesses had to be interviewed several times 'because of the failure to provide complete information the first time of asking'. There were a number of almost comic incidents – Brigadier Gordon Kerr, commander of the army's covert Force Research Unit (FRU), had ordered Brian Nelson's targeting notes on hundreds of IRA suspects to be destroyed to avoid Stevens finding them. Unfortunately for him, Nelson had already sent copies to loyalist death squads and these Stevens eventually discovered, complete with Nelson's incriminating fingerprints.

Documentation from the army was often very late and Stevens says his enquiry, which is continuing, will investigate which senior officers in the army and the Ministry of Defence sanctioned the policy to disrupt the investigation. This investigation is likely to include the questioning of past and present government ministers.

Much of the published material deals with the activities of the FRU. Martin Ingram – a pseudonym – was a British soldier who worked with the FRU between 1987 and 1991, but who pulled out of being a Stevens witness because he felt that his family would not be sufficiently protected. He confirms what Stevens says about British collusion with loyalist armed groups. He also points out that the police have Home Office guidelines for running agents – even though the RUC seems to have habitually ignored them – while no such constraints exist on the army. In contrast, the ethos of the FRU was to 'take the fight to the enemy'. Ingram says that he regrets not asking his senior officers to clarify this, but he adds, tellingly, 'in my heart I knew what they meant'.

In fact, the FRU went much further than simply colluding with loyalist death squads. They maintained a hands-off policy that allowed such mass killers as John Adair and Winky Dodds to remain at large, targeting some IRA activists, but mainly uninvolved Catholics. Nelson's influence in providing information and advice enabled him to rise to the post of senior intelligence officer and under his direction the West Belfast UDA was transformed from an incompetent and ineffective gang into a very efficient murder machine. In effect they became the FRU's – i.e., the British army's – unaccountable assassination squad.

The Stevens report is seen among nationalists as confirmation of what they have always suspected. Charlotte Notorantonio said: 'For days before the shooting, the army was everywhere. Just before my father died the soldiers, the helicopters and the barricades disappeared. It was as if they were clearing the way. And just after the shooting we found an army map in the hallway. It must have been dropped by one of the gunmen.' Such evidence is circumstantial, but strong. There are other, uncommented, pointers: why, for example, do republicans have Kalashnikovs while loyalist groups are frequently armed with similar weapons to those used by the RUC? One of the two guns used to kill Patrick Finucane was stolen from a UDR barracks. One very specific result of the report is that it will make it very hard for the now-constitutional nationalists like Gerry Adams and Martin MacGuinness to encourage nationalist participation in the Police Service of Northern Ireland – the RUC's successor.

Unionist politicians are already trying to undermine the report, using the 'few bad apples' technique and appealing for support for the security services who 'defended their country from terrorists for decades'. The problem for them, of course, is how to explain how these few bad apples managed to stay in place for so many years, and how far the canker has spread. Charlotte Notarantonio's comment shows how the few bad apples can have toleration and freedom to operate. There is a lot of evidence from events – the 'shoot to kill' policy, the summary execution of captured IRA members, the casual anti-nationalist chauvinism of British soldiers at checkpoints – that the few bad apples were in

fact merely an extreme expression of a very standard police and army attitude to the nationalist population.

That poisoned attitude has also spread to the media. Sean O'Callahan (ex-IRA) writes in the *Daily Telegraph* of April 18: 'In death, Finucane has been wrapped in a halo . . . of course [he] should not have been murdered . . . . But he was not the blameless "human rights" lawyer beloved of nationalist Ireland and the quasi-liberal chattering classes in the UK . . .' It is hard to read 'should not have been murdered' without hearing the quiet 'but let's all be glad he was'.

What makes the Stevens report so ground-breaking is that it ever appeared at all. The surprise is not that such activities go on, but that they are admitted. Tales abound of similar policies among oppressor countries throughout history. The US is fairly open about the 55 'deck of cards' Iraqis whose murder it sanctions, and George Bush wants Osama bin Laden 'dead or alive'. The Israelis kill Palestinians, and now their supporters in the International Solidarity Movement, at will, knowing their criminal government will support them. And back in the six-county police state in 1984, Lord Justice Gibson acquitted three RUC officers of the murder of three IRA volunteers by commending them for bringing the volunteers to 'the final court of justice'.

Perhaps the reason for the Stevens investigation is damage limitation. The Bloody Sunday inquiry is revealing much about the role of the British army against nationalists. Already in the report blame is being pushed down the chain – something went wrong, the FRU was a rogue unit, outside effective control. The question to ask is: did the work of the FRU further the aims of the British state? Clearly it did, in bringing about the killing of so many of its enemies. But the greatest evidence lies in whom it did *not* kill. In 1987, Brian Nelson intervened to prevent the West Belfast UDA killing two people. One was the British agent now publicly known as Stakeknife. The other, far more important, was the nationalist the British could do business with, the president of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams. **WA**

Limited gains for Unison left

Andrew Berry

The result of the Unison NEC elections was announced on June 4. While the left has increased its presence on the NEC from 10 to 14 out of 60, this really should be classed as a defeat.

This was the first time that the United Left has stood in the NEC elections and the result saw gains in London, where an additional United Left member was elected. It also saw *Briefing* supporter Jon Rogers elected, who could become an important voice of the left.

Unfortunately the result also saw the loss of SWP member Mark New and the independent John Owen. The SWP as a whole did very badly, averaging about 32 per cent of the vote when the left as a whole averaged 41 per cent. Only one SWP supporter got elected, the popular Yunus Bakhsh. SWP candidates chose to emphasise their involvement in the SWP ahead of activity in the union.

It was particularly disappointing that the independent Frances Kelly was unable to beat New Labour candidate Bob Oram in the North West, and that Socialist Party member Glenn Kelly just lost out with 48 per cent of the vote in the Local Government seat.

The only United Left member to win in a national service group seat was AWL member Kate Ahrens, who will be an asset for the left on the NEC. Two members of the United Left, Socialist Party member Raph Parkinson and SWP member Bea Belgrave, won the additional member seats which are reserved for black members and voted for by all Unison members.

While overall it was a disappointing result, some of those elected are key to the left and could make a significant difference. The United Left needs to learn the lesson that proven activists and those who emphasise their union activities can do well. We also need to look at getting the vote out – only five per cent of the membership voted, which suggests that the left's campaign made little impact. Although the total number of United Left supporters elected was small, the left candidates averaged over 40 per cent of the votes cast, suggesting that we can do better in the future. But for the next two years, we will have to settle for quality rather than quantity.

Nursery nurses strike against low pay

Lizzy Ali
Tower Hamlets Unison

Nursery nurses working in education in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets have voted for indefinite strike action from June 13. The ballot authorising action was 97 per cent in favour. They have been fighting for over three years to have their pay reflect the growing number of duties they are required to take on.

As part of their claim, they agreed to have their jobs evaluated, and for their job descriptions to be changed to reflect the current duties they carry out. When nursery nurse jobs were evaluated it was found that their current salary did not reflect what they did. The outcome was a recommendation for nursery nurses to be upgraded on the Local Government scale, and for them to receive rises of up to 50 per cent.

Although it takes two years' full-time training to become a qualified nursery nurse, it remains a traditionally low-paid and overwhelmingly female profession. Even at the top of their scale, nursery nurses in Tower Hamlets earn less than £16,700. The role of the nursery nurse has changed so much that in many circumstances they find themselves doing exactly the same job as a teacher but receive none of the benefits. They have no recognised career structure and, unlike teachers, they cannot receive extra pay for taking on posts of responsibility. Teachers, for example, who take on the responsibility for co-ordinating a core curricular subject, like maths or science, get an extra point on their salary.

But instead of honouring the outcome of the job evaluation, Labour-controlled Tower Hamlets Education Authority has tried to make a nonsense of its findings. It agreed to pay nursery nurses at the higher rate, but only for 39 instead of the 52 weeks that nursery nurses have always understood their contracts to cover. The effect would be to wipe out almost all the increase nursery nurses are due. At the same time, they are proposing increasing working hours from 32.5 to 35 per week, and have failed to address the lack of a career structure.

Send messages of support to: Chris Connolly, Assistant Secretary, Tower Hamlets Unison, Unison Branch Office, York Hall, Old Ford Road, London E2 9LN.

WA

PCS elections

Clear out the right wing!

Richard Price
Office for National Statistics Group Executive Committee Chair (in a personal capacity)

Members of the 290,000-strong Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) – the main civil service union – have a major opportunity to remove the right-wing leadership in this year's elections to the National Executive Committee. At present, the so-called Moderate group and its allies in the Inland Revenue section control a majority of the NEC. Under former general secretary Barry Reamsbottom, this group has consistently undermined union policy, sabotaged industrial action and refused to lead any struggle against privatisation.

Claiming to be a Labour-friendly faction in the union, the Moderates are in some respects even further to the right than the most Blairite sections of New Labour. Their contempt for union democracy reached a new low when they tried to prevent elected general secretary Mark Serwotka from taking office last year. Following an outcry across the trade union movement, a national campaign among PCS's membership and a court case that cost the union tens of thousands of pounds, the coup was defeated and Reamsbottom was refused leave to appeal against the judgement. (See Workers Action No.17)

Although there were sections of the membership that saw the struggle as merely 'infighting', overall the outcome heavily discredited the right and has led to a realignment within the union. One effect of the coup was to split the centre-left Membership First grouping. The right wing of Membership First which supported the coup has mostly thrown in its lot with the Moderates, while those opposed to the coup, including Hugh Lanning, who was defeated in the 2000 general secretary election, have formed a new grouping called PCS Democrats.

The upshot has been the formation of a joint slate between the main left grouping in the union, Left Unity, and PCS Democrats. While both groups have retained the right to put out their own election material, a joint slate means that the possibility of defeating the Moderates is a real possibility.

Much will depend on the turnout. The left in PCS, and in its predecessor union CPSA, has long controlled the floor of conference by a factor of 3 or 4 to 1, but it has been weak when it comes to delivering NEC elections votes. The current NEC was elected on a 12 per cent turnout. Although the left in the shape of Mark Serwotka and Janice Godrich control the two main officer posts of general secretary and president, the right-wing majority of the NEC uses every trick in the book to prevent them from progressing union policy. Two NEC meetings in the last year have been unable to be held because of a co-ordinated boycott by the right which made them inquorate.

The onus then is on the left to deliver a good turnout. The higher the turnout, the better for the left. The joint Left Unity/PCS Democrats slate is as follows:

President:
Janice Godrich – Department for Work and Pensions, Glasgow South

Vice Presidents:
Sue Bond – Equal Opportunities Commission
Steve Cawkwell – DWP Hull and East Riding
Kathy Liddell – Inland Revenue Liverpool
Glenys Morris – Lord Chancellor's Department London Courts

General category NEC members:
Ian Albert – DWP Central Branch
Rod Bacon.– DWP Hampshire and Isle of Wight
Mark Baker – DETR Bristol and South West
Chris Baugh – Land Registry Lancs and Lytham
Roland Biosah – DWP Lambeth and Southwark
Sue Bond – Equal Opportunities Commission
Bob Bowman – Ministry of Defence Central London
Alan Brown – DWP Glasgow North
Steve Cawkwell – DWP Hull and East Riding
Alan Dennis – Ministry of Defence Central London
Mary Ferguson – DWP Newcastle Central
Janice Godrich – DWP Glasgow South
Martin John – DWP HQ Sheffield
Kevin Kelly – Land Registry Durham
Marion Lloyd – Department for Education and Skills, Sheffield Head Office
John McInally – DWP Avon
Carol Massey – DETR London
John Medhurst – Department of Culture, Media and Sport
Peter Middleman – Crown Prosecution Service National
John Moloney – DETR London
Glenys Morris – Lord Chancellor's Department, London Courts
Chris Morrison – EDS Telford
Victoria Steeples – Office of Fair Trading
Lionel Welch – Amey Comax
Rob Williams – DWP Central London
Danny Williamson – Siemens Business Services, Glasgow
Garry Winder – LCD Court Service HQ
Sevi Yesildalli – Metropolitan Police Area 4 South West

WA

CWU elections

Postal workers – a shift to the left?

Pete Firmin
West End Amalgamated branch, CWU

The defeat of John Keggie, deputy general secretary (postal), in the recent Communication Workers Union elections provides postal workers with some hope that they can withstand the current onslaught on their conditions by Royal Mail.

Keggie was the champion of 'deals' with management with little gain for the workforce. Described as a 'Blairite' by the media, it was Keggie who pushed through (re-balloting until getting the 'right' result) the 'Way Forward' agreement on conditions several years ago, which seemed to be based on the levelling down of conditions to the worst rather than a levelling up. It was Keggie who fronted up annual 'pay campaigns' which produced majorities for strike action, only to produce (very late) settlements for a few more percentage points. In addition, he sat on the Labour Party's NEC, although he rarely turned up, and only once – under vehement protest – supported the union's policy against the Labour leadership.

Keggie's opponent, Dave Ward, won – by 19,400 votes to 16,800 – primarily because he is not Keggie, even though he has been involved, to a lesser extent, in many of the deals Keggie has negotiated.

The issue which blew up during the election campaign was the claim by London postal workers for an increase in London weighting. Frustrated with the delay in getting Keggie and the national union to take the London weighting issue seriously, London branches – through the Divisional Committee – have submitted a claim to Royal Mail for £4,000 a year (at present it is £2,700 for Inner London and £1,300 for Outer). Keggie claimed this was an attempt to break with national pay bargaining, which is untrue, and refused to back the claim, despite a mountain of evidence – including in reports commissioned by the CWU head office – that the cost of living in London, and some other towns, is significantly higher than the average.

Some of Keggie's supporters tried to make the London weighting claim *the* issue of the election, circulating material claiming that London officers wanted the break-up of the national union and calling for them to be expelled. They clearly hoped to help Keggie keep his £60,000 a year post by mobilising on an 'anti-London' basis. That they failed is a healthy sign that the majority of postal workers will not be used in this way. At less than 20 per cent, the turnout for the election was low, and while this is generally a bad thing in terms of the membership's involvement in union elections, it does show how little effect the black propaganda from Keggie's core supporters had.

While Dave Ward is certainly no revolutionary – if anything he appears to be resolutely unpolitical – he has been supportive of the campaign for an increase in London weighting, even though it could not have come at a worse time for him in terms of the election – there is little doubt that he would have won by a considerably larger margin without the divisions artificially created around this.

The task now is not only to ensure that Dave Ward carries out his commitment to support the London weighting claim now that he has been elected (it has the support of Billy Hayes, the general secretary, too), but more importantly that serious efforts are made to overcome the geographical divisions in the union which can only serve the interests of Royal Mail. Beyond the ongoing issue of low pay, there is the bigger issue of the future of the postal industry, and jobs and conditions within it. The intention is to make postal workers pick up the bill for the deregulation imposed by the government, which means Royal Mail competing with private firms which can 'cherry pick' lucrative areas of business rather than run a universal service, and for the massive losses made in recent years by Royal Mail.

Royal Mail's scheme for getting out of its current difficulties is to introduce 'tailored delivery service' (TDS), scrapping the second delivery and making all delivery rounds three-and-a-half hours. The CWU and Royal Mail have a draft agreement, which the CWU leadership is putting to conference, which involves a 20 per cent cut in duty hours. The 'carrot', designed to win acceptance for this, is that this involves the loss of 'only' 12,000 jobs instead of the original 15,000, and a productivity deal which would give workers a £20 increase when their office's staff cuts are met and a lump sum of up to £1,000 for cuts of over 15 per cent. Unfortunately, Dave Ward has been as involved in drawing up this agreement as has John Keggie. Management have already been trying to introduce TDS in many offices, while negotiations have been protracted and the national union has prevaricated, pushing for small amendments to the draft agreement. Just as the union only protests at the *way* deregulation is carried through, the principle of opposing the sale of jobs seems to have been forgotten along the way.

In the NEC elections, on the postal side, the left more or less retained its position on a divided executive, in the engineering section the left maintained its domination, but in the clerical section there was a setback in losing one of the two sitting members. An issue on the engineering side, however, is that one sitting member, John East, stood, and got elected, despite having put himself forward for the Broad Left (BL) slate and been rejected. East had supported the introduction of Self Managed Teams (SMT), a productivity scheme, in BT, and been punished by BL members for doing so. However, the BL (almost exclusively engineering) has seen fit not to take action against East for standing against the slate, even though his election could have prevented a member of the slate from getting elected (he only succeeded because another member of the slate was elected to an officers' post), but only to draw up rules for future years. At the same time, the Engineering Executive BL caucus has maintained its suspension of Maria Exall from the caucus on the grounds that she 'broke discipline' in opposing SMT on the executive – in line with BL policy! Clearly the concept of accountability is one that is alien to many executive members. **WA**

Foundation hospitals

Blair paves the way for private rip-off

Mike Calvert

Labour's proposals to open up NHS hospitals to the private sector received their second reading in parliament on May 7. Through the establishment of foundation hospitals, the government aims to end the system of centralised control and accountability, enabling individual hospitals to raise finance from the private sector and determine their own wage rates and clinical priorities.

The proposals, contained in the Health and Social Care Bill, are a clear break with the system of universal health provision established by the post-Second World War Labour government and are widely recognised as such. Yet the measures were passed by 304 votes to 230, after a rebel amendment was defeated by 297 votes to 117.

The government's victory was even greater than the numbers suggest since most of those voting against the main motion were Tories complaining that the government's plans did not go far enough in privatising healthcare. The Liberal Democrats said they favoured the plans in principle but objected to certain aspects of the bill.

Within the Labour Party, just a meagre 65 MPs voted against the government on the amendment, and even this fell by more than half, to 31 MPs, in the vote on the bill proper.

For weeks the media had claimed Blair would face an unprecedented rebellion by his own party. One hundred and thirty MPs had signed a motion against the bill, while the left-wing Socialist Campaign Group MPs and trade union leaders had called on Labour dissidents to 'wreck' the plans.

In the event, although it was the third biggest Commons revolt of Tony Blair's premiership, the number of Labour MPs voting against the government was well down on the 139 who had opposed the war against Iraq, and even down on the 67 who had voted against cuts in state benefits back in 1997.

During the debate, former foreign secretary Robin Cook, who a few weeks earlier had resigned as leader of the House of Commons in protest at the war on Iraq, came to the government's aid – insisting that the handing over of hospitals to foundation trusts was not privatisation and did not mean 'abandoning our socialist principles'.

The media claimed that the retreat was due to extensive pressure on potential rebels by government whips, unease at being seen to vote with the Conservatives, or government concessions, in particular, the decision to set aside an additional £200 million to enable more hospitals to reach foundation status and so counter the charge that the proposals would create a 'two-tier' health system. Above all, it was a reflection of Tony Blair's new standing in the aftermath of his 'successful' war against Iraq. Many were simply reluctant to go against a prime minister who had built up such a level of prestige and influence, the press declared.

As the centrepiece of the social policy reforms implemented by the 1945-51 Labour government, the NHS was deemed to be an example of egalitarianism in practice, guaranteeing healthcare to all regardless of their financial status and free at the point of use.

But the dream could never match the reality. Not even the most egalitarian structure could compensate for, much less overcome, the health problems generated by a system built on social inequality. The private drug companies have continued to milk the system and add enormous costs in terms of taxation, while the rich can still utilise private treatment that occupies a parasitic relationship to the NHS – using NHS-trained staff and often renting access to NHS facilities.

But under conditions where prior to 1948 more than 50 per cent of Britain's population had no access to healthcare, the NHS was correctly regarded as a significant advance and eminently preferable to the system of healthcare in the US, for example, which was seen as outdated and barbaric.

Pointing to the poor state of public healthcare provision, New Labour has sought to ridicule any notion of equality as simply meaning the right of all to suffer equally, and has actively encouraged the use of private health insurance schemes. The plan has not been a success. In a country with one of the lowest wage rates in Europe, the high premiums demanded by the private sector are simply unaffordable for most. The private sector covers just ten per cent of the population. While some are forced to seek treatment for particular conditions privately, they remain dependent on the NHS for virtually every other aspect of health provision.

Through measures such as the creation of foundation healthcare trusts, New Labour is opening the door to the take-over of NHS hospitals by the private sector. Blair has stated that failure to implement his health reforms would be a mistake of 'historic proportions'.

In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's 'right to buy' your council house policy symbolised her government's determination to 'roll back the frontiers of the state' and inaugurate a new era of 'popular capitalism' and private ownership of everything from industry to housing. Blair's healthcare bill testifies to his willingness to tackle areas that even Thatcher was unable to touch. **WA**

Defend George Galloway

The attack on Galloway by the press and the Labour leadership is an attack on the entire anti-war movement, says **Pete Firmin**

On May 6, David Triesman, general secretary of the Labour Party, suspended George Galloway MP from party membership under the catch-all charge of 'bringing the party into disrepute'.

Action against Galloway was hardly unexpected – sections of the media and Blair loyalists in the Labour Party had been pushing for action to be taken against Galloway for several weeks, especially following his interview with Abu Dhabi TV on March 28 in which he said: 'Given that I believe this invasion is illegal, it follows that the only people fighting legally are the Iraqis, who are defending their country. The best thing British troops can do is to refuse to obey illegal orders.' In the same interview Galloway said that Bush and Blair had 'fallen on Iraq like wolves'. The baying for Galloway's blood intensified when the *Daily Telegraph* reported on April 22 that it had 'discovered' documents in the looted offices of Iraq's foreign ministry which, it claimed, showed that Galloway had received £375,000 a year from the Iraqi regime.

What was unexpected was the method and timing of the disciplinary action. It had been widely predicted that the issue would be placed before the party's full National Executive Committee on June 10. While Triesman is empowered to take such action 'in exceptional circumstances', the only rational explanation for proceeding in this fashion, at this time, is that it was intended to pre-empt and force the hand of the NEC. The delay can be explained by the fact that Triesman waited until a few days *after* the local council and Welsh assembly and Scottish parliament elections in order to avoid even further damage to the party's vote from those opposed to its involvement in the war on Iraq.

Ostensibly, the action has nothing to do with the allegation in the *Telegraph* and other papers that Galloway had personally taken money from Iraq. But it is difficult to believe that Triesman and the Labour hierarchy don't regard these allegations as making it easier to take disciplinary action – some who might defend Galloway's right to make his reported statements would balk at supporting someone who took money from Saddam. Triesman claims he took action because of the many complaints he had received from party members, but he has been unwilling to disclose numbers, or how many have written in support of Galloway.

Galloway has threatened legal action for libel against the *Telegraph* for its allegations, but in the meantime they have rather run aground, with the *Mail on Sunday*, which is no friend of the anti-war movement, saying that papers it had bought in Baghdad for £1,500 are forgeries – identical documents to the ones printed by the *Christian Science Monitor* as 'proof' of Galloway's corruption, and similar to those used by the *Telegraph*. Meanwhile, the Charity Commission is investigating the affairs of the Mariam Appeal, a campaign initiated by Galloway, even though the appeal does not claim to be a charity and is not registered as such! The Charity Commission investigation was announced by Lord Goldsmith, the government's Attorney General, who is said to be considering whether to allow a private prosecution from Rupert Murdoch against Galloway for treason on the basis of his reported remarks. This is the same Goldsmith who told Blair that an invasion of Iraq would be legal, a piece of advice disputed by many other lawyers.

It is widely believed that whether or not Galloway is eventually expelled from the party, the main motivation for suspending him is to prevent him from standing for selection for the next general election. The Glasgow constituencies are being reorganised in line with the reduction in Scottish seats at Westminster, and Galloway's Kelvin constituency will disappear. While the Blairites originally hoped that Galloway would not be selected for the new seat, it has become increasingly obvious that he would win. Hence the move to prevent him standing.

Suspicion that Triesman's move is an attempt to block an NEC discussion is backed up by the fact that the issue has been given to the 'Disputes Panel' to investigate, with eventual referral to the National Constitutional Committee for any action to be taken, thus hoping to bypass the NEC altogether.

All this makes a mockery, of course, of Blair's pious claim, in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, to 'respect the views' of those against the war. On the contrary, the opportunity was seized to attack the most prominent opponent of the war. Through Galloway it is hoped to damage the whole anti-war movement and cow the opposition within the Labour Party at all levels.

Double standards are the order of the day here. While the accusation of 'bringing the party into disrepute' has been used in a similar way in some previous instances, the exceptions are also remarkable. Many centre around one man, Peter Mandelson, friend and confidante of Blair. Mandelson was not suspended from the party either for his failure to disclose a loan from Geoffrey Robinson, or for his role in the Hinduja passport affair. More recently, he spoke to journalists about how an 'obsessive' Chancellor had outmanoeuvred Blair on the euro, which was subsequently headline news in all the media. If 'bringing the party into disrepute' means anything at all, this would seem to be an example, but Blair has not even brought himself to criticise Mandelson for his remarks, let alone discipline him.

While Galloway has been tireless in campaigning against the war, he has not always been the easiest of people to associate with. His comments in 1994 on Iraqi TV, greeting Saddam with 'Sir, I salute your strength, your courage, and your indefatigability', and his lack of (or at best muted) criticism of the brutality of Saddam's regime and its treatment of any opponents, particularly the Kurds, have allowed the pro-war elements plenty of ammunition to attack him and, by implication, the whole anti-war movement. Galloway has freely admitted having his political activities financed by the governments of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and by a Jordanian businessman with strong links to the former Ba'athist regime in Iraq. His expensive tastes increase the target area. Nor has he helped his case – or those in the Labour Party working to defend him – by publicly saying, on several occasions now – that he would stand as an independent if the Labour Party excluded him as a candidate at the next election. This alone has been sufficient for the bureaucracy to expel people in the past.

But those in the anti-war movement who are reluctant to defend Galloway for any of the above reasons miss the point. Galloway is not being witch-hunted for his particular stance on Saddam's regime (one shared by some others in the anti-war movement) or for any flaws in his personal behaviour. Triesman is explicit that the suspension is only because of Galloway's reported remarks – in other words, Galloway is clearly being attacked as a representative of the anti-war movement.

The suspension is 'pending investigation', but one wonders what sort of investigation could be held. Galloway's remarks are a matter of record – he does not dispute that he made them; indeed, he defends them. So any 'investigation' is either a sham excuse or would need to look at whether Galloway's remarks were justified, and the only way that could be done would be to have Goldsmith's

legal opinion (which has not even been published in full) scrutinised by a panel of independent lawyers, something Blair would never allow. Even then, Galloway only called on soldiers to disobey illegal orders, something required of them since the Nuremburg trials under international law.

Clearly, the whole case against Galloway is a frame-up, designed to intimidate the anti-war movement and to limit the right of all Labour Party members to criticise the government. In this latter respect, Galloway ought to receive the support of even those who supported the war but who claim to support the right of free debate in the party. The question of whether Galloway's views reflect those of party members is a matter for the selection procedure, not bureaucratic measures.

Many CLPs and trade union bodies have already come out in defence of Galloway, calling for the lifting of the suspension. He has the overwhelming support of his own CLP and many MPs. Significantly, Tony Woodley, the newly elected general secretary of the TGWU, has spoken out strongly in support of Galloway. It is to be hoped that those trade unions which have representatives on Labour's NEC are putting pressure on them to back a lifting of the suspension – all too often union representatives have ignored their union's policy and have instead backed the party leadership.

WA

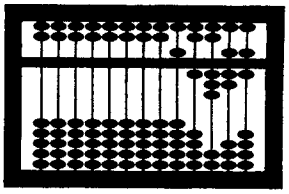
NEC debate stifled

About 60 people lobbied Labour's NEC meeting on June 10 in defence of George Galloway, but inside the meeting supporters of the party leadership prevented any serious discussion and vote on the issue by moving 'next business' after just two contributions.

Only four NEC members (Ann Black, Steve Pickering of the GMB, Mark Seddon and Christine Shawcroft) voted against this procedural motion, while Diana Holland of the TGWU abstained. Those who voted not to hear any more debate included Shahid Malik and the representatives of Unison and the GPMU, while John Keggie of the CWU, Mick Cash of the RMT, and Jimmy Elsbie of the TGWU were not at the meeting, despite their unions having a policy to defend Galloway.

This means that the issue remains for the present with the party's Disputes Committee. Defenders of Galloway need to step up the pressure, not least by demanding that union representatives attend and vote in line with their union's policy.

FIGURING IT OUT



WEALTH, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY: The gap between the rich and the poor has grown under Labour. It is now the largest it has been for 13 years, and is greater than it was in the 1980s. The average income for the richest 20 per cent of households was £62,900 in 2001-02 compared with £3,500 for those in the poorest 20 per cent. After adjustments for tax and benefits, the average income of the top 20 per cent reduced to £44,800, while the poorest rose to £10,500.

A report in May for Income Data Services showed that chief executives of FTSE 100 companies received, on average, an 11.2 per cent pay rise last year despite falling share prices and depressed corporate profits. Of 257 directors surveyed, 55 earned more than £1m per year. According to another report, top bosses' pay rose by 30 per cent in the past year. Meanwhile, the average wage has risen by 26 per cent since 1997. But while the fattest cats just keep getting fatter, lower down the City feeding chain things aren't quite so rosy. According to the *Financial Times*, average pay at City firms has fallen by 16.5 per cent to £103,502 in the past two years because of the weak stock market.

A survey of disposable income shows the Cheshire town of Tatton on top. Once purchasing power was taken into account, the average income of £29,303 in Tatton was worth £41,506 – higher than Sheffield Hallam (£41,289) and Kensington and Chelsea (£40,951). Many employers continue to pay below the minimum wage. Wales and the North-East are said to be the worst offending parts of Britain.

ETHNICITY AND INEQUALITY: According to the 2001 census, the non-white population of Britain (black, Asian and mixed race people) numbers just under four million out of the total population of 58.7 million. Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups are twice as likely to be unemployed, half as likely to own their home and run double the risk of poor health, compared with whites. The proportion of Muslim children living in overcrowded accommodation is more than three times the national average, and they are twice as likely to live in a house without central heating.

CHANGING FAMILIES: Census figures show that nearly one in four children in England and Wales lives with one parent. Of 11.7 million dependent children, 2,672,000 were in lone parent families.

COUNCIL TAX: The average council tax bill has doubled over the past ten years from £568 to £1,102, far outstripping inflation. The highest council tax bill is in Tony Blair's constituency of Sedgefield, with an average Band D charge of £1,294. The lowest is Westminster at £570. Pensioner households spend an average 5.6 per cent of their income on Council Tax, more than twice as much as the average 2.6 per cent spent by non-pensioner households.

ECONOMY: Employment in Britain has risen at its fastest rate in more than two years to 29,559,000 in the first quarter of this year – an increase of 283,000 compared with the same period in 2002. Jobs in the public sector have risen by 104,590 during this period. The UK economy is predicted to grow at two per cent this year – down from previous forecasts of 2.9 per cent.

Manufacturing continues to decline in relative importance. It now accounts for just 17 per cent of GDP compared with 30 per cent in 1973, and employs four million people. However, it continues to account for 60 per cent of total export sales.

China has overtaken Britain in the league of trading nations, pushing Britain down to sixth place, according to the World Trade Organisation. China's exports leapt by 22 per cent in 2002, compared with an increase of only one per cent in British exports, which struggled under a high valued pound.

CONSUMER DEBT: Consumer debt in Britain is spiralling. In February it totalled £844 billion, up 13.7 per cent over the year. By March, the figure had risen to £893 billion. This level of debt is the equivalent of £39,000 for every household in the UK. Mortgage equity withdrawal was said to account for over half of new borrowing. In March, credit card borrowing rose by £406 million – up from £181 million in February and the largest monthly increase since May 2000.

HOUSE PRICES AND MORTGAGES: The number of applications for first time mortgages is at a 30-year low. In the first three months of this year, first time buyers accounted for 31 per cent of the market – the lowest since records began in 1969. In the 1990s, they accounted for around 50 per cent of the mortgage market.

EMIGRATION: Nearly 300,000 people emigrated from Britain in 2000, the most recent year for which statistics are available.

MORTALITY: According to the World Health Organisation, four times as many people are killed world-wide in road traffic accidents as are killed in war, and more commit suicide than are murdered.

'Empiricist'

Local elections

Drift to the right continues

Bob Wood

In contrast to Scotland and Wales, the left can take little or no comfort from the results of the local elections that took place across most of England in May.

As the Labour Party lost more than 800 council seats, both the Tories and the Liberal Democrats gained ground, the Tories by more than 500 and the Lib Dems by about 200. The rightward drift in English politics continued, fuelled by a whole raft of government policies, not least Blunkett's assault on asylum seekers, aided and abetted by most of the press. In tandem with a lame Conservative Party, the other main gainer in the elections was the British National Party. Labour lost control of more than 20 councils, including Birmingham and Coventry, and gained control of just three, including Sheffield.

Outvoted

Those who have argued that the drastic move to the right inaugurated by Blair and New Labour created a vacuum on the left have been proved spectacularly wrong. On the contrary, Blair has managed to move the political centre dramatically to the right. Everywhere, the BNP outvoted the candidates fielded by the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative by a wide margin.

The BNP gained 11 more seats, including in Burnley where it gained five to become the second largest party on the local council. The isolated success of the Socialist Alliance Against the War in gaining a seat in Preston relied on anti-war sentiment among the large local Asian population, and bore no relation to the performance of the SA in general.

The results in Leeds were more or less representative of the results across the country, so it is worthwhile looking at how the various candidates and parties performed there. Labour lost five seats, including that of the leader of the council. The Tories overtook the Liberals to become the official opposition.

But the big success story of the night was the BNP, who stood in eight wards and gained an average of over 500 votes. In Richmond Hill, a traditional Labour stronghold based around a rundown council estate with a myriad of social problems, the BNP came second in the poll. Elsewhere in the city, though, their support seemed to come from areas which normally vote Tory: for example, in Beeston, where their greatest support was from the most prosperous part of the ward.

On the left, candidates were stood by the Green Party, the Alliance for Green Socialism (Stop War), the Socialist Alliance Against the War, and Socialist Alternative.

The Greens have all three councillors in one ward, and their sitting member romped home by a huge margin, an achievement based on years of solid work in the local community. In the other 15 wards they contested, their results were more modest, with an average of about 250 votes.

The Alliance for Green Socialism used to be known as the Left Alliance, and are a group based largely in the Leeds North East constituency. They have their origins in the Labour Party, having been formed after the failure of the NEC to endorse Liz Davies as the parliamentary candidate and the suspension of the CLP a few years ago. Apart from one ward where the former Labour councillor consistently gets around a thousand votes every election (about a quarter of the poll), they averaged 140 in the other five wards that they contested.

The Socialist Alliance stood in four wards, and almost incredibly in two of them against declared Labour anti-war candidates. Their intervention cannot be said to have harmed Labour to any great degree, though. The average vote gained by Socialist Alliance candidates was only just over a hundred, and in every case they came bottom of the poll. None of the candidates they fielded had stood before, or had any substantial record of involvement in local community campaigns.

Socialist Alternative (the electoral label of the Socialist Party) stood just one candidate, who scored just over 200 votes, a slight improvement over last time.

Disaffected

What lessons can be drawn from these results? First, the re-invented and besuited BNP needs to be taken seriously. Their social base varies from the disaffected and alienated of the inner city to the more affluent Tory suburbs, and is not limited to what one leading SWP member described as 'scum'. Nearly 60 years after the end of the Second World War, their demonisation as Nazis by the Anti-Nazi League is no longer an adequate response. Within the party and the unions we need to argue for policies that meet the needs and fears of potential BNP supporters, restoring the welfare state and providing jobs at decent rates of pay.

Decline

Inner-city pork barrel regeneration schemes that target aid to particular groups and rely on voluntary organisations must be rejected in favour of approaches that benefit working class people as a whole. The physical regeneration of buildings and streets in decaying inner cities does nothing to change the underlying social and economic causes of decline.

Years of undisputed control of town halls by Labour councillors have often led to arrogance and patronage, with the Labour group cut off from both party members and their electorate. Increasingly, voters are rejecting simple party loyalty and turning to independent or party based community activists. The remarkable success of health campaigners in Wyre Forest is probably the best known example, but the Greens and the Socialist Party have both learnt the lesson to some extent. The left in the Labour Party must also learn that there is no alternative to patient and consistent work in the community if working class political representation is to be re-established.

WA

Scottish elections

Has the SSP broken the mould?

Andrew Berry

The election of six Scottish Socialist Party members to the Scottish parliament has been seen as a great breakthrough by the left press. But in the cold light of day just how great is the SSP's victory?

The election system for the Scottish parliament is a form of proportional representation that gives candidates a chance of being elected on a small vote by having two classes of MSP. Seventy-three MSPs are elected at a constituency level and 56 from eight regional lists. It is this list system that can enable a candidate to get elected on a small vote.

It should be noted that the SSP failed to win any seats at the constituency level. The nearest it got to this, and by far its best result in the constituency section, was in Glasgow Pollock, where Tommy Sheridan achieved 27.93 per cent of the vote, coming second to Labour on 43.44 per cent.

However, across the Glasgow region, the SSP got 16.02 per cent – close behind the Scottish National Party on 17.96 per cent – entitling it to two MSPs, Tommy Sheridan and Rosie Kane, in the list section. In the other seven regions, the SSP vote ranged from just over four per cent to just over seven per cent, giving it list MSPs in Lothians (Colin Fox, 5.44 per cent), Scotland Central (Carolyn Leckie, 7.23 per cent), Scotland South (Rosemary Byrne, 5.40 per cent) and Scotland West (Frances Curran, 6.26 per cent).

Former Unison activist Carolyn Leckie's election in Scotland Central was almost certainly helped by Dennis Canavan's decision to stand only in his constituency seat of Falkirk West, where the SSP made the correct decision not to stand against him. In the 1999 elections, Canavan stood in both constituency and region, receiving 8.38 per cent of the vote in the latter compared to the SSP's 1.74 per cent.

The SSP votes, while small in real terms, were large in comparison to those obtained by the Socialist Alliance in England. The SSP stood in all bar three of the 73 constituencies and saved its deposit in 40 of those, something the Socialist Alliance could only dream of. So where has the SSP's vote come from? Peter Hain said on election night that it was a 'bad night for the nationalists', referring to both Scotland and Wales. In Scotland, the SNP lost almost the same proportion of MSPs as Plaid Cymru lost AMs in Wales. It would appear, however, that those SNP votes – its share was down from 29 per cent in 1999 to 20 per cent in 2003 – went in the main to the SSP. This trend was helped by one MSP, Dorothy Grace Elder, who resigned the SNP whip to sit as an independent. She did not seek re-election but called for a vote for the SSP, saying: 'The SNP no longer represents the ordinary people of Glasgow. The SSP reflects much more my concerns for the poor, the sick and the oppressed. Although I am not a member of any political party, I feel the SSP is attracting a lot of good people, like Rosie Kane here in Glasgow. I will be happy to give her the benefit of my experience of environmental campaigns in future.' Her assistant joined the SSP.

Another former Scottish National Party MSP, Margo MacDonald, who stood as an independent this time round and was elected for Lothians region, also made sympathetic noises to the SSP. It seems that the SSP is picking up some of the SNP left and those who fear that the SNP's aim of full independence is being watered down under the leadership of John Swinney.

At the same time as the parliamentary elections, council elections were held under the more usual first-past-the-post system, and the SSP got only two councillors across the whole of Scotland – one in Sheridan's old seat in Glasgow where the SSP candidate scraped in, and one in Dunbartonshire were Labour failed to put up a candidate. However, as part of the Lib-Lab coalition deal, the Scottish parliament will introduce proportional representation in council elections, although, bizarrely, the system under consideration is the single transferable vote. While STV is a better system in that all councillors will be constituency based, it will mean Scotland having four different systems for electing its representatives, with first-past-the-post remaining in place for Westminster elections and a pure list system for the European elections.

Under the proposed STV system, the threshold for getting elected as a councillor will be at least 20 per cent of the vote. This will still give the SSP a chance at winning more seats, but on present performance the party would be unlikely to win many – if any – outside Glasgow, and even there the best it would be likely to achieve would be four or five out of a total of 79.

So where now for the SSP? The argument made by many is that if you can get a profile, then this can lead on to greater things. In the three regions where the SSP did not get elected, the combined vote of the SSP and the Socialist Labour Party would have won the SSP a seat. So if the SSP maintains its current position and the SLP doesn't stand, or if the SSP's appeal grows at the expense of the SLP, then there are three more seats for it to win in 2007 – but it would still have more MSPs then councillors. If the SSP is to make any serious advance, it would need to move from its current seven per cent to 15-20 per cent across Scotland. This would give it a position in the parliament similar to the Lib Dems and Tories, and lead to it winning numerous council seats if the change in the electoral system takes place – but this is a tall order.

It is clear from Tommy Sheridan's response to Dorothy Grace Elder whom the SSP is targeting: 'I am delighted to get support from Dorothy. She was one of the best MSPs in the last parliament, fighting tirelessly on behalf of the people of Glasgow. I hope that I and another SSP MSP can carry on the campaign she began for the people of Glasgow and Scotland.' It will be interesting to see if the SSP gets any defections from the SNP in or outside parliament over the next four years.

But the strategy of seeking disaffected SNP supporters is risky. If the SNP changes its leader and adopts a more forthright nationalist agenda, it could lead to those members the SSP had attracted switching back to the SNP. The next big test for the SSP will be the European elections, where it will need 12 per cent of the vote to ensure it gets an MEP, or about ten per cent as long as it can overtake the Greens, who got 4,000 more votes across Scotland than the SSP.

All in all, the results show that while the SSP is a well-established political force in Glasgow, it has only just got to the starting grid in the rest of Scotland. Perhaps after the next Scottish parliamentary elections in 2007 it will be possible to say whether the SSP experiment is proving successful.

WA

Murky brown water

Exploding the myths surrounding the Welsh Assembly elections

Ed George

All elections generate their own mythology, and those for the Welsh Assembly of May 1 have proved to be no exception. There are at present circulating a number of interpretations of what happened that day, apparently held to be incontrovertibly true within the greater part of Welsh Labour, and, by a curious process of inverse logic, by many within Plaid Cymru too. But each of them is false.

Myth Number One: This was a night of triumph for Labour. Or, as Peter Hain put it, 'We won three-quarters of the constituency seats which by normal general election standards would be a landslide. This is the best result for Labour in the elections anywhere in Britain.' (Peter Hain, *Independent*, May 3)

Labour did indeed win enough seats to give it the promise of a working majority in the new Assembly – although Hain's evident disdain for the brave new world of proportionality is clear – but, as Table 1 shows, there is little other comfort Labour can draw from the election.

Looking at total votes cast in all Welsh elections since 1997 – the last British state general election to be held before the establishment of the Assembly – it can be seen that this was Labour's worst performance in this period, excepting the European elections of 1999. Of course, that the Labour turnout stood at a fraction of its performance in British general elections was to be expected: no, the really telling fact – one curiously scarcely picked up on by the mainstream media – is that across Wales Labour's performance on May 1 was actually *worse*, 11.5 per cent worse, than its showing in the 1999 Assembly elections; elections, remember, generally held as an unmitigated disaster for the Welsh party. In fact, as Table 2 shows, Labour only managed to increase its vote – measured in total votes cast – in nine constituencies: the Rhondda, Islwyn, Torfaen, Cynon Valley, Pontypridd, the Vale of Glamorgan, Gower, Bridgend and Merthyr; and, excepting the first three constituencies in this list (where Labour pulled out all the stops in an attempt to get its vote out in order to prevent a repeat of the embarrassments of 1999), only marginally. In every other constituency, Labour's vote was down on 1999.

Myth Number Two: The elections were a disaster for Plaid. On the face of it, Plaid's return does indeed look poor: the promise of 1999 appears to have been unfulfilled. 'A terrible night for nationalists,' as the ubiquitous Peter Hain put it (referring, of course, to Welsh nationalists, not the Great British nationalists of increasingly jingoistic New Labour).

But again surface appearances are deceptive. Table 1 shows that Plaid's 2003 performance is indeed well down on its 1999 showing, but that it compares favourably with Plaid's long term performance: excepting the exceptional results of the 1999 elections, Plaid's 180,000 votes in the 2003 constituency ballot rank as its second highest poll in history, marginally topped only by the 2001 general election (where the ripple of 1999 still made itself felt). There is a long term trend at work here, and 2003 has only confirmed it.

But it does merit asking why Plaid *did* poll lower in 2003 than in 1999. Now although organisational factors undoubtedly played a role, something rather belatedly acknowledged by Ieuan Wyn Jones himself (*Western Mail*, May 6), fundamentally the explanation has to be a political one. Marginal reasons will surely include a disillusionment in the operation of the Assembly, felt most strongly among those who had most hopes of the body in the first place. In addition, a relatively (and I emphasise the word 'relatively') resurgent Conservative Party must have partially awakened barely dormant fears of a future possible Tory government in Westminster – a factor that perennially increases Labour's vote at the expense of parties who will never have the possibility of governing in London.

But most decisive has to be the role played by Welsh Labour's conscious distancing of itself from Blairism. As Adam Price acknowledged: 'Rhodri Morgan's [September 11] speech, ditching New Labour and declaring henceforth that there would be "clear red water" between Cardiff Bay and Downing Street, is massively significant. Not just for Welsh politics, but

Table 1: All-Wales elections 1997-2003: Total votes[3] for Labour and Plaid compared

	1997 (G)	1999 (A-C)	1999 (A-L)	1999 (E)	2001 (G)	2003 (A-C)	2003 (A-L)
Labour	886,935	384,671	361,657	199,690	666,956	340,515	310,658
Plaid	162,030	290,572	312,048	185,235	195,893	180,185	167,653

Key: G = British-state general election; A-C = Assembly election constituency vote; A-L = Assembly election party list top-up vote; E = European election
Sources: 1997: Beti Jones, *Etholiadau'r Ganrif – Welsh Elections* (Talybont, 1999); 1999 Assembly election: *Barn* (May 1999); 1999 European election: *Welsh Agenda* (Summer 1999); 2001: http://news.bbc.co.uk; 2003: calculated from raw data from http://politics.guardian.co.uk.

for all of us who believe in restoring democratic socialism as the animating principle of the Left.' (*Western Mail*, May 5)

But it is not the case, as Jon Osmond has argued, that 'Plaid Cymru's underlying failure in the election was that as a nationalist party it did not manage to capture any clear or distinctive national themes. Instead, it chose to concentrate on bread-and-butter health and education issues and service delivery, in a way that failed to distinguish itself from the Labour Party.' (*Western Mail*, May 5) Rather, the relationship is the reverse: with 'clear red water' (CRW) Welsh *Labour* moved closer to *Plaid*, and, in the short term, Plaid has suffered (although, as we have seen, the suffering is only relative) as a result.

But this is not to say, as Osmond seems to imply, that Plaid should now retreat to its traditional base in rural Wales. As we shall see below, this would be to refuse to pick up the gauntlet that history has thrown down. For CRW is but a temporary measure: an electoral finger in the breech. If Plaid wants really to present itself as the Party of Wales, it needs to ask this question: what does CRW mean for the people of Wales if, one, Westminster is so hostile to it, and, two, the very Welsh Assembly itself still lacks the powers to implement it in any meaningful way? That would be the concrete way in which Plaid would be able to address the 'clear and distinctive national themes' that Osmond wants them to address without effecting a forced retreat to their historical rural redoubt.

Myth Number Three: Labour voters 'came home'. As Rhodri Morgan himself rather arrogantly put it: 'I do not really think we have to worry about the other parties. Our lead over them is so large because Wales has come back to Labour.' (*Western Mail*, May 3) But this is precisely, as both Table 1 and Table 2 show, what did *not* happen.

It is worth reminding ourselves of what happened in 1999. Then, traditional Labour voters, especially in the Labour heartlands of the south Wales coalfield, did two things. First, massively, they abstained. Second, in smaller numbers, they voted Plaid.[1] What happened in 2003? From Tables 1 and 2 it is clear that the first part of this particular double whammy was not reversed: outside of the Rhondda, Islwyn and Torfaen, Labour voters barely returned to Labour; and outside of the further exceptions of Cynon Valley, Pontypridd, the Vale of Glamorgan, Gower, Bridgend and Merthyr they actually stayed away in even greater numbers.

Very concretely, we are now in a position to offer an explanation of May 1: the Labour voters who abstained in 1999 abstained (with the limited exceptions noted above) – frequently in greater numbers – in 2003 as well; the Labour voters who voted Plaid in 1999 did not vote Plaid in 2003. (Why this second feature occurred has already been addressed above.)

Myth Number Four: Plaid's bubble has burst. Or, to put it another way, as *spinmeister* Hain gloated: 'Plaid Cymru's fantasy of an independent Wales has been buried for ever.' (*Guardian*, May 3) Now, aside from the real status of the project of an independent Wales in Plaid's strategy, and without going into the fantastic (in both senses of the word) nature of the notion, I am sure that the thinkers behind Welsh Labour would *want* this to be true, but, away from such wishful thinking and the triumphalist insobriety intended for public consumption, it is clear that they are

Table 2: 1999 and 2003 compared: Change in total votes cast for Labour by constituency

	Constituency[4]	% change 1999-2003
**	Rhondda	25.7
**	Islwyn	19.2
**	Torfaen	11.8
**	Cynon Valley	9.7
**	Pontypridd	7.7
	Vale of Glamorgan	7.2
*	Gower	5.3
	Bridgend	1.8
**	Merthyr T. & Rh.	1.1
	Vale of Clwyd	-1.2
	Clwyd West	-1.7
**	Ogmore	-5.1
**	Caerphilly	-5.6
*	Aberavon	-6.7
**	Neath	-7.4
	Caernarfon	-10.9
*	Llanelli	-12.1
	Meirionnydd N.C.	-12.2
	Newport West	-12.9
*	Swansea East	-13.4
**	Blaenau Gwent	-13.6
	Swansea West	-14.5
	Cardiff North	-14.6
	Carmarthen W. & P.S.	-15.2
	Ynys Môn	-16.1
	Cardiff South & P.	-18.8
	Preseli Pem	-19.1
	Carmarthen E. & D.	-19.3
*	Newport East	-19.8
	Conwy	-20.9
	Montgomery.	-22.7
	Clwyd South	-25.9
	Monmouth	-26.9
	Cardiff West	-27.2
	Alyn & Deeside	-28.0
	Ceredigion	-34.0
	Delyn	-38.9
	Brecon & Rad.	-39.4
	Wrexham	-39.8
	Cardiff Central	-47.2

Key: 'Coalfield' constituencies are marked ** and 'semi-coalfield' constituencies *.[5]

Methodology: The percentage change in the party vote is established by: $(100(V_2-V_1))/V_1$, where V_1 = number of votes cast in 1999 and V_2 = number of votes cast in 2003. Minor differences in size of electorate between the two elections have been ignored.

Sources:
1999: http://news.bbc.co.uk;
2003: calculated from raw data from: http://politics.guardian.co.uk.

Table 3: Percentage change in the total Plaid vote 1997-2003 by constituency

	Constituency	% Change 1997-2003
	Vale of Glamorgan	181.5
	Monmouth	162.6
	Newport West	159.0
	Conwy	124.9
	Cardiff North	123.1
*	Newport East	115.7
	Brecon & Rad.	113.7
**	Torfaen	100.8
	Preseli Pem.	94.8
**	Neath	91.0
	Cardiff South & P.	87.2
**	Pontypridd	77.6
	Islwyn	72.8
	Swansea West	66.8
*	Swansea East	70.0
	Delyn	66.1
**	Caerphilly	57.9
	Clwyd South	56.9
**	Aberavon	59.2
*	Gower	57.3
	Alyn & Deeside	57.2
	Cardiff West	46.7
	Carmarthen W. & P.S.	45.7
*	Llanelli	26.7
**	Ogmore	25.8
**	Merthyr Tydfil & Rh.	28.0
	Bridgend	17.6
	Cardiff Central	19.3
	Montgomery.	19.3
	Wrexham	13.6
**	Rhondda	14.1
**	Cynon Valley	4.8
	Vale of Clwyd	9.3
**	Blaenau Gwent	-8.8
	Carmarthen E. & D.	-10.3
	Clwyd West	-13.0
	Caernarfon	-33.7
	Ceredigion	-29.0
	Meirionnydd N.C.	-30.1
	Ynys Môn	-40.0

Key: 'Coalfield' constituencies are marked ** and 'semi-coalfield' constituencies *.[5]

Methodology: The percentage change in the party vote is established by: $(100(V_2-V_1))/V_1$, where V_1 = number of votes cast in 1997 and V_2 = number of votes cast in 2003. Minor differences in size of electorate between the two elections have been ignored.

Sources:
1997: www.cavrdg.demon.co.uk/election10.htm;
2003: calculated from raw data from: http://politics.guardian.co.uk.

clever enough to know that it is not.

Table 3 is probably the most interesting of all: here we can see the relative shift of Plaid's vote (again, looking at total votes cast) from the 1997 general election (the last to be held before the establishment of the Assembly) to May 1. And a very curious picture emerges. Plaid's total vote in Wales increased slightly over this period, by some 11.2 per cent. But this rise has by no means been even. Plaid has in fact lost heavily in those areas commonly denominated as its traditional heartlands, Welsh-speaking, rural Wales (in part this would account for the rise in the Tory vote in these areas: frankly, this is Plaid's gain); but has increased spectacularly where it has historically been weak – precisely in urban, Welsh-speaking as well as English-speaking, Wales.

And this, long term, is what is happening: as New Labour moves to the right, many in traditional areas are prepared to see Plaid as a better means of defending what they see as traditional 'Old Labour' values. This is what fundamentally happened in 1999: but what happened in 1999 in the south Wales Valleys was so extreme that the longer-term process was lost sight of. There is a structural shift taking place in the consciousness of the Welsh working class, of which 1999 was but one reflection. Yet this is a long-term process, which is underway but nowhere near completed (and which does not even have an inevitable conclusion). Fundamentally, this shift reflects the fact that a section of the Welsh people, at this stage a relatively small section, has been forced to look politically elsewhere: it is not that the Welsh working class is turning nationalist – Plaid gains in these areas where it does not specifically run a 'nationalist' campaign – nor is it the case that the Welsh working class is becoming less social-democratic: it is that it has increasingly to look for its social democracy elsewhere, since it seems that it is increasingly unable to find it in Welsh Labour.

This is the dynamic that Jon Osmond is addressing in his *Western Mail* article of May 5.[2] He comments: '[Plaid] faces the challenge of blending much more effectively the different character and interests of rural Wales with the Valleys, a challenge that it avoided in May.' But this would be having your cake *and* eating it. Effectively Plaid finds itself at an historical crossroads, for the choice now is as clear as this: it can fight to win back its rural conservative base, now defecting to the Tories, or it can move forward to be a *real* party of (all) Wales. In this choice, fear of not differentiating itself sufficiently from Welsh Labour must not act as a deterrent to Plaid moving to consolidate itself in urban

Table 4: Votes and seats by all parties in both ballots

	Constituency Vote				Party List Vote			
	Votes	*% Votes Cast*	*% Electorate*	*Seats*	*Votes*	*% Votes Cast*	*% Electorate*	*Seats*
Labour	340,515	40.0	15.3	30	310,658	36.6	13.9	0
Plaid	180,185	21.2	8.1	5	167,653	19.7	7.5	7
Con	169,842	19.9	7.6	1	162,725	19.2	7.3	10
Lib	120,250	14.1	5.4	3	108,013	12.7	4.8	3

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk. (With the exception of the Labour total in the constituency vote: the BBC gives Labour 7,641 votes in Newport East, a figure 20 votes higher than that given by both http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk and http://politics.guardian.co.uk. One can only assume that the BBC figure is wrong. The Labour total has therefore been calculated from the raw data supplied from the latter of the last two sources.)

The figure for votes as the percentage of the electorate has been calculated using the total party figures from http://news.bbc.co.uk (appropriately amended with respect to the Labour constituency vote) and a total electorate calculated using the raw data from http://politics.guardian.co.uk.

Table 5: Parties to the left of Plaid and Labour: Constituency vote by constituency

	Votes	% Votes Cast
Welsh Socialist Alliance		
Cardiff Central	541	2.6
Neath	410	1.9
Newport West	198	0.9
Swansea East	133	0.8
Swansea West	272	1.4
Socialist Party		
Aberavon	606	3.2
Cardiff South and Penarth	585	2.9
Socialist Labour Party		
Ogmore	410	2.5
Marek		
Clwyd South	2,210	11.8
Wrexham	6,539	37.7

Source: http://politics.guardian.co.uk

Table 6: Parties to the left of Plaid and Labour: List vote

	Party	Votes	% Votes Cast
South Wales Central	Green	6,047	3.3
	SLP	3,217	1.8
	Stop War	1,013	0.6
	Communist	577	0.3
South Wales East	Green	5,291	3.1
	SLP	3,695	2.2
South Wales West	Green	6,696	4.8
	SLP	3,446	2.5
Wales Mid & West	Green	7,794	4.2
	Stop War	716	0.4
Wales North	Marek	11,008	6.3
	Green	4,200	2.4
	Communist	522	0.3

Source: http://politics.guardian.co.uk

Wales. CRW is effectively a chimera. As Daniel Morrissey noted in Workers Action No.21:

> 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. . . . 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'.

This maps the contours of the next period of Welsh politics. Plaid (and every socialist in Wales) has to decide whether it wants to be a part of this history, or be swept away by it. The choice is as clear as that.

Further comments

Really, the figures relating to the parties to the left of Plaid and Labour speak for themselves: in effect, these parties failed even to register on the political map. Once again, Wales has proved itself to be not Scotland. What we are dealing with here is what is known as the 'BT vote': family and friends. Where there is an electoral wellspring critical of Labour it expresses itself either through abstention, or by turning to Plaid. This is the long-term dynamic analysed above, even if this time it has been relatively mitigated by the phenomenon of 'clear red water'.

There are two exceptions to this trend evident here. The first is the Marek phenomenon. Now, despite the attention paid to Marek by sections of the left, this in no way represents a kind of Welsh mini-SSP. What lies behind the Marek vote is popular discontent at the shabby way that a respected and honest sitting representative has been treated by his party. Marek is essentially a maverick, not afraid to speak his mind and principled enough not to put currying favour over saying what he thinks. This was at the root of his downfall within the Labour Party, and it is this that the voters of Wrexham have responded to. That it is not a generalised phenomenon is indicated by the huge difference between, on the one hand, the constituency votes in Wrexham and Clwyd South, and, on the other, by the difference between the percentage of votes cast in these constituency votes and the Marek party list vote. This is a purely local issue, which, barring unforeseen circumstances, will quickly fade. That Marek now appears to be in contact with the SSP means very little: he really has no-one else to talk to these days. That he does not appear to be in contact with the Welsh Socialist Alliance speaks volumes. In this respect it is unfortunate that the forces around *Seren*, especially Marc Jones of Cymru Goch (who stood in Clwyd South under the Marek ticket), invest such expectation in the phenomenon. They have clearly hitched their horse to the wrong cart, and it is a pity that they are unable to turn their not inconsiderable resources around a more useful project.

The other discordant note is sounded by the Greens (even if to include them under the rubric of 'to the left of Labour and Plaid' stretches the category a little). For a fringe party they registered relatively well in the party list ballot, especially in North and Mid Wales.

Nevertheless, excepting these two developments, it is clear that there is still no real political space in Wales to the left of Labour and Plaid. Here it is necessary to address the long-term process underway – in part analysed above and further illustrated here – that underlies all these developments. Since the 1970s, the unitary political system in the British state has been progressively breaking down, especially in relation to working class politics. The consequence today is that in England, especially in metropolitan England, there is no significant political space existing outside of and to the left of the organisational and political confines of Labourism. The consistently truly miserable performances of both the SLP and the Socialist Alliance illustrate this. There is no pleasure to be taken in pointing this out: it would be far better were it not true. But it is a fact, and no amount of wishful thinking can make it otherwise.

Scotland is clearly different. The concrete features of the development of Scottish nationalism, which in recent times gave rise to qualitatively more developed radicalisation in Scottish working class politics, most recently in the shape of the anti-poll tax movement in the 1990s (greatly more inclusive and politically developed than in England and Wales), have resulted in the appearance of a genuine large-scale radical current that is beginning to break from the dominant current of British working class politics, Labourism: a current that today manifests itself in support for the SSP.

But Wales is clearly different again, a difference that arises in turn from the specificities of Welsh nationalism. In Wales what we can discern is a long-term small but significant shift in political allegiance from Labour to Plaid, a shift that the results of May 1 only confirm, once one looks behind the surface.

That the British state left needs to grasp the consequences of all this should really brook no argument. That the English Socialist Alliance cannot become another SSP because England is not Scotland is a point rammed home with every election. That neither the Welsh Socialist Alliance nor John Marek can become another SSP because Wales is not Scotland either has also been made absolutely clear. The real conclusion of the preceding analysis, therefore, is that a British political outlook which does not recognise that England is not Scotland and Wales is not England is going to put itself in a position of being signally ill-prepared to address the real political developments taking place within the British state working class movement. What works in one part of the British state is becoming increasingly unsuited for the others. We forget this at our peril.

Notes

[1] This is an issue that is explored in detail in Ceri Evans and Ed George, *Swings and Roundabouts: What Really Happened on May 6* (Cardiff, 1999), which can be read at http://www.angelfire.com/alt/ceri_evans/writings/swings_and_roundabouts.htm.

[2] Osmond's article can be read online at: http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk.

[3] The reasoning behind the concentration of the base statistic of total votes cast (and votes cast as a percentage of the electorate, rather than as a percentage of votes cast) to be found here is developed in *Swings and Roundabouts*.

[4] For case of formatting the names of the constituencies have been abbreviated. Their full names are, in alphabetical order: Aberavon, Alyn and Deeside, Blaenau Gwent, Brecon and Radnorshire, Bridgend, Caernarfon, Caerphilly, Cardiff Central, Cardiff North, Cardiff South and Penarth, Cardiff West, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire South, Ceredigion, Clwyd South, Clwyd West, Conwy, Cynon Valley, Delyn, Gower, Islwyn, Llanelli, Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, Monmouth, Montgomeryshire, Neath, Newport East, Newport West, Ogmore, Pontypridd, Preseli Pembrokeshire, Rhondda, Swansea East, Swansea West, Torfaen, Vale of Clwyd, Vale of Glamorgan, Wrexham, Ynys Môn.

[5] By 'semi-coalfield' constituency, what is referred to is either a constituency immediately adjacent to the south Wales coalfield itself which incorporates a part of the coalfield within its territory (e.g. Gower), or a constituency immediately adjacent to the coalfield which is notably similar in socio-economic profile (e.g. Swansea East).

Bibliographical note

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Israel / Palestine

Road map no solution

Roland Rance comments on the so-called road map to peace in the Middle East which was published on April 30

The Middle East 'road map' seems set to sink into the same obscurity as countless previous western plans for pacifying the Middle East. This should be welcomed, as it offers the Palestinians very little, even if implemented in full. And, as Israel has made clear, it has no intention of implementing it.

The Israeli cabinet did indeed vote narrowly to accept the plan. The vote, however, was to accept the document as a document, not to implement it. Security Minister Shaul Mofaz explained that he voted for the plan, even though he opposed it, because it was better to say yes and do nothing, than to say no. In this, he was apparently following the advice of US public relations firm Luntz Research, who recently wrote a report for the Israeli government on how to win the propaganda war.

Israel's 'acceptance' of the road map was hedged by qualifications and reservations. As a precondition for any further steps, Israel demands that the Palestine Authority:

> complete the dismantling of terrorist organisations (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front, Al-Aqsa Brigades and other apparatuses) and their infrastructure, collection of all illegal weapons and their transfer to a third party for the sake of being removed from the area and destroyed, cessation of weapons smuggling and weapons production inside the Palestinian Authority, activation of the full prevention apparatus and cessation of incitement.

This means that the PA must not only accomplish the military victory which Israel has been unable to achieve in the two and a half years of the Intifada, but put a complete end to all political dissent and discussion in Palestine. Only then will Israel even consider carrying out any of its obligations.

Even then, Israel is quite explicit about what it will not accept:

> both during and subsequent to the political process, the resolution of the issue of the refugees will not include their entry into or settlement within the State of Israel. . . . There will be no involvement with issues pertaining to the final settlement. Among issues not to be discussed: settlement in Judea, Samaria and Gaza (excluding a settlement freeze and illegal outposts), the status of the Palestinian Authority and its institutions in Jerusalem, and all other matters whose substance relates to the final settlement . . . . declared references must be made to Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state and to the waiver of any right of return for Palestinian refugees to the State of Israel. . . . The provisional state will have provisional borders and certain aspects of sovereignty, be fully demilitarized with no military forces, but only with police and internal security forces of limited scope and armaments, be without the authority to undertake defence alliances or military cooperation, and Israeli control over the entry and exit of all persons and cargo, as well as of its air space and electromagnetic spectrum.

As well as demands on the PA, the Israelis make a demand on all Palestinians: 'End of the process will lead to the end of all claims and not only the end of the conflict.' In effect, Israel is demanding complete Palestinian capitulation, and insisting that any action or statement by any Palestinian group or individual may be used as a pretext to abort the process.

As always with Israel, it is rather more important to see what it is doing on the ground, than what it is saying or claiming. Since the beginning of the Intifada, Israel has confiscated nearly 250,000 acres of Palestinian land in the occupied territories, and uprooted a similar number of olive trees. Palestinians note bitterly that, in the period since the Oslo agreement was signed, the number of Israeli settlers in the occupied territories has more than doubled. As Noam Chomsky notes, George Bush has altered US policy on settlements. All previous presidents have called for – even if they have not enforced – a halt to Israeli settlement activity. In March, Bush said that, as the peace process advances, Israel should terminate new settlement programmes – i.e., that settlement can continue for the foreseeable future, and there will be no pressure on Israel to remove any existing settlements.

At the same time, Israel is busily building the 'Apartheid Wall' – 1,000 kilometres of eight metre high fencing, completely surrounding the occupied West Bank. Despite some Israeli claims, this fence does not even follow Israel's pre-1967 border, but is being built well into the West Bank, which will in effect become a network of hermetically-sealed ghettos, separated from each other as well as from the outside world. The patchwork of mini-enclaves, surrounded by a wall, dotted with

What they promised the Palestinians

United Nations 'Partition Plan', 1947:
You are going to have 47 per cent of the 100 per cent which was originally yours

'Oslo Agreement', 1993:
You are going to have 22 per cent of the 100 per cent which was originally yours

Israeli settlements, and criss-crossed by military and settlers' roads, will leave the areas under Palestinian control with far less autonomy or viability than even the Bantustans with which South Africa tried to maintain its racist regime.

Although Sharon pays lip service to the concept of a Palestinian state – indeed, he is the first Israeli prime minister to speak publicly about such a state – it is clear that what he means is a 'Palestinian' state outside the territory of Palestine. Sharon has long been associated with the proposal for a Palestinian state replacing the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan; as long ago as 1974, he coined the phrase 'Jordan is Palestine', since taken up by much of the moderate Zionist right (the extremist right claim Transjordan also as part of the Jewish state).

Israel's Tourism Minister, Rabbi Benny Elon, has been promoting this idea in his recent visit to the USA, meeting his (and Sharon's) closest allies – not the Jewish community, or the Zionist movement, but the Christian fundamentalists who are Bush's ideological mentors.

The Palestine authority, meanwhile, is making every effort to meet Israel's impossible demands. One sign of this is the recent statement issued by Sari Nusseibeh, Palestine Minister of Jerusalem Affairs, and Ami Ayalon, a former head of Israeli Intelligence, renouncing the Palestinian right of return, and recognising Israel as a Jewish state. This document has been condemned by many Palestinian activists and grass-roots organisations, but it clearly has the backing of important sections of the Palestinian leadership. Palestinian officials have made veiled threats against the opponents of this document, including against Israeli leftists, who have been told that this is none of their business.

The new Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), is expected to be more pliable than Yassir Arafat. Indeed, in 1996, David Hirst reported in the *Guardian* that Israel was manoeuvring to replace Arafat with Abbas and Muhammad Dahlan, the new security minister. With the expected rehabilitation of discredited militia leader Jibril Rajoub to enforce order in the West Bank, as Dahlan has done in Gaza, it seems that Israel has found its ideal partners. Although they are not themselves Israeli agents, it is clear that Israel has long identified them as the Palestinian leaders most likely to accept, and impose, Israel's terms.

Once again, developments in the occupied territories reveal the continuation of the thinking behind Rabin's original acceptance of the Oslo agreement: the PLO would rule 'Without the High Court, and without human rights groups'. Only in this way can Israel impose its 'peace' on Palestine. However, this will not be sustainable. Continuing oppression, Palestinian poverty and suffering, settlement, theft of land and water and the entrenchment of an explicitly apartheid regime in the occupied territories, are likely to lead to further outbursts of Palestinian rage. In these circumstances, the only possible responses will be Sharon's preferred option of mass expulsion, or the revolutionary response of a unitary, democratic and secular Palestine, with equal rights for Palestinians, Israeli Jews, and all ethnic and religious minorities. The 'two-state' solution is no longer a possibility, and it serves merely as a cover for continuing racism and colonialism.

WA

Lecturers reject boycott of Israeli universities

David Lewis

The Association of University Teachers Council at Scarborough in May tackled the difficult question of an academic boycott of Israeli universities and other institutions. The main discussion took place on a motion from Birmingham AUT and it is noteworthy that there was virtually no attempt to defend Sharon.

The proposal would have given national union backing to a boycott that has been growing for over a year. The initiative of Professors Steven and Hilary Rose called for academics to cease to co-operate with official Israeli institutions, including universities, to attend no scientific conferences in Israel, and not to participate as referee in hiring or promotion decisions by Israeli universities, or in the decisions of Israeli funding agencies, but to continue to collaborate with Israeli colleagues on an individual basis. This call attracted the open support of hundreds of academics from all over the world. It also attracted extreme hostility from those opposed to it.

The debate concentrated on the question of the efficacy of a boycott in combating the oppression of Palestinians by the Sharon government and on the potential for sowing divisions within the AUT. Those arguing against the boycott also focussed on the fact that Israeli academics in general are not calling for a boycott, in contrast with South African academics under apartheid.

It is actually quite difficult to take a hard and fast position on this. Many Israeli academics are vehemently opposed to Sharon and the repressive legacy of Zionism, both politically and professionally. Also, although Israeli universities rely on the Israeli government for financial support, they are being subjected to funding cuts and worsening conditions as part of the price for Sharon's war on the Palestinians. Thus, the universities are by no means guaranteed supporters of the Zionist government.

However, they are national institutions and a boycott would have a strong resonance at all levels. Neither the Roses' boycott nor the AUT proposal were directed at individuals, so the objection that academics would be cut off from an important segment of support for the Palestinians is at least partially invalid. On the other hand, the possibility of driving individual academics who oppose Sharon into an isolated inertia should not be dismissed.

In the event, the motion to boycott was defeated by a two to one majority. In the same session, AUT Council voted overwhelmingly to affiliate to the Trade Union Friends of Palestine and to establish links with Palestinian universities.

Although the motion was lost, the size of the vote in favour of a boycott made it plain that a substantial section of the AUT is prepared to take action in support of the Palestinians. This will not be easy to dismiss as the position of an irrelevant minority. Further, it was a clear indication that any future call for a boycott by a substantial body of Israeli academics would be supported by the AUT. **WA**

Afghanistan – the forgotten country

The war in Afghanistan was supposed to have been won long ago. Twenty months on, **Richard Price** examines what progress Bush and Blair's nation building has made in this shattered country

As US and British forces prepared to attack Afghanistan in October 2001, two factors lent the impending war broader support and credibility than the war against Iraq would ever have. First, there were the attacks of September 11 fresh in the memory. Second, there was the medieval obscurantism of the Taliban regime, and in particular its oppression of women.

While the anti-war movement was already a significant size, many were persuaded that a surgical operation to remove the Taliban was justified. Once removed, democracy could begin to take root, the country could be rebuilt with western aid, and women would be able to throw off the shackles of oppression.

With the sudden collapse of the Taliban, a swathe of liberal opinion in the west breathed a sigh of relief. The media saturated us with images of a benign imperialism, come to set a shattered country back on course. From John Simpson striding into Kabul, to kite-flying children, to women wearing western dress and girls going back to school, the images were upbeat. And if there were lingering doubts about the benign nature of the Northern Alliance warlords, at least they weren't the Taliban. Buttressed by western aid and benevolent military protection, Afghans could set about restoring their country and building democracy.

With the spotlight shifting to Iraq, compassion fatigue set in early for many of Afghanistan's new found friends. The war had been mercifully brief, the world was now a safer place, and a job had been well done. Less than two years on, Afghanistan has almost disappeared off the media's radar, and it's not because things have been quietly getting better.

For those who supported the war, nation building in Afghanistan isn't just experiencing a little local difficulty; it's an abject failure of immense proportions that's best not highlighted. More conscientious sections of the media face huge problems. The majority of the country is highly dangerous and out of bounds to all but the most intrepid journalists. The reality is that the first instalment of the 'war against terrorism' hasn't been won. It rumbles on in distant mountain ranges and valleys, little reported but ever present.

A country in chaos

Afghanistan is a country in complete chaos. US special forces guard President Hamid Karzai, who survived an assassination attempt in September last year. His government has no significant base of popular support. It controls the Kabul Valley and little else. The 50,000-strong police force, much of it loyal to local warlords, hasn't been paid. Neither has the civil service. Both resort to corruption and extortion to survive. The 'national' army – 4,000-strong – barely exists.

In the rest of the country, power is in the hands of 12 provincial governors, the most important of whom are Ismail Khan in Herat, Gul Agha Shirzai in Kandahar, and, in the north, Uzbek leader Abdul Rashid Dostum and Tajik leader Atta Mohammed. These warlords run their regions as personal fiefdoms, dispensing tribal justice, raising revenue, maintaining their own militias, and imposing their own cultural edicts as they see fit. Conflict between their militias – such as flared up in May between forces loyal to Abdul Rashid Dostum and

Atta Mohammed further fragment the country politically and economically.

The conditions of life after more than two decades of war and civil war have deteriorated alarmingly. Life expectancy stands at 41 years, although it may have begun to pick up with food aid going in, and the vaccination campaign that has been carried out. Nonetheless, nearly four million people face extreme hunger. One in four children dies before the age of five. Seventy-five per cent of the population doesn't have access to safe drinking water. Many in refugee camps lack adequate food, sanitation and winter heating. And 60 per cent of the population is illiterate.

Anything resembling a national economy has long since broken down, with the collapse of the country into the control of mutually antagonistic armed factions. Kabul, although deeply scarred by the effects of war, has begun to function again, although much of the economy depends on the spending power of foreign soldiers, diplomats and aid workers. Although this provides a certain number of jobs, it has also forced up rents considerably. In the rest of the country, basic infrastructure like roads lies in ruins, with only $300m in aid forthcoming – enough to build just 750 kilometres of road. The combination of the influx of food aid and long running drought has forced down wheat prices (from 21p per kilo at the beginning of 2002 to 4.5p per kilo a year later) and driven large numbers of wheat farmers to grow the poppies used for making opium and heroin. Last year's opium poppy harvest was estimated at 3,400 metric tons – up from 2,700 tons the previous year – and the price rose to $350 per kilo, yielding an income of several thousand dollars per farmer. The incentives offered to move out of poppy cultivation simply aren't enough. Those displaced from agriculture cluster in refugee camps or take the only employment available, as militiamen.

The central government meanwhile has been starved of cash by the warlords, who last year trousered $420m out of $500m customs revenue collected. The situation was so acute in May that Hamid Karzai threatened to resign unless regional governors remitted money to the centre. Nothing had been paid during the previous two months.

Bush and Blair's pledge to rebuild the country they devastated shows no sign of materialising in the amounts needed. The Tokyo 'donors' conference' in 2002 promised $5 billion. But even the west's friend, Karzai, estimates this is only a third to a quarter of what is needed to restore the country to 1979 levels. Already one of the poorest countries in the world, the per capita aid it is scheduled to receive over the next five years compares very adversely with other recent sites of western intervention.

Country	Per capita aid
Bosnia	$326
Kosova	$288
East Timor	$195
Afghanistan	$42

In 2002, Unicef received $158m of its $192m budget requirement for Afghanistan. By the end of May this year, it had only received $58.5m out of the $101m it needs.

A government without authority

The military situation is very far from secure. Karzai's pitifully small army is dwarfed by the estimated 200,000 soldiers who belong to militias loyal to local and regional warlords. Karzai wants to create a professionally trained 70,000-strong national army, part of it to come from disarming 100,000 militiamen over the next year. The likelihood is that lack of funds and political cohesion will put paid to the plan.

'Peacekeeping' is in the hands of the 5,400-strong International Security Assistance Force, drawn from 12 countries. Command of ISAF rotates every six months. Since February, ISAF has been led by Germany and the Netherlands; prior to that Britain and Turkey have led it. Its operations are almost entirely restricted to Kabul. Attempts to create a larger force capable of deploying units across the country have failed due to lack of international support and finance. US troops, largely special forces, number 11,000, and are mainly deployed in remote parts of the south against Taliban and al-Qaida forces, and others allied to them.

US generals have been claiming to be finishing off 'remnants' of the Taliban and al-Qaida for the last 18 months. Ironic then, that on June 5, as Bush told cheering American forces in Qatar that the US was winning the 'war against terrorism', Afghan government troops were engaged in their fiercest battle for months with al-Qaida forces in three border villages, and Hamid Karzai arrived in Britain with his begging bowl, desperate for more aid. Blair told Karzai that Britain would be unlikely to increase its current contribution of £180 million per year.

Bush and Blair's 'war against terrorism' has demonstrably not achieved its mission. Its most high profile targets, Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, remain at large. What the war has succeeded in doing – as the anti-war movement warned it would – is steadily recruit new terrorists. After heavy battles between US forces and al-Qaida and Taliban fighters in March 2002, al-Qaida and Taliban activity appeared to be relatively sporadic in the following six months. But since October, when the 82nd Airborne Division began a series of major raids into the south and south-east, attacks have been stepped up on US forces, Afghan government troops, aid workers and other foreigners.

Hatred of US forces is particularly strong in these Pashtun tribal areas, which were also strongholds in their time of the mojahedin in the 1980s, and the Taliban in the 1990s. Although Hamid Karzai is a Pashtun, his government is seen as dominated by ethnic groups hostile to the Pashtuns. Despite the 82nd Airborne being the most highly trained infantry unit in the US army, its sweeps through villages failed to dislodge al-Qaida and Taliban fighters, and succeeded in utterly alienating the local population. *Newsweek* described the operations as 'a disaster'.

Further bad news for the US came with the apparent formation of an alliance towards the end of last year between veteran warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, his Hizb-e-Islami party and the al-Qaida/Taliban network. Hekmatyar is a former mojahedin leader, who was bankrolled and armed by the CIA and Pakistan's ISI intelligence service in the 1980s. He is among the most hard-line fundamentalists, and in March issued a statement denouncing Hamid Karzai as 'a showboy of the US' and warning the Americans that they would be 'reduced to rubble'.

Even from the sparse reporting that is available, it is apparent that conflict has increased in recent months:

February 10: Two missiles launched at German ISAF forces in Kabul.

February 12: At least 17 villagers killed in a US bombing raid in Helmand province in the south.

March 6: Nine al-Qaida fighters shot dead near Spin Boldak.

March 22: Three Afghan army soldiers killed, two injured and four kidnapped in raids carried out by Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami forces.

March 29: Two US special forces killed in an ambush.

March 30: Rocket attack on ISAF headquarters in Kabul; another rocket hits eastern Kabul.

April 9: Eleven Afghan civilians killed by a bomb dropped by a US plane following an attack on a checkpoint near Shkin.

April 18: Major arms cache found in Zabul province.

April 25: One US soldier killed and five wounded, and three Taliban fighters killed, at an unnamed location in the south-east of the country.

June 4: Seven government troops and 40 Taliban killed near Spin Boldak.
June 7: Four German ISAF soldiers killed and 29 wounded in a suicide attack on a bus in Kabul.

The renewed insurgency in the south and south-east of Afghanistan finds a ready base of support in the rising tide of fundamentalism over the border in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. Last year, the 300-mile wide province, which has always operated as a largely autonomous Pashtun tribal region, remote from the central government, elected an Islamist coalition, which has proceeded to enact a series of Taliban-style edicts, culminating in a bill implementing sharia law in early June. These developments have encouraged Taliban fugitives to regroup, and use it as a base of operations. Al-Qaida members are able to move about with relative freedom.

What is clear is that the 'elimination of the remnants of al-Qaida and the Taliban' so often proclaimed is further away than ever. The difficult terrain, the support and shelter the Islamist fighters get from the population of the border regions, and the hatred of the occupying forces means that this struggle will run and run. If victory in the 'war against terrorism' is a distant prospect, how much further away is Tony Blair's vision of 'an inclusive, democratic structure' for the country. Elections are scheduled for 2004 – but don't hold your breath.

The situation of women

Karl Marx borrowed from Charles Fourier the idea that the situation of women is an index of the freedom of a society as a whole. If we apply this to Afghanistan, then the position of the vast majority of women indicates that freedom has a long way to go. To be sure, women in Kabul enjoy a degree of freedom unthinkable under the Taliban, with a liberalisation of dress, and the ability to meet and talk in public. There is a women's affairs ministry, with several hundred women working there. The education ministry has rehired many women teachers dismissed by the Taliban. The ten-year ban on women driving has been lifted. Women appear on television. There is even a women's park.

Outside of Kabul, little has changed. Unicef claims that three million children, including 900,000 girls, have gone back to school. Deaths of women in childbirth are running at 1,600 per 100,000 births. In December, it was reported that troops loyal to defence minister General Mohammed Fahim, a Northern Alliance warlord, were banning music at weddings. Last October, a series of co-ordinated attacks were made on girls' schools in Wardak province, near to Kabul. Leaflets warning women to wear the burqa were distributed. In January, the country's most senior judge issued an edict attempting to ban cable television on grounds of immorality. Little has been done to overhaul the legal system, so that, for instance, adultery remains punishable by stoning.

Last November, the *Guardian*'s Polly Toynbee reported after a visit to the country that over 100 women in the western province of Herat – mostly young women coerced into marriage – had resorted to self-immolation in protest at the strict religious laws in force there under the rule of warlord Ismail Khan. Women are required to wear burqas. Some ten women a day are subjected to crude virginity tests at the city's only hospital for offences such as walking alone in the street. Men are forbidden from teaching girls. Khan has also attempted to restrict women from working for NGOs.

Human rights? Democracy?

If the record on women's rights is poor, what then of human rights post-Taliban? This was, after all, what Bush and Blair promised to restore. As with Iraq, it didn't seem to occur – or perhaps matter – to the Coalition that when one regime fell banditry and criminality would fill the vacuum. Large parts of the country are completely lawless – a worse situation, some Afghans feel, than the crude medieval justice dispensed by the Taliban.

Yet this is the country to which Britain has begun forcibly returning asylum seekers, on the grounds that they no longer face a serious threat. And while on the subject of human rights, let's not forget that Blair has gone along meekly with the holding without trial and torture of some 3,000 al-Qaida and Taliban suspects, some at Guantánamo Bay, and others delegated to countries with dire human rights records like Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Morocco, where no doubt less refined methods of torture awaited them. In Afghanistan itself, suspects have been held at Bagram airbase, where according to the *Washington Post*, they have been subjected to the full range of sensory deprivation techniques.

And while Bush and Blair were pledging to bring democracy to Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11, hundreds of undocumented workers were being rounded up in the US, and, as a recent report has confirmed, routinely subjected to physical and verbal abuse. Only one person among those rounded up has been charged under anti-terror legislation.

Prospects

The situation facing Hamid Karzai's government bears a striking resemblance to that faced by the Najibullah regime once the Soviet Union began scaling down its involvement – only the names have been changed. Of course, there are differences. US forces are much better equipped and have higher morale, although there are far fewer of them. But like the Russians before them, the United States and the other occupying forces are caught in an intractable conflict. History has shown again and again that it is much easier to get into Afghanistan than it is to get out.

To deploy the kind of forces to subdue a resentful population in some of the most rugged terrain on the planet would be hugely expensive, and would in any case pose the question of whether even then it would guarantee a western-friendly regime.

What, then, are the prospects for the development of more progressive politics within the country? The answer at this stage has to be pessimistic. Afghanistan only defines itself as a country negatively, in its relationship to the outside world, and to occupying powers. Internally, it is not really a nation at all, but a patchwork quilt of rival semi-tribal, semi-national entities. The 'anti-imperialism' of the Islamist groups is not directed towards even modestly progressive 'national' goals, but towards the creation of pseudo-Islamic government and sharia law. The prospects of democracy and the institutions of civil society sinking roots into this soil is unlikely in the extreme. It's hard to think of a country which needs a socialist revolution more than Afghanistan. But it hard to think of one that's further away from one. **WA**

Forward to a united Cyprus!

Nick Davies welcomes the recent moves by both Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus to end the 29-year long partition of the island

The destruction of Iraq is just the latest example of how, after having wrecked yet another country, the USA goes into a form of denial, pretending that the chaos and destruction is nothing to do with its own actions. It is ironic that as part of its plan to impose its authority on the Middle East, the USA has seen the need to 'sort out' the problem of a divided Cyprus, a problem which it largely created almost 30 years ago. In doing so, the USA assumes a collective amnesia on the part of Cypriots. However, many Greek and Turkish Cypriots can remember what it was like to live in a multi-ethnic Cyprus. The tumultuous events of the past few weeks have shown that they need no lessons from the USA or Kofi Annan on how to do so again. They would just like to be given the chance.

Until 1974 it was difficult, if not impossible, to divide Cyprus into Greek and Turkish areas. Although the Greek Cypriots were 82 per cent of the population, there were Turkish Cypriot enclaves in every town, and Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot villages existed side by side over most of the island. There were dozens of mixed villages as well. While it would be wrong to say that there had never been any friction or conflict between the two communities, such conflict that had occurred had been created or, at the very least, exploited and greatly exacerbated by others – Greece, Turkey, Britain, and the USA – entirely for their own ends.

Divide and rule

In 1878, Britain seized Cyprus, ending 300 years of Ottoman rule. Cyprus became a 'Crown colony' in 1914, reflecting its strategic importance to British interests in India, Egypt and the Middle East. Always quick to spot an opportunity to divide and rule, the British created two categories of citizenship, Greek and Turkish Cypriot. By the early 1930s there was widespread agitation against British rule. This was not in favour of independence as such but for *enosis*: union with Greece. To its advocates, *enosis* represented both the need for an ally in their efforts to throw off British rule, and a continuation of the process of consolidation of all Greeks into one state, which had involved Crete and Macedonia and which, after the Second World War, would involve the Dodecanese Islands. As a Greek nationalist project, *enosis* was also an obvious threat to the Turkish Cypriot minority, and when the armed movement EOKA launched its guerrilla campaign for *enosis* in 1955, countered by cynical British favouritism towards the Turkish Cypriots, there occurred the first significant inter-communal violence in Cyprus. (Even during the First World War, when Greece and Turkey were on opposing sides, there was no conflict between the two communities.) It is important to recognise that not all Greek Cypriots favoured *enosis*. Most of the Cypriot left, including the large Communist Party, favoured independence for Cyprus.

However, although the British were weary of fighting a guerrilla war and, having withdrawn from Iraq and been humiliated in Egypt, were anxious to be away, they were not interested in self-determination for Cyprus either. The Macmillan government held discussions with the Turkish government about a possible partition of Cyprus between Greece and Turkey. In the end, in 1960, an independence deal was thrashed out between the British, Greek and Turkish governments, and forced on the Cypriots, on the basis that a worse alternative, partition, was lurking just around the corner. In fact, the whole logic of the 1960 constitution was partitionist. The separate citizenship categories for the Greek and Turkish Cypriots were retained. There were to be separate Greek and Turkish Cypriot municipalities. There were to be separate elections for Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and certain laws had to secure a Turkish and a Greek majority, giving the Turkish Cypriots an effective right of veto. In the civil service, police, army and the House of Representatives the Turkish Cypriots were massively over-represented. Greece and Turkey had the right to station troops in Cyprus, and the Greek, Turkish or British governments had the right to intervene in Cyprus either together or alone. Ninety-nine square miles of Cypriot territory remained under British rule as 'sovereign bases'. Despite his objections to this package, the Greek Cypriot leader Archbishop Makarios was told by the British to 'take it or leave it'. What kind of independence was this?

Disadvantage

It could be argued that some of these measures were necessary to ensure that the Turkish Cypriot community had a stake in the new state. The Turkish Cypriots were generally poorer. The growing entrepreneurial layer was almost entirely Greek. Although Makarios opposed EOKA and *enosis*, it was wrong to blur the distinction between church and state by having a Greek Orthodox cleric as head of state. The Turkish Cypriot community, moreover, had a history of political and national advantage over the Greeks, creating a 'double minority' problem, where each community felt itself at a disadvantage. Cypriots could, given time, have sorted out many of these difficulties. For example, between 1960 and 1974 Greek Cypriot trade unionists made active efforts to recruit Turkish Cypriot workers. In 1969, when a tornado had hit the Turkish Cypriot district in Limassol, Makarios made a point of promising the inhabitants that the government would

make sure that their homes were rebuilt. The problem was that Cypriots would not be allowed to deal with their problems on their own and build a multi-ethnic society. By the 1960s, Britain had largely lost the capacity, or the will, to intervene in Cyprus, but was not prepared to stand up for Cypriot independence either, so it left the USA to get involved, and that is when things got really nasty.

The USA did not really have any time for Cyprus, seeing Cypriot self-determination as an irrelevance that provoked endless rows between two important Nato allies, Greece and Turkey. What was more, Cyprus had a large Communist Party, which Makarios refused to suppress, and was a member of the non-aligned movement: all in all, a nuisance. In 1964 the USA enlisted the help of the right-wing EOKA commander, General Grivas, in hatching a plot to partition Cyprus, bringing about a partial *enosis*. The plan was rejected, unsurprisingly by Makarios, but also by the Greek government. The reaction of US president Johnson to the Greek ambassador suggests that George W. Bush is not the first president to make 'regime change' a part of foreign policy:

'Fuck your parliament and your constitution. If your prime minister gives me talk about democracy, parliament and constitution, he, his parliament and his constitution may not last very long.'

Gangsterism

Indeed they did not. Grivas circulated documents which even a Greek military court later acknowledged as forgeries, alleging that there was a 'revolutionary conspiracy' in the Greek army, as a result of which, in 1965, King Constantine, with the backing of the right wing and the army, dismissed prime minister George Papandreou. When new elections were called for May 1967, Papandreou campaigned on a platform of constitutional control over the king, civilian control over the army, and a reduction of Greek dependence on the USA. Before the elections could take place, members of the army staged a military coup. Was the USA involved? The coup leader, Colonel Papadoupolos, had only been on the CIA payroll since 1952! Therefore, US attempts to destroy Cypriot self-determination resulted in the destruction of democracy in Greece. In 1968 Richard Nixon became US president, his campaign being funded, in part, by the Greek military government. (The go-between in this arrangement was the wealthy Greek-American Thomas Pappas, who was later up to his neck in the Watergate break-in, showing the intimate connection between gangsterism at home and abroad.) Clearly, there would be a time when Nixon would have to return the favour.

In the meantime, with the backing of the Greek junta and the USA, Grivas was in Cyprus, building a terrorist organisation, EOKA-B. Its targets were not Turkish Cypriots, but Greek Cypriots opposed to *enosis*: Makarios supporters, and the Socialist and Communist Parties. By the end of the 1960s, relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots had improved considerably after the violence of 1963-64. In the eyes of the Greek junta and its agent Grivas, this harmony was one step away from 'communism', and Makarios was standing in the way of the *enosis*, which the junta hoped would give it some credibility and legitimacy in Greece.

Catastrophe

The catastrophe came on July 15, 1974, in the form of a coup, planned and supported by the Greek junta, and despite US secretary of state Kissinger's brazen attempts to pretend otherwise, with the full knowledge of the State Department. As Grivas had keeled over with a heart attack some weeks earlier, the junta had found an even more detestable right-wing thug to do its dirty work, Nicos Sampson. The first phase of the fighting was between Greek Cypriots only, and the coup was resisted bravely by Makarios's security forces and members of the Socialist Party. Many Greek Cypriots received shelter from their Turkish Cypriot neighbours. Events moved fast. Although Makarios's residence was heavily shelled, he escaped. The junta in Athens lost both the initiative and its nerve. By July 18 the Greek army had deposed the then junta leader Brigadier-General Ioannides. The Turkish army established a bridgehead in northern Cyprus. The USA, seeing which way the wind was blowing, transferred its affection to the ascendant power, Turkey. Without the backing of the USA, the Athens junta, and the coup, collapsed. Just as Cyprus had been the catalyst for the fall of democracy in Greece, it was now the catalyst for its restoration.

This must have seemed scant consolation to the Cypriots, when, a full month later, with the coup and the junta both defeated, and, therefore, the immediate threat to the Turkish Cypriots removed, the Turkish army mounted a second, full-scale invasion, to 'rescue' the Turkish Cypriots, but occupying a third of the country. The killing of civilians, gang-rape of Greek Cypriot women by Turkish soldiers, and what 20 years later would be known as 'ethnic cleansing' was what followed. In the north, there was the wholesale eviction of the Greek Cypriot population. By the same token, the Turkish Cypriot community in the rest of the island was 'transferred'. Even then, there was little or no hostility between the two communities. According to a report in the *Washington Post* of August 11, 1975, as the 500-strong Turkish Cypriot community of Paphos was being transferred to the north, they handed the keys of their homes to their Greek Cypriot neighbours, asking them to look after them for them until they could return.

In an attempt to alter the demographic balance for good, the Turkish government started moving settlers from Turkey into the north, proclaimed in February 1975 as the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus (and in 1983 as an 'independent' state, although recognised only by, and totally dependent on, Turkey). The introduction of settlers was a particular project of the extreme right wing in Turkey, and many of the settlers were supporters of the fascist National Action Party.

Back in Greece, as a protest against the abandonment by the USA of Cyprus to the Turks, and in acknowledgement of the anti-Americanism now sweeping the country, even the pro-USA, veteran right-winger Constantine Karamanlis, who won the first post-junta election in 1976, withdrew Greece from the military structures of Nato (while remaining in its political structure). The stunning election victory of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement led by Papandreou's son, Andreas, in November 1981 told Karamanlis that he had been living on borrowed time. Meanwhile, in Turkey, prime minister Bulent Ecevit found to his cost that once the right-wing nationalist beast had been let out of its cage, it could not easily be coaxed back in. By 1980, the architect of the 'rescue operation ' in Cyprus was the prisoner of the Turkish military coup, a victim of the forces he had helped unleash.

The Cypriots, however, were hung out to dry, victims of Greek and Turkish nationalist governments, but principally of the USA. Special mention must also be made of the role of Britain, supposedly a 'guarantor' of Cypriot independence under the 1960 treaty. Many Cypriots will not easily forget how, despite having two 'sovereign bases' in the country, the then Labour government twiddled its thumbs while two Nato members, with US support, attacked a member of the British Commonwealth, and foreign secretary James Callaghan, out of cynicism or naivety, continued to peddle the lie that Henry Kissinger was attempting to act as a peacemaker.

Strategic

After destroying independent Cyprus, the USA lost interest in it for the best part of 30 years, while attempts at talks never really got anywhere. What has concentrated minds in Washington is the forthcoming European Union enlargement and US interests in the Middle East. The EU listed Cyprus as a potential member in 1998. The USA, for its own strategic reasons, would like its Nato ally Turkey to be in the EU. As Paul Wolfowitz, the US deputy defence

secretary, stated in a speech last December to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, key to Cypriot and Turkish membership of the EU was a resolution of the Cyprus 'problem'. UN-sponsored negotiations had already begun in January 2002 and in November that year, Kofi Annan was duly deputed to present a 'peace plan', giving the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaderships until March 2003 to agree. At the EU's Copenhagen summit in December 2002, Cyprus was invited to join the EU in 2004 provided the two communities agreed to the UN plan by the deadline, otherwise, only the Greek Cypriot part would join. To the US's irritation, Turkey was not invited.

Demonstrations

In any event, the UN proposals were rejected, for both good and bad reasons. Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash did not like it because it threatened his ethnically 'pure' mini-state. However, Denktash and his government quickly found themselves isolated. Huge demonstrations took place in the Turkish-controlled north, demanding that the government sign up. Supporters of the UN plan and, more specifically, EU entry, ranged from trade unions to businesses and non-governmental organisations. In his exasperation, the hard-line foreign affairs and defence spokesman, Tahsin Ertugrologlu, hit the nail on the head: '. . . they meet with whoever their masters are, Brussels, Athens, South Cyprus [sic], actively involved in a conspiracy to get rid of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus and the president, and as Cypriots, enter the EU.'

As ever, the government in the north was taking its orders from Ankara. Turkish prime minister Erdogan at first supported a 'Belgian' solution for Cyprus, involving a single federal state, and then switched to supporting a two-state solution, signalling a hardening of attitude in north Cyprus. However, it is difficult to see what Denktash's problem with the plan was. Many Greek Cypriots condemned the UN plan, or had severe reservations about it, because it had the same partitionist dynamic as the 1960 constitution. In fact, its loose federal structure appeared to legitimise the 1974 partition of the country. Instead of two states there would be *three*. No state's laws would have priority over any of the others, allowing each state to do as it wished. There would still be restrictions on the right of free movement, ownership and settlement for any Cypriot, anywhere in Cyprus. Greek Cypriot refugees from the north would be forced to accept compensation instead of being allowed to go home, and any compensation would not be paid by Turkey, but by Cypriot taxpayers.

But the prospect of EU membership meant that whatever their reservations, many Greek Cypriots would vote yes, and in February the pro-settlement centre-right candidate Tassos Papadopoulos, who had the support of the large Communist Party, Akel, won the presidential election. Vassos Lyssarides of the Greek Cypriot Social Democrats spoke for many when he said 'we rely on international solidarity, so people will vote yes even if it's a bad solution'.

Flawed

Even if the flawed UN plan appears to be dead and buried, and the strategy of linking reunification and EU accession appears to have failed, they seem to have set in motion a dynamic towards reunification which could prove unstoppable. On April 23, a clearly under-pressure Turkish Cypriot government opened the 'green line' for the first time. Within days, tens of thousands of people had crossed over, including a thousand protesters from both communities with a banner saying 'No war on Iraq'. The potential for working people in both communities to bypass the politicians was demonstrated by the May Day rally in Nicosia, joined by thousands of Greek and Turkish Cypriot trade unionists. There is already increased contact between workers' organisations from the two communities, and a forum for Cypriot trade unionists scheduled to be held in Budapest in June was brought forward to May, and moved to Nicosia. At a rally in Limassol on May Day, Pampis Kyritsis, leader of the Pancyprian Federation of Workers described as 'sensational and touching' the response of Turkish Cypriot workers to the call for joint celebrations. At the same event, Oder Konuloglu, president of the Turkish Cypriot trade union TURKSEN said that the 'Cyprus EU accession process, and the excellent days we have started living through . . . shall be the beginning of reunification and a permanent solution', while Demetris Kittenis of the Cyprus Workers' Confederation maintained that 'In a year from now our country will be a full member of the European Union, guaranteeing both human and workers' rights'.

While revolutionary socialists might not share the faith of Cypriot workers in the EU, nor take its commitment to workers' rights at face value (although we recognise the progressive content to such things as the working time directive), we have to see that the momentum created by the prospect of EU membership is taking Cyprus in a positive direction, in the sense that it is undermining not only the Turkish Cypriot government but the whole notion of an ethnically pure statelet. Enlightened self interest is also at work. Within ten days of the crossing being opened, visiting Greek Cypriots are believed to have put £1.5 million into the Northern economy, which is one-tenth the size of the Greek Cypriot state and has unemployment estimated at between 40 per cent and 60 per cent.

Self-determination

There is much that could go wrong. Denktash could refuse to re-open the border, and the Greek Cypriot state could enter the EU, leaving Turkish Cypriot workers stranded and at the mercy of a reactionary regime. There are countless disputes over property ownership to be resolved. There is also the problem of the Turkish settlers in the North. These now constitute 120,000 out of a population in the north of 200,000. Socialists generally argue for open borders, and that people should live where they like. However, many Greek Cypriots, who claim to desire nothing more than to live in equality and peace with Turkish Cypriots, regard the settlers as a product of 'demographic engineering', 'facts on the ground', on a par, presumably, with the settlers in the West Bank, or the Serbs and Croats moved in to the 'ethnically cleansed' parts of Croatia and Bosnia. Surely not all these settlers, or their children, are virulent Turkish nationalists. If they wish to stay in a multi-ethnic Cyprus surely they should be allowed to.

These problems can be sorted out if Cyprus is given the basic right of self-determination. If the imperialist powers continue to interfere, and allow the continuing division of the country, they most certainly won't be. As the demonstrators with the anti-war banner at the crossing point demanded, 'Let us govern ourselves'.

- Self-determination and unification for Cyprus! Keep the border open!
- Turkish troops out now!
- British troops out! Close the bases!
- For unity and equality between Greek and Turkish Cypriot workers!
- For British labour movement solidarity with Cyprus!
- For a socialist Cyprus!

WA

Farewell to the vanguard party?

What kind of organisation should Marxists be building? **Nick Davies** argues that we have to break from the traditional Leninist model and find a new and more relevant way of working

As a tribute to the late Jim Higgins, Workers Action No.19 (December 2002) published an article of his, in which, in his usual caustic style, he lamented the state of the British far left:

> Basing themselves generally on some largely imagined organisational principles laid down by Lenin under conditions of Tsarist autocracy, they would deny their own minorities the rights they loudly demand in the wider movement. . . . In the closed, overheated revolutionary circles, a form of historical playacting has replaced any connection with the real movement of the working class. . . . The left leaderships should stop pretending they are some reincarnation of Lenin in October 1917 and the membership should be educated in the traditions and the reality of the British working class.

Poor Jim. In 1976, when that article first appeared, he did not know the half of it. Things got a whole lot worse over the following quarter-century, and it is arguable whether they've yet to start getting better.

Militant, never comfortable at the prospect of free, critical discussion or thought among its membership, grew into a large sect, and then shrivelled into a tiny one, and in so doing, gave itself the ludicrous title of 'Socialist Party'. The Socialist Workers Party underwent several waves of expulsions in the 1970s and 80s, and since then activists attracted by the organisation's size and visibility, and the more critically minded members who question the bewildering zigzags of the leadership, soon find that they have fewer rights than in their trade union branch. The implosion, in 1985, of the Workers Revolutionary Party gave the tabloid editors some excellent copy, with stories of violence, intimidation and the sexual abuse of women members by its leader and guru, Gerry Healy. No wonder that the far left was seen by many as a refuge for cranks and cultists. No wonder that many on the left who had come to the conclusion (even before the Blairite takeover) that the Labour Party could never be a vehicle for real and lasting social change nevertheless refused to commit themselves to one of the far left organisations. From their own experience, or that of their comrades, they could expect a soul-destroying routine of activism, and indoctrination against the rest of the left. Why did they leave? 'I couldn't hack going to meetings four nights a week and every weekend', or 'They were desperate to recruit me, then they just took me for granted', or 'Our branch didn't agree with the organisation on some issue or other, so the leadership kept sending people up from London to talk us round, then they split the branch, and then a load of us just got fed up and left', or 'I was accused of being "petit-bourgeois" ', or 'I was expelled when I told my girlfriend what happened in a branch meeting'.

The Socialist Party may only be a fraction of the size of *Militant* in its heyday, and the only active remnant of the WRP is the bizarre and irrelevant *NewsLine* sect. However, what has not gone away is the burning question of what kind of party or organisation socialists need. The failure of these previous groups has been used by some as a reason for doing away with any kind of organisation, on the basis that they are all corrupt and repressive, and therefore counter-productive, and by others as a justification for a much looser kind of organisation. Others will say that there is nothing wrong in principle with building these kinds of organisations, but that the problem was of the leaders – the 'bad men' view of history.

Democratic centralism

Most parties or organisations of the far left, from the Communist Party of Great Britain of 1920-91 to the tiniest sects and propaganda groups, base their practices on those of Lenin's Bolshevik Party, or, more accurately, on their particular interpretation of those practices, known, partly for reasons of political shorthand, as democratic centralism. It is worth looking again at the history of the Bolshevik Party and asking ourselves a number of hard questions: To what extent were the Bolsheviks' methods correct in the first place? To what extent are they applicable now? To what extent are the bad practices of the far left in recent times derived from the theoretical heritage of Bolshevism? As the Bolshevik Party was largely the creation of Lenin, any critique of that party inevitably becomes a critique of Lenin.

To say that the Bolshevik Party and Lenin's ideas on party organisation are products of the particular conditions of Tsarist Russia scarcely does the subject justice. Russian revolutionaries were forced to operate under conditions of police repression, in a country where the peasantry dwarfed the small and localised working class and the middle-class intelligentsia, many of whom were influenced by Marxism. Exile and imprisonment depleted the ranks of the scattered groups of revolutionaries. In this situation, two themes preoccupied Lenin: the need for centralisation, and the need for a vanguard party. Some of the ideas set out in the Marxist journal *Iskra* seem uncontroversial even today. Take, for example, the role of *Iskra*: 'A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser.' On the other hand, under Lenin's influence, *Iskra* was to become famous, or infamous, for its ruthlessly polemical style, prompting Trotsky's comment that it was 'fighting not so much against the autocracy as against the other factions in the revolutionary movement'. More problematic still was Lenin's concep-

tion of the party as an elite vanguard. This was partly an inevitable consequence, it was argued, of the conditions in Tsarist Russia. By necessity, any revolutionary organisation had to restrict its membership, be largely clandestine, and composed mainly of 'professional revolutionaries'.

Context

This conception, borne out of a particular political context, coexisted with one that, for Lenin, had a much wider application. This, most famously argued in *What Is To Be Done*, was that 'class political consciousness can only be brought to the workers from without, that is, only from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers'. This refers to and legitimises the need for 'professional revolutionaries'. The elitist and centralist implications of Lenin's conception were seized on at the time by Lenin's opponents. Martov commented that they would result in the formation of a 'bureaucratic, putschist organisation'. In 1904, Trotsky, no longer in the same organisation as Lenin, following the split the year before in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) which created both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions, warned that 'Lenin's methods lead to this: the party organisation at first substitutes itself for the party as a whole, then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally a single dictator substitutes himself for the Central Committee.'

Nevertheless, Lenin protested that he was in favour of the broad democratic principle. This, in his view, presupposed two conditions: 'full publicity, and election to all offices'. It was only the need for security and secrecy that prevented the party operating in such a way. These problems were not unique to the Bolsheviks. The same reasons of security also precluded the functioning of the elective principle in the Menshevik organisation.

Flexibility

The comparative freedom brought about in the two years after the 1905 revolution gave Lenin the opportunity to demonstrate his flexibility and his adherence to democratic principles. As soon as the political situation loosened up, so did the Bolshevik Party. At the Bolshevik conference in London in April 1905, Lenin successfully moved a resolution which noted that, although 'the full assertion of the elective principle, possible and necessary under conditions of political freedom, is unfeasible under the autocracy', nevertheless, '*even under the autocracy this principle could be applied to a much larger extent than it is today*' (My emphasis – ND). In St Petersburg the leadership consisted of an elected conference which met twice a month and which was subject to re-election every six months. It was this conference which elected the party committee in the city. Lenin's view was that this arrangement made 'possible and inevitable the participation of the majority of outstanding workers in the guidance of all the affairs of the entire local organisation'. Referring to the vote on whether or not to boycott the elections for the first Duma, Lenin's recommendation was that 'a referendum in the Party' should take place whenever an important political question was involved. In Moscow, the elective system was operative in party committees at factory, town and district level down to 'nearly the end of 1907'. In Odessa, in October 1905, the Bolsheviks in the city decided to model their party's organisation on the German Social Democrats. Lenin was in favour of a 'liberal' interpretation of the right of free expression in the party press, declaring in November 1905 that 'There is no question that literature is least of all subject to mechanical adjustment or levelling, to the rule of the majority over the minority. There is no question, either, that in this field greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclination and fantasy . . .'

In this period, and this context, this was what democratic centralism meant for Lenin when he argued in a resolution put to the 1906 Stockholm congress of the RSDLP (at which the term 'democratic centralism' appears to have been used for the first time) that 'the principle of democratic centralism in the Party is now universally recognised'. In his report on the Stockholm congress Lenin spoke of the need 'really to apply the principles of democratic centralism in Party organisation . . . and see to it that all the higher-standing bodies are elected, accountable and subject to recall'. Of course, democratic centralism implied the right to existence and of freedom of expression for minorities. The Bolshevik Party congress of 1905 gave an unconditional right to minorities 'to advocate [their] views and carry on an ideological struggle, so long as the dispute and differences do not lead to disorganisation, split our forces, or hinder the concerted struggle against the autocracy and the capitalists'. Within the reunified RSDLP, after 1906, Lenin's interpretation of minority rights was even more generous: 'there can be no mass party . . . of a class, without full clarity of essential shadings, without an open struggle between various tendencies. Of course, democratic centralism combines freedom of discussion with unity in action.' Ruled out by Lenin was 'all criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the unity of an action decided on by the Party. In the heat of battle, when the proletarian army is straining every nerve, no criticism whatever can be permitted in the ranks. But before the call for action is issued, there should be the broadest and freest discussion and appraisal of the resolution, of its arguments, and its relevant proposition'. According to Lenin, only the party congress possessed the authority to make the call for action that would suspend the freedom to criticise.

Intolerance

So, the most liberal interpretation of democratic centralism is, in this period, also Lenin's, assuming that we take Lenin at face value. Unfortunately, as his political opponents among the Bolsheviks would find out in due course, he did not always stick to the letter or spirit of this interpretation. This was particularly so after the autocracy re-established its grip after 1907. In particular, the 'Leftists', led by Bogdanov, and the 'Conciliators', who sought to reunite the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the RSDLP, found themselves on the receiving end of sectarian intolerance, characterised by Lenin's almost absurdly poisonous invective. Increasingly, Lenin's emphasis was on absolute party homogeneity on principles, on strategy, but also on *tactics*. Lenin began to contrast those members showing *partiynost* ('partyism') with those who showed 'anti-party tendencies'. Thus a kind of 'party patriotism' developed – 'my party, right or wrong' – according to which all methods of preserving the unity or integrity of the party were legitimate.

Having had to confront difficulties of party organisation and democracy as an underground faction, the Bolsheviks had to confront them again, after the October Revolution, as the ruling party in Russia. Confronted by appallingly difficult circumstances, the Bolshevik Party took, or some would say were forced to take, a number of extraordinary measures, some of which were justifiable, some of which seem difficult to justify today but can be understood in the particular context, and some of which cannot be justified and which, although this was not the intention of those who advocated them, speeded up the degeneration of the party and of the state. Examples of this last category are the freeing of the Cheka from party control, the repressive measures taken against those tendencies in the workers' movement which opposed the Bolsheviks but supported soviet power, and, within the party, the banning, at the 10th Congress in 1921, of all factions and tendencies opposed to the leadership. It might be objected that there was a difference between actions against elements outside the party and intra-party measures, but a party which brooks no criticism speeds up its own degeneration – a one-party state becomes a no-party state. The point is not, for now, to embark on a discussion on the rights and wrongs of these acts. Let us assume, for the moment, and for the purposes of argument, that we accept Lenin's concep-

tion of the party, and the justification given for the abrogation, at certain times, of the principles of party democracy. The point is that we have here, broadly speaking, three conceptions, or models, of party organisation on which the political heirs of the Bolsheviks could base their own practice: pre-1905, 1905-07 and post-1917. Which have they chosen?

Absurdity

Whilst the analogy with 1905-07 is somewhat stretched (no recent revolution, workers' insurrection or the emergence of soviets, for a start!), there is no conceivable doubt as to which of these conceptions of democratic centralism is appropriate to the present period, or indeed the entire post-war period in most of western Europe, North America and Australasia, and, increasingly, in parts of eastern Europe and Latin America, where the far left, although small and marginalised, is legal. Nevertheless, Gerry Healy of the WRP, *Militant*'s theoretical guru Ted Grant, and Tony Cliff of the SWP, all of whom would have surely thrown the Lenin of 1905-07 out of their own organisations for 'petty-bourgeois individualism' and who carried out routine expulsions for 'indiscipline', plumped for an amalgam of the first and third of these conceptions, so that the (possibly necessarily) grotesquely warped version of democratic centralism which existed under Tsarist autocracy or in immediate post-revolutionary isolation, in the midst of famine, civil war and foreign invasion, is the version of democratic centralism which has been handed down to the would-be Leninist-Trotskyist groupuscules of the last 50 years. For a group to base its political organisation on this conception, in a liberal bourgeois democracy, decades later, would simply be screamingly funny in its absurdity were it not for the fact that we, the revolutionary Marxists of today, who, whether we like it or not, are the political heirs to this tradition, are faced with the monumental task of unlearning this nonsense and finding a new, and rather more relevant way of working.

'Bad men'

But this isn't the whole story. Aren't we resorting to the 'bad men' theory of history here? Surely the far left organisations did not become so degenerate simply because their leaders made bad choices, or failed to study properly the history of the Bolshevik Party or the Russian Revolution? Why did they choose to build organisations in this way? It is argued that they did not 'choose' this way at all. It was 'forced' on them, the 'inevitable' result of an existence isolated from the masses, during a post-war period turning out to be completely different from that which had been expected. In this situation, it is argued, cliquism and cultism thrive. Indeed, sectarianism – putting the interests of the organisation above those of the working class as a whole – or, which is even worse, cultism – so that the membership is cut off from everyday political reality – are the only ways to keep together an organisation dedicated to imminent revolution, when revolution seems very far away. How else can the membership be kept together as the positions of the organisation lurch from the ultra-left and back again in an attempt to find an interface with the working class and make the long-awaited 'breakthrough'? There is a large element of truth in this. Many who argue it seek in no way to justify the actions of a Healy, for example. But it is not the whole truth either.

Healy, Cliff, Grant and the other lesser chieftains scattered across the globe are easy targets. A more pertinent question is from where did these tin-pot despots get their tools, and the theoretical justification for what they did? We ought to look a bit further back.

Most of the far left had its origins in the opposition to Stalinism which emerged first in the Communist Party in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, spreading throughout the next 20 years to most of the parties of the Comintern. To be more precise, the far left's origins lie, in the main, in the Left Opposition, led by Trotsky, which, from 1926 to 1927, joined with the supporters of Zinoviev and Kamenev to form the Joint Opposition.

Degeneration

Trotsky's struggle against the degeneration of the party in Russia was too late and, possibly more importantly, too narrow, fought out as it was within the confines of the party only. Why was it too late? Because he had been the orchestrator, or at least a keen supporter, of many of the measures which had created a gulf between the Bolsheviks and the working class: the expropriation of the factories from the workers' councils, the advocating of incorporation of the trade unions into the state, and the militarisation of labour. Although this was not his intention, these measures had already hastened the process of degeneration of the party into an administrative apparatus, a process completed by the time the 10th Party Congress of 1921 imposed its ban on factions, a measure also supported by Trotsky, two years before the founding of the Left Opposition.

Why too narrow? Because the struggle was confined to the party only. Trotsky was always a 'party patriot', once he'd actually joined it. Possibly in order to prove his party loyalty to the 'old Bolsheviks', Trotsky's party patriotism had all the zeal of the convert. Once defeated at the 12th Congress in 1923, Trotsky remained a loyal member of the party until 1927 when he and the rest of the Joint Opposition were expelled. Unfortunately, if the working class as a whole was to be won over, something radically different from party patriotism was required. The Left Opposition groups inherited Trotsky's party patriotism, as well as the cruder vanguardism of the Zinovievists. Party patriotism in the Bolshevik Party could at least be understood. After all, it had been the Bolsheviks, not the Mensheviks or the other tendencies, which had won power and kept it. However, the opposition groupings, when they emerged (a particular example is Cannon's SWP in the United States and its earlier incarnations), took this party patriotism with them, and also very often adopted a restrictive and distorted version of democratic centralism modelled on the bureaucratised parties which they had just left. They camouflaged their insignificance with the trappings of the mass party and a particularly excitable rhetoric, in imitation, conscious or otherwise, of Lenin's polemical style in *Iskra*. Opposition to Stalinism took the form of doctrinal orthodoxy, embodying a certain authoritarianism, at least as much as a reclamation of the democratic impulse of the October Revolution, or the practices of post-1905 Bolshevism. As a result, Trotskyism inherited much that was philistine, dogmatic and intolerant from Stalinism.

There has to be a connection between the Trotskyist groupings' mini-mass party mentality, their frequent virulent sectarianism and their adherence to the conception of the vanguard party. Blaming the post-war leaders such as Ted Grant or Tony Cliff only tells part of the story. It's a get-out clause for the Trotsky-worshipping 'consistent Trotskyists'. It's a convenient way of avoiding dealing with a deeper problem, and part of that problem is what amounts to the sacred cow of the vanguard party. This is common to Stalinism and Trotskyism, and has affected every organism from the CPSU to the tiniest Trotskyist propaganda group. The Leninist conception of the vanguard party was developed for a specific political environment. That part of it which was supposed to have a wider application, about how 'class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without' is not only demonstrably untrue, as was shown as early as 1905 with the emergence of the soviets, but was partially disowned by its author no more than a year after it was written: '. . . we all know that the economists have gone to one extreme. To straighten matters out somebody had to pull in the other direction, and that is what I have done.' And just how irrelevant is the declaration in *What Is To Be Done* that socialist aims could not be attained if 'we begin with a broad workers' organisation, which is supposedly most "accessible" to the masses (but which is actually most accessible to the gendarmes and makes revo-

lutionaries most accessible to the police)'? In any field of political activity, or indeed any activity at all, other than organised religion, uncritical adherence to such a text would be thought of as laughably quaint.

Pretensions

But it is not enough to draw back from the self-evident absurdities of, say, the Healy regime, without developing a fully worked out alternative to it. Isn't it time we made a bonfire of the organisational paraphernalia of Leninist kitsch, such as 'central committees' and the like, along with the accompanying political pretensions, all designed for a party of several tens or hundreds of thousands, many decades ago? This rigmarole acted as a substitute for the dialogue with the working class that these organisations simply weren't having, and, in the form in which they existed, couldn't have had. They became the necessary trappings of thoroughly self-referential sects, surviving on rhetoric and self-delusion, which frequently acted as mere cults dedicated to Lenin and Trotsky, and their own particular interpretative guru. In the hands of these 'leaders', the 'vanguard party' is akin to a loaded gun. We have seen examples of 'party patriotism' in the quite unacceptable way in which members of far left groups behave towards their supposed comrades in other tendencies. (How often have we heard the term 'comrade' uttered with a knowing sneer?). We have seen it in the way that political positions are used not to explain, understand or enlighten, but as a political knuckle-duster, or a shibboleth, to justify a separate existence from the group which seems closest. We have seen it in the way that, rather than admitting to doubt, difference, or disagreement, members chorus the 'line', only for that line to change with indecent haste a few years later.

Fresh start

More generally, and more importantly, the far left needs to make a fresh start, re-examining the way it does things, how it organises itself, and how it communicates within itself and to the world.

So, what sort of organisation do we need? From this question flows two others. The first is: how does the far left relate to other organisations and individuals; in other words, how does it make people, ordinary working people, often with busy lives and who come home from work feeling tired, feel that it is worth their while joining? Is it going to seem relevant to them? Are its concerns their concerns? The second question is: how do we see the future development of a revolutionary leadership? What is it going to look like, and how is it going to intervene in society?

Whether or not revolutionary Marxists are prepared to junk all Lenin's thoughts on party-building, at the very least they can adopt, as a minimum starting point, his views on democratic centralism from 1905-07. Balking at the elitist implications of Lenin's 'professional revolutionaries' does not prevent revolutionary Marxists from carrying out their work 'professionally' in the sense that they do it well. Rejecting the elitist implications of the vanguard party does not mean that in the present period, revolutionary Marxists can have the luxury of addressing the entire working class. At the moment we can only communicate with the class-conscious 'vanguard', but that vanguard, and the situation in which it finds itself, is a world away from Russia in 1903. Rejecting Lenin's most centralising tendencies should not be an excuse for the 'democracy' of the permanent assembly, which is not a democracy at all, or for everyone doing what they like, regardless of the views of the majority. A certain basic organisational discipline is required, consistent with the maximum democracy and freedom of expression. Part of the art of making this work is to be able to decide which questions are appropriate for the group to adopt a position on at all. Obviously, certain questions, such as wars, strikes or major upheavals in the class struggle might require a single 'line'. For others, there is surely no need for a 'line', so why not let a 'hundred flowers bloom'?

Further, and possibly controversially, should we necessarily be striving to create only one party? A party or organisation without openness and criticism, especially self-criticism, and which believes itself to be the sole repository of Marxist truth, is not in danger of degenerating, it *is* degenerate. If a number of organisations can work together on a long-term basis, might it not be better to accept each other's existence, rather than resorting to endless manoeuvring, membership-poaching, and abortive splits and fusions. To try to build a single vanguard party when our aim is multi-party workers' democracy, exercised through workers' councils, seems illogical. The big problem with the vanguard party idea is that not everyone whom its leaders think ought to be in it will want to be in it. What happens to those people who support a socialist revolution but don't join, or won't join, the party, or join something else, is a question never satisfactorily answered.

The recent anti-war protests, involving hundreds of thousands of young people, all new to political activity, served as an encouragement and as a warning to the ageing far left. What was encouraging was that despite New Labour's attempts to reduce politics to technocratic managerialism, gutting it of any ideology or principles, protest and political activity are not out of fashion. With union militancy on the increase again, and wide public support for the firefighters, the potential audience for our politics seems to be on the rise. What should serve as a warning is how society has changed in subtle as well as not-so-subtle ways since the last time the far left was able to grow. The way young people relate to political activity seems to be more fluid, and less structured than the 1960s and 1970s, with more of an emphasis on single-issue politics than on parties or organisations. They can be won to revolutionary Marxism, but not by being herded into a community centre to be patronised by a party hack in a donkey jacket. Look at the way they recoil from New Labour's leadership cult, or the condescending control freakery of Charles Clarke or Tessa Jowell.

Jim Higgins never got to see the renewed far left that he hoped for. Let us hope, for their sake, that the school students who walked out of lessons to protest against the war find a revolutionary Marxism of which they can feel a part. **WA**

How are revolutionary parties formed?

Ever since the Russian Revolution, small groups of revolutionaries have applied themselves to the task of building vanguard parties. *Revolutionary History* editor **Al Richardson** examines why so much effort has resulted for the most part only in the building of sects isolated from the working class

The title of this article is all the more necessary since straight away I wish to remove the misunderstanding that all I am arguing for here is the necessity for revolutionaries to support the Labour Party, and hence 'reformism'. Another misunderstanding that may as well also be dismissed at the start is that the 'Leninist' theory of party building demands that revolutionaries should operate as a small sectarian formation calling itself a 'party' that elaborates its programme without involving the class in its deliberations. I have elsewhere tried to show that this false concept of 'Leninism' is a caricature dreamed up by Zinoviev to discredit Trotsky.[1] Needless to relate, even when the Bolsheviks operated clandestinely from abroad, Lenin argued that workers should be encouraged to take an interest in the arguments going on within the party, and write to its newspaper taking sides in them. If they were not made aware of these differences, how could this be possible?

The necessity of working class unity

I will start with the necessity for the unity and unification of the working class by quoting a passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, written in the year before the *Communist Manifesto*.

> Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle. . . .
>
> Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself. The organisation of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society. . . .
>
> Meanwhile the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution.[2]

It is quite clear that, contrary to the understanding of it current among all the revolutionary groups today, the United Front is not a temporary non-aggression pact between sectarians, but an attitude which revolutionaries adopt to the existing mass working class movement and its institutions. Obviously revolutionaries stand for the unity of the class rather than splits, because all other organisations represent only sections of the class. The trade unions only represent that minority of the working class organised in them, and not at all the unemployed, or those who do not go out to work, but are part of the class nonetheless. For example, since the trade unions pay for the Labour Party, it represents the labour aristocracy, the better-off workers. In part, too, it represents the non-working class petty-bourgeois democracy (that is, where it does not represent merely the appetites of its leaders, which seems increasingly to be the case).

Even would-be revolutionary organisations represent only sections of the class in the same way and are not, therefore, whatever they claim, parties. The present Socialist Workers Party has a high content of students, teachers, social workers and white-collar local government functionaries; the Socialist Party shares this implantation in the civil service and local administration; the Alliance for Workers Liberty has a student base and, at least in London, a high proportion of computer programmers; the tone of Workers Power is set by lecturers. But revolutionaries alone represent the whole of the class. And, as Marx has explained, to continue in power the ruling class has to split up its enemy by the old tactic of *divide et impera* – divide and rule.

Therefore, the class can only be unified at the point when it comes to power. This, as Marx points out, can only be a political struggle led by the party of the class. So while there might be particular tactical applications, the United Front as a whole is not a 'tactical question' at all, but a strategic goal, and that is illustrated throughout history. As Trotsky pointed out, when Lenin called for 'All power to the Soviets' when the majority were Menshevik and SR, he was calling for the entire working class to take power. Similarly, in Germany in 1933 Trotsky called for the Communists and Socialists to unite against Hitler. If this had succeeded the working class would have been in a position to make a bid for power afterwards.

What do we mean by a working class party?

Before we explain the relationship between party and class, we must rid ourselves of the notion that the Marxist concept of a revolutionary party is of a uniform, tightly organised Blanquist conspiracy destined to preach doctrine and give orders to an unconscious and passive working class, or simply an organisation formed to contest elections. When Marx and Engels used the term, the word 'party' was only just ridding itself of its previously unpopular connotations as a conspiracy of a group of politicians against the rest of the citizenry. To them, the party of the working class consisted of all those who took its 'part', or side, in the class struggle. What workers in Britain had previously possessed the vote had already lost it in the first Reform Bill, before Marx and Engels became active in politics. Owenites, Proudhonists, Lassalleans, anarchists, trade union leaders and even nationalist insurrectionists all had their place in the international organisations they helped to build. Obviously, these parties could not be described as 'revolutionary' as a whole, or even to a great extent. Marx and Engels envisaged their role as of an inner kernel, educating the party in the direction of revolutionary consciousness by a combination of propaganda, programmatic elaboration and the day-to-day experiences of the workers themselves.

The United Front from within

Next I want to deal with how to build revolutionary parties by means of the United Front from within. This is best illustrated from the words of Engels rather than Marx himself, as to use the latter would involve a very large amount of tedious history. But it is not illegitimate to use them in this case, because Engels is summarising his own and Marx's past practice, and he is looking back at their previous experience.

Here is Engels writing to Bebel, a leading German socialist:

> Our view, which we have found confirmed by long practice, is that correct

> tactics in propaganda is not to draw a few individuals and members here and there from one's opponent, but to work on the great mass which still remains apathetic. The primitive force of a single individual whom we have ourselves attracted from the crude mass is worth more than ten renegade Lassalleans, who always bring the seeds of their tendencies into the party with them. And if one could only get the masses without their 'local leaders' it would be all right still. But one always has to take a whole crowd of these leaders into the bargain, and they are bound by their previous utterances, if not by their previous views, and have above all things to prove that they have not deserted their principles . . .[3]

Again, writing to a female socialist in the United States, Engels says:

When Marx founded the International, he drew up the general rules in such a way that all working class socialists of that period could join it – Proudhonists, Pierre Lerouxists and even the more advanced section of the English trade unions; and it was only through this latitude that the International became what it was, the means of gradually dissolving and absorbing all these minor sects . . . . Had we from 1864 to 1873 insisted on working together only with those who openly adopted our platform, where should we be today? I think that all our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our own distinct position and even organisation . . . .[4]

In a nutshell that defines our attitude to those who differ from us. Working class unity demands that we have to work with large numbers of people with whom we do not agree, in institutions that are not governed by our principles. Communists grow up as a party inside the institutions of the class, and not outside them. They alone, in fact, stand for the unity of the class. That is borne out by all past experience. In his articles in *Labour Standard* Engels advised the British trade unions to form a party, a future Labour Party, and just before he died he himself joined the ILP. He was in favour of the union of the Eisenacher 'true' Socialists with the Lassalleans, who were by no means socialists in our sense, while the early Comintern defined the form of the United Front in Britain as the struggle for the acceptance of the Communist Party into the Labour Party.

Throughout the 1930s Trotsky was an entrist of one kind or another in Britain, and in the United States he pressed the American SWP to build a Labour Party. Entrism is not an invention of Trotsky at all; but he did give it its definition as the 'United Front from within'. Thus the split of *Militant* from the Labour Party, and of the WRP and SWP before them, needlessly cuts off the advanced revolutionaries from the rest of the class before what Engels calls 'the great mass which still remains apathetic' is ready to move. It can only lead, as it so obviously does, to a sect counterposing itself in an ultimatistic manner to the mass institutions of the working class. It robs the class of its leadership at the very moment that it starts to think, and if the mass movement and the trade unions are on one side, and the revolutionaries are on the other, then the split is premature.

Communists and the mass movement

This leads on to the question of the relationship of revolutionaries to the mass movement, and I fear I may start a row here. So my next quote is taken from Marx's *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 in the old SLP edition of 1909.

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole? The Communists are no separate party distinct from other working class parties. They have no interests separate from the interests of the proletariat in general. They set up no sectarian principles on which they wish to model the proletarian movement.

The Communists are only distinguished from other proletarian parties by this: that in the different national struggles of the proletarians they point out and bring to the fore the common interests of the proletariat independent of nationality; and, again, that in the different evolutionary stages which the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie must pass through, *they represent always the interests of the movement as a whole* [my emphasis – AR]. . . .

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: organisation of the proletariat on a class basis; overthrow of the supremacy of the bourgeoisie; conquest of political power by the proletariat.[5]

So Communists cannot represent sections of the class to the detriment of the rest of it; so neither can they counterpose sectional demands, such as feminism, to that of the movement as a whole. Just as there is no such thing as a 'Communist engineer' – for the Communist engineer is primarily a Communist, who happens to be an engineer by trade, but as a Communist he represents the aspirations of the entire class – so there is no such thing as a 'Socialist-Feminist'. Nor do we assist the ruling class by helping to break up the class on the lines of race by supporting separatist Black Power organisations and slogans, and in this connection when people talk about 'Black sections' in the Labour Party one thinks of the Russian Bund in the past. What we should strive to do is to persuade the class as a whole to take up the demands of the sectionally oppressed and, in emancipating itself, emancipate them.

This concept also applies to the little sects of self-proclaimed 'vanguard parties' who hope to build up their organisations to represent the class by a molecular recruitment of ones and twos. The experience of Russia is that the Bolsheviks were the majority section of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and, almost invariably, mass Communist parties arose out of deep splits within the Social Democratic ones.

The lessons of history are, alas, quite clear on this. They even apply to the Trotskyist organisations that have at one time or another attained a leading position in the working class. Except in countries such as Bolivia, where no party generally accepted by the working class had previously existed, there has never been a mass revolutionary party created by recruitment in ones and twos to a sect. The Chilean, Vietnamese and Ceylonese organisations either came out of a split within a previous organisation, or from a split within a previously existing United Front with the Stalinists. In the latter examples it was the Stalinists who split away through dog-like loyalty to the Comintern's demands for an alliance with the bourgeoisie: the Trotskyists only broke their organisational links with the Stalinists in Vietnam in 1937, and in Ceylon in 1940. That is how a revolutionary party conquers and unites the working class in the struggle for power.

Nor should it escape our notice that one of the major demonstrations of the success of this policy in Britain was provided by the long and patient struggle of *Militant* within the Labour Party, which not only provided the Trotskyists with their first MPs, but also enabled them to bring a major industrial city into direct conflict with the government, and assume leadership in the struggle that defeated the hated Poll Tax. The fact that they lost their nerve at the time of the witch-hunt and obligingly pulled their supporters out of the Labour Party when the bureaucracy asked for it does not detract from this splendid achievement.

The last word on this question was provided by Trotsky himself:

> The fact that Lenin was not afraid to split from Plekhanov in 1905 and to remain as a small isolated group bears no weight, because the same Lenin remained inside the Social Democracy until 1912 and in 1920 urged the affiliation of the British CP to the Labour Party. While it is necessary for the revolutionary party to maintain its

independence at all times, a revolutionary group of a few hundred comrades is not a revolutionary party and can work most effectively at present by opposition to the social patriots within the mass parties. In view of the increasing acuteness of the international situation, it is absolutely essential to be within the mass organisations while there is the possibility of doing revolutionary work within them. Any such sectarian, sterile, and formalistic interpretation of Marxism in the present situation would disgrace an intelligent child of ten.[6]

Organisation and consciousness

So how, in the end, do we explain why revolutionary consciousness continues to vegetate in small groups with extravagant pretensions, while the workers in their organisations appear to remain inert?

By the examples of their lives Marx and Engels proved, and Lenin explained why, that the science of revolutionary theory has to be taken to the working class from the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois intelligentsia who are renegades from their class. The increasingly minute division of labour under capitalism, and the conditions of working class work and existence, simply do not provide the opportunity for large numbers of workers to generalise their class consciousness alone and concentrate it into an instrument for the seizure of power. The task of the revolutionary party is to create an indivisible unity between the two groups. Intellectuals must proletarianise themselves, and workers must create their own theory.

We are still living in an epoch in which this has only rarely taken place, and to explain this we have to talk about the relationship between ideas and organisation. Conditions determine consciousness, as Robert Owen proved long ago. The consciousness of our petty-bourgeois intelligentsia – often of a surprising level of sophistication, for we should not at all be ashamed of the quality of our thinkers, and any one of us could reel off a list of over a dozen of them scattered among the different revolutionary groups – is formed by the ready and rapid exchange of ideas. Theorists, writers, lecturers and teachers have to be able to drop an idea at will, and take up another – often, in education, a series of bewildering, self-contradictory and irrational ideas dictated by the demands of one governmental department or another. The Socialist intelligentsia therefore comes to accept the need for a revolutionary organisation from the need to give ideas a concrete application. So the movement here is from ideas to organisation.

Working class consciousness arrives at the same goal from the opposite direction. The very need to defend its wages and working conditions requires extensive organisations, and imbues the working class with a strong sense of the necessity for class solidarity. The very existence of a trade union, however little it may do by way of class struggle, puts limits upon the power of the bosses in the workplace. Class-wide institutions are a question of survival, not of choice. If workers left their organisations every time their leaders betrayed them, the entire trade union movement would be broken up into impotent and incoherent fragments. They extend this strong sense of loyalty to those parties which claim to speak in their name. So the opposite is true of the thinking of the working class: class consciousness here is a function of working class organisation.

Revolutionaries neglect this difference in thought patterns at their peril. Since the mountain cannot come to Mohammed, it is the task of Mohammed to go to the mountain.

Notes

[1] A. Rosmer, *Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism*, Francis Boutle Publishers, 2002, pp.12-14.
[2] K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Progress, 1973, pp.150-152; also see *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol.6, pp.211-212.
[3] F. Engels, Letter to Bebel, 1873, in *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, Progress, 1955, p.283.
[4] F. Engels, Letter to F.K. Wischnewetsky, 1887, in *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, p.400.
[5] See also *MECW*, Vol.6, pp.497-498.
[6] L. Trotsky, *Writings (1935-36)*, Pathfinder, 1977, p.382.

From mass murder to genocide

The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution
By Mark Roseman
Penguin, 2003, 152pp, £6.99

Richard Price

On January 20, 1942, a group of 15 well educated men, mostly in their 30s, sat round a conference table in an elegant villa in a Berlin suburb on the shores of Lake Wannsee and discussed mass murder. Afterwards they chatted over cognac and cigars, and went away to carry out their duties as senior civil servants, or as SS and Nazi party officials.

The minutes (or 'Protocol') of the Wannsee Conference have fascinated and appalled historians since they first came to light in 1947, when evidence was being collected for the Nuremburg trials. Much of the controversy surrounding this slim document has centred on the extent to which Wannsee marked the turning point of the Nazis' 'Final Solution'. Mark Roseman's book sifts through the mass of conflicting historical research concerned with the triggering of the Holocaust and subjects it to thorough analysis.

In its broadest sweep, at issue is whether the Nazis had a blueprint for genocide all along, or whether the successive shifts from racist discrimination, to mass murder, to extermination were responses to external events. Then there is the significance accorded to the Protocol – 'a deeply mysterious document' as Roseman describes it. 'On the face of it,' he writes, 'it captures the moment when the Nazis decided to eliminate the Jews. The prosecutors believed they had found the Rosetta stone of Nazi murder and the Wannsee Protocol still figures as this in popular imagination today . . . [But] The mass murder of Soviet Jews had begun half a year earlier. Jews had been gassed at Chelmno since December 1941. The Belzec concentration camp was already under construction.' (p.2)

Historians have searched long and hard for the Holocaust's smoking gun in terms of an order from on high. That the search

has been largely fruitless is explained by the extremely cautious approach both Hitler and Himmler had when committing orders on Jewish issues to paper. Nonetheless, Roseman describes the Wannsee Conference, chaired by the ambitious head of the Reich Security Main Office (RHSA), Reinhard Heydrich, as 'an important act of closure in the process of turning mass murder into genocide'. (p.6)

The author draws some interesting distinctions between different groupings within the Nazi leadership. The leading cadre of the RHSA, which was a merger between the SD (the SS security service) and the Gestapo, was comparatively young, and drawn from the student circles that were enthusiastically anti-semitic in the 1920s and 30s. It was 'as fanatic and committed as the Party rank and file, but hostile to street violence, seeking a rational and organized solution' (p.17) to the Jewish question. This, Roseman suggests, predisposed this group to the leading role it took in the industrialised murder of the Holocaust.

The step-by-step, piecemeal approach of the Holocaust was partly the product of rivalries within the Nazi leadership. When the Second World War began, there was no plan for genocide as such. As late as the summer of 1941, the regime was still promoting Jewish emigration. When Jews began to be deported to the 'General Government' administration of eastern Poland, its governor, Hans Frank, resisted it being turned into a 'social refuse tip'. In the spring of 1941, on the eve of the attack on the Soviet Union, Nazi officials still thought in terms of removing Jews – albeit with great brutality – to a territory in the east.

Murder

The invasion of Poland in September 1939 was an important turning point in accustoming both party and civilian arms of the occupying administration to large-scale killing. Hitler, who had 'always regarded murder as a legitimate means of political struggle', now used it widely as a 'tool of political control and social engineering'. (p.24) The Nazis cut a swathe through the Polish intelligentsia after the invasion. Around a third of those killed by the end of 1939 – civil servants, teachers, academics, officers, etc – were Jewish. In the spring of 1940, all Polish Jews with mental health problems were murdered. In the Polish crucible, 'the pogrom-style violence of the Party man, the controlled brutality of the security police and the callous disregard for local interests of the "colonial" civil servant began to meld'. (p.26)

The invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 greatly accelerated these trends. By December 1941, the activities of the Einsatzkommando groups and other forces had resulted in the murder of half a million Jews in the Baltic states and the western flank of the Soviet Union. Initially, orders appear to have sanctioned the killing of Jewish men of working age. But from there to outright genocide was a short step. Roseman concludes therefore that: 'By August 1941 at the latest, the fate of Soviet Jewry was sealed.' (p.33) Concurrently, a staggering two million Soviet prisoners of war had died in captivity through starvation and disease.

Evidence

Even this level of mass killing fell short of the plan expressed in the Wannsee Protocol to eliminate all of Europe's Jews. But if German occupation officials were still clamouring in the summer of 1941 for a section of Soviet territory to be used as a dumping ground for German and eastern European Jews, the manner in which they were to be deported was intended to be little short of genocidal. Roseman examines the conflicting evidence of whether the impulse towards full-scale genocide came from zealous regional officials acting in advance of direct orders, or whether it emanated from the 'Centre'. In practice it is difficult to separate the two. When Himmler ordered mass deportations to Lodz in early autumn 1941, the initiative to kill 100,000 Jews to make room for the deportees came from local officials, although it was sanctioned by the 'Centre'.

The meeting at Wannsee on January 20, 1942, thus took place several months after the decisive steps towards carrying out the Final Solution had been taken, even if they had been taken at slightly different times in different sectors of German-occupied eastern Europe. The Protocol 'suggests that a comprehensive plan was just emerging'. (p.74) The presence of senior civil servants at the meeting indicates that Heydrich not only wanted to introduce a high level of bureaucratic efficiency into the genocidal project. He also wanted to ensure that bureaucrats and party men were in it together. One of its most significant sections noted:

> In the course of the Final Solution, and under appropriate leadership, the Jews should be put to work in the East. In large, single-sex labour columns, Jews fit to work will work their way eastwards constructing roads. Doubtless the large majority will be eliminated by natural causes. And doubtless any final remnant that survives will consist of the most resistant elements. They will have to be dealt with appropriately, because otherwise, by natural selection, they would form the germ cell of a new Jewish revival. (p.113)

About a third of the Protocol is devoted to a series of related issues that caused the assembled dignitaries more difficulties than the principle of mass murder ever would. In a discussion that has strange echoes of South African apartheid's racial definitions, they debated what to do with half-Jews and quarter-Jews, and Jews in mixed marriages. The Nuremburg Laws had not given watertight criteria as to who was a Jew. As a result, both quarter and half-Jews were termed *Mischlinge*. Nazi radicals wanted half-Jews designated as Jews, whereas the Interior Ministry, eyeing public opinion, wanted them to retain a separate status. Quarter-Jews had been allowed to marry Germans but not Jews or *Mischlinge*. Future mixed marriages had been banned by Nuremburg but it had left open what was to be done about existing ones. Heydrich got his way in narrowing the definition of those exempted from the Final Solution to a tiny number. Only half-Jews with exceptional service to the state could hope for anything better than deportation, and that in any case meant sterilisation. Quarter-Jews if there was anything unfavourable in their record or if they looked Jewish could also be deported, as could the Jewish partners in mixed marriages. Heydrich's insistence on the strictest racial criteria served to emphasise his dominant role in the Final Solution.

Supremacy

The Wannsee conference was 'part of a concerted, co-ordinated campaign by Himmler and Heydrich to assert their supremacy'; (p.84) the Protocol 'was probably the closest the Nazis ever came to writing down their overall plan of genocide'; (p.103) it was not the blueprint for the Holocaust as such, but rather 'a signpost that genocide had become official policy'. (p.107) Whereas up to March 1942, less than ten per cent of the victims of the Holocaust had perished, in the year that followed, half of its victims would die.

Coolly analytical, Mark Roseman's cameo is a significant addition to the history of the Holocaust. He emphasises that to read backwards the full horror of the Holocaust is to endow Nazism with a prescience it lacked. Although Hitler's anti-semitic ravings from the 1920s onwards played a powerful role in creating the climate for the Holocaust, to a significant degree it evolved out of conditions its authors reacted to empirically: 'Striking though the degree is to which educated young men subscribed to Nazi ideas, the fact is that they nevertheless embarked on a journey that left far behind what they could have imagined.' (p.91)

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Introduction to 'The March Action'

Richard Price

This short article first appeared in English in *Fourth International*, Volume 1, Number 2, Summer 1964. Its author, Pierre Broué (b.1926), was for many years a member of the Lambertist tendency in France (variously OCI, PCI, and latterly Parti Ouvrier). An internationally recognised historian, Pierre Broué has published a steady stream of books and articles on the history of the revolutionary movement for over four decades. His only book-length work to be published in English is *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (with Émile Témime), which was originally issued in France in 1961. Other works yet to be translated include *The Bolshevik Party* (1971), *Revolution in Germany 1917-1923* (1971), an epic 1,000-page biography, *Trotsky* (1988), and his *History of the Communist International* (1997). He is also the editor of many collections of Trotsky's writings, including an authoritative version of his post-1928 writings, *The Chinese Question in the Communist International*, and *Leon Trotsky, Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer: Correspondence (1929-39)*. He is the founder and editor of *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, a journal dedicated to historical research on Trotsky and the revolutionary movement. He was expelled from the PCI in 1989, on the pretext that he had addressed a right-wing gathering (on Trotsky!) without the party's permission. He currently publishes *Le Marxisme Aujourd'hui*, and is a member of the Socialist Party. Translations of five articles by Broué can be found at: http://marxists.anu.edu.au/history/etol/writers/broue/

The debacle represented by the 'March Action' in Germany in 1921 was a crucial turning point in the development of the Communist International. The defeat led to a crisis in the German Communist Party (KPD), which had repercussions for the entire International. Under the immediate impact of the defeat, the Third Congress of the Comintern steered a course away from the adventurism and putschism which Bukharin and Zinoviev's 'theory of the offensive' had encouraged, and adopted the policy of the united front. Yet even after such a graphic lesson, the united front continued to be resisted in practice by a number of important Comintern sections.

The March Action does contain enduring lessons for the left above and beyond the specific adventurist actions advocated by the majority of the KPD leadership. At their broadest, they are that to attempt to lead workers across a broad front into offensive actions, without having first convinced a majority of workers to take part, still less having won their organisations to supporting the action, will almost always lead to defeat and confusion.

In *Left Wing Communism*, Lenin had insisted that '. . . you must soberly follow the actual state of class consciousness and preparedness of the whole class (not just of its communist vanguard), of all the toiling masses (not only their advanced elements)'. Many on the left today disagree in practice with Lenin's approach. Instead, their method is to itemise the betrayals of the Labour and trade union leaders, and counterpose to this 'what is necessary', whether this involves making a fetish out of the call for a general strike, or elevating the standing of candidates in elections into a principle. The groups affiliated to the Socialist Alliance may not have that much in common. But they do share a common belief that the central task at present is to organise 'the left of the left' independent of a significant level of radicalisation across broad sections of the working class.

What unites the ultra-leftism of the 1920s with its less spectacular, though no less mistaken, forms today is that together they are the 'Marxist' first cousins of the anarchist 'propaganda of the deed'. The decision for action is taken largely independent of the organisations of the working class, and is relayed to workers at best as an example to follow, and at worst as an ultimatum.

Further reading: Pierre Broué's *Revolution in Germany 1917-1923* is perhaps the most important Marxist study of Germany in this period, but it remains untranslated (see above). There is, however, an extensive literature on the March Action and its aftermath. For a general overview of the German workers' movement and the prospects for revolution, see Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918-1923*, Bookmarks, 1982; Mike Jones, 'The Decline, Disorientation and Decomposition of a Leadership' in *Revolutionary History*, Vol.2, No.3, Autumn 1989; and 'Germany 1918-23: From the November Revolution to the failed October', *Revolutionary History*, Vol.5, No.2, Spring 1994. Extracts from Paul Levi's pamphlet, 'Our Course Against Putschism', together with documents and correspondence from Radek are in Helmut Gruber (ed.), *International Communism in the Era of Lenin*, Anchor, 1972. The Executive Committee of the Comintern's statements on the March Action and on the expulsion of Levi, together with its manifesto on the conclusion of the Third Congress, are reprinted in Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents*, Vol.1, Oxford, 1956. Lenin's comments (referred to in the text of the article that follows) can be found in Klara Zetkin, *My Recollections of Lenin*, Moscow, 1956, together with her own views. Brief comments by another participant, Heinrich Brandler, can be found in Isaac Deutscher, *Marxism, Wars and Revolutions*, Verso, 1984, pp.135-137. Other memoirs include Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow*, Bookmarks, 1987, pp.144-151, and Rosa Leviné-Meyer, *Inside German Communism*, Pluto, 1977, pp.17-20. The assessment made by the Third Congress of the Comintern, in section VII of the 'Theses on Tactics' and in the brief resolution 'The March Events and the United Communist Party of Germany', can be found in Alan Adler (ed.), *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, Pluto, 1983. Trotsky's speech to the Third Congress dealing with the March events is in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol.1, New Park, 1973, while a later assessment and a sharp public attack on Paul Levi is in Vol.2, New Park, 1974. Lenin's speeches to the Third Congress are in *Speeches at Congresses of the Communist International*, Progress, 1972, while his later 'Letter to the German Communists' is in his *Collected Works*, Vol.32, Progress, 1965, pp.512-523.

Germany 1921

The March Action

Pierre Broué

March 1921. An atmosphere of civil war. Armed nationalist bands provoke workers suffering from crisis and unemployment. In central Germany hard-fought strikes break out; the miners have bloody tussles with the police. On March 16, Horsing, the Social Democratic security chief, announces that the police will occupy the mining district of Mansfeld. Objective: to restore calm, disarm the workers.

The police were welcomed with firing. *Rote Fahne*, organ of the German Communist Party, on the 18th appealed for resistance: 'Every worker should defy the law and take arms where he can find them.' On the 19th a thousand police occupied the district: the strike spread to all trades in the affected region. The workers barricaded themselves in their factories; on the 23rd there was fighting throughout the district. On the 24th the Central Committee of the German CP called for a general strike. It was not followed. Fights between workers broke out everywhere: the strikers, few in number, took on the 'blacklegs' who remained in the majority, the Social Democrats and the trade unions indignantly denouncing the attempted 'rising' of the communists. . . .

Here and there Communist officials organised false attacks on themselves in order to provoke the indignation of the masses and bring them into the struggle. In the centre of the country the factories were surrounded and bombarded and gave up one after another: the Leuna factory, the last to do so, surrendered on the 29th.

On the 31st the CP rescinded the strike order. Illegal once again, it was to experience an unprecedented crisis: a number of its leaders, including Paul Levi, denounced its adventurist policies and were expelled. Shortly afterwards the Third World Congress of the Communist International gave its verdict on the 'March Action', in which it saw a 'forward step' at the same time as it condemned the theory of 'the offensive at all costs' which its supporters had put forward. The German party lost a hundred thousand members, including many trade union cadres, who had refused to follow it, condemned its actions or been overwhelmed by the publication in the bourgeois and socialist press of documents which incriminated its leaders.

It was some time before it was understood that the March Action brought to a close the post-war revolutionary period, that it was the last of the armed actions of the proletariat which had begun with the struggles in Berlin in January 1919. The contribution which this affair made to the failure of the German Communists to build a revolutionary mass party, a Communist Party of the Bolshevik type, has yet to be measured.

The building of the party

The Bolsheviks thought that their revolution could only be the forerunner: the problems posed in Russia could only be resolved on a world scale and, in the meantime, the decisive battlefield was Germany, where the bourgeoisie, after November 1918, owed its survival to the alliance between the officer corps and the Social Democratic and trade union apparatus against the Workers' Councils. The murderers employed by the socialist Noske won the first round: by assassinating the revolutionary leaders Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the outstanding founders of German communism, they decapitated the young party which was coming into being.

The vanguard, moreover, was deeply divided. Years of opportunism had fed a violent anticentralising reaction in the German working class; the years of war pushed the young generations towards impatience and adventures. Against the leadership around Paul Levi a strong leftist minority called for the boycotting of elections, condemned work in the trade unions and wished to retain from the Russian experience only the lesson of the insurrection, which was possible at any time since the workers were armed and the bourgeoisie was provoking them. Lenin, who polemicised against them in *Left Wing Communism*, nevertheless wished to keep them in the party, but Levi took steps to expel the leftists.

Despite the difficulties, the new perspectives seemed to confirm his viewpoint. The Independent Social Democrats [USPD], born of the split from the Social Democratic Party during the war, had recruited hundreds of thousands of instinctively revolutionary workers whom Levi hoped to win for communism *en bloc*. Their leaders had collaborated in the crushing of the Councils in 1918, but the difficulties of the working class in post-war Germany, the prestige of the Russian Revolution, the tenacious action of the International, radicalised them and won them gradually towards communism. In September 1920, at their Congress at Halle, the majority of the Independents decided to ask for affiliation to the Communist International and to accept its 21 conditions. In December the Unified Communist Party was born: it had over half a million members, a solidly organised vanguard with strong fractions in the big unions, control over local unions in several industrial towns, 40 daily papers and several specialised reviews and periodicals, an underground military organisation and considerable financial resources. It was the instrument which had so far been lacking to bring the proletarian revolution in Germany to a successful conclusion, all the communists thought.

The conquest of a majority of the proletariat

The Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920 had set itself the task of the construction of such parties, with the perspective of an early conquest of power in several countries. Summing up its work, Zinoviev, president of the International, declared: 'I am profoundly convinced that the Second Congress of the Comintern is the prelude to another congress, the world congress of Soviet republics.' And Trotsky explained why the Communists wished to see a *split* in the working class movement: 'There is no doubt that the proletariat would be in power in all countries if there had not been between the Communist Parties and the masses, between the revolutionary masses and the revolutionary vanguard, a powerful and complex machine, the parties of the Second International and the trade unions, which, in the epoch of the disintegration and death of the bourgeoisie, placed their machine at its service. From the time of this Congress, the split in the world working class must be accelerated tenfold.'

Zinoviev indicated the meaning of the split at Halle: 'We work for the split, not because we want only 18 instead of 21 Conditions, but because we do not agree on the question of the world revolution, on democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat.' For the Communists the split was not simply a state of affairs destined to last for some time, but an immediate necessity in order to eliminate definitively from the workers' movement the reformist leaders who acted as 'agents of the bourgeoisie'. It was the preface to the reconstitution of unity on the basis of a revolutionary programme, a condition for victory in the struggle for power.

Once the split had been realised there was still the question of wresting from the reformist chiefs the millions of proletarians who made up their following. Lenin, more than anyone, sought to win support in the Communist Parties for the understanding of the necessity for a United Front policy; later, Zinoviev said of this policy that it was 'the expression of the consciousness that (i) we have not yet won a majority in the working class; (ii) the social democracy is still very strong; (iii) we occupy defensive positions and the enemy is on the offensive; (iv) the decisive battles are not yet on the agenda'.

It was from analysis such as this that at the beginning of 1921 the leaders of the German CP addressed an 'open letter' to the trade unions and workers' parties proposing common action on an immediate programme of defence of living standards. The letter, which Lenin described as a 'model political initiative', began with the recognition that

more than ten million workers still followed the Social Democratic leaders and the trade union officials and obeyed their orders. 'Communist strategy,' wrote Radek, 'must be to convince these large masses of workers that the trade union bureaucracy and the Social Democratic Party not only do not want to fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat, but also do not want to fight for the most fundamental day-to-day interests of the working class.'

However, the Second Congress fixed as a first objective the construction of parties capable of leading the struggle of the masses for power: for Zinoviev and a part of his group, in the headquarters of the International, the idea of the 'conquest of the masses' apart from the march to power was an opportunist conception. They saw the 'open letter' as an instrument of demobilisation.

Destructive activism

Rallying to the Zinoviev line after having been one of the authors of the 'open letter', Karl Radek then wrote to the German CP that it was necessary to break with the wait-and-see attitude which it had followed while it was still a sect and become conscious that, now that it was a mass party, it had become a real factor in the class struggle. It was necessary, he wrote, 'to activise our policy in order to draw in new mass support'. For his part, Rakosi, emissary of the International at the Italian Socialist Party Congress at Livorno, adopted the same activist position and took pleasure in the perhaps inevitable but catastrophic split, which left the overwhelming majority of the revolutionary workers behind the centrist leaders of the Socialist Party and reduced the scarcely founded Italian CP to the status of a sect. Against Levi, who maintained that they had no right to split when the movement was in retreat, he boasted before the Central Committee of the German CP of the necessity and virtue of splits, developing the theme of a 'too large party' which 'would strengthen itself by purging itself'.

Another collaborator of Zinoviev, a compatriot of Rakosi, Bela Kun, bore the responsibility, as emissary of the International, for having thrown the German CP into the 'March Action'. Did he, as has been supposed, follow the suggestions of Zinoviev, who was frightened by Russian internal difficulties at the time of the Kronstadt revolt? Did he try to 'force' a revolutionary crisis in Germany to prevent the Russian communists from having to make the retreat of the New Economic Policy? In the present state of documentation no certain answer is possible. What is certain is that Kun placed his prestige as Comintern delegate behind a theory of the offensive which was to be used to justify the position of the CP in March and was to end in disaster.

It is equally unquestionable that the centralised structure of the International, the doubtful practice, introduced by Zinoviev, of Comintern agents not responsible to the parties which they supervised, raised a problem of organisation which would be pointed out by Lenin at the Fourth Congress, but never really tackled.

Lenin on the party and the March Action

It is known today, on the other hand, that Lenin and Trotsky had to wage an energetic political struggle in the leadership of the Russian CP and the CI against the partisans of the offensive, at the head of whom stood Zinoviev, before imposing their point of view at the Third World Congress. It was upon Trotsky that the task devolved of showing that the international situation had been modified since 1919, that the taking of power was no longer on the agenda, but that the Communist Parties had to turn to the conquest of the masses: a condition for the struggle for power in the next phase of revolutionary advance.

To Lenin fell the task of denouncing, 'wringing the neck' of, the theory of the offensive, holding up to ridicule the puerile arguments of its defenders – the 'kuneries', as he called them, of Kun, as well as the boasting of the Italian Terracini, who took advantage of the Bolshevik example in order to excuse the small size of his own party.

Lenin joined Levi in denouncing the March Action. He was careful, in approving someone who had broken party discipline, not to anger those who, through discipline, and in good faith, had followed absurd slogans. He conveyed his inner thoughts to Clara Zetkin, who, very fortunately, later recounted them. Lenin thought that Levi's criticism was justified. Unfortunately, he made it in a 'unilateral, exaggerated and even malicious fashion', in a way which 'lacked a sense of solidarity with the party'. In short, 'he lost his head' and thus concealed the real problems from the party, which turned against him. For this he had to be condemned by the Congress and was. But Lenin added: 'We must not lose Levi, both for ourselves and for the cause. We cannot afford to lose talented men, we must do what is possible to keep those that we have.' Lenin declared himself ready, if Levi 'behaved himself' (for example, by working for the party under an assumed name), personally to ask for his readmission after three or four months. 'The important thing,' he said, 'is to leave the road open back to us.'

Speaking to Clara Zetkin of two workers, Melzahn and Neumann, supporters of Levi and delegates at the World Congress, who had even been reproached by hecklers for the posts which they held in the trade unions, while they replied by attacking 'hair-splitting intellectuals', Lenin said: 'They are wonderful . . . I do not know whether they will make shock troops, but there is one thing of which I am sure: it is people like these who make up the long columns with solid ranks of the revolutionary proletariat. It is on their unbreakable force that everything depends in the factories and the trade unions: these are the elements who must be assembled and led into action, it is through them that we are in contact with the masses.' He added, speaking of the Independent leaders who had come to communism in 1920: 'With them also patience is necessary, and one mustn't think that the "purity of communism" is in danger if it sometimes happens that they do not succeed yet in finding a clear, precise expression of communist thought.'

Through these informal words of Lenin to the German militant can be seen the constant concern of the revolutionary leader for his party. Lenin saw that a leadership cannot be built in a few days by bureaucratic decisions, but develops and raises itself up in years of patient effort. It was vital not to 'close the doors' by purely negative attitudes to erring comrades but to aid them, develop a deep sense of the solidarity of the party and enable them to take their bearings. The party of the workers' vanguard had to bring together different generations, comrades with varied experience: the young, the impatient, the 'leftists' together with the older, more solid and prudent, often 'opportunist' members. The intellectuals had to be brought into harness with the practical men of the trade unions. The contacts of the party had to be enriched and its understanding, consciousness and means of action developed by the qualities brought into it by people from very different, yet close, backgrounds: syndicalists, socialists, anarchists – who sought a common goal by different roads, like the proletariat itself. All these men had to be brought into a common struggle by a constant effort to construct the party, raise the level of its consciousness and by fighting to raise the level of the consciousness of the masses. 'Learn, learn, learn! Agitate, agitate, agitate! Be prepared, prepared to the utmost in order to use the next revolutionary wave with all our conscious energy.'

These are the real lessons of the March Action. Thus, as Lenin stressed in a letter of August 14, 1921, to German militants, revolutionaries must learn 'to determine correctly the times when the *masses* of the proletariat *cannot* rise with them'. Ten years later, in the face of the Nazi hordes, there would not be a revolutionary party in Germany, but a Stalinist party and a Social Democratic Party which equally shared the responsibility for the disaster of 1933. The responsibility of those who were unable to build the party which was necessary in Germany is no less crushing. After them, however, it is no longer possible to underestimate the difficulties of the enterprise, and to believe that it is enough to 'proclaim' ideas in order to win, without undertaking the hard labour of construction of the historic instrument for their victory.

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