Workers ACTION

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November 2: the global election

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Cover: Demonstration against Bush in New York City on August 29, 2004

About Workers Action

Workers Action is a Marxist current in the labour movement.

Workers suffered a series of heavy defeats under the Tories from 1979 onwards. The Labour movement is only now beginning to show signs of recovery both in terms of the level of strike action and the election of left-wingers to leading trade union positions. But the Labour Party leadership is resolutely pro-free market and pro-business, and has yet to see a real challenge to its authority inside the party.

Workers Action believes that the most important task at the moment is a struggle to renovate the existing labour movement, politically and in the workplace, so that it can fight effectively in its own interests.

This requires a struggle in the Labour movement as it is, with all its problems and weaknesses. Workers continue to support the Labour Party far more than any other party in elections and 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 a positive development in that they show that there is opposition, 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 at the moment there is a realistic possibility of a serious electoral challenge to Labour. 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.

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Editorial

Bush v Kerry: what's at stake?

Should socialists in the United States break with tradition and vote for John Kerry on November 2?

Election time in the United States of America means that two rich right-wing men spend millions of dollars in pretending that the political differences between them are much greater than they really are. Anything up to 50 per cent of those eligible to vote, and a higher percentage of African-Americans, refuse to dignify this nauseating spectacle with their participation.

Outside the United States, it is usually a matter of supreme indifference to millions in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America as to which brute will have the privilege of bombing them, supporting their local military dictator or looting their natural resources. For as far back as anyone can remember, it has never really mattered who wins.

But not this time. In this election millions of people all over the world are desperate for change, and millions in the United States are preparing to vote for the first time. What they want, above all else, is the end of the most repulsive regime ever seen in the United States, or indeed in any democracy. There are two questions. Are these people right in placing so much importance on simply changing the occupant of the White House, rather than the system which placed him there, and how should socialists relate to the phenomenon known as Anyone But Bush?

To answer both questions, we need to ask further questions. Is the Bush regime merely business-as-usual US capitalism, albeit with some particularly unpleasant features? Is it simply the cold war combination of paranoia and overwhelming military might updated for the modern era? Or is it something worse?

The nature of the Bush administration

A number of factors indicate that the Bush regime is not a business-as-usual administration. The prominence of the neo-cons suggests that while previous US administrations harboured crazies, such as Senator McCarthy in the 1950s, this administration *are* the crazies. The neo cons, who occupy key government positions, believe in the doctrine of pre-emptive war. They intend to develop tactical nuclear weapons, to be used on a first-strike basis. Their attitude to international law, and treaties, is one of rampant lawlessness, as evidenced by the string of US gulags, of which the one at Guantánamo Bay is only the best known. The Patriot Act could have been drafted in Brezhnev's USSR.

The refusal, by a country that with five per cent of the world's population produces 25 per cent of the pollution, to ratify Kyoto or indeed to take seriously any environmental issues, could, over several decades, condemn millions of people to death and cause catastrophic damage to the planet. The violation of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act could leave the USA with decades of environmental damage. The regime's hostility to condoms as prevention against AIDS threatens the lives of millions of Africans. This policy is just one manifestation of the lash-up between the neo-cons and the fundamentalist Christian right. So is the threat posed by a second Bush term to the right to abortion. Uncritical support for Israel, which threatens a Middle East bloodbath, does not merely reflect US strategic interests but the belief among millions of Bush's core supporters in the literal truth of the Book of Revelation. In a cranking up to a hitherto unknown intensity of the USA's long-running 'culture war' there is a relentless, and increasingly ferocious, offensive by regime supporters in Congress and in the media against 'liberals' – which means everyone other than the far right of the Republican Party – environmentalists and socialists as 'un-American', who are, in a thinly veiled incitement to murder, equated with 'terrorism'.

The leadership of the Republican Party is dominated by those who never accepted the Clinton presidency as legitimate, despite the fact that Clinton was by no stretch of the imagination a liberal. If Kerry wins, they will first aim to have him impeached or destabilised, and then think of the reasons why. Finally, Bush and his cronies rigged the 2000 election in Florida on blatantly racial grounds and then, in a judicial *coup d'état*, had the result verified by judges nominated by Bush's father, or his father's boss. Thatcher never did this, and neither, so far as we know, did Nixon or Reagan.

When the Republican Party was content merely to be one of the twin parties of US capitalism, it had a sizeable liberal wing. Civil rights for black people, the right to abortion and gay rights presented no problem so long as they did not get in the way of making money. It was Nixon who reached out to southern whites when the reforms of Kennedy and Johnson won American blacks to the Democratic Party, and it was under Reagan that the coalition between neo liberalism and social illiberalism was cemented. The often forgotten Independent candidate in the 1980 election, John Anderson, was in fact a liberal Republican. Now, those liberal, or pragmatic (as they would prefer to be called) Republicans are utterly outshouted and marginalised, their last significant representative in government, Colin Powell, going absent without leave during the convention.

Even if the above analysis of the Bush regime is a correct one, does it justify an electoral position of Anyone But Bush, which for all practical purposes, and notwithstanding the candidacy of Ralph Nader, means a vote for the Kerry-Edwards ticket?

Why socialists don't like voting Democrat

There are three basic objections among United States socialists to the breaking of the taboo against voting for the Democratic Party. The first is aversion to what is known as 'lesser evilism', in other words, voting for the party or candidate which presents the lesser evil. But what is wrong with this? In the absence of any significant workers' party which can intervene in the political process on its own terms (in other words, most of the time!) the history of the workers' movement has been, in part, a history of tactical choices based on lesser evilism. Bourgeois democracy against fascism? Most workers were happy to have bourgeois democracy, with all its faults, every time, and socialists who in the Second World War adopted a position of neutrality between Nazi occupiers and the national bourgeoisie-led resistance generally consigned themselves to irrelevance. Another example: imperialist occupation against a national liberation movement? No contest, surely.

Taking the argument onto the plane of parliamentary politics, we advocate voting Labour in Britain in the first place because Labour is a party based upon workers and their organisations, and at least contains the possibility of a fight for socialism within its structures that could potentially change the policy of the party. But there is an element of 'lesser-evilism' involved here too, since both Labour and Tory governments stand for varieties of bour-

geois democratic rule, and under both class relations are fundamentally the same. When workers vote Labour, they vote, or think they are voting, for a series of reforms that will make their conditions of life better than those offered by the Tories, who are historically the most direct representatives of the ruling class. Workers would hardly form the bedrock of Labour's voting strength if their social outcomes were consistently worse under Labour governments than under Tory ones.

The preference for capitalism plus democracy plus social reforms over just capitalism and democracy is surely a sign of class-based 'lesser evilism' at work.

The second objection is that the Democratic Party is not a workers' party but a bourgeois party, one of the twin parties of the US ruling class, no less. Historically, its record of opposing human rights and democracy in furtherance of US interests is as bad as that of the Republican administrations. Would socialists have voted for the Democrat Adlai Stevenson in 1956 because of the McCarthy purges and the overthrow of Mossadeq in Iran? Should they have voted McGovern in 1972 because of Vietnam? It was Nixon who got out of Vietnam, shook hands with Brezhnev, and went to China. It was Kennedy who went in to Vietnam and attempted to invade Cuba.

Socialists should not be advocating a vote for non-workers' party, so the argument runs, but be attempting to build a US Labour or Workers' Party. But what about the Greens, or various nationalist or populist formations? They are not workers' parties, but socialists have in the past advocated a vote for them, and quite rightly too, in some cases. As for the US Labour Party, it is currently dormant and is not fielding candidates in this election, nor did it in the last one. At the moment, there appears to be nothing there to vote for, or to build.

The third objection is that the Kerry-Edwards ticket is not particularly liberal even by the standards of the Democratic Party. Much has been made by the Bush regime of Kerry's 'liberal' record in the Senate. He's more liberal than some in the Senate, and less than others. He supports a woman's right to choose. He opposes Bush's tax breaks for the very rich. He's made some noises about heath and education, and Edwards has referred to the 'two Americas' without, of course, coming up with anything that remotely begins to tackle the USA's appalling poverty and inequality. Kerry is more liberal than Bush, but that's not difficult. However, Kerry voted for the war on Iraq, although now, along with a number of other Democrats, he claims he was misled into doing so. He voted for the Patriot Act, as did almost all Democrats in Congress. He is putting at the centre of his campaign his record in a previous blood spattered escapade, the Vietnam War. Therefore, isn't an Anyone But Bush position simply a way of building support for someone who supported the policies that are apparently so exceptional that they justify a vote for the Democrats?

The case for voting for Kerry

Taking all these arguments together, there is nevertheless a case for voting for Kerry on the grounds that four more years of Bush represents a real, immediate threat to the lives of millions of people all over the world, either through starvation, disease, environmental disaster or war. In the USA itself, the right to abortion will be lucky to survive until 2008. A Bush second term threatens still further the United States's battered and corrupted version of bourgeois democracy, the right to demonstrate, the right to publish and the right to dissent. The millions who intend to vote against Bush, and the millions more outside the US who hope he loses, even if they have no illusions at all in Kerry, are right to see Kerry as the lesser evil. The thing is, many of those who refuse to vote for Kerry are secretly crossing their fingers hoping that he wins. But that is not an honest position. Either you want Kerry to win, in which case you say so, or you genuinely don't care, but you can't have it both ways.

The important argument is less about whether there is an actual difference between the two parties than about how key sections of class conscious workers and the anti-war movement perceive there to be differences. Even if we took the view that the two main parties were exactly, or almost exactly, the same as each other, how should socialists relate to class-consciousness amongst those who believe that from the point of view of the US working class, the most important task at the moment is getting rid of Bush? If we stand on the sidelines, we will never get a hearing, and the present state of the US left does not say a great deal for the merits of the abstention position. If socialists go through that experience of getting rid of Bush with those workers and activists, even if they do not see the question in quite the same way, then they might listen when the left tries to convince them that a Labour Party, and not the Democrats, is the answer.

Advocating a vote for Kerry does not mean that socialists should campaign for him. Neither does it imply any political support for the Kerry Edwards platform. It means that socialists should, on this occasion, vote to put Bush out, which means voting for Kerry. It is permissible to hold the nose while doing so, or to walk through disinfectant after leaving the voting booth, as did those voters in France who preferred the crook Chirac to the fascist Le Pen.

It is difficult to predict what will happen to Nader. He is standing as an Independent, not on a Green Party ticket as he did in 2000. Then, his campaign was a Labour Party campaign in all but name, attracting support from many socialists and trade unionists. Because of the pressure to get Bush out, he's unlikely to pick up as much support as last time, but he is still a genuine alternative to the two big parties, and the only one that is likely to trouble the scorers. One problem is the amount of bad blood between Nader and the Democrats, including liberal or left-wing Democrats, over allegations that in standing last time Nader took votes from Gore and helped Bush win. These do not hold a lot of water, given that many of Nader's voters would not have voted Democrat anyway, and that Bush only 'won' by the intervention of the Supreme Court.

If Kerry does win, what will happen? There'll be an almighty backlash against the neo-cons, who are already regarded in sections of the military and the State Department as a bunch of fanatical, incompetent chancers, or, as Colin Powell pithily put it, 'fucking crazies'. General Tommy Franks, not, so far as we know, a part of the US left, has referred to leading neo con Douglas Feith as the 'fucking stupidest guy on the face of the earth'. The Project for the New American Century will require some redrafting. With two one-term presidents, the political credibility of the appalling Bush family will take a nose-dive. Saddled with a war he supported but was not his idea in the first place, president Kerry will probably attempt a withdrawal of troops from Iraq on the best possible terms, leaving behind a puppet regime. It won't be Vietnam style defeat, but it might be a while before the USA attempts another invasion. Kerry will be under pressure to repeal or modify the Patriot Act, to ratify Kyoto, and to mend fences with France and Germany. Without his ally, Blair will face increased international isolation: no Aznar, no Bush, and only Berlusconi left, and he is living on borrowed time. Blair will of course pontificate about the 'special relationship', but his closeness to Bush may result in a frostiness between him and Kerry reminiscent of the Clinton-Major period. Of course, all the inequality, poverty and racism which disfigure the USA will still be there, but if socialists have worked together with workers and anti war campaigners to get rid of Bush, then those workers may be more inclined to listen to what socialists have to say, and so the conditions for building a workers' alternative to the Democrats and Republicans will be enhanced. **WA**

Comment

Russia out of Chechnya!

The horror of Beslan is the price of Russia's brutal ten-year war against the Chechens

There is no point looking for a justification for the hostage taking in Beslan, because there can be no justification. There are reasons though.

Over the past ten years the Chechens have had plenty of practice at burying their own children. In 1993, before the first of the two Russian invasions of 1994 and 1999, the population of Chechnya was two million. Now it is 800,000. At least 200,000 Chechens are estimated to have died in the ten-year conflict, although it is hard to get reliable figures. Hundreds of thousands more are refugees, many having survived torture or gang-rape by Russian soldiers. Playing unwilling host to 300,000 Russian soldiers, Chechnya must be the most insensitively occupied country in the world.

Vladimir Putin is the second Russian politician who has made a career out of being 'tough' on Chechnya. Because Chechnya was not a constituent republic of the USSR, but an autonomous republic of Russia, it was not allowed to go its own way in 1991. Instead, it suffered as a result of the determination of first Boris Yeltsin and then Putin that the Russian empire would not fall apart. Yeltsin used the destruction of Chechnya as the means of securing his re-election in 1996, before he finally retired to spend more time with his vodka habit. From the start of the Chechen rebellion against Russian rule in 1991, the West, and in particular the USA, allowed successive Russian governments generous credit facilities, and therefore effectively subsidised the Russian military campaign. As Chechnya lies between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, it is a potential obstacle to any pipeline taking newly extracted Caspian Sea oil westward. It suited Western oil interests to have this part of the Caucasus in 'safe' hands. Western support for Boris Yeltsin involved turning a blind eye to the invasion of Chechnya, the destruction of Grozny and the killing of thousands of Chechens.

September 11, 2001, was a godsend to Yeltsin's successor, Putin. Now he could claim the Russian occupation of Chechnya was a part of the 'war against terror', and calm the occasional Western unease at his brutality by pinning the blame for the Chechen struggle for independence on Osama bin Laden. With no one else in the world prepared to support them, is it any wonder that the Chechens accept money from Saudi Arabian charities, provoking further claims that they are the puppets of al-Qaida?

When speaking to journalists recently (*Guardian*, September 8), Putin justified his brutal tactics in Chechnya, saying that if Islamists (sic) detached Chechnya from Russia, a 'domino effect' would ensue, with other parts of the Caucasus following. He is selling himself as a guarantor of stability and integrity of the Russian empire, warning western Europeans that should they feel queasy about Chechnya, the consequence will be half a dozen Afghanistans not too far from their precious pipelines. Despite their differences over Iraq, Putin obviously sees Bush as a man he can do business with, strongly indicating that he is hoping Bush is re-elected in November.

However, there is a twist. The Chechens may not be completely without Western friends. A number of prominent US neo cons (Richard Perle, Kenneth Adelman, Michael Leeden – the usual suspects, in other words) are heavily involved in the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya (ACPC). Rather than advocating that a free hand be given to Putin, this body prefers a 'political solution', and criticises Putin's violation of human rights in Chechnya.

It is surely no coincidence that some of the most vociferous critics within Russia of Putin's policies are Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov, both pro US, both advocates of neo-liberal economics, both associated with the Yeltsin era and therefore both less than enamoured with Putin. Is there a plan to recreate Chechnya in the image of a Baltimore suburb, just like the plan for Iraq that has been such a roaring success? Is this what Putin meant by his obscure reference, reported in the same *Guardian* article, to attempts by outside powers to tear 'juicy pieces off Russia'? With 'friends' like this, the Chechens need all the real friends they can get.

What governments vilify as 'terrorism' is in general a method of struggle employed by the weak against the strong, the oppressed against the oppressor. We have to recognise that, however unpalatable or objectionable their methods, and however confused or wrong-headed their political views, the aim of the Chechen separatists in this case was the basic human right of self-determination for Chechnya, free from Russian domination or interference. The final responsibility for the terrible events at Beslan lies at the door of Putin and the Russian state.

Socialists must defend Chechens against their demonisation in the media, demand Russian withdrawal from Chechnya, and support the Chechens' right to self determination. But they should also be utterly opposed to tactics such as hostage-taking, indiscriminate bombing and all other attacks on civilians, even when they are carried out in the name of self-determination. The Chechen action at Beslan was not just morally indefensible, it was politically inept – it will make the struggle for Chechen independence even more difficult and protracted. **WA**

Labour Party conference

'Big four' get Blair off the hook

Despite being out-manoeuvred in Brighton, the Labour left is potentially in its strongest position for some time, argues **Darren Williams**

Labour conferences are the supreme test of the party leadership's stage-management skills. It was Tony Blair's demonstration of his ability to outflank the left and stifle dissent that first won him the cautious endorsement of the right-wing media. Now, he has to repeat the performance on an annual basis, like a jaded comedian reprising a well-loved routine to satisfy a restless audience.

In the course of his ten years as party leader, he has proven adept at finding new ways of routing his critics. At first he was able to play on the anxiety not to jeopardise Labour's chances of dislodging the Tories. Then, in the year of the first election victory, the 'Partnership in Power' regime came into force, diverting inconvenient debates over policy through the circuitous channels of the National Policy Forum. The challenge for the left became not so much to win votes at conference as to get the relevant issues on the agenda in the first place. Nevertheless, there were upsets for the leadership: over PFI in 1999 (resolved by the ingenious method of getting conference to take the vote again in order to arrive at the right answer on its second attempt); and over pensions in 2000. Three years ago, the shock of 9/11 provided a ready-made excuse to close down debate. The two subsequent conferences, however, saw inconvenient votes against the platform over PFI (again) and Foundation Hospitals – albeit votes that the leadership pledged to ignore.

This year's gathering in Brighton, as the last before the expected general election, was particularly important for the audience beyond the conference hall. By rights, it should have been an uncomfortable week for the leadership. June's local, European and GLA elections were disastrous for Labour, which was pushed into third place by the Liberal Democrats and lost control of councils like Newcastle and Swansea that it had held for several decades. Party membership is now at half its 1997 level, following mass resignations over the war and a host of other issues, and the level of activism is at a historically low ebb. Blair's craven connivance with US aggression has brought such dishonour upon his party that the Liberal Democrats are winning 'safe' Labour seats like Brent East and Leicester South at by-elections (the narrow 'victory' at Hartlepool at the end of conference week was a huge relief for the leadership), and even the despised Tories are beginning to make a comeback in the opinion polls (notwithstanding their disastrous fourth place result behind the UKIP in Hartlepool). Moreover, the continuing conflict in Iraq – and, in particular, the plight of the British hostage, Ken Bigley – meant that Blair would have some difficulty in presenting the invasion and occupation as a successful war of liberation.

In the run-up to conference Blair was furiously sending signals to reassure the world (and perhaps himself) that he was still in charge, after several months in which his control over government and party seemed increasingly precarious. Having supposedly considered resignation over the summer, he had apparently recovered sufficient confidence to award key positions to two of his closest supporters – both widely disliked in the party at large – with apparent unconcern for any negative reaction: first installing Labour's resident pantomime villain, Peter Mandelson, as Britain's European Commissioner and then making a Cabinet seat available for Alan Milburn, who is to 'masterminds' the election campaign – a role previously reserved for Gordon Brown.

The 'Warwick Accord'

But while Blair has dealt imperiously with his parliamentary colleagues, he has chosen to present a more conciliatory face to his main counterweight in the party, the trade unions. The July meeting of the National Policy Forum at Warwick University – surely the most widely reported meeting of that unglamorous body in its seven year history – was supposedly the occasion of a historic compromise between the party leadership and the industrial wing of the movement: the 56 point 'Warwick Accord'. Leaders of the big four unions publicly celebrated a 'watershed' in party-union relations, with the party leadership acknowledging, and agreeing to address, key union concerns on public services and employment rights. Addressing the TUC in Brighton, Blair and party chair Ian McCartney reaffirmed their commitment to this accord.

On closer examination, however, the concessions won by the unions, while worthwhile, hardly seem grounds for great jubilation. For example, employers' ability to sack striking workers is simply to be deferred from eight weeks to twelve. The government is to extend to temporary workers the same employment rights currently enjoyed by permanent staff – but this was already demanded by an EU directive. And Blair has made a further commitment to end the 'two tier' workforce, whereby companies running outsourced public services are able to bring in new employees on poorer pay and conditions – yet change here was first promised in 2001. Of course, the full set of measures agreed will – if a third-term Labour government can be relied upon to carry them out – add up to a modest but welcome shift in favour of workers' rights. But these are policies that can be adopted fairly painlessly by the party leadership – that is, without jeopardising the hard-won confidence of big business and the right wing media. More substantial items on the unions' list of demands – such as the restoration of the link between pensions and earnings – have been flatly rejected. Moreover, Blair has apparently secured the acceptance of the key union leaders that his public sector 'reform' agenda will continue in the same direction and that relations in the workplace will remain fundamentally unchanged. In addition, the 'accord' signals a generally improved relationship between party and unions, providing assurance that union support will be forthcoming – not least in financial terms – as the election campaign gets underway.

The whole Warwick experience confirms that there is little substance left in the idea of a union 'awkward squad', presenting a consistent challenge to government policy. This concept, much beloved of the media, always concealed a wide range of political approaches, from the soft left Prentis/Curran end of the spectrum to the more authentically militant Crow and Serwotka. Mick Rix's election defeat within Aslef and the departure from Labour of the RMT and FBU has weakened what cohesion the group may have had. The big four leaderships have, in any case, increasingly been operating as a discrete bloc.

While they reportedly remain unhappy with the New Labour agenda, they are obviously prepared to present a positive face for the benefit of their members and the wider Labour-inclined electorate. The days of fractious union leaders heeding warnings not to 'rock the boat' in the run-up to

an election are obviously still with us.

The Iraq debate

The conference saga of the debate on Iraq provided further confirmation of the new, 'constructive' relationship. Last year's hard-won rule change, allowing CLPs and affiliates each to choose their own list of four topics for 'contemporary' debate, meant that the acquiescence of the big four unions would not be sufficient to keep Iraq off the agenda. CLP delegates duly selected Iraq for discussion in the 'priorities ballot' on Sunday – albeit as the fourth of their four preferred topics – leaving the unions to decide how to vote on the issue. At the beginning of the week, it was generally assumed that at least Unison and the TGWU, and possibly the GMB, would support a composite motion opposing the occupation, to be moved by Regent's Park and Kensington CLP. By the evening before the debate, however, intensive lobbying by Blair and Straw had secured the backing of all the big four for a mealy-mouthed NEC statement endorsing an ongoing British military commitment, supposedly in the cause of 'a federal, democratic, unified and pluralist Iraq'.

The 'rebel' composite, which dared to call for a date to be set for troop withdrawal – a policy supported by 71 per cent of the British people, according to a *Guardian* poll published the previous week – was duly defeated by 86 per cent to 14 per cent. The support of a majority of CLP delegates was ensured by the usual methods of bullying and misinformation on the part of ministers and party officials, which also brought about an eleventh hour withdrawal by the Walthamstow CLP delegate as seconder of the anti-occupation composite. An Iraqi Kurdish speaker was also cynically wheeled out to plead with conference not to 'desert us in our hour of need'. One wonders whether Straw would have threatened to shoot her himself unless conference voted the right way, had the outcome been in question.

An illustration of the flimsiness of the union bureaucrats' commitment to uphold their unions' policies is provided by Dave Prentis. In an article in the *Guardian* of September 28 entitled 'No time to be heads down, gobs shut', he wrote, 'The lack of trust on Iraq has dealt a body blow to the Labour Party which we simply cannot ignore.' After Tony Blair's speech that day, however, he told the same newspaper that Blair was 'a man who has the courage of his convictions and he showed that when he talked about Iraq', praising the prime minister for coming 'as close as he could to apologising on WMD'.

However, while the Warwick Policy Forum helped to buy Blair the co operation of the union big guns, it also bequeathed a couple of controversial issues to be addressed by conference, which resulted in the two big defeats of the leadership in the course of the week. These resulted from motions on two important issues, which were defeated at the forum but gained sufficient support to be put before conference as minority positions. These called for the introduction of a level playing field with regard to council housing – allowing local authorities access to the same level of funds as housing associations – and for 'an integrated, accountable and publicly owned railway'. These eminently reasonable propositions, which would command overwhelming support from the general public – let alone the party membership – survived the manoeuvring, thanks to union support, and were adopted by conference on the Sunday and Monday, respectively. The well-established rule is, however, that conference is allowed to make policy only when its decisions are amenable to the party leadership, and rail renationalisation was duly ruled out by Transport Secretary Alistair Darling after the vote. On council housing, it seems that John Prescott might at least pursue a compromise that would allow some councils to resume house building.

The big speeches by the leader and presumed 'leader-in-waiting' obviously attracted much of the media attention in conference week (along with Bono's non partisan appeal on behalf of the Third World). While Blair apparently removed the word 'sorry' from his speech at the last minute, some commentators made much of the fact that he admitted he had been wrong about weapons of mass destruction – although it is hard to see how he could have done otherwise, given the damning verdict of the Iraq Survey Group not long before. The real issue, which continues to be avoided, is of course that WMD were never more than an excuse for an invasion that would have been pursued even if Saddam has disbanded his

armed forces and dumped all their weapons in the waters of the Gulf. While Blair's speech was less strident than last year's 'no reverse gear' nonsense, his statement, 'I only know what I believe' still suggests, rather chillingly, that his policies will continue to be guided by some inner truth to which only he is privy, and which is uncontaminated by evidence and facts. Gordon Brown's speech was, as usual, peppered with vague allusions to a more authentically 'Labour' agenda, which were seized upon by the party's incurable optimists as evidence of the better times to come when Blair finally steps down. As the Blairite columnist Martin Kettle shrewdly observed in the *Guardian*, however, 'Brown has become a past master at allowing people to project on to him views that he does not hold', and his speech reaffirmed his commitment to 'competition, liberalisation and reform'. Those looking for a shift to the left will have to look elsewhere for leadership.

The crucial question, then, is: what kind of shape is the Labour left in? While it scored few victories at conference beyond the two (no doubt, short-lived) successes on council housing and rail renationalisation, this is not in itself grounds for pessimism given that conference is very much the terrain of the bureaucracy. It is, after all, difficult to win any game in which one's opponent has written, and constantly rewrites, the rules. The failure of CLP delegates to take full advantage of the rule change on contemporary resolutions – choosing three of the same topics for which the unions had already guaranteed a place on the agenda – is disappointing but unsurprising. It is hard for the bulletins of the centre-left to compete with the 'briefing' sessions and arm twisting of the bureaucrats. The only real solution is for CLPs to ensure that their delegates are better briefed and clearly mandated before they leave home.

Organisationally, things are looking better for the left than they have for some time. The launch of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in July was an upbeat event, and the LRC continues to promise much – although it obviously remains to be seen what impact it will have in the longer term. After barely more than a year of existence, Save the Labour Party (StLP) has done some excellent work in popularising issues of party democracy such as calling for the election of the party chair and campaigning against state funding of political parties. Moreover, it has launched the 'umbrella' project to bring together the various left and centre-left groups within the party and attempt to pool their resources, which has already borne fruit in the shape of a conference news website and bulletin service for delegates. In addition to StLP, this initiative is supported by the CLPD, the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government, Labour Reform, *Labour Left Briefing*, the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance, *Chartist*, the Campaign for Socialism (Scotland) and Welsh Labour Grassroots. This list is itself impressive, but in reality the very existence of so many groups with overlapping aims and activities is a luxury the Labour left can ill afford, when the pool of available activists is so small and steadily diminishing. Making the best use of the available resources is the first step towards reversing the decline of the left and reinvigorating party democracy.

In the meantime, however, the left is at least holding its position. In the constituency section of this year's NEC elections, the three sitting Grassroots Alliance candidates – Ann Black, Mark Seddon and Christine Shawcroft – topped the poll (although the other three seats were taken by right-wingers, leaving the remaining members of the Grassroots Alliance slate in eighth, ninth and twelfth places). The number of votes cast, however, was less than 30 per cent of the 1998 figure: 214,633 (the number of members voting presumably being roughly a sixth of this). This reflects the decline both in membership and in activism in recent years. Nevertheless, among the remaining party members, the message of the centre-left, to the extent that it is clearly distinguished from the Blairite orthodoxy, continues to strike a chord. At conference, activists will always face the full weight of the party bureaucracy, the spin doctors and arm-twisters. Delegates are prevailed upon to 'put the party first', to put aside their personal concerns and criticisms and work for a 'historic third term'. In addition, the bureaucracy is nowadays aided by the absence of delegates from many CLPs, which have simply stopped going to conference since the 'Partnership in Power' process took away much of their capacity to engage in democratic decision-making. Nevertheless, the left emerges from conference bloodied but unbowed – and potentially in its strongest position for some time. While the New Labour faithful struggle to put a brave face on years of government disasters, the left speaks for the majority of party activists, members and voters. If it can get its act together organisationally, and particularly if it can work effectively with the rank and file trade union left, then it should be able to turn around the situation in the party. Activists should resist the usual pressure to keep their mouths shut 'for the good of the party' in the run-up to next year's election. In the conference hall, the apparatchiks and spin doctors may be able to ensure that Blair gets his way, but outside, in the real world, it is only the activists that keep the party ticking over. It's about time that that strength was brought to bear. **WA**

Let battle commence

If the announcement by Tony Blair that he would lead the Labour Party for a third term, but not a fourth, was designed to dampen down speculation about who would succeed him, it has proved to be a major political miscalculation. As one media pundit wittily observed, Blair has declared open season on himself. If the next election is, as expected, sometime next year, the next but one will be in about five or six years. A new leader will want to be bedded in for about two years by then. Blair's announcement has effectively fired the starting gun on a three-year leadership contest, assuming, of course, that he is not forced out sooner. Some MP's are already saying that he should go sooner rather than later. Blair must be the first lame-duck leader with a Commons majority of 158.

The re-emergence of Blairite Alan Milburn and Blair's announcement of his intentions when Gordon Brown was out of the country give a flavour of the manoeuvre and counter-manoeuvre of the next few years. Gordon Brown's ability, on special occasions, to use the vocabulary of the labour movement rather than the board room makes him the favourite of many socialists in the party who are sick of Blair and New Labour. But, as we argue here, and have argued previously, the Blair v Brown contest is not one in which socialists can take sides. However, the unpredictable nature of the coming period gives socialists in the Labour Party and trade unions a greater opportunity to fight against war, privatisation and the anti-union laws, and to mount an effective challenge to the authority of the New Labour clique. This struggle has to go up a gear now. After all, when a leadership election comes along, we can't say we weren't warned.

Has Respect achieved lift-off?

Do recent results in east London mean that the Respect coalition is on the verge of an electoral breakthrough, asks **Charli Langford**

In the June 10 elections, the votes for Respect were pretty much standard for a leftist electoral challenge. Despite the participation of the Muslim Association of Britain and George Galloway, the hoped-for advances on the Socialist Alliance figures were in general not made.

There were a few exceptions, however. In the Greater London Assembly election, Oliur Rahman gained 19,675 votes (13.5 per cent) in the City and East constituency, covering the City of London and the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham, and Barking and Dagenham. Lindsey German gained 17,585 votes in the London mayoral election from that area as well. Most of these votes came from Tower Hamlets and Newham. In the European Parliament election, the Respect list headed by George Galloway topped the poll in Tower Hamlets with 10,611 votes – narrowly beating Labour's 10,103 – and came second to Labour's 18,078 votes in Newham with 11,784.

Subsequently, on July 29, Oliur Rahman won the council by election for Respect in the St Dunstan's and Stepney Green ward of Tower Hamlets with 878 votes (Lib Dems 754, Labour 578, Tory 445, NF 172). On September 8, in Tower Hamlets, Paul McGarr gained 635 votes for Respect in Millwall ward (Tory elected with 828, Labour third with 571, Independent 195, Lib Dem 150).

Do these votes indicate a breakthrough for Respect? Sadly, the answer must be 'no'. None of the three elections can be seen as particularly meaningful – the by-elections would not change the power balance on the council and none of the June 10 elections were treated particularly seriously, so there was plenty of scope for protest voting. But far more important is the nature of the area.

Due to the proximity of the London docks, Tower Hamlets and to a lesser extent Newham have been primary immigration areas for at least two hundred years, and despite the demise of the docks they continue to be so due to family links and to the clothing trade in the area. (Historically, clothing has been a favoured trade for immigrants because it is very cheap to set up and well-suited to home based piecework, so the immigrant capitalists have been able to use fear of racism to super exploit their own community). The politics of the area has for a long time been an amalgam of traditional British party politics and the politics of the original countries of the immigrant populations. The area elected a communist MP, Phil Piratin, during the 1939-45 war, based on the Jewish ghettoes of Stepney.

More recently, groupings from the Bangladeshi community have colonised parts of both the Labour and Liberal parties. There has also been a racist backlash – from the mid-'70s to the early 90s the area figured highly in the calculations of the far right, and in the mid 80s the Lib Dems won control of the council on the basis of the essentially racist policy known as 'Sons and Daughters', under which council housing priority was given to those with parents already living in the borough – which obviously discriminated against new, mainly Bangladeshi, arrivals.

For these reasons, the area has been very politically volatile. The current immigration wave – city financiers and the like moving to the Isle of Dogs – has now helped to elect the first Conservative councillor for at least 40 years, in the area where Paul McGarr came second for Respect and where, 12 years ago, Derek Beacon of the BNP was infamously elected.

Today, about 50 per cent of the population of Tower Hamlets is Muslim, mainly from Bangladesh and Somalia, most of whom are strongly opposed to the West's intervention in Iraq, seeing it as a war against Muslims.

The local Labour Parties must bear a great deal of the blame for their own defeats in the council elections. Despite every local Labour Party body voting to oppose the Iraq war – from the council Labour group, through the Local Government Committee and the General Committees of both constituencies in the area, to many of the wards themselves – there has been no presence from any of them at any of the anti-war activities in the borough. Less than a dozen Labour Party members have attended any anti-war meetings. The most public Labour figures in the area have been the two MPs – Oona King and Jim FitzPatrick, both out and-out Blairite warmongers. The fact that both MPs were reselected without a contest, even though they were known to be pro war and the parties had already declared against the war, speaks volumes for how opportunist, unprincipled, and out-of-touch the parties are. The elections report at the September meeting of the Bethnal Green and Bow party dismissed the war as 'just one of a number of issues' that were to blame for the defeats – despite the fact that Labour had been trounced by a new party with no history whose major difference with Labour was the war!

Some Labour Party members have denounced Respect for splitting the vote in Millwall and allowing the Tory in. Such a response would be reasonable if Respect had gathered a small percentage of Labour's votes. But since Respect gained *more* votes than Labour such a position is ludicrous. It would be marginally less crazy to suggest that Labour had split Respect's vote!

The real issue – as *Workers Action* has consistently argued – is whether the best tactic of the left is to fight inside Labour to win it or (more likely) to create a split that would have the support of the organised bodies of the Labour movement and at least a sizeable minority of the party, or to appeal directly to the masses over the head of the Labour Party, as Respect is attempting to do. Given that the direct appeal tactic has at least three separate drawbacks – it concedes the advantage of unchallenged organisation within Labour to the party leadership, it fails to understand the political linkage of the trade union bureaucracy to the Labour Party, and it fails to understand the level of loyalty of the working class to 'their' party – it seems to us that fighting within Labour is preferable. And this is without considering the dangers inherent in the Respect project itself, the chief of which is that differences between the socialist elements and the Muslim Association of Britain/George Galloway axis may cause a split which could create the nucleus of a right wing religious party, if not a specifically Islamic one.

There are strong rumours that Galloway will fight the Bethnal Green and Bow seat against Oona King at the next general election. On current showings there is a strong chance that he could win it. If Labour's response is to trivialise the war issue and to rely on a swing to the main parties in a general election, they are showing a misunderstanding of the locality that may prove fatal. However, that is not to say that Respect is a serious challenge to Labour anywhere else – in the Hartlepool by-election on September 30, it was once again the Lib Dems who benefited from the defection from Labour, although not enough to win them the seat, while Respect polled just 1.8 per cent. **WA**

All out for Fawkes' sake!

Civil servants are set to strike across Britain on November 5. **Richard Price**, PCS Group Executive chair at the Office for National Statistics, examines the background

On November 5 – assuming a yes vote in a ballot to be held in the first three weeks of October – 300,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services union will take strike action in defence of jobs, services and pensions. It will be the biggest Civil Service strike since the one against market testing exactly 11 years earlier.

In July, the government's spending review for the next three years announced an unprecedented attack on civil servants' jobs, working conditions and pensions.

- 84,150 Civil Service posts are to cut by April 2008;
- 20,000 posts in Civil Service organisations linked to the Scottish parliament, the Welsh Assembly, local government and in Northern Ireland are also to go;
- 20,000 posts are to be relocated from London and the South East;
- Plans are underway to introduce not paying the first three days of sick leave, to raise the pension age in 2006 to 65 for new entrants, and for all civil servants under the age of 50 in 2012.

To justify what amounts to the biggest single attack ever on the public sector, government propaganda has resorted to ritual attacks on waste and bureaucracy, and pledges to transfer staff from backroom duties to front line service delivery. The tabloid press has seized on this to round on civil servants as useless time-servers waiting for fat pensions – even though any remotely objective analysis shows that they are among the lowest paid public sector workers. And these cuts will fall hardest upon low-paid junior staff, many of whom are women or from minority ethnic groups – making a mockery of government commitments to equality and diversity. Those who retain their jobs will be faced with increased workloads and stress.

This pre election grandstanding doesn't add up. In many departments and agencies not directly involved in direct service delivery, the distinction between the backroom and the front line is largely meaningless. In those with a direct service delivery function, like benefits and pensions, the two are interdependent, as anyone who has tried to sort out a problem claim knows.

The degree of agreement across party lines in parliament has been striking, with the main issue for the Tories and Liberal Democrats being whether the promised cuts can be delivered. Most London MPs, including some on the left of the parliamentary party, accept the rationale for transferring jobs out of London, even though it means in most cases moving posts from an area of higher unemployment to areas of lower unemployment. Normally off-message Newport West MP Paul Flynn has hailed the transfer of 600 jobs from my own department to his constituency as a 'sweet jobs victory . . . a stupendous day for Newport' – even though it means the likelihood of redundancy for hundreds of London civil servants, and cuts elsewhere in Wales will mean a net loss of jobs.

First Minister Rhodri Morgan also gave 'a warm Welsh welcome' to the relocation. 'We have been lobbying very hard for these jobs to come to Wales under the government's dispersal programme,' he said. The 'clear red water' Morgan wanted to put between Wales and Westminster seems to have gone a strong shade of green.

Challenge to Brown

Only a small number of MPs, led by the chair of the PCS parliamentary group, John McDonnell, have been prepared to challenge the rationale of Gordon Brown's drastic short termism. For most MPs, the penny doesn't seem to have dropped that it is almost impossible to deliver improved services and greater efficiencies, while cutting nearly one in five civil servants, and turning departments upside down with relocations, freezes on recruitment and the resulting collapse of morale and increased stress. In some departments, new 'visions' for shiny improvements in output seem to be based on business plans and costings scribbled on the back of a fag packet.

PCS has launched a broad-based response, involving adverts, a wide range of leaflets, fringe meetings at the TUC, Labour and Liberal Democrat conferences, a lobby of Labour Party conference, and briefings to MPs and select committees. Members of the Labour Representation Committee in PCS managed to get four Constituency Labour Parties to submit a contemporary motion on the cuts to party conference.

Right now, activists have to cut across a number of currents of opinion among civil servants. Among some older workers there is a feeling that they've seen it all before. Reviews come and go and it'll probably come to nothing, *Yes Minister*-style. Among others, there is a sense of resignation, that it's all inevitable. But there are also very positive indications to build on. Union membership is growing rapidly, and there has been a growing willingness to take strike action over pay in the past year, especially in the huge Department for Work and Pensions, which has seen three two-day strikes in the past year.

Campaign on all fronts

It requires a campaign on all fronts – industrial action, publicity, parliamentary activity, and legal challenges in relation to employment and equality legislation. There are early signs that any attempt to enforce the mobility clause in many civil servants' contracts when relocating posts could fail, and departmental managements are noticeably wary of the implications of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 in relation to the duties it places on public bodies to uphold and promote diversity. Transferring large numbers of posts from London to much less diverse areas runs directly contrary to the spirit of the Act.

Nobody is under any illusion that the one day strike on November 5 will halt the cuts on its own. But it will play an important part in developing a mass campaign, and combating the negative stereotypes of pen pushers and faceless, wasteful bureaucrats fostered by government. Tactically, attempting to call sustained action at this stage, when in some departments cuts will not bite for some time to come, might well be counter-productive. But further industrial action will be necessary. While mobilising the entire membership of the union is important, it is increasingly clear that PCS will also have to revisit whether selective action by strategic groups of workers is the most effective form. **WA**

Blunkett's law

The democratic right to criticise religion will be threatened if the Home Secretary's proposed law against inciting religious hatred is passed. **Charli Langford** explains why

Citing as an excuse the pleas of Muslim leaders and organisations, David Blunkett is again trying to bring in a law against 'incitement to religious hatred'. His previous attempt, under the November 2001 Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, was abandoned for fear that the entire bill would fail in the House of Lords; the only part to get through was the addition of a 'religiously aggravated' clause to some existing crimes. Blunkett has acknowledged (boastfully, some say) on the *Today* radio programme that this was almost certainly by oversight, but rather than remedy this he intends to take full advantage of it.

This is the measure of the man. Combining New Labour authoritarianism with personal social conservatism, contemptuous of those he calls the 'liberati' who raise petty questions of human rights and unanticipated consequences, he plays to the dark side – fear, prejudice and vengeance. His promotion of identity cards is fuelled by a supposed terrorist threat, as are his continuing powers of detention. He wants secret trials of terrorist suspects with vetted defence counsel. He enforced the suspension of the chief constable of Humberside because he had failed to spread unproven allegations about the Soham murderer, Ian Huntley. He is proposing to make all crimes arrestable offences. He wants to remove the right to jury trial for some offences and to lower the criterion for proof from 'beyond reasonable doubt' to 'on the balance of probability' for others to ensure more convictions – at a time when the prison population is at record levels. He supports the televising of deportations.

Religion in Britain

Britain today is nominally a Christian country but apart from the disputed six county north of Ireland statelet it is in practice secular. About seven per cent of the population attend religious services regularly. There is some hangover of a Christian past – only the Christian religion is protected by the archaic blasphemy laws (but the most recent successful prosecution was over 80 years ago, in 1921). A daily act of collective religious worship (not specifically Christian) is required in schools, but in urban areas a majority of schools ignore this. The monarch is head of the state cult, the Church of England, and 26 Bishops are members of the upper government body, the (unelected) House of Lords. No other religious group is recognised, although Jews and Sikhs are defined as particular ethnic (but not religious) groups under the laws against racial hatred. The New Labour government, in power since May 1997, has reneged on promises to reform the House of Lords (which would have removed the Christian clergy from their privileged governmental role). Muslims have attempted to extend the blasphemy laws to cover Islam (in attempting to prosecute Salman Rushdie over his book, *The Satanic Verses*) but the law has been confirmed as defending only Christianity.

Muslims under attack

It is clearly true that criticism of Islam has become more public since the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, and it is also true that there have been calls to hate, attack and take revenge on 'Muslims'. Neither of these facts justifies Blunkett's proposed religious hatred law. 'Muslims' is a code word that carries exactly the same message as 'Pakis'; in this context it doesn't mean 'followers of Islam' any more than the latter means 'Pakistanis'. It is a term of racist abuse for all people from, roughly, the Indian subcontinent, irrespective of nationality or religion. The only reason the word 'Muslim' is now being used is to try to reinforce racism in others by reference to the events of September 11, 2001.

It is already illegal to incite attacks against anyone – something that makes the existing laws against incitement on race grounds (which serve as the model for the religious hatred laws) fairly pointless. But while it might be argued that a law against hatred based on race would not do actual harm, the same is not true for a religious hatred law.

Personal choice

Liberal commentators have made this point by arguing that one's religion is a personal choice, unlike one's race, sex, or (probably) sexual orientation which are genetically determined and therefore outside personal control. This argument is true in an abstract, idealised sense but it is totally inadequate. It does not address what religion is, nor does it understand the reality of the lives of most people. There are a huge number of factors that prevent people making choices on religion. Some lack the intellectual capacity to do so; some find the question of no interest; some may not want to offend friends or relatives; some wear religion as a badge of identity or solidarity; some are in fear of sanctions if they question established religion – there are places and communities where apostates are shunned, expelled and even executed.

Religion as a form of social control

The most important thing about religion is that it is a form of social control. Every religion has a social agenda and frequently that agenda is to be found far more clearly expressed in the practice of the religion than in the doctrine. Right wing interpretations of Roman Catholicism and Islam, for example, will promote respectively the 'turn the other cheek' and 'whatever happens is the will of Allah' fatalism that supports the existing social order, particularly in a less developed country where natural or social disasters are more frequent and less controllable. The Protestant work ethic and a 'render unto Caesar' mentality may be appropriate in the more advanced states. Such social agendas are not always right wing – Christian-based liberation theology has been a major factor in social struggles in Central and South America, and in Britain Quakerism and primitive Methodism have played a supportive role in the workers' movement. But overall, the religious agenda has been overwhelmingly to support the more conservative interpretations of the status quo.

For any democratic system to work, each and every social agenda has to be subject to criticism which may well be severe. It is perfectly reasonable to hate a creed and to try to get others to hate that creed also; most people hate fascism, for example. Religions as social forces are specifically open to ridicule because of what they have in common – the explicit appeal to faith, which means that the central tenets of the system have to be accepted with no supporting evidence whatsoever. The passing of a law against religious hatred will destroy this central democratic principle of freedom to criticise. The adherents of any belief system will be able to claim that criticism of some aspect of their doctrine is an attempt to incite hatred against them.

The law protects the government . . .

Blunkett's law as it is currently formulated does recognise this problem – but has attempted to resolve it in the standard patronising, authoritarian New Labour way

and has therefore only exacerbated it. Blunkett will prevent frivolous use of his law by allowing only the Attorney General to initiate prosecutions. This solution can only work if the Attorney General is a being of superhuman levels of principle, honesty, and communication skills.

In fact, the Attorney General's role now has no credibility whatsoever because the government tried to use it to provide legal justification for the invasion of Iraq. The government withdrew the prosecution of Katherine Gun under the Official Secrets Act when it became clear that the Attorney General's legal advice regarding the war would have to be made public if the prosecution went forward. It doesn't need a brain the size of a planet to realise that this advice either a) doesn't exist, or b) is so flawed and incompetent that while the government was prepared to go to war on it, it wasn't prepared to subject it to any critical examination. To give the Attorney General – or by extension any other officer of so dishonest a government – sole power to initiate prosecutions under Blunkett's religious hatred law makes it absolutely clear that such prosecutions would be launched against those the government considers its enemies while allowing immunity to its friends.

. . . and attacks the left

But the mere existence of the law on the statute book is likely to enforce journalistic self censorship, if not censorship by publishers and the distribution media. Those considering making some comment against a religious view or practice would have to consider whether they or their target were more in New Labour's good books before speaking. It might be useful to consider a few scenarios, selected to be of particular interest to those of a left persuasion:

In the light of current suggestions to restrict the abortion law on the basis of earlier foetal viability due to technological advance, a re-established National Abortion Campaign might suggest that certain religious groups opposed to abortion were supporting the oppression of women by denying them freedom of choice in the matter. Said religious groups might then claim that labelling them as oppressors of women would incite hatred against them.

A gay activist carries a placard saying 'Islam Nazis behead and burn queers'. Muslims claim incitement to religious hatred.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators claim that the Jewish belief that Israel was given to the Jews by God is merely a justification for the oppression of Palestinians. Jews claim incitement to religious hatred.

A newspaper carries an article claiming that freemasonry is wicked and corrupt because freemasons conspire to discriminate against non-masons in business and social institutions. Freemasons claim incitement to religious hatred (the proposed legislation refuses to define what a religion is, leaving the door open to many groups to claim that they are being discriminated against).

Freedom of criticism under attack

There are many other scenarios where the left may have less immediate concern – or in fact may be extremely opposed to the view being suppressed. But it is still necessary to permit the view to be expressed in order to defend the principle of freedom of discussion and criticism. Salman Rushdie must be free to write *The Satanic Verses*; Ian Paisley must be allowed to decry the Pope as the 'antichrist'; films like Monty Python's *Life of Brian* must be allowed to be made; and even Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, heavily criticised for being anti-Jewish, has to be defended.

Blunkett's a bright bloke, and even if he tried to claim he was not aware of the possible uses of his law there has been sufficient media uproar to edify him. He's a democrat in so far as he has to be in order to maintain his position, but his 'liberati' comment indicates contempt for any further sensibilities. The Attorney General may be let loose on a number of targets – probably the far right, less probably the middling to far left, almost certainly on Abu Hamza, less certainly on other extreme Muslims or Christians. He definitely won't be taking on mainstream religions.

Social conservative

As far as is known, Blunkett is not himself a religious person. But the social conservative recognises that in general the official representatives of established religion are likely to be his political allies. Having opposed the equalisation of the age of consent for gays, Blunkett showed himself to be on the far right of the cabinet in his reaction to the repeal process of section 28 of the Local Government Act (the notorious clause against the 'promoting' of homosexuality in schools).

Despite repeal of this legislation being part of New Labour's manifesto, he did all he could to prevent it happening short of openly splitting the cabinet on it: he accepted the contention of the anti gay and anti-lesbian bigots that it was possible to 'promote' a sexual orientation; he allied with the major Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu leaders (who were uniformly anti-homosexual) and declared them to be 'representative of the views of the people' at a time when polls showed majority support for repeal – he even included Cardinal Winning (who was organising a homophobic campaign against the repeal with other extreme right wing mavericks like Brian Souter at the time) as part of his panel of representatives.

The final settlement of this dispute was described by a Church of England spokesman as follows: 'The deal that is being done . . . is that we won't go to the wire over Section 28, in exchange for greater clarity over the guidelines.' Blunkett, as Education Secretary, announced the new guidelines – which promote 'marriage and traditional family life'. While the abhorrent anti homosexual wording has gone, in many ways this represents a retreat in that now unmarried heterosexuals are being discriminated against as well. Recent revelations about Blunkett's personal life have exposed his opportunism and hypocrisy in this area.

An attempt to shore up the 'Muslim vote'

So, if he is personally not religious, he is aware of the dangers to democracy in his proposed law, and he agrees that there is no need for a religious hatred law anyway, why is he doing this and why is Labour supporting him?

Basically, he's trying to undo the damage the Iraq war has done to New Labour. He understands that many Muslims see the whole 'war on terror' as anti Muslim, and the illegal Iraq adventure as a measure of how far Bush will go and how far New Labour will follow him. He has seen the vote that Respect – 'the party that defends Muslims', as they describe themselves – has gained in the areas with the biggest Muslim population. He may even, if he has been following the fine detail, have noticed that Muslim organisations are determining the shape of Respect's politics and so may fear the possible development of an explicitly Muslim party in Britain that would damage New Labour (which has the largest part of the Muslim vote in Britain) far more than the Tories or Lib-Dems.

The religious hatred law is New Labour's attempt to pitch itself as Muslim friendly by carrying out a measure that many of the leading Muslim organisations want, that superficially 'levels the playing field' and removes some Christian privilege. It is a cynical vote grabbing exercise and nothing more. The fact that if passed it would be a huge negative pressure on democratic discussion and another tool with which to suppress dissent is probably seen by Blair and Co as merely a minor secondary benefit. **WA**

Reject the EU constitution

The left should be preparing its own campaign for a no vote in the promised referendum on the EU constitution, says **Nick Davies**

In the run-up to the negotiations over the EU constitution, Jack Straw promised the Confederation of British Industry that 'We will insist that . . . the Charter of Fundamental Rights creates no new rights under national law, so as not to upset the balance of Britain's industrial relations policy'. It seems that New Labour was as good as its word. Blair returned from the Brussels meeting boasting that Thatcher's anti-union laws remained intact. So, soothing words for middle England and a calculated insult to millions of trade unionists, giving us an idea of how Blair will try to sell the constitution in the referendum promised for after the next election.

There is an element of truth in what the government is saying about the constitution being a 'tidying up exercise'. It incorporates most of the articles in the Treaty of Rome, the Single European Act, and the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties. But, as Darren Williams explained in 'EU25: a brave new world?' (*Workers Action* No.26), the constitution goes further in that it removes the veto, granted to member states by the Nice Treaty, over decisions to open international trade negotiations in health and education. Now, the European Commission has the sole right to enter into negotiations at the WTO through the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) process, which aims to open up public services all over the world to privatisation. Thus, the new constitution yokes together the dominant features of the European integration process: neo-liberal economics; and, in the appropriation of yet more decision-making powers to the unelected Commission, a profound democratic deficit. The extension of Qualified Majority Voting is justified by the expansion of the EU to 25 states, but the conflict between expansion and the existence of a national veto could have been dealt with by an increase in the powers of the only directly elected body in the EU, the Parliament. Of course, it would be naïve to think that that was ever going to be on the cards. The appointment of Peter Mandelson as EU trade commissioner is entirely in keeping with the direction taken by the EU. His predecessor, Pascal Lamy, himself no friend of the poor, has suggested that Mandelson will act as a Trojan horse to promote Anglo-US neo-liberal policies. This is exactly why Mandelson got the job. Mandelson is up to his neck in the 'Lisbon process' which emerged from the Lisbon summit of 2000, described in approving terms by Blair as a move away from the 'social regulation agenda of the 1980s and instead a direction of enterprise, innovation, competition and employment'.

What about the Charter of Fundamental Rights, incorporated into the constitution? Doesn't that make it worth supporting? But the Charter is only to be interpreted in accordance with 'national traditions' – those 'traditions' apparently including the most restrictive anti union laws in any Western democracy, thanks to that last minute amendment, secured at the CBI's request, that workers in Britain should not get any new rights.

It was this development which prompted Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson, general secretaries of the TGWU and Amicus respectively, to fire a furious broadside at Blair ('We can't back a yes vote', *Guardian*, June 30), accusing him of demobilising potential support among the trade union movement for the European Union, and for a yes vote, by refusing to allow the Charter of Fundamental Rights to improve British workers' rights. Because of Blair's desperation to appease big business and the Eurosceptic right, they argued, British workers will be second-class citizens: easier to exploit, easier to ignore and easier to sack than anywhere else in the EU. As they put it, 'the Government has drawn its European red lines in the wrong place. We are not in the heart of Europe, but in the wallets of big business, and there are no votes in that'.

Powerfully put, and in what it says about both Blair and the effect of his actions on trade union support for the EU constitution, correct. However, Woodley and Simpson seem to be implying that if it were not for Blair's backsliding, the EU constitution would be something that trade unionists could support. This is taking the right-wing Eurosceptics' position that the EU is somehow semi socialist (and to them, an anathema) at face value. As we argued in 'Say no to the Euro!' (*Workers Action* No.24), the existence of laws and guarantees concerning the rights of workers do not contradict the operation of the free-market in the EU. Instead, they seek to give it a legal and institutional basis, representing a break from the fascism and dictatorship, in Germany and Italy at least, before 1945, and reflecting the influence of continental European social-democracy and Christian democracy. It is less harsh and brutal than the Anglo-Saxon model of the USA and Britain, but it's just another way of organising a market economy, and the Charter should be seen as an attempt, by granting some positive rights, to co opt into the project the leadership of the EU's trade unions.

Charter or no charter, socialists must oppose the constitution and therefore in the referendum they should be voting no. Won't we be in danger of being indistinguishable from the right-wing Eurosceptics in the Tory party and the UK Independence Party? Only if we have no confidence in our politics and we fail to put the socialist objection to the constitution clearly. Even when we are arguing against something that binds the parliaments of member states, such as the Stability and Growth Pact, this does not represent a capitulation to nationalism. Where the powers and institutions of the nation states of the EU, which involve a process of political participation, albeit within the parameters of parliamentary democracy, are usurped by undemocratic, unaccountable bodies whose creed is neo-liberalism, it is not in itself reactionary to oppose those usurpers. The question is, how do we do it? The Tories and UKIP will be cheering for their own unaccountable, unelected institutions: the Crown, the judiciary and the House of Lords. Socialists would be seeking to link up with workers throughout the EU and, crucially, with those workers in Eastern Europe currently excluded from 'fortress Europe', to fight against privatisation, for the defence of jobs and services, and for the transfer of power from the Commission and the Council of Ministers to the European parliament.

The left must link up with European workers to mount a forceful and articulate campaign for a no vote. If it does not, then either Blair will win the referendum, and the EU could be saddled with an undemocratic, Thatcherite constitution, or Blair will lose, but the winners of the argument will be seen to be the Eurosceptic right of the Tories and UKIP, shifting the mid-point of political discussion even further to the right.

WA

Iraq

Descent into chaos

Simon Deville looks at the latest situation in Iraq, where armed opposition to the occupation forces is growing daily

It's easy for opponents of the war to be smug and complacent – not least because almost every new event in relation to Iraq only serves to underline just how wrong the claims of supporters of the war have proved to be, and how much of the analysis of the anti war movement has been vindicated. Whether on the question of Iraq's non existent WMD stockpiles, the legality of the war, the kind of welcome that occupying troops were likely to receive from Iraqis, the ability of the invaders to impose order through force, or the ability of the US and Britain to reconstruct what they have destroyed, the anti war movement has been proved right and the warmongers' claims have been demonstrated to be palpably absurd.

Unfortunately, the extent to which we have been proved correct only underlines just how little government policy has been changed by public opinion and mass activism over the past two years. However much Blair hides behind legal sophistry and dodgy inquiries, it has been apparent throughout that he has consistently lied about the war and that he had already agreed to support Bush's war long before any discussions took place in the UN Security Council. The two dossiers were developed to make a case for war after the fact, as was the legal advice from the Attorney General. Recently leaked memos from the Cabinet Office and Foreign Office have shown that Blair was warned of the likely results of occupying Iraq, while a leaked document from the Pentagon has underlined that Britain was involved in war preparations as early as June 2002, although Blair was publicly denying this was the case months later. If the stir these leaks has caused has been limited, it's partly because they simply confirm what most people knew to be the case anyway. Opinion polls over the past six months have shown a steadily growing majority opposed to the reasons for war and neither believing nor trusting Blair.

The problem is that this isn't enough. Despite what must be one of the largest political movements in British history, Blair is still in office, with Charles Kennedy looking depressingly like his most credible political challenger. On one level this is a damning indictment of the inability of the movement to effect political change. But on another level it has simply demonstrated the extent to which the political system has been able to wall itself off from public influence.

But while the government seems to be almost entirely insulated from the rising tide of distrust, Blair is damaged goods. Whether he survives for a few months, or past the general election, his reputation has been permanently tarnished. If he does remain as leader throughout most of a third term, as he has announced, the rift between the Labour leadership and the rank and file can only deepen, with possibly disastrous results for the party.

The latest promise unravelling before our very eyes is that the purpose of regime change is to bring democracy to Iraq. Far from the resistance consisting of 'remnants of the old regime', it has become abundantly clear that opposition to the occupation is widespread, multi-faceted and growing daily. There has been much attention given to the abduction and killing of foreigners – something that happens to Iraqis on a much wider scale with virtually no Western media attention – but this is only a very small and particularly objectionable section of the resistance. Opposition to the occupation is almost universal. Much of it is peaceful, though the armed resistance is undoubtedly significant, and a number of towns and cities have become *de facto* no-go areas for Coalition troops.

The response of the occupation force has been aerial bombardment and collective punishment, only deepening the hatred and resentment felt by Iraqis. To date, most resistance is organised on a local level with little apparent national co ordination. But the history of every colonial occupation tells us that a national movement will develop over time, and that the situation for the Coalition forces will only get worse. The month of September alone saw nearly 2,400 armed attacks.

Iraqi democracy – US style

Against the backdrop of a steadily worsening situation, Ayad Allawi, head of the US appointed interim government of Iraq, has insisted that elections will take place in January. This is no surprise since it merely echoes what George Bush has told Allawi. However, when the assertion is placed under any scrutiny it becomes farcical. The interim government is preparing for less than a quarter of the polling stations that the United Nations has estimated would be needed to conduct representative elections across Iraq. But it is doubtful whether elections will take place even on this limited basis. Members of the occupation-backed government can rarely venture beyond the heavily fortified Green Zone in central Baghdad, yet they claim to be only three months away from holding national elections.

More realistically, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has remarked that elections will only take place in areas not under the control of rebels. While Allawi seems to have been informed of the decisions that his government is to make, Rumsfeld appears to have neglected to let

Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in on the secret, resulting in a very public disagreement over the nature of elections that Iraqis are supposed to be organising themselves. What the occupying forces are planning is for elections to be held in a few areas at the discretion of the interim government.

Clearly, elections of this nature will give no one a mandate to govern Iraq. However, that isn't their purpose. They are important in the same way that the fictitious 'hand-over of sovereignty' was earlier this year. They are an exercise in public relations designed for consumption in the West, while almost no one in Iraq is taking them seriously. To a significant degree, the timing of the elections is for US domestic consumption. The US administration wants to give a positive democratic spin to the occupation of Iraq in order to help Bush win a second term in the White House, but it has made little secret of the fact that after that has been accomplished it will step up the military offensive to re-take areas of Iraq that are currently held by resistance forces.

The democratic credentials of the Republicans were thoroughly exposed in Florida in the 2000 presidential election. They now seem to be taking history lessons from the past masters of colonial rule in Iraq, British imperialism.

While the Bush administration has regularly warned of the danger of civil war, the occupation has tended to strengthen the unity of ordinary Iraqis. There has been little evidence of the widely heralded Sunni-Shia conflict, even though armed resistance is being conducted by very different tendencies, with little apparent co-ordination between them. In fact, a limited civil war – or at least the threat of one – has some advantages for the Coalition. It gives the occupation an air of legitimacy, and deflects more of the fighting away from Coalition forces and onto Iraqis. As things stand, the number of Iraqis killed since 2003 is about twelve times the number of Coalition casualties. In the civil war scenario, the US would be able to secure Iraq's vast oil reserves and keep its military bases for the foreseeable future with little criticism from the 'international community'.

At present this is little more than a wish. The US-appointed government has little support among ordinary Iraqis and the situation far more closely resembles a war of national liberation than a civil war. That is not to say that a pro-Western capitalist class can't develop with some support from sections of the middle class. But to date the occupation and the sanctions that preceded it have caused too much economic instability for any significant number of people to feel that they will benefit from US stewardship, and the situation has been getting worse for months.

Building a solidarity movement

The outcome of the conflict in Iraq will be decisive in determining the world political map for many years to come. If the US is able to secure Iraq as a permanent military base and major source of oil, world politics will move further to the right. If the US is defeated, the workers in much of the world will have far more room to manoeuvre.

In Britain, the primary task for all anti-imperialists is to do all we can to force the government to pull out of Iraq. This means rejecting the new position that Downing Street is hesitantly putting forward that we draw a line under the war and move on, and instead campaigning on a day-to day basis to highlight the brutal nature of the occupation, its illegality, and the profiteering of the multinationals at the expense of Iraqis.

Progressives throughout the West must also do all they can to work in solidarity with Iraqis resisting the occupation. This does not mean lending any level of support to indiscriminate abductions and killings, or to the bombing and shelling of public places. This kind of armed resistance is part of the problem, not the solution. It means building solidarity with the broad mass of Iraqis opposed to the occupation, without making the mistake of demanding that Iraqis agree with us before we lend them our support.

However, that is a task more complicated than simply repeating stock phrases about giving unconditional but critical support to those in struggle against imperialism. While this remains a good rule of thumb we also need a more serious analysis of what it means in practice. Many genuine socialists in Iran took the line that they shouldn't criticise Ayatollah Khomeini in the Iranian revolution in 1979 because he had attacked the 'Great Satan' of US imperialism. Many of those maintained this position until Khomeini had them put up against a wall and shot for having greater loyalty to socialism than to his theocratic dictatorship. The events in Iran – from the mass mobilisations and the establishment of workers' councils, to the formation of a dictatorship that was not too dissimilar from fascism – should be a warning to socialists who support anyone who claims to be opposed to imperialism and is prepared to take up arms.

In Iraq, there are some armed actions that should be applauded by socialists, some that we should support even if we would not advocate them, and others that we should condemn outright. Not the least of our problems is determining who exactly is in a genuine struggle against the occupation – simply taking up arms does not necessarily demonstrate an anti-imperialist struggle.

In December 2003, the Southern Oil Company trade union threatened to go on strike against the occupation-imposed pay settlement of the equivalent of £35 per month, making it clear from the outset that any attempt to break the strike by force would be met with armed resistance. The workers subsequently won almost all of their demands and decisively undermined the authority of the Coalition – something which they almost certainly wouldn't have achieved had they not been prepared to use force. In Fallujah, it would be criminally irresponsible not to support the mass response to the Coalition's deadly incursions. With other rebellions, such as that in Najaf led by Moqtada al-Sadr, socialists might not feel particularly close to the leadership, nor agree with their overall objectives, but again we have a duty to side with them against the illegal occupation. Socialists in Iraq might feel that there are more effective methods and strategies to challenge imperialism, but those who fail to side with the insurgents against the Coalition will not even get a hearing among the masses, who clearly know which side they are on.

We need to give practical support to help Iraqis rebuild the infrastructure necessary to support a decent standard of life, and to better equip them to defend themselves against the occupation. Above all, we should build links – direct union to union links where possible – with the emerging Iraqi workers' movement, while warning of the clammy embrace Blair and Co gave the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions in Brighton. The mass anti-war movement in Britain must be rebuilt as a movement against the occupation. **WA**

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Labour's unethical foreign policy

Blair's Wars
By John Kampfner
The Free Press, 2004, 401pp, £7.99

Richard Price

When it was first published in September last year, John Kampfner's blow-by-blow account of New Labour foreign policy won widespread praise from reviewers across the spectrum of the broadsheet press. This revised paperback edition takes in the Hutton inquiry and the post-war turmoil in Iraq up to April this year. Even with an extra seven months' reflection, it's still largely a piece of instant history, albeit a superior one, with nearly three quarters of the book devoted to post-September 11.

First the strong points: Kampfner has a good grasp of diplomacy, of the qualitative difference between the neo-cons and previous US administrations, and of the characters in New Labour's inner circle. Having conducted over 80 interviews with a pledge of anonymity, he has been able to marshal revealing insights from current and former insiders in both London and Washington. As political editor of the increasingly New Labour-sceptic *New Statesman*, Kampfner has sufficient political detachment to cast a sceptical eye over much of Blair's foreign policy, and enough high level contacts to keep the story interesting, and sometimes revealing.

Now the downsides: just where more analysis would yield results, Kampfner tends to drift into who said what-to-whom journalese. This lends some of the book a curious neutrality that led reviewers in the Tory press to praise its balance. So determined is the author to reconstruct what took place in Western corridors of power, that he neglects to analyse political developments in the Middle East. What, for instance, motivated Saddam Hussein's brinkmanship in the face of Bush and Blair's ultimatums? And – presumably in an effort to lend the narrative some flinty realism – Kampfner often writes in very short sentences. This gets irritating.

For a prime minister who would go on to fight five wars in six years, Blair showed little interest in foreign affairs in opposition. When he swept into office in 1997, he was still a novice, whose main concern had been to keep foreign policy out of the election campaign. Labour's ethical foreign policy – how long ago that seems! – was Robin Cook's baby, and before you could say Hawk jets to Indonesia it had become a piece of inconvenient window dressing.

Blair set out his foreign policy stall early in the life of the new government. On November 11, 1997, in his Lord Mayor's banquet speech, he wrote his own epitaph: 'When Britain and America work together on the international scene there is little we cannot achieve. Our aim should be to deepen our relationship with the US at all levels. We are the bridge between the US and Europe – let us use it. By virtue of our geography, our history and the strengths of our people, Britain is a global player.' (pp.16-17)

By November 1998, Blair was already in the slipstream of US Middle Eastern policy. When Clinton, under pressure from a right-wing Congress and neo-cons already agitating for regime change, signed the Iraq Liberation Act, which provided $100 million for US approved Iraqi opposition groups, Blair obliged with a three-page dossier portentously entitled 'Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction'. A month later, Britain joined in 'Monica's War' – the three days of bombing widely thought to have been timed to deflect attention from the Lewinsky scandal. Far from building bridges to Europe, it was an early foretaste for Blair of isolation within Europe. 'Supporting the Americans is part of Tony's DNA,' one cabinet minister said. (p.33)

Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni questioned the action in words that six years later look positively prophetic: 'I don't think this has been thought out. A Saddam in place and contained is better than promoting something that causes Iraq to explode, implode, fragment into pieces, cause turmoil.' (p.29)

Blair's need to strike a global pose paradoxically made his government ever more the envoy for the narrow interests of Britain's booming arms manufacturers. In early 2002, with tensions rising between nuclear neighbours India and Pakistan, it was revealed that 148 weapons licences for India and 18 for Pakistan had been approved as recently as February 2001. In January 2002, Blair spent a fair proportion of his 'peace mission' to India trying to flog more Hawk jets.

Meanwhile, the trumpeted concern for human rights had given way to a cynical selective blindness when it came to the record of allies in the Orwellian 'war against terror': 'The Central Asian autocracies that had allowed the US to set up military bases, such as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, were considered beyond reproach. China had *carte blanche* over Tibet; Russia over Chechnya ... The new element in determining American foreign policy was what assets – bases, intelligence and diplomatic leverage – a particular country could bring to bear, first against al-Qaeda, then against Iraq.' (p.171)

Time and again the picture is of Blair's overweening self-belief and sense of mission leading to diplomatic overstretch. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, Blair spoke grandiosely of the need to seize the moment and reorder the world's problems 'from the slums of Gaza to the mountains of Afghanistan' – a phrase that sounded suspiciously as if it had been lifted from Ian Dury's *Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick* – as well as poverty in Africa. Blair saw the road map for Israel/Palestine as a *quid pro quo* for building support for an attack on Iraq.

But the neo-cons in the Bush administration, operating more and more, as Kampfner says, as an outpost of the right wing of the Likud party, saw it *simply* as a cynical gesture, much as Bush's father had spoken of Palestinian rights at the time of the first Gulf War: 'Blair believed that if he could get some form of assurance on the Palestinian issue, he would have less trouble selling Iraq to his party. Bush did not see the link. His people, in any case, did not appreciate what they saw as Blair's unhelpful meddling on the issue.' (p.260)

In relation to Old Europe, Blair's bridge proved just as rickety. He convinced himself that he could talk Chirac and Schröder round. When he was faced with another round of humiliating isolation he was left muttering about 'unreasonable vetoes' to which Chirac, not unreasonably, pointed out that in the history of the Security Council France had wielded its veto 18 times, compared with Britain's 32 and the United States's 76.

Kampfner goes some way towards vindicating BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan, who accused Blair's inner circle of 'sexing up' the September dossier: 'It would have been more correct to say that Blair did not know the intelligence to be true, but hoped it to be true. That would have been damning enough. Blair always had his doubts about the intelligence. The claim that the information had been inserted against the wishes of the intelligence community was also inaccurate. Whatever the concerns of others, those at the top – from Richard Dearlove, the head of SIS, to John Scarlett,

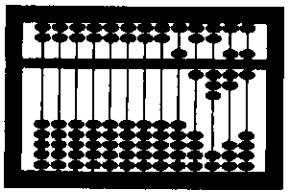
the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) – had been willing parties to the decision. They were all in it together. But Gilligan was largely correct on the main charge.' (p.367)

Kampfner neatly captures the irony of Blair's post-war charm offensive on Libya: 'So the man Ronald Reagan had called the "mad dog", described in the 1980s by the Americans and British as the biggest sponsor of international terrorism, Muammar Gaddafi, had become the West's newest friend. The man who was the West's friend in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein – even as he was gassing thousands of Kurds in a single day in Halabja – became its implacable enemy at an opportune moment.' (p.381) Just to complete the irony, Kampfner notes that Blair failed to support motions condemning Saddam tabled by fellow Labour MPs at the time of Halabja. (p.7)

Of course, any attempt to explain Blair's trajectory out of his psychological make up is circular at best. But Kampfner's picture of Blair's cabinet, hardly meeting for long periods of the build up to war, reduced to impotence by presidential diktat, means that Blair's ideological cocktail of pro-Americanism, neo-liberalism, moralism and Third Way waffle has exercised a uniquely powerful influence over foreign policy. As the book concludes: 'His was a combination of self-confidence and fear, of Atlanticism, evangelism, Gladstonian idealism, pursued when necessary through murky means. His was a combination of naivety and hubris. These were not his government's wars, least of all his party's wars. These were Blair's wars.' (p.387)

WA

FIGURING IT OUT



DEMOGRAPHICS: The number of people living to at least 80 will double within 30 years to almost 5 million. By the early 2050s, when the last of the baby boomer generation pass their 80th birthdays, the over-80 population will peak at nearly 7 million. By that time, the population as a whole will be about 65 million. The proportion of older people within the population will increase significantly, with the population's average age rising from 39.3 in 2002 to 43.6 in 2031.

COUPLES: A recent study has found that the average British couple spend just 15 minutes a day enjoying social time with each other. Couples with children spend half as much time together as those without – just 78 minutes every weekday. Of the average two and a half hours spent together each day, a third of that is taken up by 'passive activity', such as watching television, rather than interacting with each other. When not watching television, couples take only 30 minutes to eat together, 24 minutes doing the housework, with social activities accounting for 15 minutes of each couple's day. Sleep and work account for nearly 13 hours of the average person's weekday. That should leave couples up to 11 hours of time together but couples, on average, only spend 126 minutes in shared activity on a weekday. This increases at weekends to 210 minutes a day, but including 64 minutes watching TV.

SINGLES: The single population is set to increase to 16 million by 2010. The number of single people has doubled in the past 30 years to 10 million.

LONE FATHERS: The number of single fathers has risen dramatically over the past three decades. By 2001, there were about 326,000 father-only families, accounting for 422,000 dependent children in England and Wales.

OLDER WORKERS: With the pensions crisis worsening, hundreds of thousands of pensioners are working into their 70s and 80s to avoid poverty. An estimated 1,011,000 people over the state pension age were in paid employment in July. A report by the Third Age Employment Network found that 10 per cent of people aged 56 to 69 and a third of those in the 60 to 65 age group are still working.

GENDER GAP: Research by Payfinder.com suggests that on average men are paid 24 per cent more than women. Government statistics estimate that the gap is 19 per cent. Meanwhile, new research from the Equal Opportunities Commission suggests that the pay gap between women working part time and men working full time has not narrowed in 25 years. Women in part time jobs earn an average of 40 per cent per hour less than men who are working full time.

DEATHS AT WORK: The number of fatal accidents in the workplace rose to 235 last year – a rise of 4 per cent on 2002. The TUC commented that it was in marked contrast to the government's commitment of achieving a 5 per cent decrease in the number of deaths at work between 2000 and 2004.

LUNCH BREAK: The average lunch 'hour' is now just 27 minutes long, and one in four people do not leave their desk at lunchtime.

OIL IMPORTS: Britain became a net importer of crude oil for the first time in 11 years in June, and imports in the second quarter were at their highest ever level. Although lower June production figures may have been the result of seasonal maintenance on oil rigs in the North Sea, the trend is steadily downward, with North Sea oil production as low as 2.2 million barrels per day.

POLLUTION: Transport emissions rose by 47 per cent between 1990 and 2002, partly offsetting an otherwise downward trend in greenhouse gas emissions. The rise was slightly blunted by a 3 per cent fall in emissions between 2000 and 2002, mainly reflecting the fall in air travel after September 11, 2001. Emissions from private vehicles rose by 6 per cent since 1990, with overall road transport emissions rising by 13 per cent. But air transport emissions rose by more than 85 per cent. Friends of the Earth commented that this reflected 'the sorry state of the government's policy on transport and climate change'.

'Empiricist'

Sudan

Fractured at birth

Bob Wood explains the background to the current conflict in the fragile Sudanese state

For nearly all of its almost 50-year history as an independent state, the Sudan has been wracked by civil war. In its anxiety to forestall Egyptian influence, and the possibility of a unified Egyptian Sudanese state, Britain granted independence in 1956 with very little preparation. Little thought was given to what kind of constitution a country the size of western Europe, stretching from the Congo in the south to the Red Sea in the north, would need to make it viable. The religious and racial fault lines which have plagued the country ever since were there from the beginning.

The first civil war, pitting the largely Arab and Muslim north against the mainly African and Christian south, had in fact started a few months before independence, and was only brought to an end in 1972 by a peace agreement negotiated in Addis Ababa between President Nimairi and the rebels. A coup in 1969 had ushered Nimairi into power with the support of socialists and communists. Over the years Nimairi gradually distanced himself from this support and came to rely more and more on Islamists and the West.

The Addis Ababa Agreement provided for regional government in the south, with very little true autonomy. The gains made at Addis Ababa were slowly whittled away, and eventually in 1983 Nimairi dissolved the southern regional government and replaced it by three state governments, all of whose ministers were his appointees. Throughout this period there were defections and mutinies by groups of soldiers who had fought in the first civil war, many of whom fled to Ethiopia. The second civil war had started.

In 1985, street demonstrations in Khartoum led to the fall of Nimairi and his replacement by Sadiq al Mahdi, leader of the Umma Party. His government was on the verge of concluding a peace deal with the southern rebels in 1989 when it was overthrown by a coup backed by the National Islamic Front, incensed that part of the agreement involved the suspension of Islamic law. The coup brought Umar al-Bashir to power and he remains president today.

Throughout its history, power in the Sudan has effectively resided with a northern commercial elite whose base is in various Islamic movements. The ideology of these movements is one in which religion and race are compounded. Islamism is more or less equated with pan Arabism. To be an Arab is to be a Muslim. To be a Muslim is to be an Arab. That is why black African mosques in Darfur and elsewhere have been destroyed without conscience, since they are the mosques of rebels, who because they are rebels cannot be 'true believers'. The government's war is a jihad. Since some of the rebels are Muslims, a fatwa issued in 1992 declared: 'An insurgent who was previously a Muslim is now an apostate; and a non-Muslim is a non-believer standing as a bulwark against the spread of Islam, and Islam has granted the freedom of killing both of them.'

Article 126 of the Sudanese Penal Code, adopted in 1991, states: 'Section 1: Any Muslim who promotes the forsaking of the creed of Islam or who declares openly having forsaken it by a clear statement or an unequivocal act shall be deemed a perpetrator of the offence of apostasy. Section 2: He who commits the offence of apostasy shall be called upon to repent . . . If he insists on his apostasy and in case that he is not a recent convert to Islam he shall be executed.' Since the 'creed of Islam' is open to interpretation, this Article is an open invitation to accuse political and religious rivals of apostasy.

The political project of the northern politicians in Khartoum is, then, an entirely Islamic Sudan. The rebel movement, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), together with its military wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), has on the other hand consistently fought for a democratic, secular and federal Sudan. A breakaway from the SPLA in the early nineties was willing to consider independence for the south, and having apparently got the agreement of the Bashir regime to this, eventually ended fighting on the government's side, before crumbling away.

Recent events in Darfur have followed a pattern long established by the Sudan government and its army. In this case the Janjaweed have driven villagers from their homes, poisoned wells, burnt huts, raped women and killed any men of fighting age, all with the support of the army, particularly air support. But in the past the government has used local militias (the PDF – Popular Defence Forces) as paramilitaries to pursue a scorched earth policy elsewhere, in the Nuba Mountains and Bahr al Ghazal most notably. By attacking civilians thought to be sympathetic to the SPLA in this way, the government has sought to deprive the rebels of the supplies and support they need, but in the process has understandably created many new enemies.

Clearing whole areas in this way has brought great economic benefits to northern capitalists. In the name of development, the government has pursued a policy of large-scale mechanised agriculture. The merchants who have invested in these schemes, using capital from Islamic banks, have done extremely well for themselves. Large-scale clearances of subsistence farmers (not unlike the enclosure movement in England in earlier centuries) has also had the additional benefit of creating a large pool of workers available for hire as wage labourers.

The Sudanese army has similarly not hesitated to clear local civilians from oilfield areas, creating a secure zone around the wells. There is a certain black humour in the story of how one Canadian oil company, when questioned about dealing with the Sudan government, pointed to the medical services it provided locally, apparently unaware that the people it was treating were PDF militias who had displaced the indigenous population.

North American involvement in the exploitation of Sudan's oil has for the time being been replaced by Chinese and Indian investment, with some European support, a situation clearly not to the liking of Washington.

The prospect of direct intervention by the US or the UK in Darfur seems remote. Apart from the disastrous expedition to Somalia, the imperialist power has preferred to use surrogates from other African or third world countries to protect its interests on the African continent. In the Sudan, the Americans seem happy to let the African Union provide the muscle, and already Rwanda and Nigeria are sending small contingents. How much effect even a few thousand soldiers can have must be open to doubt though, given that Darfur is the size of France. And the record of African soldiery in other African countries is not an inspiring one. They frequently behave in ways not so very different from the warlords they are sent to police. In the Congo, Ugandan and Rwandan officers grew fat by exploiting the trade in natural resources, for example coltan, and in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Nigerians indulged in an orgy of looting.

Much hope has been placed by the West on the peace talks held between the government of Sudan and the SPLA. If only, the US appears to think, the 20-year old civil war can be concluded, we can cross the Sudan off our list of 'terrorist' countries, and begin to get our hands on some of that oil. Under American pressure, the latest round of discussions in Naivasha,

Kenya, produced a result very close to a final agreement. Those talks are now on hold, and a cynic might be forgiven for concluding that Khartoum deliberately unleashed the Janjaweed militias in Darfur precisely to prevent a successful conclusion.

The confrontation between an Arab, oil-rich country and the United States has wrong-footed many on the left, triggering an automatic anti-imperialist response, and sometimes giving more credence to the Sudan government's protestations of innocence than they deserve. Any moves towards direct intervention by the West should of course be vigorously opposed, but that is unlikely at present. And the call for an arms embargo on the Sudan should be supported.

In addition a little solidarity with the movements in opposition to Bashir in Khartoum would not come amiss. Little is known about the politics of one of the groups in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), but the Sudan Liberation Movement has policies similar in many ways to the SPLM, including the separation of the state from religion, and a preference for a Sudanese federation rather than a unitary state.

- No arms to the ethnic cleansers in Khartoum;
- For a unitary, secular and federal Sudanese state;
- The Fur, Masaleit and Zaghawa peoples of Darfur have the right to self defence;
- No armed intervention by the West.

The above article draws on information contained in Douglas H. Johnson's book, 'The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars', Indiana University Press, 2003. **WA**

Portugal

The revolution that got away

Nick Davies re-visits the inspiring events of 30 years ago in Portugal that saw the collapse of the dictatorship and a struggle for power by the working class

Thirty years ago, just like this summer, Portugal was in the news, but the flags of the thousands of people filling the streets of Lisbon day after day were red, and the reporters excitedly jabbering their copy into hotel telephones were not sports writers, but political correspondents. The issue was not whether Portugal's gifted but erratic football team would be European champions, but whether Portugal's workers would take power. For 18 months, despite stiff competition from Vietnam, Watergate and Cyprus, events in Portugal kept the world mesmerised. There was much at stake. For the left, there was the intoxicating prospect of the overthrow of capitalism in a Nato country, two hours' flying time from London or Paris. For the ruling classes in western Europe and North America, there was the prospect that Portugal might indeed be 'lost'.

Today those hopes and anxieties are replayed in a different form. Europe's ruling classes, including that of Portugal, can comfort themselves that Portugal is a functioning parliamentary democracy, fully integrated into the EU. Living standards are higher, and the health, education and transport systems more developed than in 1974. Revolution seems a reassuringly long way away. Portugal was not 'lost' but 'saved', or 'normalised'. To socialists, the Portuguese Revolution represents the most recent attempt in Europe, if not the world, by the working class to take power into its own hands. The fact that it is recorded in colour TV pictures, and not in blurred black and white photographs or grainy newsreel footage, suggests that revolution is not a mere historical curiosity, or best-forgotten nightmare under Stalin or Mao. It is part of the experience of maybe hundreds of thousands of people, many still only in early middle age, who took over factories, shipyards and rural estates, gave them names such as 'Red Star' or 'Now or Never' and formed workers' councils to run them.

Among the left, Portugal has the potential to reveal deep-seated differences on how the socialist project can be realised. For example, Portugal has been used to prove and to disprove the proposition that the working class needs its own party. Some say that Portugal just goes to prove that socialist revolution is really not that difficult. After all, this almost happened in a western European state only 30 years ago, so why can't it happen here? This approach misunderstands both the specific conditions existing in Portugal in 1974, and also more general problems about consciousness, and how capitalism exercises its power and authority in western European societies.

April 25

On the morning of April 25, 1974, in what was surely the only instance of a revolution being triggered by a DJ, the playing of a popular song was the signal for a well-organised military coup. By nightfall, 48 years of Portuguese fascism had been consigned to history. General António de Spinola was propelled into the leadership almost by default, as the dictator Caetano preferred to surrender to him rather than to a junior officer 'with a mob behind him'. Caetano had something else to say: 'General, I surrender the power to you. You must take care. I am frightened by the idea of power loose in the streets.'

Caetano's fears were well founded. Many of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), as the organisation of anti-fascist soldiers, sailors and airmen was called, and its civilian supporters, wanted nothing more than an orderly and peaceful transition from fascism to bourgeois democracy, accession to the EEC and a resolution, preserving Portugal's economic interests, to the endless, futile wars by which Portugal was trying to hang on to its African colonial empire. But the working class had other ideas. The coup opened up a Pandora's box of working class militancy. Workers took to the streets demanding better wages and conditions. One hundred thousand marched through Lisbon on May Day. Many soldiers, not only rank-and-file but junior officers as well, were sympathetic to the workers, and open to socialist ideas. The enduring image of the Portuguese Revolution is that of soldiers with red carnations in the muzzles of their rifles.

The MFA was obliged to make concessions to the working class: legalising the right to strike, introducing a minimum wage,

and inviting representatives of the two biggest workers' parties, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PCP), now able to organise openly, and led respectively by Mario Soares and Alvaro Cunhal, into the first provisional government. Spínola and his supporters decided that matters were getting out of hand, but his September 27 'march of the silent majority' was faced down by workers and rank and file soldiers, thus triggering a huge escalation of the class struggle. In October 1974, 400 'disturbances' were recorded, ranging from strike action for higher wages, to factory occupations. Many enterprises were taken over by the workers after their pro-fascist owners had fled.

The revolution's high point

Conscious of their growing power, workers, particularly those in the Lisbon area, were building committees to fight for the workers' control of industry. By the end of October 1974, there were in existence almost 2,000 *plenários*, in which all workers in an enterprise, regardless of which union they were in, would discuss their problems. These were parallel bodies to the trade unions, and more democratic, with the leaderships elected for one year and subject to recall. They would discuss, for example, whether wage differentials for skilled and unskilled workers should be retained, discrimination against women workers, and how profits should be shared. By the end of March 1975, 200 workers' committees were actually running their factories. In January 1975, a federation of workers' committees, Inter-Empresas, was formed, and on February 7, 1975, tens of thousands of workers joined its demonstration against the visit to Portugal of Nato forces, marching behind the banner 'Redundancies are the inevitable consequence of the capitalist system. The workers must destroy this system and build a new world'. The years 1974-75 saw a profusion of grassroots campaigns fighting for better housing, health and education. There was squatting of unoccupied buildings, the setting up of nurseries to allow women to work, or popular clinics, in which sympathetic doctors would work for free. Women's organisations emerged to fight for equal pay, and for the right to contraception and abortion on demand, thus combating not only the power of the Catholic church, but also the reactionary attitudes still prevalent in even the most militant trade unions. Finally, there was a wave of occupations by farm workers of the large estates in the south of the country. The rural south with its proletariat working on the large estates, a proletariat which had close links to the large urban centres due to the migration there of family members, was always more left wing than the conservative, priest-ridden north with its small peasant holdings.

The collapse of Spínola's attempted right wing coup on March 11, 1975, was the high-water mark of working class activity and consciousness in Portugal. The occupations stepped up a gear. The fourth provisional government, reflecting the influence of the working class and a shift in favour of left-wing officers in the MFA, proclaimed a 'transition to socialism' guided by an alliance between the 'MFA and the people'. The government declared the nationalisation of the banks and insurance companies, which was followed by state control of the steel, petrol, electricity and transport companies. There was an increase in the minimum wage, and prices were declared frozen until the end of the year. In some cases, nationalisation was a way of legitimising, after the event, the occupation by the workers. Sometimes it was to stop an enterprise going bust, and in the case of strategically important industries it was in the 'national interest'.

By the middle of 1975, Portuguese workers, assertive, confident, backed by their allies in the armed forces, the middle classes and in the countryside, appeared to have power in their sights. The bourgeoisie, on the defensive and compromised by its association with fascism, looked beaten. How could this have happened, and how was the initiative allowed to slip away?

Fascism outlives its usefulness

By the beginning of 1974, capitalism in Portugal was not able to continue ruling as it had been doing. The poorest country in western Europe, Portugal had suffered decades of fascist dictatorship. Portuguese fascism had been constructed and strengthened on a piecemeal basis throughout the 1930s, following a right-wing military uprising in 1926. Its project was to end Portugal's economic dependence on Britain. Traditionally, Britain had supplied Portugal with manufactured goods (thus stunting the growth of Portuguese industry), and acted as a market for Portuguese agricultural products (thus benefiting Portugal's landowners). The *Estado Novo* of the dictator Salazar sought to promote Portuguese industry, in the form of a small number of strategically important monopolies, by means of economic protectionism. This, on its own, could not work. Wages also had to be kept low; hence the brutal oppression of the working class and the outlawing of independent trade unions. Finally, as a ready market for Portuguese goods and a source of raw materials, the *Estado Novo* needed Portugal's colonial empire, principally the African colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, which were run with an unedifying mix of brutality and neglect.

By the 1960s, the regime was in a state of slow collapse. The cost of the colonial wars, which were by the late 1960s eating up over 40 per cent of public expenditure, prevented any meaningful investment in the economy or infrastructure. Increases in the prices of essential imports produced inflation. Emigration, to escape conscription or the grinding poverty of rural Portugal produced a labour shortage, making it difficult to keep wages down. Many of the middle classes were frustrated with life, seeing Portugal as decrepit and repressive (as indeed it was) compared to the rest of western Europe. When Salazar succumbed to a stroke in 1968, his successor, Marcelo Caetano, attempted to save the regime from itself, allowing selected liberals to contest rigged elections. However, the working class soon attempted to exploit this thaw with strikes and demonstrations organised principally by the semi clandestine PCP. This was too much for the regime, which responded with further repression. Like all 'moderate' reformers, Caetano merely enraged the right wing, disappointed the liberals and attacked the working class, and it was clear that his days and those of the regime were numbered. Crucially, opposition was brewing in the armed forces. This was nothing new in Portugal. Army offic-

ers had been active in the overthrow of the monarchy in 1910 and in the various, sporadic attempts to resist or overthrow fascism. Many junior officers were angry at what they saw as the decadence of the fascist regime, which was insulting their professionalism by ordering them into unwinnable wars. Fascism, then, was a model for organising capitalism in Portugal that had become clearly unviable. It did not work any more, and many of those in the layers of society that had sustained Portuguese capitalism knew it.

Even in European countries as poor and repressive as Portugal, capitalism has always been able to rule by a nicely balanced combination of force and consent. Capitalism, personified in the cartoon figures with bags of money and top hats, would never be able to rule without exercising hegemony, or authority, in any given society. That authority is generally exercised by the harnessing together of a number of sections of society in a hegemonic bloc, through which the ideology of capitalism, its bureaucratic and technical rationalism, the 'right' to own and dispose of means of production, the 'right' to manage, notions of a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay', patriotism and the sexual division of labour are diffused throughout society as 'common sense' and so the ideas of capitalism are adopted as the ideas of society as a whole. Although there was a far greater emphasis on force than in any West European democracy, Portuguese fascism did not rule solely through its police apparatus and political organisations. It constructed a hegemonic or historic bloc, consisting of the military, industrial capital, colonial profiteers and settlers, the church, agricultural landowners, large sections of the professional middle class, and, of course, some peasants. What started in the 1960s and culminated in the events of 1974 was the slow disintegration, then final collapse of that bloc, resulting in an organic crisis of capitalism, a rupture between the structure and superstructure, a crisis of capitalist hegemony. The ruling class could not go on ruling in the old way. What was required for capitalist rule to continue in Portugal was, through a process of realignment and transformation, the construction of a new hegemonic bloc – for capitalism to find a new way to rule. This was the aim of the 'moderate' officers such as Spínola. This process could not be achieved in a vacuum, however, and the working class was getting in the way. So, the key questions were, how could this be achieved, when the bourgeoisie was so compromised and discredited by fascism, and could it be achieved before the working class was able to construct its own bloc and establish its own hegemony?

Socialist Party to the rescue

For capitalism in Portugal, and for the security of Nato's western flank, help was at hand in the shape of Portugal's two principal workers' parties, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. The PCP was the dominant political force in the Portuguese labour movement, although in the course of 1974-75 it had to compete for the allegiance of workers with an alphabet soup of Maoist, Trotskyist and Syndicalist tendencies. Its traditional orientation had been attempts to build electoral fronts with reformist politician. After April 25, the PCP used its influence, particularly its tight control of the union federation Intersindical, to act as the MFA's policeman within the Portuguese working class (this was *before* the MFA moved to the left, with the defeat and isolation of Spínola). It supported the first military government's anti-strike laws, and was quick to denounce what it termed as 'strikes for strikes' sake'. It distrusted the popular, grassroots movements and the workers' councils. It denounced the Inter-Impresas February 7 march, comparing it to Spínola's 'silent majority' march. Instead of turning the strength and self confidence of the working class into a force which could defeat the right wing, the PCP sought to use the working class as a stage army in support of the MFA, mobilising behind the 'left wing' army officer Vasco Gonçalves, who headed the fourth and fifth provisional governments. The problem was not the sincerity of many of the armed forces. It was that the MFA wanted to be in control of the process, with the support of the workers, rather than the other way around. The PCP reinforced this situation.

The PCP performed something of an unintentional double act with its rival for support in the working class, the Socialist Party. Where the PCP held back workers in the trade unions and tied them to the MFA, the PS peddled illusions in electoralism and specifically the promised elections to a Constituent Assembly. It did this by exploiting dislike in the working class of the PCP's dictatorial methods in the trade unions, and exploiting the fears among the middle class that the PCP was too 'Russian'. When the land seizures and occupations provoked a backlash against the PCP, which became very violent, the PS leadership sat tight, neither defending the PCP nor verifying the PCP's indignant protests that the occupations and seizures were not its doing. The position of the PS was strengthened by its victory, with 38 per cent of the vote, in the April 1975 elections to the Constituent Assembly. These were the first truly free elections ever held in Portugal, and it would be wrong for socialists to stand aloof from the strong desire for any form of democracy. However, by the time of the elections, the most class conscious workers in both town and country had moved beyond a simple desire for free elections and were starting to construct a deeper, more direct form of democracy – workers' democracy. To this, the PS counterposed bourgeois democracy: a vote every four years for one of the parties of the ruling class, among which the PS's own hollowed out 'socialism', acceptable to the middle classes and to Portugal's 'allies' (the US and the EEC), would be just one contesting participant.

The central role of the armed forces was a result of the partial disintegration of the old state apparatus and the discrediting of the old political parties after April 25. The MFA attempted to hold the ring between the weakened bourgeoisie, its international allies and the working class, claiming to be 'above politics' and the only force capable of uniting the country. But the MFA could not be above politics, and as the anti-fascist opposition fragmented into left and right factions, so did the MFA. The instinctive desire among many workers to move to the left of the PCP and PS was reflected in the emergence of a radical wing of the MFA under Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, who in fact had drawn up the original plans for the April 25 coup. This radical wing gained control of the MFA's security apparatus, COPCON, which, in the Lisbon region in particular, frequently intervened in strikes and occupations on the side of the workers. However, although the working class was eager for a fight, it was politically disarmed by placing its trust in a bunch of idealistic junior officers, just as the PCP supporters were told by the party to put their trust in Vasco Gonçalves.

Portugal is 'normalised'

On November 25, 1975, matters came to a head when, amid allegations that he was preparing a left wing coup, Otelo was relieved of his command. In his support, 1,500 paratroopers staged a revolt, which was defeated by forces loyal to the government. This was followed by 'normalisation' in the armed forces – the sacking and detention of left-wing officers, the sacking of left wing government officials and the take over of all radio and TV stations except those owned by the church. All civilian-held arms were to be given up and demonstrations were banned. In response, crowds of workers congregated outside barracks demanding guns, and strikes were called in support of the paratroopers. The PCP called a two hour strike and then ordered workers to return to work. It did not even leave the government, but used its influence to sabotage any fightback, criticising striking nurses and bank workers as

'reactionaries'. Mário Soares claimed that November 25 had 'saved the revolution', and then supported all the government's anti working class measures, including a wage freeze.

On the basis of a pact signed between the PS and the MFA (minus, of course, its left faction) allowing for an all powerful presidency and the subordination of the legislative assembly to the 'forces of order', the PS dominated the first constitutional government in 1976. Having sought to 'normalise' politics, the PS then sought to 'normalise' economics, by submitting Portugal to 'international realities'. The 'protection' of the public sector, by which the PS set such store, involved making the public sector 'commercially viable'. Measures were taken to combat 'wildcat strikes' and enlarging the grounds for fair dismissal, to satisfy the employers' complaints about overmanning. 'Unrealistic' price freezes were removed. This, and currency devaluation, produced inflation of 20 per cent in 1976 and 27 per cent in 1977. The existence of the public sector was legally consolidated in 1977, but this was hampered by 'realistic' criteria of profitability, and the concept of competitive coexistence with the private sector. Thus, many enterprises which were under workers' control and which, due to the circumstances of their take over, could not present the required rationalisation plans, lost out on state aid. The introduction of 'democratic' legality and competitive profitability led to the political or commercial destruction of many enterprises under workers' control, and the return of them to their former owners. When the unions and workers' committees resisted these measures, their power was reduced, they were obliged to elect their leaders by secret ballots, and they were forbidden from interfering in management.

This 'normalisation' process was carried out by the Socialist Party, using its authority in the workers' movement to restore the ideological and material power of capitalism while the political representatives of Portuguese capitalism were regrouping, rebuilding and cleaning up their image. When the first constitutional government collapsed in January 1978, the PS went into coalition not with the liberal capitalists of the PPD, later renamed the Social Democratic Party, but the more hard right pro-business CDS, some of whose members were strangers to democracy in any form. It was now that Mário Soares came clean, announcing that the constitutional commitment to constructing socialism had to be put 'in the drawer', in favour of an alliance between the inheritors of Portuguese monopoly capitalism, the CDS, and imperialism in the form of the IMF, which now, at the invitation of the PS, was able to impose its dictatorship on Portugal, committing Portugal to policies later to be known throughout the world as monetarism. This, then, was Chile without the bloodshed, or a prototype of how parties ostensibly committed to social democracy and welfarism would do the IMF's dirty work for it. Soares had presented his own party and its commitment to parliamentary democracy as essential for the stability of post fascist Portugal, but in defining the PS in purely negative terms – anti-Marxist and anti PCP – and its policies in purely pragmatic, non-ideological terms, he had created a vacuum all too quickly filled by the right. The PS had allowed capitalism, updated, modernised and democratic, to recast itself as 'common sense' and the 'real world'.

Could it have been different?

Could it have been any different? Possibly, yes. There was every likelihood that in time the workers, with their allies, the agricultural workers, students and some of the middle class, could have expanded and developed the rudimentary framework of workers' democracy which emerged in 1974-75. Already, the analyses and the solutions from the workers' councils were becoming less naive, and more radical and coherent. Those organisations needed to assume more and more of a political and administrative role, posing the question, who rules the country? Workers' democracy had to be reconciled with a plan of production. There would have to be physical defence of Portuguese workers' power, rather than reliance on sympathetic soldiers. It has been argued that experience of the Portuguese revolution and the destructive role of the PS and the PCP demonstrates that the working class does not need a political party of its own, and that the working class could have established its own hegemony over society with the workers' committees and the grassroots organisations which had developed spontaneously. It is true that the occupations and workers' councils were yet further proof that Lenin was not merely exaggerating but simply wrong when he made his famous remark that left to itself the working class can only develop a trade union consciousness. But that is not the same as saying that the Portuguese workers did not need their own political organisation. Workers' power may well have developed without one, in time. However, time was not what the working class was going to get. To combat the efforts of the PS, aided by the Portuguese right wing, European social democracy and the IMF, to re-establish the norms and prejudices of capitalism in Portugal, the working class needed its own independent party to centralise the experiences of its many, partial struggles. With the grave of the Portuguese revolution being dug by two workers' parties which were loudly proclaiming their allegiance to it, this new party would have to challenge the rhetoric of the PS and PCP, demonstrating that it was socialist and democratic, and that they were neither.

There were other huge difficulties. The Portuguese revolution was isolated in the poorest country in western Europe. Elsewhere, although the working class was in better shape than it is now, the end of the post-war boom saw it thrown back on the defensive by the attacks from the ruling class. In Spain, as Franco approached his end and the working class was starting to flex its muscles, the Stalinists of the PCE would do their best to ensure that the transition from fascism to democracy was as orderly as possible. If 'socialism' in one country was a catastrophic failure in the USSR, how would it fare in a country of nine million? Portugal's workers needed allies elsewhere.

Inspiration or blueprint?

The Portuguese revolution was a product of particular circumstances in a particular society, at a particular time. Those circumstances will not be repeated, and so it is probably futile to try to see the Portuguese revolution as an exact prototype for any other society. We can draw encouragement from the fact that almost 50 years of fascism, the outlawing of trade unions, and considerable isolation (the only alternatives to the state controlled media were underground newspapers, and information from emigrants in France, Luxembourg or Switzerland) did not prevent the workers of Portugal reaching out for power. On the other hand, in 1974, there were, in shipyards and factories, large concentrations of workers who, because of their pay and conditions, clearly thought of themselves as workers. The existence of the USSR, with all its imperfections, suggested to many workers that there was more than one way to organise society. Now, free-market capitalism reigns, or claims to reign, supreme, and the cold war is over. In Britain, many large centres of working class militancy have been broken up. Capitalist hegemony in Britain, for example, is vastly more subtle, sophisticated and deep-rooted than the comparatively ramshackle Portuguese fascism, itself a product of Portuguese capitalism's historic weakness. Those who say that 25 years of attacks by Thatcher and Blair on the working class and its organisations have ended forever any real possibility of a struggle for socialism in Britain are wrong. Those of us who disagree with them should see the Portuguese events as an inspiration, but not a blueprint. **WA**

Through the smoke of Atocha

Demystifying the Spanish elections

Ed George analyses the events that led to the surprise victory of the Socialist Party in the general election held three days after the Madrid bombings of March 11

'Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.'

Proverbs 26: 4-5

The language of hyperbole and cliché generally counts for too much in a lot of political analysis, but in the case of the Spanish state it would be fair to say that the recent election of a PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party) government really did send shock waves around the international political world.

That the Socialists won the election against all prediction was surprise enough.[1] That the defeated incumbent, José María Aznar, leader of the neo-liberal, neo-clerical Partido Popular (PP), had been a key international figure, along with Tony Blair, in the preparation and carrying out of the West's war in Iraq added to the novelty an international dimension. And that, within days of assuming office, the new prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, ordered the immediate withdrawal of the Spanish state contingent of the occupying forces in Iraq prompted many commentators to speak of a global realignment of the political stage.

Of course, as is now well known outside of Spain, the elections took place in decidedly extraordinary circumstances. Just three days before, on March 11, a series of bombs ripped simultaneously through early morning commuter trains at the huge terminus station of Atocha in Madrid, killing around 200 and maiming and injuring five times as many more.[2]

These circumstances pose a number of obvious questions. First, what effect did the bombings have on the elections? Concretely, given that, if the opinion polls are to be believed, the Socialist Party was well on course to lose the elections, why, after March 11, did they in the end win? And what does all this tell us about the prospects for the new government? What follows below is an attempt to give some summary, but precise, answers to these questions.[3]

Naturally, the interpretation of the socialist victory, and the relationship of this to the events of March 11, vary according to political position. For the unreconstructed right of the PP, in what is a simple and blatant campaign to delegitimise the new government, their defeat at the hands of the Socialists in the emotionally supercharged post-bombing aftermath simply amounts to a 'victory for terrorism', a fact left the more obvious given the subsequent withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq.[4]

Of course, the left – by which here I mean the Socialist Party itself, the Communist Party's electoral front organisation, Izquierda Unida (IU), and also what counts for a revolutionary left in Spain these days – goes along with little of this. But it is curious that, beneath the overlaying nuances held by the distinct currents, there is a basic common interpretation of what happened that is held by the left nearly in its entirety.

This is how it goes. On the Thursday morning, when the bombs went off, the government jumped to the conclusion that the perpetrators had been the radical Basque nationalist group ETA. But as evidence quickly mounted up suggesting that it was in fact highly unlikely that ETA had planted the bombs, that they had, in fact, probably been the work of an 'al-Qaida' type organisation, the government either suppressed, or manipulated, this information, and continued to insist on ETA responsibility right up to the election. The reason for what effectively amounted to a campaign of official dissimulation was that if it had become public knowledge that the attacks had indeed been carried out by an al Qaida type organisation, just days before the elections, remember, then the PP feared that they would have been held ultimately responsible for the attacks, since it had been they who had embroiled Spain in the Western invasion of Iraq, an operation that was, and still is, extraordinarily unpopular in Spain. To avoid paying an electoral price for its foreign policy decisions, then, the PP government had to insist, at least up until the elections, on someone else – *anyone* else – being responsible, and ETA just happened to be credible patsies, the most convenient fall guys, for this operation.

But the plan came unstuck. In what now can only be interpreted as a triumph of the 'democratic spirit' of the Spanish people, an outraged Spanish public, cannily realising that the government was trying to pull the wool over their eyes, and shocked at the way that the PP could try to take political advantage of the carnage of Atocha, voted, in a record turn-out, against the PP, and for the Socialist Party.

My fundamental argument here will be that this interpretation, while containing a thread of truth just strong enough to make it believable, in fact, through its multiple lacunae and over-simplifications, in the end only obscures what really happened. My subsidiary argument will be that its very ecumenical acceptance in turn tells us a great deal about the present state, and most urgent weaknesses, of the left in Spain.

What is wrong with this interpretation? In the first place, it is simply not true to say that the PP was the only party publicly to attribute guilt to ETA. It is not even true to say that the PP was the *first* to do so, since before the PP made any such declaration the leaders of PSOE, IU and the moderate Basque nationalist PNV had *already* made

public declarations to that effect." Even if it is the case that these parties had to have been acting, at least in part, on information supplied through official channels, it is nevertheless important to note the curious fact that at this early point – Thursday morning – practically the only political force to *not* name ETA was the government. Only at 1.30 that afternoon, with a statement by Angel Acebes, the Interior Minister, was there any *official* naming of ETA as chief suspects.[6]

But, of course, as time passed, evidence, both circumstantial and concrete, that this was almost certainly not the work of ETA did begin to accumulate. And in the light of this, over the course of the Friday the other principal parties began to raise doubts about the government's it-was-ETA hypothesis. But here another discrepancy between the left's interpretation and the truth stands out. It is certainly the case that in each and every public statement made by the government over this period it was insisted that they believed that ETA was responsible for the attacks; but it was never the case, as is now generally claimed, that the government ever *ruled out* the possibility, however remote that it may have been for them, that someone else was responsible. Government statements being government statements, the language in which they were couched was formal and carefully constructed to cover the backs of whoever wanted their back to be covered, but the claim that the government ever *definitively* ruled out authorship by a person or persons not connected with ETA at any point is a false one.

But, in the end, these two discrepancies amount to mere quibbles, for there is a far more important question here that we must consider.

Once the scale of the carnage became known that Thursday, the government called mass demonstrations throughout Spain for the Friday evening under the slogans of 'With the Victims, With the Constitution, For the Defeat of Terrorism'. At first sight, from outside of Spain, this combination of slogans looks curious. 'With the Victims' and 'For the Defeat of Terrorism' appear logical in the circumstances; but 'With the Constitution'? To understand what was happening here it is necessary to explain certain features of the ideological configuration of Spanish politics.

The Constitution,[7] which established the post Franco state as a bourgeois-democratic constitutional monarchy, was drawn up and approved in the 'transition to democracy' (by popular referendum in 1978, to be precise) that took place following the death of the dictator Franco in 1975. Naturally, that Spaniards are now able to operate within conditions of constitutional democracy after suffering three and a half decades of fascist dictatorship is clearly a positive state of affairs. Only the churlish would begrudge Spaniards the right of assembly, of free movement, of political association, to vote, and if comparison is made with the years of autarky of the 1940s and 50s – the freedom from starvation, summary arrest, torture and the middle of the night firing squad; even if, of course, these rights, like all bourgeois-democratic rights, exist within a constitutional framework designed both to protect the untrammelled operation of capitalist government and to keep it safely out of reach of the tinkering of ordinary people; even if, as is inevitable in all bourgeois democratic systems, the system of bourgeois democratic rights will often march hand in hand with some ugly and most decidedly anti democratic activities; and even if the democratic transition itself has had the effective result of tying the Spanish working class and its parties to a political system within which low wages, institutionalised labour flexibility, entrenched clericalism and the highest rate of domestic violence in western Europe flourish.

But the real problem is this: the affinity of the left for what it calls '*la democracia*' – the constitutional monarchic bourgeois-democratic system that issued from the democratic transition, and the institutional framework in which it is inculcated, '*el estado de derecho*' (the 'state of law', although the vocabulary of an Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence is unable to convey accurately the import of the expression) – a combined system for which the Constitution acts both as synonym and cipher – is precisely *not* based on seeing it as a sum total of concrete rights and freedoms, but rather as an abstract symbol – a nationalistic totem – of a reified Spanish people, and of its history and destiny. In short, the trinity of *la transición*, *la democracia* and *el estado de derecho*, rather than taking the form of a constitutional guideline for the day-to-day operation of Spanish society, acts as an emblem of the millennial virtues of an imagined (if not imaginary) Spanish national people, a vision in which the very integrity of the Spanish state itself stands as the fundamental, and only, guarantee of the survival of Spanish national virtues – of democracy, freedom, constitutionality, and rationalism.[8]

It is necessary here to understand the material and ideological background against which this modern vision of the Spanish nation and its destiny was constructed. While in the rest of western Europe, what George Mosse once called the 'nationalisation of the masses' was inculcated within the context of international wars, in Spain, which failed to participate in any significant international conflict at all after the Napoleonic invasion of 1808-1813, it was generated within a context of internal, *civil*, wars; while other European nations fought each other with gay abandon, and could vent their newly found jingoistic frustrations on 'foreigners', Spaniards fought each other. And while elsewhere modern mass nationalist consciousness, based as much on an oppositional hatred of the 'other' as it was on a positive conception of 'self', was channelled towards xenophobic denigration of other nationalities (think about how attitudes towards the French, the Germans, the Italians and even the Spanish themselves have been received in popular English-British culture), in Spain the 'other' – precisely the enemy of domestic millennial virtue – came to be represented not by foreigners but *by the non-Spanish nationalities within the Spanish state*; by, specifically, the Catalans and the Basques. Contemporary political opposition to irredentist Basque and Catalan nationalism (and, of the two, Basque nationalism has a qualitatively stronger irredentist coloration to it, making it, in this historical vision, qualitatively nastier) is a foundational element in Spanish politics; and Basque nationalism is, as a consequence, not just pronounced, it is *visceral*: the most commonly used epithet *on the left* to refer to ETA is 'nazi'.

Thus in the context of March 11, the ideological logic of 'With the Constitution' stood at the tip of an already established and not very subtle ideological iceberg. If 'With the Constitution' was to be the official response to the bombings, then the bombings themselves could only be understood as an attack on Spain itself, on the Spain of *la transición*, *la democracia* and *el estado de derecho*, on the Spain of the vision of a millennial struggle on the part of the 'Spanish spirit' for democracy and freedom against those who would destroy it. But if the bombings had really been carried out by an al-Qaida group, or by little green men from Mars for that matter, what would the *constitutional* ramifications have been? No. Posing the bombings as an attack on the Spanish *nation* in this way was in the popular imagination simply a coded way of saying that behind them must have stood Spain's *national* enemies, and in the present context this could only have meant ETA. 'With the Constitution' and 'Against ETA' functioned here effectively as synonyms.

But what was the response of the left to all this? From PSOE, not a peep of discomfort. The moderate Basque nationalists of PNV, while they broached no argument with regard to these slogans for the rest of the Spanish state, requested that the mobilisations in the Basque Country be carried out under no slogans at all. IU, at least, argued that 'With the Constitution' was 'inappropriate' for a demonstration of solidarity with the victims, on the grounds that this latter should not be made dependent on support for the former.

But this was to miss the point: 'With the Constitution' was not a peripheral issue at this time, unnecessary ideological baggage that could be safely left out, but the *central* ideological feature of developments.

For what was really happening now was this. Once the it was ETA line had became fixed, by around midday on Thursday, and it was fixed out of practically unanimous all-party consensus, a political momentum was built up which carried almost all along with it. Fundamentally, what now drove the whole process forward was a recrudescence of simple Spanish nationalism, and the way that all shades of Spanish state politics had bought into the totems of Constitution, *democracia*, and *estado de derecho* as the concrete living manifestation of everything wonderfully Spanish about Spain propelled a self-fulfilling logic which saw to it that once this holy trinity was deemed to have come under attack, and by definition it could only have come under attack from *within* the Spanish state, not from *outside*, a deluge of patriotic reaction was unleashed which practically no one, whether they wanted to or not, could have stopped.

The thirty years of *la democracia* had sown the wind; what was now being reaped was the hurricane. Right across the political spectrum the reification of the Spanish nation as expressed by *la democracia* made it inevitable that no-one could stand against the flow of mass nationalist sentiment unleashed through the mutual effort of all with their denunciation of ETA 'nazis' and 'barbarians' intent on destroying 'democracy' (and for 'democracy' here we are compelled to read 'Spain'). The case was that the only response open to all political forces to such a shocking event turned out to be a nationalistic one: and Spanish nationalism, in its modern form, is forged above everything else on opposition to irredentist nationalism in general and Basque nationalism in particular. If for Doctor Johnson patriotism was the last refuge of the scoundrel, in Spanish politics, nationalism – liberal constitutional, democratic, post-Franco nationalism – is the last refuge of practically everybody in a crisis as deep as that unleashed that Thursday morning.[9] It was not that the conviction that ETA was responsible for the bombing made the explosion of Spanish nationalism inevitable, but the other way around: that the only fundamental common political discourse remaining within Spanish state politics is nationalism meant that by default ETA *had* to be blamed – be it directly, or indirectly – before the facts, and independently of them.[10]

So when subsequently the mainstream left was to claim that by Friday, once concrete and circumstantial evidence seemed to have pointed in a different direction, they had dropped the it-was-ETA hypothesis which they had shared on Thursday morning in 'good faith' we have to say that this is absolutely not what happened. The failure of the left to counter the 'With the Constitution' hysteria landed them in the it was ETA camp right up to their necks.

In the light of this, that the mainstream party leaders could be vocal in their concerns over the Friday that the government just *might* not be playing a fair hand with the facts smacks then rather of disingenuousness. For surely, if we can impute dastardly motives to the PP given the proximity of the elections to put their own particular spin on events for electoral advantage, this does not mean that we cannot do the same with regard to the left. To plant the suggestion, but only the suggestion, that the government might not be being *entirely* honest in the context of the shock and outrage still being palpably expressed would reap its own reward. Goose and gander here could surely eat off the same plate.

But did the government lie? Did the government, once the evidence started to mount up, *really* believe that the probability was that it had been ETA?

Now while it is always unwise to impute stupidity to one's adversary, it is also dangerous to overestimate their intelligence and capacity to understand: 'All science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence,' and it would be unwarranted to expect of the thorough-bred nationalists of the PP an understanding of the inner workings of Spanish nationalism itself. The point of this essay is not that really existing Spanish nationalism in the concrete form of *el estado de derecho* and *la democracia* is a simple smoke-and mirrors device to pull the wool over the workers' eyes, but that it is a real phenomenon in which its participants really believe. There is no reason to think that the so frequently emitted line that ETA are a band of crazed killers interested in the game of butchery for butchery's sake is not believed by its perpetrators – certainly at the 'middle-cadre' level of the state and security force bureaucracy, i.e., the very people who were passing on to the government the information with which it had to work. For the left to claim now that all was simply a campaign of dissimulation carried out at the whim of the PP central office in order to win the elections is, given the fact that the rest of the left went along with this story for a good part of that Thursday and subsequently too, just too disingenuous and naïve to be believed; in addition, this interpretation, so at odds with the facts, in turn indicates just how much the left too was swept along by the momentum of a process it was equally incapable of understanding.

As it turned out, the demonstrations of that Friday night were truly enormous.[11] All over the Spanish state the flag of the Spanish monarchy was being displayed – in shops, in people's windows, on lapels – and on the demonstrations of that Friday evening themselves, possibly the biggest popular mobilisations seen in Spain since the days of the Second Republic, the mood was aggressively nationalistic: '*España, unida, jamás será vencida*' – 'Spain, united, will never be defeated' – was a common chant. Clearly, the dynamic that was now being unleashed here was not solidarity with innocent victims of mindless slaughter *per se* but *Spanish* victims of an attack on *Spanish* democracy, on *Spanishness* itself, a dynamic symbolised by the unity of political forces – Communists, Socialists, neo liberals, the Church, the Royal Family – heading the marches.[12] The mood was on the whole frankly ugly, and depressing, and not just because of the events of the previous day: a complete contrast to the enormous mobilisations against the Iraq war of the previous year.

But the tide of nationalism did not sweep all along with it. Honourable mention must be made of the Basque nationalists of Eusko Alkartasuna, who criticised the basis of the Friday mobilisations in the strongest of terms, to the point of threatening not to participate in them (a decision that they finally rescinded at the last minute); and of the Catalan nationalists of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, and especially of its leader Josep Carod Rovira, already something of a hate figure outside of Catalunya, who argued on the Thursday morning, with no small degree of political courage, for the necessity of political dialogue with those responsible for the attacks, whoever they may have been. And special mention needs to be made of Corriente Roja (a minority grouping within Izquierda Unida), who did refuse to take part in the mobilisations, precisely on the

grounds of what the lie that 'the unity of democrats in the face of terror' represented.[13]

And there were also dissenting voices, even if they formed a small minority, on the mobilisations themselves. Alongside the slogans of solidarity with the victims, and slogans of an overt Spanish nationalist nature, there could also be heard slogans questioning the interpretation of the government (and the other parties) of what had happened. When Aznar arrived to head the Madrid demonstration, for example, he was jeered and jostled and greeted with cries of '*¿Quién ha sido? ¡Cuéntanos la verdad!*' – 'Who was it? Tell us the truth!' At the end of the Barcelona demonstration, Finance Minister Rodrigo Rato and Catalan PP chief (and former Foreign Minister) Josep Piqué too were jeered. Cracks were now beginning to appear in the consensus reaction to the events of Thursday, and the people who were going to get the blame – even though they were hardly alone in leading the nationalistic dance – were the PP.

The following day, the Saturday – now the day before the election, in Spain a 'day of reflection' on which political campaigning is banned – something rather more dramatic happened: that afternoon, spontaneous, and quite large, demonstrations – organised by text messages, emails and word of mouth – were held outside PP offices. Around 5,000 outside the PP's central offices in the Calle Génova in Madrid – '*¡Antes de votar, queremos la verdad!*' ('Before we vote we want the truth!'), people cried; some 7,000 or more in Barcelona, under the slogan '*Las guerras son vuestras. Los muertos son nuestros*' – 'Your wars, our deaths'; and demonstrations in as well, amongst other places, Santiago de Compostela, Bilbao, Sevilla and Valencia.

The organisers and participants of these demonstrations were (mostly young) progressively-minded people, with some kind of history of political activism, most clearly in the massive anti-war mobilisations of the previous year. Most significantly, it was precisely this layer's reluctance to vote in an institutionalised political system which seemed to them unrepresentative and immovable that had been responsible for the PP's consistent lead in the opinion polls, presaging their victory in the forthcoming elections.

How had these people seen the events? Stunned – like everyone else in Spain had been – by the scale of the carnage of Atocha, they were now questioning why, now that so much evidence had accumulated pointing to the improbability of ETA involvement, the government were so insistent on this as a principal line of enquiry. Smelling an electoral rat, they began to ask themselves if it was not the case that the PP were now deliberately managing the situation for their own political advantage, a supposition fuelled by the most gentle of noises now emanating from PSOE, IU and PNV headquarters suggesting too that, at the least, the government should be widening its investigative dragnet just a little. This line of thinking which really amounted to putting two and two together and making three and a half, since it failed to answer why the PP, along with everyone else, had so confidently gone for the 'it-was ETA' explanation on the Thursday morning before *any* evidence pointing to a possible perpetrator had surfaced, and failed to see that PSOE, IU and PNV doubts were themselves inevitably coloured by the mental concentration being provoked by the imminence of the elections – is ultimately what explains what happened on the Sunday, as Spain went to vote.

The first thing that is striking about the election itself is the dramatically high turnout compared with the previous one. Compared to 2000, the number of votes cast was up 2,507,146, from 23,339,474 to 25,846,620.[14] All of the major parties, in a continuation of the ideological coloration of the preceding days, were to hail this fact as a 'triumph of democracy' against terrorism. But this increased turnout was far from being evenly distributed across the political spectrum; and given that PSOE's vote increased by 2,990,935 votes (from 7,918,752 to 10,909,687), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the increased turnout almost on its own accounts for the rise in the Socialist vote. This interpretation is only reinforced if we take account of what happened to the votes of the other parties. The PP appears to have been on the receiving end of severe punishment by the electorate if one relies solely on mainstream psephology's analytical tool of choice, percentage of votes cast, for its share of the vote fell from 44.5 per cent to 37.6 per cent. But when we look at total votes cast, the fall in PP support turns out to be statistically less dramatic: from 10,321,178 to 9,630,512. This was no 'swing' from PP to PSOE. If there was a swing involved at all, it was from disillusioned, left-minded abstainers to PSOE. IU, in turn, also appeared to have suffered a fall in its vote, for its share was down from 6.0 per cent to 5.0 per cent, but again, if we look at total votes cast rather than share of the vote, we see that in fact IU just about maintained its support at parity (although, since IU is the party that had publicly set itself the task of turning the street mobilisations into votes in the ballot boxes, this itself must be regarded as failure). That for IU the negative balance-sheet of its performance in the election has been focused not on the total number of votes it received, nor on its share of the vote, but the fact that this latter translated itself into a loss of four parliamentary deputies indicates quite how deep into the electoral mire it has sunk.[15]

In short, therefore, what happened on March 14 has to be understood as a continuation of the reaction to events witnessed by the dissenting voices on the demonstrations of March 12 and by the anti-PP demonstrations of March 13, as a significant minority of Spaniards, natural left-voters, but without, through reasons of disillusionment with the political system, intention of voting, decided that the PP's behaviour after March 11 (or at least their perception of it) merited a '*voto útil*' for PSOE this time, in order to unseat the government. If this was a 'punishment vote', it was a punishment inflicted on the PP not by its own supporters, but by a social layer that no longer, in normal circumstances, votes at all.

But it is also important to note that the elections cannot be seen as forming any kind of definitive closure on the events of March 11. That people chose to punish the PP over all the other parties for its behaviour indicates that what really took place has not been fully understood. For to see what happened as PP dissimulation pure and simple is, in and of itself, inadequate; to fail to see that the nationalist reflexes that pushed the PP are shared almost in their entirety by the parties of the left too means that the unresolved contradictions of the Spanish left, although they may now be hidden beneath the surface, for the moment invisible to the naked political eye, are still with us as much as they ever where.

March 14, which appeared to harbour so much change, in reality changed surprisingly little.

Bearing all this in mind, we can now offer some kind of provisional assess-ment of the Socialist government's future prospects. Frankly, the omens do not look good.

In the first place, it is necessary to note that this is a government that has had power thrust upon it in the most unexpected manner possible, for it is absolutely not the case that PSOE won these elections, but that the PP lost them.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that Zapatero has so far acted with exemplary directness. He fulfilled the first of his substantial pre-election pledges, the withdrawal of the Spanish military contingent from Iraq, within days of the government assuming office, and he seems to be well on course to fulfil another, the legalisation of gay marriage. But while only the churlish would begrudge these measures, we should also be aware that as far as fulfilling election promises goes this is likely to be it, since these two measures are about as far into the quasi-neo liberal wish-list of good intentions that

the Socialist Party presented as an electoral programme that he will be able to go. That Zapatero acted so quickly on the commitment to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq is indicative that he is keenly aware of who exactly his three million extra voters are. But all he is able to do here is extend the honeymoon period, and, as any married couple, gay or not, will tell you, all honeymoons, however romantically they may have started, must eventually come to an end.

On the economic front, dark clouds are looming. What has fuelled economic growth more than anything over the last years – and the growth has been robust indeed – has been a spectacular, and increasingly speculative, boom in construction, as property prices soar well above inflation: to the point where today a whole *third* of the entire Spanish housing stock now stands empty. This indicates that in the rest of the economy, still suffering from the perennial economic defect of weak Spanish competitivity, things are going somewhat awry, as capital is sucked into other investment fields – property itself, and overseas (Latin American) investments, for example. When this bubble does burst (and already this year both the IMF and the OECD have issued sharp warnings to this effect to the Spanish government[16]), this will have a calamitous knock on effect on the rest of a not very healthy economy.

And when this happens, Spain will no longer be cushioned by the advantages it has enjoyed up till now as one of the more deserving of the European poor. As Europe looks east, not only is Spain on the point of losing substantial Structural and Cohesion Fund subsidies, but there are increasing signs that multinationals, originally drawn to Spain in the 1990s by virtue of its cheap and flexible labour force, are now upping sticks and decamping to the greener, and considerably cheaper, pastures of the east.[17]

Looked at in this way, it is hard to escape the impression of a government trapped in the grip of a set of contingent processes none of which it has either the capability or the will to deal with. The PP legacy, the new government's inheritance, already has something of the look of a poisoned chalice about it. Cast unprepared into office on the back of a political process completely beyond its comprehension and control, and, having cut its strategic international ties with the Bush-Blair axis in the name of a return to the Europe of old, but finding this latter now looking in the other direction, to the east, the government finds itself adrift in the storm of a global economy not inclined to show favours to even the best of intentions, with the rocks of economic catastrophe, although still in the middle distance, drawing closer all the time.

But there remains one fundamental issue, which stands out over the other potential pitfalls and disasters outlined above, serious though these may prove to be, hanging over Zapatero and his team, an issue which has the capacity to not only blow the government off course but back to where it came from and beyond.

When the last PSOE government, that of Felipe González, collapsed in 1996, it is instructive to note that the *coup de grâce* was administered through the scandal prompted by the government's secret 'dirty war' directed against ETA.. And what stands out above everything else in the March 11 aftermath is the confirmation of Spanish Socialism's unconditional, almost irrational, affiliation to the Constitution: to *la transición*, *el estado de derecho* and *la democracia*, a nexus bound together by the cement of chauvinistic Spanish nationalism. Defence of this system may be Spanish socialism's *raison d'être* in the present day; it is also its greatest, and most deadly, weakness, for when this ideological affiliation is challenged, it finds itself automatically in a bloc with the Spanish right, to the latter's perennial advantage.[18] Guided by this 'socialism of fools', how will the Zapatero government react to the Basque question? What approach will it take with regard to renewed demands for Basque self-government? What will it do should ETA strike again? How will the Basque section of the Socialist Party fight the Basque elections scheduled for next year? What approach will it take towards the banned radical Basque nationalist party Batasuna, should it, as it will, demand the right to contest the elections: will it rescind the PP's ban on radical nationalist politics, or will it continue with the PP's policy that even to *think* that responsibility for ETA violence lies ultimately in Madrid is an idea so dangerous that it cannot be permitted in the electoral arena? In short, will Spanish social democracy sacrifice itself once again on the altar of chauvinistic Spanish nationalism, or will it finally see that its unconditional affiliation to *la democracia* is precisely the mechanism by which any vestigial reflex on its or its supporters' part for social and political justice is neutralised?

The omens are not good. Given the inauspicious social, economic and political climate in which it finds itself, it may well be that, one day, historians will judge that the elections of 2004 could well have been the ones it was better to lose. And should this government fail – and while we might really and genuinely hope that it doesn't, the omens seem to augur ill – what will come next? We need to remember that the last failure of Spanish Socialism led directly to eight years – and they would have been more, were it not for what happened between March 11 and 14 – of PP neo-liberalism. History is not kind to those who fail to learn its lessons, yet the entire political outlook of Spanish social democracy is founded on burying the past, not interrogating it. And the fact is that socialism in Spain will only be built on an understanding of precisely those lessons of Spanish history over which March 14, 2004, seems only to have laid yet another layer of mystification.

León, August 1, 2004

NOTES

1. For a representative example of the evolution of the intention to vote as measured by the opinion polls since the elections of 1996 see: <http://www.elmundo.es/documentos/2004/03/04/voto.pdf>.

2. 'Around 200' due to the fact that the very violence of the explosions has made the identification of the victims a difficult (and extraordinarily unpleasant) task. The original official figure of 201 deaths has subsequently had to be downgraded to 191. Nevertheless, according to *El País* (August 1, 2004), there still remain 13 mortuary sacks of human remains in storage which have yet to be attributed either to known victims or to known survivors who lost body parts in the explosions.

3. The analysis here draws on the major themes of an earlier article, which analyses the main lines of Spanish state politics as it was configured in the post Franco period: Ed George, 'Frankenstein and the monster: the Spanish state left after the May elections', *What Next* 26 (2003), pp.1-11 (available online here: <http://mysite.freeserve.com/whatnext/Pages.htm/Back.htm/Wnext26/Spain.html>).

4. An analysis disgracefully shared by Timothy Garton Ash, who, in an article published in the British *Guardian* (but subsequently syndicated world wide, including in the Spanish state – see 'Bienvenidos al "Titanic"', *El País*, March 21, 2004), could write: 'So far as the Spanish voters' intentions are concerned, the election result was not subjectively a victory for al-Qaida. But it is, as Marxists used to say, an objective victory for al-Qaida.' ('Welcome to the Titanic', *Guardian*, March 18, 2004.)

5. That morning, Zapatero stated that the attack was 'the most horrendous that ETA have committed'; and Izquierda Unida leader Gaspar Llamazares denounced the attack as a 'nazi barbarity committed by ETA', an 'attempt to drown democracy in blood', and called for 'police and penal persecution' to finish off the group. And the Basque *lehendakari* (first minister) and leader of PNV, Juan José Ibarretxe, said, in a prepared declaration to the press at 9.30 that morning, that 'ETA is writing the last pages of its history [...]. ETA has tried to dynamite democracy.'

6. Quotations and chronologies assembled from both print and online editions of *El País*, *El Mundo* and *El Diario de León*, March 12, 2004.

7. The present Constitution (in Spanish) can be read here: <http://www.constitucion.es/constitucion/castellano/index.html>; and an (imperfect) English translation here: <http://www.igsap.map.es/cia/dispo/ce_ingles_index.htm>.

8. This is the Spanish version of what Tom Nairn once described as the 'spirit-country', the 'national spirit essence, a land of the mind distinguishable from the mundane [...]. One can think of it [...] as a set of mental map survey points implanted in our communal psyche.' (*The Enchanted Glass*, London, 1988, pp.91–2).

9. As expressed by both Aznar and the king in live television addresses to 'the nation' on the afternoon and evening of Thursday. Speaking first, Aznar claimed that the people who had died had died 'because of the mere fact of being Spanish', conveniently forgetting the large number of victims – due to the location of the bombs – who were immigrants, often without papers, forced as a consequence to work in sweatshop conditions without rights due to his government's racist anti-immigration laws. Aznar's subsequent declaration that non-Spanish victims and their immediate families would be granted Spanish citizenship – even if posthumously – just gave the knife an extra twist. Later, the nation was addressed by its king, the Bourbon Juan Carlos, who continued the theme like this: 'Discouragement was not made for Spaniards. We are a great country, which has demonstrated with interest its capacity to overcome difficulties. Let there be no doubt. Terrorism will never achieve its ends. It will never be able to weaken our faith in democracy, or our confidence in the future of Spain.' (Both quotations from *El Mundo*, March 12, 2004.)

10. Let us note here an isolated incident, but a revealing one. On the Saturday, in Pamplona in Navarra, Angel Berroeta, a baker, refused a request from one of his neighbours that he display a poster with a black ribbon and the slogan 'ETA No', of the kind now going up in shop and house windows throughout Spain. The neighbour, who is married to a policeman, returned to her flat and told her husband what had happened. Her husband went to the baker's shop, and shot the baker dead. Needless to say, Berroeta's name does not appear on the official lists of the victims of the events of March 11. (See *El Mundo*, March 14, 2004).

11. And in addition, Friday midday also saw what amounted to a virtual 15 minute general strike. The slogans for the stoppage from the two principal trade union federations were 'No to ETA!' (UGT), and 'ETA Against All, All Against ETA' (Comisiones Obreras).

12. According to a report commissioned by the UN Human Rights Commission (available online in Spanish here: <http://www.ugt.es/inmigracion/muniidas.pdf>), over the last 12 years, around 2,000 immigrants (according to the most 'optimistic' figures), largely sub-Saharan Africans, have died crossing the Straits of Gibraltar attempting to enter Spain, a figure that should be at least double if account is taken of the bodies washed up on the Moroccan side of the Straits too. Between January and September 2003 were recorded 162 deaths on the Spanish side alone. Perhaps it is also churlish to ask where are the black ribbons and the mass demonstrations for these victims of a global terrorism of a different sort.

13. Corriente Roja's statement in which they made this position clear can be read online (in Spanish) here: <http://www.nodo50.org/corrienteroja/archivos/archi145.htm>.

14. For a comprehensive statistical account of the election (in Spanish), see <http://www.elmundo.es/especiales/2004/03/espana/14m/resultados/congreso/globales/>.

15. Perhaps at IU headquarters minds were also concentrated by the fact that under the Spanish system parties receive funding on the basis of the number of parliamentary representatives they have, and the party was clearly staring down the barrel of a significant drop in income.

16. See 'IMF concludes 2003 Article IV consultation with Spain', <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pn/2004/pn0431.htm>, and *El País*, May 13, 2004, respectively.

17. According to the European Industrial Relations Observatory (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/>), the average labour cost in the ten new member states stands at 4.2 euros per hour, while in Spain it stands at 14.4 euros per hour.

18. A phenomenon – the politically debilitating effect on the working class movement effected by its own chauvinism – that Marx understood well: 'I have become more and more convinced – and the thing now is to drum this conviction into the English [*sic*] working class – that they will never be able to do anything decisive here in England before they separate their attitude towards Ireland quite definitely from that of the ruling classes, and not only make a common cause with the Irish, but even take the initiative in dissolving the Union [...]. And this must be done not out of sympathy for Ireland, but as a demand based on the interests of the English proletariat.' ('Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann', November 29, 1869, *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 43, 1988, p.390.) Marx concluded that 'This antagonism [between Irish and 'English' workers] is the secret of the English working class's impotence, despite its organisation. It is the secret of power by the capitalist class.' ('Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt', April 9, 1870, ibid., pp.474-75.) **WA**

Madagascar

Paradise lost

Simon Blazeby reports from the crisis-stricken island of Madagascar, whose people and unique environment are now more than ever under threat

There are many examples of countries suffering complex disasters, a mix of environmental and economic blunders that leave the poorest suffering the most. What makes Madagascar a unique case is that today the future of the island rests on a critical knife-edge between social and environmental devastation and sustainable progress led by a unified people.

When you think of Madagascar, what springs to mind? Most people's answer would include acres and acres of rainforest, lemurs, chameleons and other rich and varied wildlife. In essence, Madagascar, people believe, is a tropical paradise.

However, Madagascar's recent history paints a very different picture: recent figures have shown that nine million people are living in hunger. Two cyclones in February left two million people homeless. Political turmoil, locust plagues, huge rates of unemployment and inflation, and a spate of grenade attacks against cabinet ministers have left the country in disarray. The new government, endorsed by France and the United States, has begun closing down opposition radio stations and beefing up security in the 'national interest'. All this comes at a time when both the population and the environment of Madagascar least need it.

The eighth continent

Located off the east coast of Africa, Madagascar is the fourth-largest island in the world and split from Africa 65 million years ago. Sometimes dubbed 'the eighth continent', it has as much biological and geographical variation as South America. It has been recognised as one of the world's top three biodiversity hotspots and boasts some 80 per cent endemic species, most of which are concentrated in the island's rich primary rainforest.

Unfortunately, over the past few hundred years deforestation has devastated Madagascar. Slash-and-burn agricultural techniques, logging and corporate exploitation

have claimed some 80-85 per cent of the original primary rainforest. An original 50 species of lemur has now been reduced to 33, with almost all of those remaining under threat of extinction. Many other endemic species are also under threat, including countless species of flora and fauna that remain undiscovered.

So what went wrong?

A country of contradictions

The first thing that strikes the independent traveller in Madagascar is the diversity of its population. Malagasy society is made up of 18 tribes, sharing as many similarities as differences from each other. However, people also share a particularly strong sense of identity – that of being Malagasy. It is said in Madagascar that 'people constitute one giant mat', each woven colour or group of colours representing a different family, lineage, or tribe.

First settlement on the island is thought to have been by Indo-Polynesian traders around 2,000 years ago, followed by people from the Middle East and the Bantu tribes of Southern Africa. Tracing the epistemology of Malagasy culture from that point has been the root of much speculation, but it is generally accepted that tribes developed according to kinship and marriage, with ancestral beliefs being passed down through generations.

Of course the initial appearance of harmonious heterogeneity is not without its contradictions. Various patterns of dominance versus resistance, political hierarchy versus demands for an equal share of scarce resources, and the scars of a country still trying to find its feet after some 60 years of colonisation are evident everywhere.

A history of dominance and resistance

Walk around the city of Toliara (Tuléar) and you will see people with white clay covering their faces in an attempt to make their skin whiter and thus be more eligible for employment. The roots of this practice are believed to have resulted from 400 years of brutal rule by the lighter skinned people of the island – first the Merina, then the French. Most people in positions of authority belong to the Merina, a tribe of Malayo-Polynesian ancestry believed to be the merchant traders that originally settled on the island. The Merina kingdom is believed to have taken control of the main trading centres in Madagascar in the 17th century, being recognised by the British as rulers of Madagascar in 1817. The French readily exploited the established administration when they colonised the island in 1896.

Although the Merina, 'those of the highlands', controlled the central plateau, many tribes had inhabited areas of Madagascar over which the Merina found it difficult to maintain jurisdiction. This made subsequent control of the Malagasy people by the French colonisers particularly difficult, since from as early as 1895 various tribes would revolt against a colonial administration unable to develop a unified strategy of dominance.

As soon as France established administrative control over Madagascar, the government set about changing the structure of the Malagasy economy. The first modern land use projects were established by French settlers or Creole immigrants from the Mascarene Islands in the 19th and 20th centuries. They introduced cash crops such as coffee, sugar cane, vanilla, cloves, and sisal for export. They also built small-scale mines to exploit the island's graphite, chromite, and uranium resources.

To facilitate the processing and marketing of these commodities, the French immigrants established a number of financial and commercial enterprises and built a small, modern railway system. They then brought some Malagasy into this modern sector of the economy, either as wage labourers and sharecroppers on the foreign-owned plantations, or as low-level employees in the civil service or business enterprises. The foreign owners and managers, however, retained almost all of the benefits from these operations.

Thus, as with other countries, the French colonial strategy was primarily one of using forced labour accompanied by unequal trade and new farming techniques to produce cash crops, manufactured goods, and livestock and fish stocks for the emerging global markets.

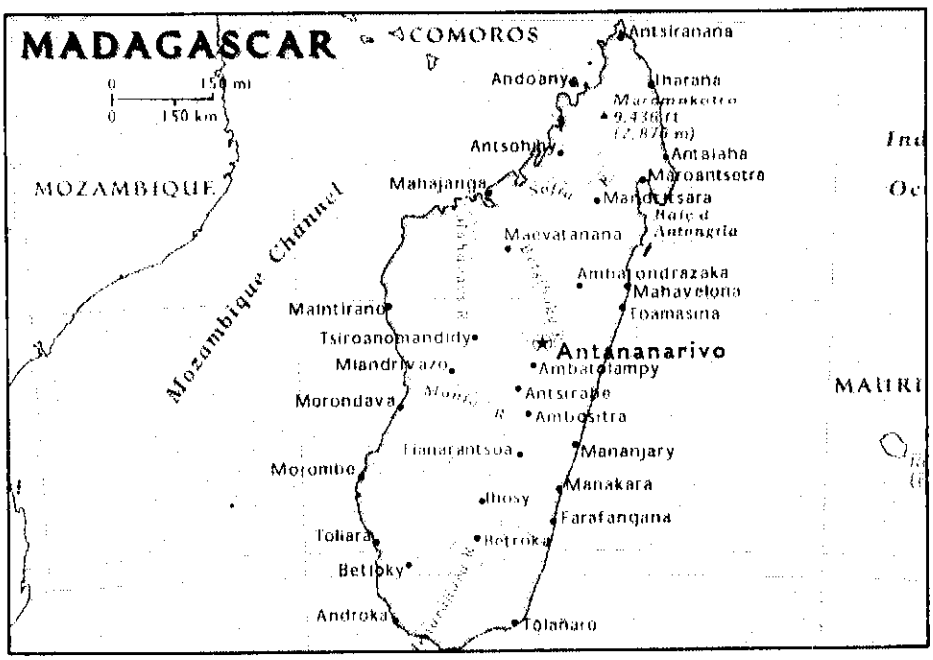
Various other techniques were introduced by the French to make the Malagasy dependent on colonial rule. One particularly illustrative example was the introduction of a fly that fed on a cactus the Malagasy used for water and nutrition. The cactus was wiped out, the Malagasy having to further resort to the trade and purchase of other crops for their nutritional needs.

Various policies implemented by the French served to increase Malagasy resentment towards French colonial rule; in particular the 1926 decree ordering all Malagasy who didn't have proof of land ownership to hand over their ancestral land. Subsequently, colonial rule became far from smooth as what began as a series of uprisings formed into a unified independence movement.

The Malagasy's first major rebellion in 1947 hastened the need for a decision on the troubled island's future. Various considerations ensued – the island even became a serious consideration by the European powers as a destination for Jewish settlers after the war. However, on June 26, 1960, Madagascar became one of the first African nations to win independence from French rule.

Visit Madagascar today and one will see the remnants of colonialism; sisal and coffee plantations, factories and abandoned early 19th-century buildings give testimony to a failed administration.

However, the most distinctive echo of colonisation is in Malagasy language and culture. French is the language of bureaucracy, which means many Malagasy are excluded from understanding anything about how their country is run. Many people speak, not French, but their tribe's dialect of Malagasy; the only remnant of the imposition of French language being in a



number of adopted words for which there is no Malagasy equivalent.

One particularly poignant reminder exists in the use of the word 'aller' – 'go' in French, originally used as an order to Malagasy workers to work harder or move – now the strongest insult in Malagasy; usually reserved for getting dogs out of the way.

Post-colonial Madagascar

After independence the Philibert Tsiranana regime did little to change the French domination of the modern sector of the economy, despite increasing outrage at this continued economic dependence. This anger, together with growing concern over an unequal distribution of wealth that left the southern and western parts of the island in relative poverty, caused the ousting of Tsiranana in 1972 and a shift in economic policy.

Understandably, the rhetoric of politics since then has been largely dominated by a military-led Marxism heavily defined by anti-imperialism. However, although Madagascar belongs to the category of African Marxist regimes of military origin, there exists a certain ambiguity in the socialist policies of the government and their implementation.

The new military regime led by Gabriel Ramanantsoa cut most ties with France and began to 'Malagachise' the economy. Despite this, slow progress toward this goal and a lack of clear political ideology helped to precipitate the end of the Ramanantsoa regime in mid 1975.

Indeed, by 1975 an ideologically aware 'progressive party', grouping military and civilian actors, had been established, the rise of Didier Ratsiraka to the presidency later that year signalling the start of the takeover of formerly French-dominated enterprises. However, the manner in which the second republic was established hardly constitutes a Marxist revolution. Ratsiraka, not being strong enough to obtain complete hegemony in 1975, had to form alliances with other political factions through ideological concessions and financial incentives. Ratsiraka's policy of 'revolution from above' went beyond confiscating or buying out foreign firms and turning them over to Malagasy ownership; he intended to socialise the economy by nationalising major enterprises. The state acquired majority or minority ownership in nearly all large financial, transportation, marketing, mining, and manufacturing enterprises. Firms left under private control were required to buy and sell at state controlled prices, and the state closely monitored the repatriation of profits.

In the rural sector, Ratsiraka aimed to establish local farming co-operatives. Almost as important as this institutional reform was the regime's intention, announced in an economic plan for the 1978-80 period, to increase dramatically the level of government capital investment in all sectors of the economy in order to improve the availability of goods and services to all.

Ratsiraka ruled Madagascar for close to 30 years, being re elected after a short spell out of power and in exile in 1991. Maintaining his anti-imperialist rhetoric, Ratsiraka openly discouraged French commercial enterprise, while aid and commercial relationships were accepted from the Soviet Union and other African states sharing a similar ideology. However once again contradictions existed in the ruling ideology, many believing Ratsiraka was essentially using a rhetoric of Marxism whilst benefiting from post colonial enterprises based on the subjugation and exploitation of Malagasy people and natural resources.

Many allege millions of French Malagasy Francs went into Ratsiraka's commercial interests and the pockets of his political peers, while being taken away from healthcare (in 1998 only US $6 a head was spent on healthcare), education and public services such as roads.

Look anywhere in Madagascar and you will see a country marred by under investment. Roads are, for the most part, tracks etched in the mud – any concrete long since gone. Hospitals are limited to main towns and worryingly under equipped. Most villages are without schools.

The last few decades of the 20th century saw Madagascar become a country crippled by debt repayments and high level corruption, resulting in poverty, malnutrition and frequent civil unrest. By the start of the 1980s, Ratsiraka's attempt to fashion viable socialist institutions and to stimulate the economy through increased investment had failed to improve economic production and welfare. The only apparent effect of the enhanced level of investment was to put the country deeply in debt to foreign creditors and, therefore, pave the way for a series of structural adjustment agreements signed with the IMF and the World Bank during the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Thus, the post-1980 Ratsiraka and, briefly, the Albert Zafy regime oversaw the disbanding of agricultural marketing boards, the ratification of more liberal investment codes favouring foreign investment, the privatisation of the banking industry, diversification of traditional, primary-product exports, and greater investment in food production. Despite a reputation for reneging on commitments to reform, the formerly Marxist Ratsiraka ironically became known as one of the IMF's 'star pupils' in Africa.

The new president, Marc Ravalomanana, has continued this trend, the granting of these and related agreements being linked to the same co-ordinated set of structural adjustment requirements designed to foster the liberal, export oriented economy favoured by the IMF and the World Bank.

Reactions in Madagascar to these policies, both individual and organisational, have been mixed. The World Bank and IMF see these ongoing policies as positive. However, certain individuals and aid organisations have expressed doubts as to whether the selling of Madagascar's resources at a time so critical in its national development is the right thing to do.

The environment at risk

Over the years, successive French colonial and independence era governments have sought to modernise Madagascar's economy. Despite such efforts, the majority of Malagasy in 1994 continued to earn their livelihoods in ways fundamentally unchanged from those of their ancestors – small-scale farms supporting traditional irrigated rice cultivation, dry land farming of cassava and other foods, zebu cattle herding, or the raising of cash crops.

Tragically, Madagascar has suffered almost 85 per cent deforestation. This is particularly sad due to the global potential of Madagascar. A simple example illustrates this point: if it weren't for ethno-botanists stumbling across a traditional Malagasy healing remedy in the 1950s, the drugs currently used to treat Hodgkin's disease and childhood leukaemia wouldn't have been developed from the rosy periwinkle plant unique to the island.

Commercial interests are not strictly to blame for the greater part of this deforestation. The evidence points towards slash-and-burn agricultural techniques (a once sustainable means of farming passed down the generations from people's ancestors)

putting significant strain on forested regions as early as 1750. Indeed, in the mid 18th century there are reports from Merina kings that several chieftains had expressed concerns over the destruction of entire swathes of rainforest for rice and cassava farming and the harvesting of firewood.

However, since the colonisation of Madagascar at the end of the 19th century, the population has grown from two to 16 million, only increasing the strain on the island's resources. Almost a century of biological and cultural exploitation of Madagascar has understandably had a number of consequences for both the people and environment. For all its biological riches, Madagascar is now in the top ten of the world's poorest countries. One in three children work, however many adults are unemployed – one worker supports eight people in rural areas. The lack of variation in people's diets has led to chronic malnutrition. The child mortality rate is 157/1,000, i.e., over one in 10 children die before the age of five.

Sanitation facilities are counted at 25 per cent nationally and are non-existent in many areas. As a result, the people of Madagascar suffer regularly from cholera and other diseases. Lack of any waste management in many rural and urban areas means disease is a major problem. The year 1998 signalled the third bubonic plague outbreak in five years, a trend which is likely to continue.

A number of issues remain problematic for Madagascar. Land-intensive farming techniques are the preferred method of agriculture, meaning each family in rural areas gets through about two hectares of forest every three years. Indeed, the farming and consumption of rice and cassava is so ingrained in Malagasy culture that one can hear a Malagasy person define themselves by it, saying 'Zao Malagasy: mihina-zo vary' 'I'm Malagasy: I eat rice'.

Attempts by aid organisations to educate Malagasy people in the farming of multiple food sources 'permaculture' are making limited progress in some areas as people begin to realise that, contrary to the teachings of the ancestors, the forest may not last forever.

Similar attempts have been made to alter the damage done by excessive consumption of wood burnt for firewood and charcoal. Charcoaling is illegal in many protected areas in Madagascar although resources for policing this are limited. Furthermore, the impact of poverty means that people will burn large areas of forest in desperation for some kind of wage – one tree being reduced to a bag of charcoal worth the equivalent of around 30p.

Attempts at a reduction of wood consumption range from education to the introduction of improved stoves, which burn 70 per cent less wood. Successes have been widespread in villages where these projects have been introduced; however, implementation on a wider national scale is necessary for any consequential impact on the rate of deforestation.

Other work has concentrated on health and sanitation, with certain aid organisations working with Malagasy people to reduce malnutrition through preventative and curative healthcare. Isolated fair trade successes also exist, encouraging the Malagasy not only in the preservation of their cultural traditions, but also their environment.

A new threat?

However, an altogether graver threat exists. The future mining of raw materials essential to the Western world threatens to speed up the rate of deforestation three fold. Take, for example, the south east of Madagascar. It is the most underdeveloped region, with cholera and malnutrition representing major problems in daily life. People can't afford to feed their families, let alone concentrate on healthcare or sustainable environmental management.

Huge potential exists in the rich biological and human resources in the region; certain charities and companies are just beginning to realise the potential for developing the community towards responsible eco tourism and the fair trade of Malagasy crafts and sustainable crops.

But this potential for fair trade may be extinguished before it is even realised as a big find of ilmenite in the Manafiafy region has meant that QMM, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto Zinc, is proposing to remove 75 per cent of the littoral forest, unique to only two areas in the world, to mine this valuable resource. Ilmenite is essentially a whitening agent. In the Western world this agent is used in everything from tooth paste to paper; almost everything you see that is artificially white has a good chance of having had ilmenite used somewhere in the production process.

QMM's argument is that the mining of ilmenite will bring millions of dollars and countless jobs for the population of Madagascar. The government has already given the go ahead for one mine, and another is likely to follow. QMM has brought in organisations such as Conservation International to support its model of environmental regeneration after the mine through the planting of non-native tree species. However, other organisations believe such regeneration will not support existing lemur populations and cause the extinction of the brown, and golden bamboo lemurs in the region, as well as a host of other flora and fauna.

Recent troubles

Madagascar sank into political crisis in 2002 after a disputed presidential election in December 2001. The largely peaceful standoff was marked by sporadic clashes between supporters of Ravalomanana and former president Ratsiraka. Rasiraka fled the country after Ravalomanana's government, supported by France, the US and many African states, seized power.

However, there has been further unrest in recent months after soaring inflation has left the Malagasy people questioning whether the incoming president really has the ability to fulfil his election promises. The authorities have been reticent to link the recent grenade attacks to growing frustration over soaring inflation. Many Malagasy have taken to the streets in recent weeks to protest at the high cost of living.

What is certain is that Madagascar's troubles are unlikely to be solved quickly. Recent discoveries of gems and other minerals signal the danger of a neo-colonial 'scramble for Madagascar'. Health continues to decline, and the increase in the frequency of natural disasters means that substantial investment in infrastructure is needed, for which there simply aren't the funds available. For the people and environment of Madagascar, a long hard struggle remains ahead.

● More info: The Madagascar Foundation, www.madagascarfoundation.org; Azafady, www.azafady.org; WWF www.panda.org; and for 'responsible eco-tourism' projects: Blue Ventures, www.blueventures.org

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Class structure and class politics

Darren Williams argues that socialists need to base their political practice on a deeper theoretical understanding of the concept of class, particularly in the light of structural changes in the economy, society and the labour force

In recent years, discussions about political strategy among socialists in the British state have tended to become fixated on the question of whether one should work within the Labour Party or try to establish an alternative party of the left.[1] A crucial factor in the arguments put by both sides in this debate has been *class*. Those seeking to build a new socialist party claim that Labour's shift to the right has reopened the question of the political representation of the working class. Conversely, those who continue to work within Labour argue that it retains the allegiance of the majority of politically conscious workers – both individually, at the ballot-box, and organisationally, through trade union affiliation. In their use of the concept of class, however, both sides tend to rely on assertion and generalisation, rather than making a coherent argument about class and its influence on politics. While this debate has been conducted particularly sharply in the British state – partly because of the near consensus among socialists during the Thatcher years that it was necessary to relate to the Labour Party – similar debates are taking place on the left in other countries.

At the same time, the resurgence of youth radicalism and mass popular protest, around the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements, has prompted some socialists to look to these newer forces, rather than to the established organisations of the workers' movement, for the leadership of a political challenge to capitalism.[2] Whatever the virtues of these arguments, they are generally presented in terms of what seems possible and desirable in the present conjuncture, rather than taking a longer term strategic perspective. Rarely is there any acknowledgement that investing one's hopes for social change in the anti globalisation movement represents an implicit reconsideration of the historic status of the working class as the agency of socialist change.

In this article, I want to argue that there is an urgent need to re-connect the theoretical examination of class with the political practice of socialists. We have to take theory seriously – to examine, openly and critically, the intellectual legacy of past generations and apply what remains valid to the world as we find it. Only by so doing can we develop a strategic orientation that will prove adequate to the present turbulent political situation. In what follows, I will look at the conception of class in the writings of Marx and Engels and its development by subsequent writers and attempt to draw out its contemporary political relevance. I will focus on two questions: *what do we mean by the working class*; and *what is the significance of the working class to the prospects for socialism in the twenty first century*?

Why does class matter?

Some concept of class is, of course, common to many different currents of social theory as a way of trying to understand the ways in which societies are structured. There are, however, a number of important respects in which Marxist class theory differs from most of the others. First, Marxists see class as determined not by, say, family background or lifestyle choices, but by one's role in the *production* of goods and services – or in the reproduction of the social structures that allow production to take place. Second, class is, for Marxists, *relational*, rather than *gradational*: it is not a matter of placing someone on a linear scale that measures their possession of certain attributes (wealth, status, education, for example); it is about relationships between groups (classes). These relationships are fundamentally unequal – one class exercises power over another – and, at least potentially, conflictual, as the subordinate class has an interest in overturning this state of affairs. As a consequence of this, the Marxist conception of class is not simply a useful concept for describing and analysing societies; it has immediate political implications. To acknowledge that societies are divided along class lines is to be obliged to take up a political position, either for or against the status quo. To quote Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it'.[3]

All this is summed up very pithily at the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto*, with the famous statement that 'the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles'. In the epoch of capitalism, such struggles take place, of course, primarily between the bourgeoisie (or capitalist class) and the proletariat (or working class). The development of capitalist industry, says the *Manifesto*, has produced the 'grave-diggers' of the bourgeoisie in the form of the proletariat. The unique historical role of the working class as the agent of socialism was, for Marx and Engels, the consequence of its having both the 'motive' and the 'means' to overthrow capitalism. The motive was due to workers' subordinate position within the capitalist mode of production. There are three distinct, but inter-related, elements to this. First, the economic compulsion to work for the benefit of an employer, and the consequent surrender of control over one's labour process, leads to the *alienation* of the worker from his or her labour and its product. Marx and Engels (unlike, say, Adam Smith) saw labour not as an unfortunate necessity but as the core of human activity, as the means by which people created not just goods and services, but themselves. To have one's creative capacities completely subordinated to the dictates of profit is likely to make work a deeply dissatisfying and even repugnant experience.

The second provocation that capitalism offers to workers is their increasing impoverishment, at the same time as their labours enrich their employers. The *Communist Manifesto* argues that the workers' miserable, deprived living and working conditions mean that they would have 'nothing to lose but their chains' in seeking to overthrow capitalism. In *Capital*, Marx describes a historical tendency for the increasing 'immiseration' of the working class. As capital accumulates, a greater proportion of that which is reinvested is used to buy labour-saving machinery, rather than to pay workers' wages, thereby creating a pool of surplus labour – a permanent 'industrial reserve army' – which is available to newer branches of industry whose demand for labour may currently be increasing. The existence of a surplus labour force maintains a downward pressure on the overall level of wages, which means that capitalist accumulation and working class impoverishment are inextricably linked.[4]

Labour and exploitation

Yet alienation and immiseration are secondary features of capitalism: behind both, and at the heart of the system, is *exploitation*. In its specific Marxian sense, this refers primarily to the extraction by the capitalist of surplus value created during the labour process. The worker creates saleable

goods or services whose exchange (market) value exceeds the value of the wage he or she would have to be paid to maintain his or her own life and living conditions. The latter is derived from Marx's labour theory of value, which states that labour time is the common factor that establishes the respective exchange values of different commodities. For any amount of labour time that a worker undertakes, s/he is paid a wage equivalent to the combined labour-time of the various goods and services that s/he needs to consume to sustain him/her for this period. Yet, the combined value (labour time) of the goods *consumed* is generally smaller than the value (labour time) of the goods *produced*. The difference – the *surplus value* – is the source of the capitalist's profit. This is important not primarily for the capitalist's personal consumption, but for his/her ability to accumulate – to reinvest on an ever-expanding scale and compete with other capitalists – and the capitalist must therefore constantly seek to increase the proportion of surplus value produced by each worker in a given period.[5]

Marx also presents this in terms of the worker putting in *surplus labour-time* for the capitalist, over and above the time needed to create value equivalent to that which the worker consumes. Only those who produce commodities with an exchange value (and who thereby also produce surplus value) can be considered *productive* in terms of the requirements of capitalism. While other wage earners (e.g., shop assistants) also do work that is necessary for the system to function – for example, by contributing to the realisation of surplus value – they are unproductive, inasmuch as they do not convert the value invested by employing them into a greater value. Nevertheless, while surplus value is extracted only from productive workers, surplus labour-time is extracted from productive and unproductive workers alike: both (most Marxists agree) are exploited.

The capitalist's need to intensify the exploitation of the labour force manifests itself in constant pressure for workers to work harder or longer. To facilitate this, the capitalist needs to take away from the worker more and more control over the labour process, breaking down that process into disconnected segments requiring less thought and skill, and producing less satisfaction, and thus tending to produce greater alienation.[6] Moreover, any real increase in workers' wages entails a corresponding reduction in the rate of profit, and must therefore be held back; thus, the tendency to immiseration is also ever present. But while capitalism thus gives workers good reason to rebel, it also increases their capacity to overturn the system. There are, again, a number of aspects to this. First, whereas commodity production in pre-capitalist (and early capitalist) societies took place in small workshops or even in the worker's own home, capitalism brings workers together in unprecedented numbers, in factories, mines and other large workplaces, where they can be more easily regimented and controlled, and where economies of scale can be developed. This, however, tends to engender on the part of the workers a strong sense of common experience and identity of interest, which can be turned into active solidarity in opposition to the employer. The system also requires that more and more people be turned into proletarians, swelling the ranks of the working class, which is therefore empowered by its very size. Finally, a working class revolt against capitalism represents the most damaging kind of attack on the system: one that comes from within. Since the whole system is based on the creation by the working class of value and surplus value, that system will grind to a halt if the workers en masse withdraw their labour and their consent to their own exploitation.

The unique social weight and economic position of the working class also has implications for the type of society it will create. Whereas the revolutionary movements of previous epochs had brought about the displacement of one minority ruling class by another, 'the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority'. It 'cannot raise itself up without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air'.[7] Thus its revolution must establish, not the dictatorship of a new ruling class, but a classless society. While earlier thinkers and movements and had seen the creation of a socialist society as the task of an enlightened minority, Marx and Engels were among the first to see the proletariat alone as being in a position to carry this through. It is driven not merely by an ethical objection to capitalism, or by sympathy with the plight of the poor and oppressed, but by its own fundamental material interests. Moreover, its very place at the centre of capitalism gives it the leverage to overturn the system. This insight has underpinned the political strategy of the main currents of the international socialist movement – both revolutionary and (at least, until recently) reformist. It represents the main line of demarcation from all alternative progressive currents (such as the Greens), however radical and egalitarian in their intent. While sections of the far left have, from time to time, invested their hopes in political parties or guerrilla movements based on the peasantry, in revolutionary students or in 'specially oppressed' groups, no such idea has ultimately supplanted the widespread acceptance on the socialist left that the working class is uniquely placed to act as the principal agent of socialist change under capitalist society.

The above summary draws on comments by Marx and Engels over the course of their politically active lives. In the course of this period, they developed and modified their views. The concept of 'alienation', for example, is more characteristic of Marx's early writings (although he returned to it while writing the *Grundrisse* in 1857–58), whereas he developed his labour theory of value only in the course of his intensive study of economics in the 1850s and early 1860s. It was often, however, the actual political events of their lifetimes that caused Marx and Engels to modify their views – in particular, the many setbacks experienced by the nascent working class movement. Thus, the rather easy link between economic causes and political effects suggested by the *Communist Manifesto* (admittedly, a work of impassioned propaganda, not sober analysis) was abandoned in later years as Marx and Engels revised their prognosis for revolution. The further developments of the century and more since their death have thrown up more fundamental challenges to their theories, however. Their successors have had to answer charges that their hopes in the working class have been falsified. The working classes of the advanced capitalist countries have, more often than not, seemed willing to accept capitalism as a system and to limit their political demands to reforms within the system. Socio-economic changes have changed the class structure beyond recognition since the time of Marx and Engels. The working class that they described – if it still exists at all – is, we are told, declining in social weight and in its capacity for political action. I will attempt to address these questions of class identity and agency in the remainder of this article.

Who makes up the working class?

Rather surprisingly, given its centrality in their political ideas, Marx and Engels never systematically set out their conception of class. The only place where Marx began to do so was in volume 3 of *Capital*, where he refers to wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords as 'the three great social classes' and poses the question of what gives them this character. He considers that it might be because in each case, the members of the class derive their revenue from a common source, but then points out that this would make physicians and officials separate classes as well. Engels then tells us

that the manuscript breaks off, without the question having been resolved.[8]

Where Marx and Engels discuss class in more theoretical terms (as opposed to commenting on concrete developments) they generally concentrate on the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, who are introduced in the *Communist Manifesto* as the 'two great classes directly facing each other' in 'our epoch'. In a footnote written in 1888, Engels explains: 'By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers, who having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live.'[9]

This certainly establishes wage labour as a necessary criterion for membership of the proletariat but it is doubtful that Marx and Engels saw it as a sufficient criterion, considering their references elsewhere in the *Manifesto* to intermediate strata such as 'the lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant', none of which is regarded as part of the bourgeoisie proper, and at least some of whom would be reduced to selling their labour power. In *Capital*, Marx focuses his attention on manufacturing and extractive industries, since his purpose is to explain the creation of exchange value and surplus value, and the examples he gives are therefore of workers in these industries. This presents an 'ideal type' of proletarian but consigns other categories of wage-earner to an analytical grey area.

The *Manifesto* and *Capital* both suggest, however, that history might resolve this ambiguity: capitalism is simplifying class antagonisms and bourgeois society is increasingly being polarised between the 'two great classes', as intermediate strata are rendered obsolete by the processes of historical development. While capitalism has certainly transformed social and occupational structures in the last century or so, it has, however, left us with, if anything, a more complex pattern of stratification. In the advanced capitalist countries, the proletarian occupations characteristic of Marx's time – manual workers in manufacturing and extractive industries – have declined as a proportion of the total workforce. For the USA, Harry Braverman shows that workers in such 'goods producing' industries steeply declined as a proportion of all non-agricultural workers after 1950. Moreover, even within such industries, there were almost 22 administrative employees for every 100 productive employees in 1947, compared to fewer than eight for every 100 in 1899. The proportion of the employed labour force in clerical jobs increased from 0.6 per cent to almost 18 per cent in the USA between 1870 and 1970, and in Britain from 0.8 per cent to almost 13 per cent between 1851 and 1961.[10] Manufacturing, construction, energy and water together account for less than 20 per cent of the employed British population today, compared to around 50 per cent throughout the century leading up to the 1970s.[11] Braverman describes some of the reasons for this: the mechanisation and automation of manufacturing processes, which mean that fewer workers are required to produce a given quantity of goods; and conversely the concentration and centralisation of capital, creating giant corporations with specialised marketing, administrative and personnel departments.

Another important factor, however, has been the growing international division of labour, as West European, North American and Japanese capital is exported to less developed countries (LDCs) in search of cheaper labour (as well as markets and raw materials). Robert Went cites the example of Nike, none of whose 9,000 employees at its Oregon headquarters is involved in production, which is instead subcontracted to independent companies in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and China, altogether accounting for some 75,000 jobs.[12] As heavy industry declines in the advanced capitalist countries, it is reconstituted in newly industrialised countries like South Korea and Taiwan: for example, the share of manufactures in the LDCs' exports increased from less than a fifth in 1965 to almost 60 per cent in 1987.[13] While, therefore, the kind of proletarians that Marx and Engels had in mind may now be fewer in number in Britain or Germany than they might have expected, the global proletariat is still rapidly expanding. Thus, a 1995 World Bank report estimated that there were 101,938,000 people employed in industry in the advanced capitalist countries of the OECD, but 168,275,000 in East Asia and the Pacific and a further 39,904,000 in Latin America and the Caribbean.[14]

The problem of the 'new middle class'

Nevertheless, for socialists in the advanced capitalist countries, there is still the question of the new intermediate strata, commonly referred to as the 'new middle class'. To put this in perspective: current official figures for the British state working age population place 10.8 per cent in 'higher managerial and professional occupations', 22.2 per cent in 'lower managerial and professional occupations' and 10.3 per cent in 'intermediate occupations'.[15] This presents Marxists with a complex set of problems, with which theoreticians have grappled for the last thirty years, but which activists rarely acknowledge.[16] Yet these problems have real practical relevance: how can socialists expect to lead the working class in its historic mission if we are not even sure who is part of the working class? Moreover, Marx and Engels referred repeatedly to the proletariat as the 'immense majority' and saw this as crucial to its ability to carry out a successful socialist revolution. If the working class is barely a majority – or is even a minority – then the odds against it are somewhat greater. Not only does it face the hostility of the capitalist class and all those institutions that reinforce its social control; it also faces the prospect of significant forces among the subordinate social strata which may, at best, be unconvinced and, at worst, actively hostile to the socialist cause. It is therefore essential to understand how non-proletarian strata fit into the big picture. Is there really a separate middle class or classes? And if so, are its interests closer to those of the working class, or the bourgeoisie? How far is it susceptible to the appeal of socialist politics? Can it be incorporated into an alliance for socialism?

There are four basic approaches that have been taken by Marxist theoreticians. One is to say that bourgeois society really is polarised between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and that members of any so-called 'middle class' actually belong in one of these two classes (in most cases, the working class). Another is to say that a 'new middle class' does exist, and is a consequence of the complex division of labour in modern capitalism, which creates new occupations that are essential to the maintenance of the economy and society. A third approach is to treat it as a new manifestation of the petty bourgeoisie. The final position holds that middle strata exist which are neither bourgeoisie nor proletariat, but which do not constitute a separate class or classes in their own right; rather they combine aspects of the two main classes.[17]

The first type of argument is one often favoured in practice by the organised far left, perhaps because it is simplest conceptually: there is only one significant dividing line in capitalist societies, that which separates those who own and control the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and those who do not, and who therefore have to sell their labour-power for a wage (the working class). Even allowing for the fact that top corporate executives may safely be placed in the bourgeoisie, because they exercise real economic ownership of the means of production, even if they are not the legal owners, this still leaves the vast bulk of the working population in the working class. Such a broad definition would include significant strata whose earnings, level of authority and degree of employment security mean that they have very

little in common with, say, a factory operative, a sales assistant or a junior clerical officer. Moreover, in many cases they would themselves consider it laughable to be regarded as working class. Of course, this could be put down to 'false consciousness' – the obscuring by bourgeois ideology of 'real' economic relations, but this hardly seems adequate to justify the idea that, say, judges, chief constables, vice chancellors or senior corporate managers (to take admittedly extreme examples) are part of the working class. The fact is that there are substantial numbers of wage- (or, rather, *salary*-) earners in advanced capitalist societies who derive considerable material benefit from the status quo, and it is just not credible to suggest that they are 'essentially' the same as any other 'worker'. (Such an argument also has little basis in the writings of Marx and Engels, whose frequent references to 'the middle classes' should dispel any notion that they considered all wage earners to be proletarians.)

A more sophisticated variation on the simple two-class model has been put forward by Alan Hunt, who argues that all those who are compelled to sell their labour-power are *potential* members of the working class, the *actual* membership of the class is determined by class struggle.[18] A similar position is taken by Harry Braverman in his classic study of the labour process, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Braverman argues that the compulsion to sell one's labour-power represents a sufficient formal criterion for membership of the working class but that the practical saliency of this will vary. At a time when the vast majority of the population have been separated from ownership of the means of production, those selling their labour power include relatively privileged strata of managers, engineers, etc, whose comparative affluence and degree of control over their own labour, and that of others, mean that they do not share the experience of those who are 'unmistakably' part of the working class. However, Braverman argues, class is dynamic, not static and needs to be seen as a process. The tendency throughout the twentieth century has been for white collar work to be proletarianised and there are indications that many more groups of relatively privileged wage-earners are succumbing to this process.[19] While this argument seems persuasive when it relates to low paid clerical workers increasingly being treated, and identifying themselves, as part of the working class, it is less plausible when one considers the relative situations of, say, an unskilled production-line worker and a manager in the same factory. Neither Braverman nor Hunt would consider there to be any fundamental class difference between the two, yet their respective positions in production relations are clearly very different. The fact that the manager may find his or her job downgraded at some time in the future does not make that difference any less real.

The second type of argument, that there does in fact exist a distinct middle class between bourgeoisie and proletariat, has been presented in various forms by a number of writers, but perhaps most persuasively by Barbara and John Ehrenreich, in their essay, 'The Professional-Managerial Class'.[20] The Ehrenreichs define this class – the 'PMC', for short – 'as consisting of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations.'[21] Thus it includes 'cultural workers, managers, engineers and scientists, etc.' Its emergence is a response to the need for specialised occupations to reproduce the structures of capitalist society, and presupposes the existence of a sufficiently large social surplus to support it, in addition to the bourgeoisie. While the work of the PMC objectively serves the interests of the bourgeoisie, it has a distinct ideology of its own, which is essentially technocratic and which sometimes takes an anti-capitalist form. The argument contains some important insights, but it ultimately seems unconvincing to argue that the many disparate types of occupation involved share a common class interest. University lecturers, social workers, doctors, journalists, civil servants and managers in capitalist firms (to mention some of the 'PMC' occupations cited by the Ehrenreichs) encompass vast differences in terms of their roles in social and economic activity, the degree of power they exercise over others and the rewards they receive. Some, indeed, are involved in the production process (albeit not as the direct producers), while others are completely marginal to production. Nevertheless, the 'PMC' thesis is better thought-out than many other versions of the 'new middle class' approach.[22]

The 'new petty bourgeoisie' argument was favoured by Nicos Poulantzas, who pioneered the serious theoretical discussion of class among Marxists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Poulantzas argues that the economic boundary of the working class is set by the distinction between productive labour – which he defines very specifically as labour creating value through the production of tangible goods, as opposed to services – and unproductive labour.[23] He goes on to argue, however, that even some productive wage-earners should be excluded from the working class: those who perform a supervisory function – since they are dominating the workers on behalf of capital – as well as scientists, technicians and others who perform principally mental rather than manual labour, since this also accords them a socially dominant position by giving them 'secret knowledge' of the production process. All of the residual strata of wage-earners who are non-productive, non-manual and/or supervisory, Poulantzas classifies as the 'new petty bourgeoisie'. While, as he admits, these non-working-class wage-earners are economically very different from the traditional petty bourgeoisie (shopkeepers and self employed artisans), Poulantzas gives a political and ideological justification for placing both within the same class: both the 'traditional' and the 'new' petty bourgeoisies have fundamentally individualistic ideological tendencies, and neither has a consistent political programme of its own, but instead vacillates between those of the bourgeoisie and the working class.

Poulantzas's arguments have been widely criticised, on a number of grounds – most persuasively, in my view, by the US Marxist, Erik Olin Wright.[24] Wright argues that Poulantzas's definition of productive labour is too narrow (since non material goods sold on the market also represent exchange value and surplus value[25]); that he takes no account of the fact that most jobs involve both productive and non-productive aspects; and – most importantly – that there is no reason to suppose that productive and unproductive workers have fundamentally different interests, since both are exploited by the capitalist. Wright further challenges the legitimacy of assigning the 'traditional' and 'new' petty bourgeoisies to a common class on the basis of ideological, rather than economic criteria, and questions whether they share much ideological common ground in any case (for example: the traditional petty bourgeoisie tends to be hostile to the state, whereas a significant section of the 'new petty bourgeoisie' is made up of state employees). Wright also analyses statistical data on the US labour force, using Poulantzas's categories and finds that less than 20 per cent of the labour force would be considered part of the working class.

Contradictory class locations

Wright's own view is that the so-called 'new middle class' is not a cohesive class in its own right, but a series of strata comprising locations that combine elements of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These locations have objectively contradictory interests, inasmuch as they are comparatively privileged in relation to the working

class but are subordinate to, and exploited by, the bourgeoisie. According to Wright's original version of this thesis, a particular location may be nearer the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, depending on the extent to which it which it exercises control over investments and the accumulation process; the physical means of production; and the labour power of others. According to these criteria, for example, senior managers would have more in common with the bourgeoisie, and foremen or line supervisors more in common with the proletariat. The Italian Marxist Guglielmo Carchedi, taking a somewhat different theoretical approach from Wright's, nevertheless comes to similar conclusions, arguing that some wage-earners have 'ambiguous' class positions, performing both 'the function of the collective worker' and 'the function of global capital'.[26]

Wright has subsequently set out a second version of his theory of contradictory class locations, following his rejection of the orthodox Marxian labour theory of value in favour of a new theory of exploitation developed by John Roemer.[27] According to this version, the principal form of exploitation under capitalism, based on ownership/non-ownership of the means of production, is supplemented by secondary forms of exploitation, based on ownership/non-ownership of, respectively, 'organisation assets' and 'skills/credentials'. The bourgeoisie possess all three, the working class none, and those occupying contradictory class locations possess some but not others. Exploitation constitutes the capacity to compel others to labour on one's behalf – to benefit from the surplus labour time performed by workers who do not possess the same assets as oneself.

As is no doubt clear from the above summary, these are complex arguments, and there is insufficient space in an article like this to do them justice. To my mind, Wright's arguments (and those of Carchedi) are compelling in their attempts to capture the complexity of class relations in advanced capitalist societies. The more recent version of Wright's theory certainly represents a significant departure from orthodox Marxism in suggesting that many wage-earners, who are exploited in one respect, may also be exploiters in another, but it is worthy of serious consideration. In any case, both versions of his theory produce similar results, in terms of where they draw the main class boundaries. The main practical difference is the introduction in the newer version of 'credentials' as a factor excluding some locations from the working class (reflecting the greater influence of the ideas of Max Weber on Wright at this stage). When Wright attempted to 'operationalise' his theory through empirical research, in the form of extensive surveys of samples of the US and Swedish workforces, he found that in both countries the working class represented around 40 per cent of the labour force, although a clear majority – 60 per cent – could be created if the 'contradictory locations with marginal control over organisation or skill assets' were added.[28] Interestingly, very similar figures can be arrived at by adding up the nearest equivalent categories in the official socio-economic classification of the British state working population, the theory behind which is largely based on the work of the Weberian sociologist, John Goldthorpe.[29]

Wright's revised theory, in all its conceptual complexity, could certainly not easily be adopted by activists as a practical tool for engaging in class politics. To a large extent, however, this simply reflects the fact that social reality is inconveniently messy. What should be clear from the whole debate is the difficulty of trying to establish the class character of large sections of advanced capitalist societies in an analytically robust way. This is not merely a question of placing people in the 'correct' pigeon-holes. Of course, social formations are dynamic, not static. The processes of capitalist development, and the struggles to which they give rise, constantly re draw class lines. But, unless we abandon any determinant role for the economy, we must accept that the scope for such alignments and realignments is circumscribed by the respective locations of particular agents in the class structure. Of all those who are neither part of the bourgeoisie nor 'unmistakably' part of the working class, some are clearly more likely to identify with the working class than others. We need to have some idea of what are the determining factors behind this and, whether or not we fully accept his conclusions, Wright's analysis helps to identify these factors.

Class formation and class politics

Even if we are able to establish the class identity of a particular section of working people, this does not necessarily tell us how they are likely to behave politically in a given situation. This applies not merely to those strata whose status has been the subject of debate (as discussed above), but even to those who are unambiguously part of the working class. One of the major theoretical advances of Marxism in the twentieth century was the general abandonment of any assumption that workers' political behaviour will correspond to their objective class location (or that it will do so once their 'real interests' have been pointed out to them, causing any temporary confusion created by bourgeois ideology to disappear). Classes, after all, do not have a concrete existence. 'Class' is an analytical category which describes, more or less accurately, certain social relationships. For Marxists, the relationships in question are the most important for understanding the ways in which societies are structured and how they might be changed. For particular individuals, however, class is only one possible way of identifying themselves; it may be less important than their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or their national, religious or cultural affiliations. One's experience in the workplace may generate a certain degree of class consciousness, but this need not be translated into a broader political commitment. The first task of socialists is therefore the organisation of people sharing a common economic relationship into a cohesive political force. As Adam Przeworski explains: 'the division of a society into classes does not necessarily result in the organisation of politics in terms of class . . . [This] is always a result of conflicts in which multiple forces strive to maintain or to alter in various ways the existing social relations.'[30] Thus, socialists need constantly to demonstrate that class interests and class divisions are the most salient features of capitalist societies, in order to organise workers politically.

Of course, socialists do not, and cannot, relate directly to the working class as such. It is never classes that engage directly in politics, but organisations seeking to represent classes, sections of classes or – alternatively – national, ethnic or religious groups (or, indeed, broad coalitions of any of these). In the first instance, workers are organised politically through trade unions, and workers' parties generally base themselves on trade unions (or seek to do so). This is not the place to consider the histories of the various workers' parties and the specific reasons for their successes or (more often) failures in pursuing the interests of their social base. Instead, in the remainder of this article, I want to consider the arguments of those on the left who claim that the organised working class is no longer capable of acting as the revolutionary subject – the agency of socialist change.

The retreat from class

The theoretical downgrading of the role of the working class, by several influential socialist thinkers, became increasingly common from the late 1970s onward, reflecting the international offensive of the New Right and the infliction of a series of major defeats on the labour movement. The apparent inability of the working class to

fulfil its supposed revolutionary destiny, or even to withstand the 'roll-back' of the social gains it had won in the twentieth century, provoked two types of theoretical revisionism. The more radical of these was typified by André Gorz's *Farewell to the Working Class*,[1] which argued that the working class has been too successfully incorporated into the structures of capitalism to be able to free itself and overthrow the system. While socialism remains desirable and, in principle, achievable, it must be realised by alternative forces, characterised by their capacity to extricate themselves from the capitalist labour process and establish practical alternatives to capitalism on a small scale, prefiguring the eventual new society. In contrast to this was a more defeatist analysis, which developed out of the increasing accommodation of the Eurocommunist parties to social democratic reformism and reached its apogee with the 'New Times' project of *Marxism Today* in the late 1980s.[2] This claimed that the project of replacing capitalism with socialism had either missed its chance, or else had always been misconceived. Either way, the idea of a unified emancipatory movement, based on the organised working class, was at odds with an increasingly 'postmodern' world in which 'mass society', characterised by generalised class consciousness, had been replaced by a plurality of competing and overlapping identities. In place of a unified political struggle aimed at an overarching objective, the left should embrace a range of popular and democratic struggles – against racism, imperialism and patriarchy, for peace, ecology and gay and lesbian liberation, etc – none of which should take precedence over any of the others. Moreover, each of these could only be advanced by occupying and enlarging the democratic spaces within bourgeois democratic states; any direct challenge to capitalism and the capitalist state was now unfeasible and probably undesirable.[3]

This analysis proceeds, in part, from a legitimate criticism of much twentieth century Marxism and socialism: its 'economism', which saw struggles for gender and racial equality (for example) treated as secondary to the overriding imperative of the class struggle. Following the burgeoning of new social movements such as feminism in the 1960s, however, most leading Marxist thinkers, and much of the organised far left, accepted that they could not dictate to the 'specially oppressed' in society the order of priority of the political struggles in which they were engaged. Nevertheless, for most socialists, two considerations continued to assign the class struggle a unique character. First, the subordinate group in question accounts for the vast majority of humanity, so that almost all of those enduring sexism and/or racism, if they are of working age, are also being exploited as sellers of their own labour power. Second, capitalism is a form of society characterised by structural inequalities, which takes advantage of particular weakness to impose even more skewed economic relations. Such a society offers little prospect of finally overcoming discrimination based on sex, race or any other factor, whereas any socialism worthy of the name would be founded on the absolute equality of all human beings.

The *Marxism Today* school of thought, however, took the critique of economism and the evident weakness of the socialist and workers' movement and wove them into a new dogma that disavowed any possibility of comprehensively abolishing capitalism. This was underpinned by a socio-economic analysis of advanced capitalist societies, which conflated significant societal changes and superficial fads, under the rubric of 'post Fordism'. Whereas the workers' movement was experienced by many as an oppressive (white, male, authoritarian) force, the new 'post-Fordist' capitalism was supposedly flexible and inclusive, accommodating an endless variety of cultures, lifestyles and aspirations. In place of a concern with production and the labour process, therefore, the 'New Times' post Marxists shifted their attention to the liberating potential of a new, intelligent consumerism, which supported the proliferation of alternative lifestyles. But, while the 'New Times' project accurately reflected contemporary trends in metropolitan popular culture, it became increasingly clear that it offered nothing in the way of left political strategy, other than to legitimise social democracy's embrace of neo-liberal capitalism.

Anti-globalisation and class politics

The recent flowering of the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements, however, has seen a revival of a non-class based conception of political agency similar to that of André Gorz. Writers such as Naomi Klein and, most recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, have championed the myriad popular groupings, currents and initiatives, from the Zapatistas to anti-WTO protestors, which have moved into conflict with global capital. Hardt and Negri, coming from within the Marxist tradition, explicitly identify 'the multitude' as the new agent of change, in place of the working class.[4] In the face of such radical ferment, largely outside the workers' movement, it is understandable that much of the anti-capitalist left sees little reason to wait for the working class to take the lead in the struggle against capitalism.

Why, then, is a political movement based on the working class still necessary? First of all, only such a movement – one that starts from the analysis of class relations – necessarily contains within it a critique of capitalism *as such*, and demands its complete abolition. Only by recognising that the purpose of the subjugation and exploitation of people *as workers* is the extraction of surplus value – the creation of profit – can we understand that this is what drives the system. Of course, there are other – non-class – grievances against capitalism which are equally devastating. The most pressing concern of the green movement, in particular, is the very real threat to the continuation of life on this planet – a threat from which capitalists are no more immune than workers. This is a concern about a specific contemporary effect of capitalism, however, not necessarily about the system as such. Conceivably, the governments and ruling classes of the world could be forced by well orchestrated campaigning and rational argument to adopt a more responsible economic regime, thus averting any danger of imminent environmental catastrophe, while leaving the relations of exploitation fundamentally intact. For some green activists (although, in fairness, probably not many) this state of affairs could be endured indefinitely, their principal objective having been accomplished. An awareness, however, that the motive force of capitalism is the imperative to exploit and accumulate, regardless of the broader social and environmental considerations, should lead one to expect that the kind of irrationality that jeopardises life itself will continually recur as long as the system exists.

The same considerations apply to most of the issues around which the anti-globalisation movement is organised: the 'super-exploitation' of workers and farmers in the less developed countries; 'unfair' international trade; the imposition of structural adjustment programmes; repression of trade union and community activists; destruction of indigenous cultures and economies; degradation of food and drink; duplicitous and manipulative advertising and marketing, etc, etc. While, collectively, these phenomena tell us a great deal about the character of capitalism, none of them is more than a contingent feature of the system, which could conceivably be eradicated while leaving the social order fundamentally unchanged. Only the critique of capitalism as such can identify the common origin of the many social evils that the system throws up, and only the working class – the perennial victims of capitalism, in all places and all periods of its existence – can bring it to an end. Who is better placed than munitions workers to end the manu-

facture of lethal armaments? Who could halt the despoliation of the environment more easily than workers in the polluting industries themselves? The anti-globalisation movement – and the many other radical social movements which preceded it and which have coalesced within it – have much to teach the labour movement, as well as offering a radical zeal and new ways of organising and campaigning. But ultimately, if capitalism is the problem, then the hegemony of the organised, politically conscious working class will be a necessary part of the solution.

But to recognise this brings us little closer to a viable strategy for overcoming capitalism. A real challenge for the left is to reinvigorate the workers' movement with the radicalism of the anti-globalisation movement. Recent attempts by Marxists to address this have, however, gone little further than acknowledging that it is desirable and expressing a voluntaristic determination to bring it about. Fausto Bertinotti, for example, argues that what is needed is 'a radical refoundation of politics as a worldwide process and thus a reconstruction of the agency of change: a redefinition of the working class. . . . [This] means starting from the main resource available, which is the movement against capitalist globalisation.'[5] This, however, is hardly coherent: it pays lip service to the Marxist conception of working class agency, while effectively seeking to establish a political movement without a definite class base as a *substitute* for the working class. A little more concretely, Bertinotti suggests that we need 'to build a link between the fight against globalisation and the fight against insecurity and exploitation', although he does not suggest how this might be accomplished (at least, not in the article cited).

Is class politics still relevant?

A major problem is the fact that, even within the organised labour movement, there has for some time been little semblance of a class based conception of politics. The New Right has been very successful in eradicating the language of class from mainstream public discourse, and in this it has been greatly assisted by the ideological capitulation of the leadership of social-democracy. An important element of this is the idea that in advanced capitalist societies the working class, as traditionally conceived, is no longer a cohesive social force, but has been rendered obsolescent by growing social mobility and diversity, allowing people to choose their own identity and lifestyle (part of the *Marxism Today* 'New Times' thesis). The more voluntaristic elements of the far left assert that this is simply a fiction perpetuated by a treacherous political leadership, which may be stripped away to reveal and express the continuing reality of capitalist class relations, and thereby advance the class struggle. They rightly point out that, while heavy manufacturing industry has declined (at least in the advanced capitalist countries), the proletarian conditions of alienation, immiseration and exploitation have been reproduced in the newer service industries – an oft cited example being the rapid growth of call centres. Building a class-conscious political movement on this basis is not so easy, however. One germ of truth in the 'New Times' thesis is the argument that the decline of heavy industry has had a destructive impact on the cohesion of the working class. The social infrastructure of the class – whole communities (housing, amenities, social clubs) built around factories and mines – has been irreparably fractured. Thus, while today's low-paid, unskilled 'service' employees meet the criteria for working class membership (as elaborated by writers like Erik Olin Wright) just as much as the miners or factory workers of the twentieth century, they tend to exist in a more atomised world, without the support networks of their social forebears. Moreover, they are much less likely to belong to a trade union. They cannot, therefore, be assumed to represent a reserve of latent class militancy, just waiting for the right leadership.

The process of class formation – whereby the disparate agents who occupy working class locations in the class structure are constituted as a conscious political force – will therefore require patient work by socialists and trade union militants. The primary focus for the left will inevitably be the comparatively small proportion of wage earners who are already unionised. These, however, include significant strata – such as civil servants and local government staff with managerial or supervisory responsibilities – who, in Wright's terminology, occupy 'contradictory class locations'. It is essential to recognise that, in such cases, there is likely to be a degree of ambivalence about their class allegiances. They are more likely to think and act like workers when their jobs are threatened or their employers are trying to hold their wages down than when they are in line for promotion. When circumstances bring class struggle to the fore, the cogency of socialist analysis is obviously more likely to be apparent, but even then left activists cannot rely on clichéd rhetorical appeals to a homogeneous conception of 'the workers'. Socialist politics has to relate to the way working people actually think about themselves, their jobs and the wider world. We have to recognise that, while the alienating conditions of most employment under capitalism may well engender a degree of class consciousness and a desire for change, such instincts are less likely to be sustained in the absence of a readily available socialist worldview. The weakness of any consistent challenge to the prevailing neo-liberal ideology in recent years has left large sections of the working population resigned to the inevitability of an unrewarding, unfulfilling working life, seeking consolation in leisure time, holidays, personal relationships and the availability of consumer goods. For those with better pay and prospects, diligence and obedience may offer a future of relative affluence. To tell them that this is against their 'real' interests, which actually lie in a hypothetical future socialist society, might not seem very plausible.

The task ahead, then, is formidable. A modest upturn in industrial action and the election of left leaderships in a few unions do not mean that the entire working population is seething with militancy. Yet the very nature of capitalism means that it will continually create conditions that make working people receptive to the arguments of socialists. The imperative to accumulate – to boost profits, drive down labour costs, cut back, slim down, become 'leaner' and more competitive – means that few jobs are really secure in the long term. We could all be waiting a long time for a cataclysmic economic crisis, but pressures and dysfunctions on a smaller scale are rarely far away. The socialist left needs to find ways of making sense of all this, and arguing for a feasible alternative, in a way that avoids both dogmatism and opportunism. We have to put the labour process at the centre of political analysis, and not just defensively – trying to curb employers' worst excesses – but by raising the questions of power and control at work. In this, we can certainly benefit from some of the insights about the horrors of the system that have been popularised by the anti-globalisation movement. One thing is certain: as long as capitalism reproduces class relations, class politics will remain not just relevant, but essential.

● It was only after writing this article that I read Ellen Meiksins Wood's excellent book, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism*, Verso Classics, 1998, which is extremely relevant to the issues I have discussed. Wood effectively demolishes the arguments of several highly influential theoreticians of the 1970s and 1980s who argued for a shift away from class politics. I would strongly recommend her book to all readers of this journal.

NOTES

1. This has certainly been the case since Arthur Scargill's decision, in 1995, to establish the Socialist Labour Party; a lower

key discussion had accompanied Militant's decision to exit the Labour Party three years earlier. Of course, similar discussions had taken place periodically since the 1920s.

2. See, for example, the article by Fausto Bertinotti, national secretary of Italy's Rifondazione Comunista: 'Reformist social democracy is no longer on the agenda', *Guardian*, August 11, 2003.

3. K. Marx, *Early Writings*, Pelican, 1975, p.323.

4. See *Capital*, Vol. 1, chapter 25: 'The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation'. Many critics have pointed out that the absolute living standards of the working class, at least in the advanced capitalist countries, have generally improved since *Capital* was written. A careful reading, however, suggests that Marx saw immiseration only as a relative, rather than an absolute process: '. . . in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, *be his payment high or low*, must grow worse.' (p.799 of the 1976 Pelican/NLR edition, my emphasis).While the material conditions of the working class have remained stable, and even improved somewhat, they have consistently been excluded from the benefits of the wealth produced by capital accumulation – the gap between rich and poor has increased. On this, see Ernest Mandel's introduction to the edition cited, pp.66-73, and Harry Braverman's 1958 article, 'Marx in the Modern World', available on the internet at www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/amersocialist/AmerSoc_5805.htm

5. This is a very brief and schematic sketch of the rich and complex argument set out by Marx in volume 1 of *Capital*. The labour theory of value has, of course, been criticised on a number of counts, not only by bourgeois economists but by many sympathetic to Marx, and some of these criticisms warrant serious consideration. Needless to say, this article is not the place to assess such criticisms (nor, indeed, am I particularly well qualified to conduct such an assessment). For our present purposes, however, it is enough to note that the basic gist of Marx's account of exploitation is accepted – at least in qualitative terms – by almost all those in the Marxist tradition.

6. The intensification of this 'de-skilling' process is the theme of Harry Braverman's classic *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Monthly Review Press, 1974.

7. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in K. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, Pelican, 1973, p.78.

8. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (ed. F. Engels), Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, p.886.

9. K. Marx and F. Engels, op. cit., p.67.

10. H. Braverman, op. cit., pp.238-40, p.295.

11. Office for National Statistics, *Labour Market Statistics*, August 2004, table 5, www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/lmsuk0804.pdf; K. Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain*, Palgrave, 2001.

12. R. Went, *Globalization: Neoliberal Challenge, Radical Responses*, Pluto Press/HIRE, 2000, p.17.

13. P. Armstrong, A. Glyn and K. Harrison, *Capitalism Since 1945*, Blackwell, 1991, p.289.

14. D. Filmer, 'Estimating the World at Work', background paper for *World Development Report 1995*, World Bank, 1995, econ.worldbank.org/files/846_wps1488.pdf; 'Industry' here covers 'mining and quarrying, manufacturing, gas, electricity and water, and construction'. The figures quoted are not entirely mutually exclusive since one East Asian country (Japan) and one Latin American country (Mexico) also belonged to the OECD at the time that the report was produced (South Korea has joined subsequently).

15. Office for National Statistics, 'Socio-economic classification of working-age population, summer 2003', *Regional Trends* 38, www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D7665.xls.

16. The organised far left is particularly guilty of neglecting these issues. For example, in a recent issue of *Socialist Worker*, Kevin Ovenden devotes an entire column to explaining 'what is special about the working class', without ever defining who the working class are ('The power that is able to transform the world', *Socialist Worker*, November 29, 2003). Even an in-depth article about class by the SWP's leading theoretician, Chris Harman, which *does* seek to identify the working class, does not give an explicit rationale for Harman's chosen definition, but rather takes it as read that it is methodologically correct ('The Workers of the World', *International Socialism* 96, Autumn 2002).

17. This typology comes from E.O. Wright, *Classes*, Verso Classics, 1997, pp.37-42.

18. A. Hunt, 'Theory and Politics in the Identification of the Working Class' in A. Hunt (ed.), *Class and Class Structure*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977.

19. H. Braverman, op. cit. See especially chapters 15 and 18.

20. This originally appeared in the journal *Radical America* in 1977 and was subsequently reprinted, along with a number of responses by other US Marxists, in P. Walker (ed.), *Between Labour and Capital*, Harvester, 1979.

21. Ibid., p.12.

22. For example, Chris Harman glibly refers to 'the new middle class who get paid more value than they create in return for helping to control the mass of workers' – a characterisation that begs more questions than it answers (C. Harman, op. cit.).

23. See N. Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, NLB, 1975, introduction and part three.

24. E.O. Wright, 'Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies', *New Left Review* 98, July-Aug 1976 (reprinted in his *Class, Crisis and the State*, NLB, 1978). See also G. Carchedi, *On the Economic Identification of Social Classes*, Routledge, 1977, and several of the essays in A. Hunt (ed.), op. cit., which also contains a response by Poulantzas to his critics.

25. Wright also points out that Poulantzas's view has little basis in Marx, who remarks in one passage in *Capital* that a private schoolteacher is as much a producer of surplus value as a worker in a sausage factory (Wright, 'Class Boundaries', p.15).

26. G. Carchedi, op. cit., esp. chapter 1.

27. See E.O. Wright, *Classes*. Roemer's ideas are set out in *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, Harvard University Press, 1982. For a short summary, see 'New directions in the theory of class', in J. Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism*, CUP, 1986.

28. Wright, *Classes*, pp.194-95.

29. 'Socio-economic classification of working age population, summer 2003', *Regional Trends* 38, www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D7665.xls; 'Routine' and 'semi-routine' occupations together account for 23.1 per cent; the long-term unemployed account for a further 16.5 per cent; lower technical and supervisory occupations make up 9.4 per cent and 'intermediate' occupations (which 'do not usually involve any exercise of authority') add a further 10.3 per cent. See *The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification User Manual*, ONS, April 2002, www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/ns_sec/downloads/NS-SEC-USER-VER1.2.pdf

30. A. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, CUP, 1986, pp.100-101.

31. A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, Pluto Press, 1982.

32. S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds.): *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1989, contains a representative collection of essays. See especially those by Dick Hebdige, John Urry, Charlie Leadbeater and Frank Mort.

33. I am not dismissing the validity of such strategies if they are based on a perspective of working 'in and against the state', recognising that the capitalist state must ultimately be transcended. The problem with most of the *Marxism Today* writers was that their affiliation to 'popular-democratic' struggles eventually lost its transformative edge, leaving them with an essentially liberal view of the capitalist state as neutral arbiter between competing social forces.

34. M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2001. The journal *Historical Materialism* has published a number of responses to this work, spread over several recent issues.

35. F. Bertinotti, op. cit. **WA**

Why feminism?

Louise Whittle casts a critical eye over the record of the left in tackling the oppression of women

'Why is feminism still so contentious?'[1]
Why is feminism such a thorny issue? I am usually dismayed and annoyed with the current ideas about fighting for women's liberation. I have experienced the dismissive responses to feminist ideas, such as how outdated it is and that women have 'got it all'. The question is, have women finally achieved equality? The answer is no.

This article attempts to elaborate why women's liberation is important and integral to fighting the class struggle and why feminism is important for the fight for liberation. I also want briefly to challenge organisations on the revolutionary left such as the SWP who are critical of feminism and women's autonomy.

Have women 'got it all'?

When you examine the statistics and put them into context, then women haven't achieved equality. For instance:

- 40 per cent of women, compared to less than 20 per cent of men, have incomes of less than £100 per week.
- 25 per cent of women live in poverty.
- Average hourly earnings for women in full time work are 18 per cent lower, and for women working part time are 40 per cent lower, than for men working full time.
- 52 per cent of women with children under five are in employment compared with 91 per cent of men who are fathers with under fives.
- 18 per cent of violent incidents in 2002/2003 were domestic violence.
- 73 per cent of the victims of domestic violence were women.
- Up to one in ten women experience domestic violence each year.
- One in five young men and one in ten young women think that abuse or violence against women is acceptable.

Recently New Labour has decided to attack abortion rights, and this is also the case in the USA.

(The above statistics are from the Fawcett Society, Equal Opportunities Commission, www.payfinder.com, Women's Aid, www.domesticviolencedata.org)

I think the general response to these statistics from people on the left and the trade union movement is 'we know all of this', but these statistics needs to be restated as I believe the left has become complacent and only pays lip service to the oppression of women. There are some on the left who see women's liberation as a distraction from the class struggle.

The attitude of the trade union movement

'We need to be heard more, we need to be seen more, to be treated with respect more'
This quote is from a study of black women's participation and experiences in the trade union movement. Women need to be more visible and not to be side-lined and marginalised, whether on the left or in the trade union movement. Many women have experienced patronising behaviour from male trade unionists and it is necessary to challenge the male hegemony within these structures. One way of challenging it is by educating the membership and for women to be taken seriously and demands made by them listened to. I know from my own experiences of being active on the left and in the trade union movement how little you can be valued and heard.

In my own union, Unison, there are women's groups active in branches and also regional women's committees, which are now part of the structure, but the question I ask is how seriously are they taken? Almost one million women members in Unison make up two thirds of the union, but it is still a male dominated union. Again, how many of the 'awkward squad' are women? None!

While I support the campaigns Unison promotes, I still wonder how hard they are pushing women's issues. An example of this is the 'Raising the Roof' campaign, which is focusing on the need for management to take domestic violence seriously and supporting women who are experiencing violence. But why not develop a strategy which educates the membership as a whole? It is OK to train trade union reps, but again, shouldn't education be a bottom up process?

At the 2002 TUC Women's Conference, delegates completed a survey on domestic violence and 55 per cent stated that they, or someone they worked with, had experienced domestic violence. The TUC Women's Policy Officer, Rebecca Gill, stated that: 'As a movement we recognise that it is our responsibility to work with employers and to work with our members to ensure that those who perpetrate domestic violence are not sheltered in our workplaces or organisations.'[3] Fine words which I agree with, but how do you achieve it in a 'movement' which is entrenched in bureaucracy?

The study of black women's experiences in the trade union movement referred to above states that: 'Sexism, along with racism, was also noted within the unions, where some older white male long term activists find it hard to adapt to a more egalitarian climate. They were described as patronising and insulting to women'.[4] As a trade union activist, I too can relate to this; the number of times I have been patronised by a male trade unionist, resulting in despair and frustration!

I am not disputing the time or effort trade unions are putting into fighting oppression, but at the same time we need a bottom-up process of educating the membership and putting women at the forefront. It is the same with fighting for equal pay women need to be at the helm of this campaign.

The revolutionary left

'The women's movement in Britain has wavered between two alternative paths: aligning itself with the labour movement with workers' struggles, with the trade unions – or going its own separatist way'.[5]
The revolutionary left as a whole pays lip service to women's oppression, and treats feminism with contempt. The above quote is from Tony Cliff's book *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation*, and it never ceases to amaze me how wrong organisations like the SWP get it.

My criticisms are not just with the SWP but with all the revolutionary groups which either 'pretend' to take oppression seriously, or which are downright opportunistic because at the end of the day it is how many people you can recruit. Quantity as opposed to quality!

I will concentrate on the SWP as they have written various articles on women's oppression, the latest I have read being Lindsey German's 'Women's liberation today' in *International Socialism Journal*, which reduces everything to a question of economics and simplifies the demands. German makes correct observations about the 'individualistic' feminism of the likes of Katie Roiphe and Naomi Woolf, but at the same time totally caricatures feminist ideas by maintaining that, overall, feminism is only concerned with getting more women into academia! German distorts feminism by stating that we are only interested in patriarchy and nothing else. I believe that patriarchy and capitalism are interconnected, and not separate.

German contends that 'liberation will only be achieved when the working people of the world take control of it, ending exploitation which dominates our lives and de

stroys our human potential and relations'.[5] So once the revolution happens, we will all wake up liberated and free? Er . . . no!

I have many problems with the revolutionary left and their interpretation of women's liberation. Marxists claim to be so sophisticated in their analysis of the class struggle, yet the same cannot be said of their understanding of oppression. Their organisations operate within a Leninist framework with an emphasis on democratic centralism, but this stifles debate and, again, educating the membership is a top down process as opposed to a bottom-up one. Tony Cliff's reason for shutting down *Women's Voice* and *Black Voice* was that they were against 'Leninist principles'. A work colleague of mine says that she was active in *Women's Voice*. She also says that it was open one minute and shut the next, due to an edict from the leadership. No discussion, no nothing, she said. The membership was not involved in the discussions. She later joined the Labour Party.

The question for me is why organisations like the SWP can't, for instance, admit that patriarchy exists and that it is not just about the means of production? I was reading the chapter written by Sheila Rowbotham in the book *Beyond the Fragments*, where she talks about the hostility towards feminism by organisations such as the SWP during the 1970s.

'The IS [precursor to the SWP], ostensibly committed to learning from workers' struggles, the initiator of rank-and-file groups, opposed to bureaucracy in the labour movement, baulked at extending these ideas into the wider issues of everyday life or at applying them within their own organisation'.[7]

The IS/SWP also dismissed feminism during the seventies with the charge that it was middle class, something they still say. The IS/SWP have not changed and still wallow in their own limited and simplistic dogma. And now we see them ditching their limited ideas around fighting oppression. An example of this is their orientation towards Respect.

For me, as a socialist feminist, power relationships within society are complex and cannot be reduced just to the means of production. What about the sexual division of labour and unequal relationships between men and women in society? What about the politics of neo-liberalism and globalisation and the way it is commodifying human relationships? What do Marxists say about women in the Third World? For example, their ability to give love to children and willingness to do the most menial of domestic work turned into a source of profit for capitalists through globalisation? To restrict your arguments to basic economics is futile and crude, and to educate your membership by denying a free flow of debate is short sighted because, as they see it, the party is always right.

On a personal level I am depressed at the left's low level of political insight into, and awareness of, liberation politics. If you stifle debate within your organisation and only use a top-down method of education, then it isn't any wonder that sexism and unequal relationships between men and women exist on the left. I used to feel shocked at some of the sexist behaviour on the left (including the revolutionary left) as I believed 'they should know better', but nothing really shocks me anymore, whether it is crass sexist jokes or abusive behaviour. Again, if you treat the membership with contempt then it is not surprising they are as sexist as hell! The left talks about collective responsibility, but what about individual responsibility? We all have a duty to treat people with respect.

Conclusion

A woman asked me recently whether I believed that women will be liberated under socialism. If she had asked me that ten or 15 years ago, I would have automatically responded that yes, women will be emancipated. But now I believe it will be an uphill struggle, and that the demands the oppressed make are shuffled to the back of the queue.

We need to challenge and fight oppression *now* and not wait for the revolution. We need to listen and support women and not pay lip-service. If we are to have any chance of living in an equal and free society then we need to act now. A strong and dynamic women's organisation is what the left needs. Educating the members is a start, and supporting autonomous groups, not criticising them for being 'separatist'. I also think that consciousness-raising groups for women are important as they let women discuss things which they believe are important to them, and gives them a chance to talk with other women. The whole process is empowering as women can control things on their own terms.

I am appalled that there doesn't seem to be a women's forum at this year's European Social Forum, although the organisers say that if there is 'time' in the programme they will organise something. Bit late in the day for that!

I have been e-mailing and meeting some women involved in an organisation called 'Next Genderation', who are a collective of feminists who came together at the ESF last year because they believed that the issue of women's liberation was sorely neglected. There have been interesting debates and articles written posted on their website about feminism and globalisation. It is worth a visit. They are hoping to organise an event with the autonomous spaces as the 'official' ESF has done nothing about women. I believe in working with the 'official' forum but at the same time sympathise with them because it feels like women have been pushed aside to make way for 'more important' issues.

Two final points: I came across a website called Seventies Feminism which lists the original demands from the women's lib movement in 1978. Women still haven't achieved those demands. On the website they encourage women to send in their demands – and the demands now are the same as the demands then. I feel very positive that there are women out there who still strive for feminism and a world without oppression and domination. Feminism isn't about getting more women in management, or about women working in the city claiming sex discrimination because they are not being paid the same bloated salaries as their male counterparts, and wish to stick their heads in the trough. Feminism isn't some 'old fashioned' concept rooted in the seventies. There are various websites which have mushroomed over the past couple of years which are dedicated to young women and their thoughts around liberation and oppression.

Feminism isn't going away, comrades!

I called this article 'Why feminism?' I will end it with a quote from Lynne Segal: 'Why feminism? Because its most radical goal, both personal and the collective, has yet to be realised: a world which is a better place not just for some women, but for all women.'[8]

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NOTES

1. Lynne Segal, *Why Feminism?: Gender, Psychology, Politics*, Polity Press, 1999, p.1.
2. Harriet Bradley, Geraldine Healy, Nupur Mukherjee, *A Double Disadvantage? Minority Ethnic Women in Trade Unions*, Universities of Bristol and Hertfordshire, p.30.
3. Rebecca Gill, 'A workplace problem?', *Safe: The Domestic Abuse Quarterly*, Winter 2002/3, p.4.
4. Bradley, Healy, Mukherjee, op. cit., p.24.
5. Tony Cliff, *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation*, Bookmarks, 1984, p.269.
6. Lindsey German, 'Women's liberation today', *International Socialism Journal*, Winter 2003, p.25.
7. Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, Merlin Press, 1979, p.35.
8. Lynne Segal, op. cit., p.232.

● You may be interested in checking out: www.nextgenderation.net; www.feministseventies.net; www.thefword.org.uk **WA**

Introduction

Richard Price

Maxime Rodinson, the author of the article that follows, died on May 23 this year at the age of 89.[1] Born in Marseille in 1915, his parents were Russian-Polish Jewish immigrants who later joined the Communist Party, and he left school at 13 to work as an errand boy. Despite having no formal qualifications, he managed to pass the entrance exam to university, and after graduation his academic career began to take off. He joined the Communist Party in 1937, and was fortunate enough to land a teaching post at the French Institute in Damascus in 1940, narrowly avoiding the fate of his parents, who died in Auschwitz.

He became an expert on the history and culture of the Muslim world, and held several senior academic positions. His widely read books included *Islam and Capitalism*, *Israel and the Arabs* and *Mohammed*. He left the Communist Party in 1958, complaining that it was too rigid and doctrinaire, but remained an independently-minded Marxist. This non-sectarian spirit was shown in his willingness to contribute an introduction to the first French edition of the Belgian Trotskyist Abram Leon's classic *The Jewish Question*. Although critical in some respects, Rodinson acknowledged the importance of Leon's work. Increasingly critical of Zionism, especially after 1968, Rodinson campaigned for a Palestinian state, and in 1973 published *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* under the imprint of Monad, associated with the US Socialist Workers Party.

This article was first published in French in *Les Temps Modernes*, No. 177, Paris, 1961, and formed a chapter of Rodinson's *Marxism and the Muslim World*, Zed Press, 1979.

* * * * *

When the Bolsheviks took power in 1917, they inherited the vast multi-national, multi-faith Tsarist empire. A classic example of uneven and combined development, it encompassed cities in European Russia with a large working class concentrated in huge enterprises, as well as vast areas almost devoid of an industrial working class inhabited by non-Russian nationalities, many of them predominantly Muslim. This was especially true of the lands on the southern rim of Russia, much of which had been acquired by conquest in the nineteenth century, and in central Asia.

The overthrow of Tsarism was greeted with enthusiasm by many of the non-Russian minorities. By agitating in favour of self-determination for oppressed nations and land to the peasantry, the Bolsheviks won sufficient support to carry the revolution into the non-Russian lands.[2]

In the course of these struggles in the periphery, the Bolsheviks were obliged to strike some curious alliances. In August 1919, for example, General Deniken's White army was defeated by the combined efforts of the Bolsheviks and a force of Chechens led by Uzun Haji, a Sufi Islamic cleric, who declared: 'I weave a rope to hang engineers, students and all those who write from left to right.' As the authors of a recent book on Chechnya note, 'He died in May 1920 before he had a chance to start fighting the Bolsheviks as well.'[3]

Support for the overthrow of Tsarism and for the defeat of the Whites in the Civil War did not necessarily translate into political support for, or even neutrality towards, the post revolutionary regime. In the Ukraine and Georgia, the principle of self-determination was overridden by strategic military considerations.

The dilemma facing the Bolsheviks was considerable. There was no blueprint for striking a balance between the competing claims of centralising the forces of the revolution and making concessions to local cultural and political conditions, and the stick was frequently bent, first in one direction and then the other. Complete autonomy risked the predominance of reactionary pan Islamic and other counter revolutionary forces. Over centralisation risked driving the masses into the arms of the same forces down a different route.

The dangers of bureaucratic centralisation haunted Lenin towards the end of his life, and were at the core of his 'last struggle' that led to his breaking relations with Stalin before he became entirely incapacitated in 1923.[4]

On paper, the Communist programme supported the right of self-determination up to and including secession, even under a bourgeois leadership.[5] In practice, the willingness of counter revolutionary and imperialist forces to utilise anti-Soviet movements, and the need to use whatever purchase the Bolsheviks had in the periphery of the former Tsarist empire to turn the oppressed masses of 'the East' against British imperialism meant that this right remained largely abstract.

How to relate to the Muslim oppressed posed particular difficulties, not least on the issues of religion and the liberation of women. E.H. Carr points out that:

'. . . the national question in the east . . . at first . . . presented itself to the Soviet leaders almost exclusively in its Muslim guise . . . they were astonished to discover that, while the hold of Islam over the nomadic peoples and in parts of Central Asia was little more than nominal, it remained elsewhere a tenacious and vigorous institution which offered far fiercer resistance than the Orthodox Church to new beliefs and practices. In regions where it was strong – notably in the northern Caucasus – the Muslim religion was a social, legal and political as well as a religious institution regulating the daily way of life of its members – in almost every particular. The imams and mullahs were judges, lawgiv-

ers, teachers and intellectuals, as well as political and sometimes military leaders."[6]

Some delegates to the Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in Baku in September 1920, including John Reed, thought that Zinoviev had overstepped the mark when he called on several occasions for 'a real holy war' against British and French imperialism.[7] According to one account, Zinoviev even called for recreating 'the spirit of struggle which once animated the peoples of the East when they marched against Europe under the leadership of their great conquerors'.[8] Indian Communist M.N. Roy refused to attend, calling the congress in advance 'Zinoviev's circus'.[9]

Sultan Galiev, the subject of this article – a review of Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Quelquejay's book *Les Mouvements Nationaux chez les Musulmans de Russie. 1: Le 'Sultangalievisme' au Tatarstan* (*National Movements Among the Muslims of Russia 1: 'Sultan Galievism' in Tatarstan*) – is an almost forgotten figure of early Soviet history. His career from protégé of Stalin (when Stalin was Commissar of Nationalities) to victim of Stalin is a poignant commentary on the failure of the Russian revolution to live up to its early promise in the eyes of many that it professed to liberate. The legacy of Stalinist Great Russian chauvinism in the Muslim republics lives on in Putins' brutal denial of Chechen independence and the shocking retaliation at Beslan.

A useful further source on the life of Sultan Galiev is at: harikumar.brinkster.net/MLRB/Sultan-Galiyev-FINAL.htm. This avowedly 'Marxist-Leninist' website (founded by former members of the Albania-USA Friendship Society!) should be treated with considerable caution, and its account remains curiously agnostic about his fate. It nevertheless contains a number of references to the available literature.

NOTES

1. See Douglas Johnson, 'Maxime Rodinson, Marxist historian of Islam', *Guardian*, June 3, 2004.
2. See the useful account of the evolution of Bolshevik policy on self determination under Lenin in E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, Vol. 1, Penguin, 1977, Chapters 11-14, pp.292-435.
3. Carlotta Gall and Thomas De Waal, *Chechnya*, Pan, 1997, p.21.
4. See M. Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, Pluto, 1975.
5. N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, Penguin, 1970, p.248.
6. E.H. Carr, op. cit., pp.323, 329-30.
7. Ed. B. Pearce, *Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East*, New Park, 1977, pp.23-36.
8. R.A. Rosenstone, *Romantic Revolutionary*, Penguin, 1982, p.378.
9. Pearce, op. cit., p.190n.

WA

Sultan Galiev

A Forgotten Precursor

Maxime Rodinson

The book on which these reflections are based has just been published under the auspices of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études (6e section)*.[1] It is a conscientious and detailed study of a set of questions which have on the whole been given far more serious attention in the Anglo-Saxon countries than in France, where gratuitous political prophecy passes for scientific research all too often. A book like this is usually received with *a priori* suspicion in militant circles, and even elsewhere. My aim is to offer some counterweight to this traditional sectarianism.

Sultan Galiev is one of the men who played an important part in the early days of the Communist International and the Soviet Union. Most socialist militants are aware of him only through a passing reference made by Stalin,[2] rather an emotional reference, I used to think. Perhaps I was right. To have aroused some emotion in Stalin is already something in the way of an achievement.

Mir Sayit Sultan Galiev was born the son of a Tartar schoolteacher in about 1900.* The Tartars were a Muslim minority within the Tsarist Empire, with a character all of their own. There were about three and a half million of them scattered throughout the Empire, but they were concentrated to some extent in the 'Government' of Kazan, their political and cultural centre. They were mainly peasants, and the few Tartar industrial workers still kept close ties to rural life. But there was also a bourgeoisie: a few industrialists and many shopkeepers, from which a Muslim 'clergy' and an intelligentsia had emerged. This bourgeoisie and these intellectuals were active, dynamic and ambitious. Many had long been 'modernists' in their attitude towards Muslim dogma, and 'advanced' in their attitudes to the traditional Muslim way of life. Their teaching activities often led them to penetrate and even establish themselves in areas inhabited by their less evolved co-religionists, such as Central Asia, Siberia and the Caucasus. In so doing, they introduced new ideas and modern ways, and generally stirred things up. They can be seen playing this role in the translations of Kazak and Tadjik novels published by Aragon, for instance.[3] All this was naturally viewed with great suspicion by the reactionary Khans.

Then came the October Revolution. An important part of the Tartar intelligentsia supported it, thinking that the socialism established by the new regime would realise and deepen the reformist movement's programme. Naturally enough they particularly appreciated Bolshevism's internationalist orientation. They hoped that this would lead to equality between ethnic groups and put an end to Great-Russian domination, a domination the 'Whites' would re-impose should they be victorious.

Sultan Galiev joined the Bolshevik Party in November 1917, and, thanks to his talents as an orator and organiser, soon became an important figure as the representative of this 'colonial' intelligentsia. He became a member and then president of the 'Central Muslim Commissariat', a new body affiliated to the Narkomnats (The People's Commissariat for Nationalities), a Commissariat presided over by a Bolshevik leader still relatively unknown at the time, Joseph Stalin. With the help of friends, Sultan Galiev created a Muslim Communist Party, and raised Tartar military units which played a key role in the struggle against Koltchak. Despite the opposition of the local Russian Soviets and communists, he extracted a promise from the Central Government to create a large predominantly Muslim state, the Tartaro-Bachkir Republic, which was to have five to six million inhabitants and to cover the vast areas of the Middle Volga and the Southern Urals.

It was during this period that he developed a series of ideas which he hoped to defend and to realise. He saw Muslim society, with the exception of a few big feudal landowners and bourgeois, as a unit which had been collectively oppressed by the Russians under Tsarism. There was thus no point in dividing it with artificially created differences and class struggles. Since for the time being the poorer Muslims were too impoverished and uncultured to provide cadres, one should not hesitate to make use of the available ones: the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and even the reformist clergy, who had given some proof of their faithfulness to the Revolution. In fact, the socialist revolution should adapt itself to fit a society so imbued with Muslim traditions. Sultan Galiev, an atheist himself, therefore recommended that Islam be handled gently, through a gradual 'defanaticisation' and secularisation. The

* This date is almost certainly wrong. Other sources have him born in a village in Bashkiria in 1880 – Ed.

Muslims of Russia, and especially the most enlightened amongst them, the Tartars, would then be capable of playing a tremendous historical role. For on the world scale the Revolution would have to be above all a liberation of the colonial peoples. It was therefore vital to counteract the Comintern tendency to concentrate mainly on the West. *The socialist revolution would begin in the East.* And who could bear the torch of both culture and socialism into Asia better than the Bolshevik Muslims of Russia?

To avoid confusion it should be stated right from the start that neither religious nor clerical demands were at issue. There were several ethnic groups in Russia whose religion was Islam, which had given them a common culture and tradition, and had similarly influenced many important aspects of their way of life. There was thus a certain incontestable cultural unity amongst these people which went beyond their ethnic particularities, especially as the latter were in many cases not very pronounced. This cultural unity had been reinforced by their resistance to attempts to convert them to Christianity and to turn them into Russians, an attempt which they perceived not as an ideological struggle, but as a colonial aggression against their common cultural heritage.

These ideas worried the Bolshevik leaders. Stalin supported Sultan Galiev against those who wanted to fan class war in Muslim circles and break off all contact with the non-proletarian elements. But unlike the Tartar, he saw the class alliance as only temporary. Once Koltchak and the Czechs had been defeated, the support of the Volga and Ural Muslims, whose cadres had been disabled during the struggle, became less important. The Muslim Communist Party lost its autonomy and the idea of a lasting alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat was rejected by the September 1920 Congress of Oriental Peoples in Baku. It was proclaimed that the national revolution had to be led by the proletariat, that is to say, the Western proletariat, and that, as one Congress delegate declared, 'the salvation of the East lies only in the victory of the proletariat'.[4] The project of a great Muslim state was dropped. Instead, two small republics were created, the one Bachkir and the other Tartar. Most Tartars lived outside the latter, and its population was only 51.6 per cent Tartar. Its towns were almost 80 per cent Russian. Kazan, the capital, was a Russian centre.

It was at this stage that Sultan Galiev, who still held an important official post, moved into opposition, in an attempt to fight the manifestations of what he called 'Great Russian chauvinism', and sought to infiltrate his Tartar partisans into Party organisations and Soviets. He wanted to make Kazan into a centre for Tartar national culture and a revolutionary seedbed from which 'Muslim Communism' would spread to all the Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union and beyond, to the whole Muslim East. He struggled against the leftists who argued for a more anti bourgeois policy and were backed by the Russian elements. And he worked towards making Tartar and not Russian the official language of administration.

Having come up against the unflinching opposition of the Central Government and the Russian Communists, especially after the 10th Party Congress had passed a clear resolution condemning the 'nationalist deviation', Sultan Galiev established more or less secret contacts with a number of discontented militants. He wanted to set up a common front against the Russians, whom he accused of readopting Tsarist colonial policy. How far did he go in seeking support for this front? Stalin accused him of having gone so far as to contact the *Basmatsh*, the gangs of insurgent Muslims who were waging armed struggle against the Bolsheviks of Turkestan. But there is no reason to take Stalin's words at face value. Be that as it may, in 1923 Stalin had Sultan Galiev arrested and expelled from the Communist Party. He was released shortly afterwards, but Kamenev was later to regret that he and Zinoviev had given their consent to this 'first arrest of an eminent member of the Party on Stalin's initiative'.[5]

Little is known of Sultan Galiev's life after 1923. He was perhaps exiled, re-arrested, then released. He worked in Moscow in the state publishing houses. But he continued his struggle, clandestinely. He had created a whole underground organisation which had attracted a great many Muslim communists, mainly Tartars. He developed his ideas in the light of the evolving situation. As he now saw it, the socialist revolution did not resolve the problem of inequality between peoples. The Bolshevik programme amounted to replacing oppression by the European bourgeoisie with oppression by the European proletariat. In any case, Soviet rule was being liquidated; NEP was in full swing. It would either be overthrown by the Western bourgeoisie or would turn into state capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Whatever the outcome, the Russians as a people would once again become dominating oppressors. The only possible remedy was to ensure the developing colonial world's hegemony over the European powers. This meant creating a Communist Colonial International, which would be independent of the Third International, and perhaps even opposed to it. Russia, as an industrial power, would have to be excluded. The spread of communism in the East, which this new International would promote, would make it possible to shake off Russian hegemony over the communist world.

As the Russian regime grew stronger it became less and less tolerant of dissent. On several occasions the Russians realised they were facing an organised Tartar opposition. Stalin clamped down on it. In November 1928 Sultan Galiev was arrested and sentenced to ten years' hard labour, which he served in Solovski. He was released in 1939 and we lose track of him in 1940...

Lessons of a forgotten history

Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Quelquejay deserve our gratitude for hav-

ing revived this forgotten history. Their task of sifting, scrutinising and organising a mass of documents in Tartar and Russian was a difficult and important one. Hopefully we can draw certain conclusions from their findings.

The first thing which comes to mind is that analysis of the political struggle over the problem of the Muslim minorities in the Soviet Union clearly demonstrates that there can be contradictions under a socialist regime. This is not new of course: Mao Tse-tung himself has said so – albeit with the quite gratuitous rider that such contradictions can only be 'non-antagonistic'. But that does not change the fact that every time someone highlights one of these contradictions on a practical level everything is done to deny it or to minimise it. Naturally, the most dogmatic make no attempt to analyse such contradictions, to explain them or to understand their causes and their repercussions. On the contrary, each phase of the policy adopted by the communist leaders is presented as determined by a superior wisdom which carefully follows the twists and turns of the national and international conjuncture, guided by the infallible compass of Marxist doctrine. Of course the reality is quite different: each policy decision is the outcome of constant struggles between opposing tendencies and expresses the balance of forces between them. The social background to these struggles is probably quite different from that in a class society, but the mechanism is essentially similar. In other words, history continues and we have not yet entered the timeless realm of the holy city. Many people will answer that all this is quite obvious, but perhaps they do not grasp all its complications.

Soviet policy could have been different, more oriented towards Asia, for example. Some of Sultan Galiev's ideas could perhaps have been put into practice. But there were very real obstacles to such a programme: the lack of Muslim cadres, the situation in the East at the time. In the interior there was a definite danger of Tartar nationalist deviation, strengthened by harmful Tartar chauvinism. Abroad, even if Sultan Galiev's ideas, which were partly shared by the Indian communist Manabendra Nath Roy and others who defended them during the first Comintern Congresses, had been applied, the benefits would probably have been few and far between. Even Walter Z. Laqueur agrees with this pessimistic view, and nobody could suspect him of being indulgent towards the Bolshevik leaders.[6] But it is clear that the choice of *orientation* in this respect was also influenced by other considerations: there was the dogmatism of the leaders, the fact that at certain periods the idea that the proletariat was the predominant force in the revolution was applied mechanically and against all common sense, even to areas in which the proletariat was non-existent. Indeed, on the whole, and until quite recently, the communist leaders have been as obtuse as the capitalists in their approach to the colonial people's awakening. And, although their lack of understanding is excusable on many levels, the fact remains that it has had many disastrous consequences even from their own point of view.

Socialism and the national question

It is also clear that socialism, by which I mean the socialisation of the means of production, does not automatically resolve all problems. Stalinism has shown us that despotism was possible under socialism, and hence that there was a problem of political power. Other events suggest that the national problem also does not necessarily vanish under socialism. "The fact that the proletariat will have carried out the social revolution will not turn it into a saint," wrote Lenin in 1916. "But eventual errors (and the selfish interests which push one to ride on the backs of others) will inevitably lead it to realise the following truth . . . By turning capitalism into socialism, the proletariat creates the *possibility* of entirely abolishing national oppression: this possibility will "only" ["only"!] become fact when democracy has been completely established in all fields."[7]

The example of Sultan Galiev demonstrates that between 1920 and 1928 the Tartars were very wary of the Russian communists, and feared a Russian communist neo-colonialism. The Bolshevik leaders denied that such a fear was justified. Stalin himself declared, in 1923, that "If Turkestan is effectively a colony, as it was under Tsarism, then the *Basmatsh* are right, and it is not up to us to judge Sultan Galiev, but up to him to judge us, as the sort of people who tolerate the existence of a colony in the framework of Soviet power."[8] But things were not quite so simple. Soviet policy towards the Soviet Union's Muslim minorities has, on the whole, been extremely attentive. The Muslims have been well cared for and their areas have been industrialised. Indigenous cadres were gradually promoted, and this process continues. Muslims are protected by exactly the same laws as other Soviet citizens, and in practice the 'locals' have even enjoyed certain privileges *vis à vis* the Russians. But this evolution has been carefully controlled. A tight grip is maintained over all key posts. Furthermore, the general tendency of Stalinist *mores* did not favour interpenetration between communities. The situation has nothing in common with colonial situations elsewhere. But national problems persist, as was clearly shown by the behaviour of many minority groups during World War II, and as is borne out by many small incidents even today.[9] And incidentally, such happenings would attract less attention, and might well be less distorted abroad, if the Soviets did not put so much effort into covering them up and attacking the 'slanderers' who dare to suggest that everything is not absolutely perfect in these areas of the Soviet Union.

A precursor

Sultan Galiev does not seem to have had any real spiritual heirs in the Muslim areas of the Soviet Union. We do not know what would happen today if political pressure groups were allowed to emerge. But what one can surmise about the aspirations held by the peoples of these areas shows them to have little in common with Sultan Galiev. Their demands appear to be much more 'reformist', much less revolutionary. If they could, they would press for slight changes, without questioning the regime's right to rule. The role of propagators of the Revolution in the East seems to hold little attraction for them. It is possible, of course, that the lid of official conformism hides a much more ebullient reality . . .

But it is outside the Soviet Union, in the so called underdeveloped countries, that the contemporary situation constantly makes one think of Sultan Galiev's ideas. To what extent can he be said to be a precursor of the new line adopted by the Soviet Union since 1954, a line which backs the Afro-Asiatic neutralist bourgeoisie? To what extent can he be said to be a precursor of Maoist communism, which concentrates essentially on the immediate struggle for socialist revolution in the ex-colonies?

The attitude of Sultan Galiev and the Tartar communists in 1918 stemmed from their refusal to serve as a mere back-up for a European proletarian movement, however justified. They wanted the Revolution to be their revolution as well, and to follow a course determined by their own actions, not by those of their somewhat over-paternal elder brother, the Russian proletariat. One should note that one of the latter's methods of intervention, which was later to be used elsewhere, was an insistence that indigenous support should be drawn only from amongst the proletariat. In countries where the proletariat was still embryonic, this amounted to arbitrarily designating the individuals who were worth talking to. The Tartars' essential demand 'to carry out our own revolution' came at the wrong time. The Bolshevik leadership was already taking a very different turn: careful bureau-

cratic control over every aspect of the mass movement. Both the Soviets and the trade unions at home and allied or communist parties abroad, were being kept on a very tight rein.

Significantly, the man of the moment was Stalin, whose universal and petty wariness was later to become quite pathological. The ailing Lenin was ignored when he warned that 'The harm which a lack of unity between the national state apparatuses and the Russian state apparatus may cause is nothing compared to the damage which will result from an excess of centralism; this will injure not only ourselves but the whole International, and the hundreds of millions of Asians who will soon follow in our footsteps and burst onto the historical scene.'[10] In theory the International's purpose was to further the world's march towards socialism. Its task would therefore seem to have been to develop a Marxist nationalism fighting for national independence and socialisation in the dependent countries. The social development of the East at the time precluded any more ambitious ventures. In spite of all his mistakes, it is clear that this was Sultan Galiev's basic intuition. The Stalinist system made it impossible for the colonial Communist Parties to accomplish this task. Essentially, it was their rigid subordination to the world strategy of an International centred on the European world which was to blame for this failure. These colonial Communist Parties were sometimes even directly dependent on their European equivalents. A Marxian nationalism did nonetheless eventually emerge, borne on the tide of history. But it did not do so in the framework of the communist parties, and it took American anti-communist imbecility to push the Moroccan and Algerian left, Castro, Sekou Toure and Modibo Keita into the arms of what remained of the Third International.

Today the Colonial International recognised by Sultan Galiev exists. It takes the form of the Afro Asian bloc, which is beginning to extend to Latin America, and is united against white domination, as the Tartar commissar dreamed it would be. But already there are differences, which do not yet amount to a split, between a Marxist wing committed to rapid advance towards socialism, and a bourgeois wing which favours slow transformation or even no change at all. There are also a number of ambiguous cases which are particularly interesting.

Since 1954 the Soviet Union has supported this Colonial International. But Khrushchev is only apparently and partially following Sultan Galiev's line. The colonial peoples are still seen only as a back-up force whose function is to exert pressure on the Soviet Union's white adversaries, to extract concessions from them, not to destroy them. The Soviet Union does not encourage socialisation in the Third World and probably does not even desire it. It would seem that the Soviet authorities finally agree with Sultan Galiev on this point, but their motive is not to strengthen the revolution; the aim is a much more selfish one. The world triumph of socialism is still seen essentially as the result of the more or less revolutionary evolution of the industrially advanced countries. It is only in China, where distance and ancestral Chinese cunning made it easier to sidestep the Stalinist international strategy, that Marxist nationalism was able to emerge triumphant in the framework of a traditional Communist Party. Indeed, Mao Tse-Tung was quite content to apply the ideas defended by the Comintern during its popular or national front phases. But he applied them systematically and consistently. His victory and the ensuing circumstances, the militant hostility of the white nations and the socialisation of Chinese society, led him to take the helm of a new type of colonial communism, which he proposed as a model for the whole underdeveloped world as early as 1949. Since then, events in China have constantly brought the ideas of the new Chinese leaders closer and closer to some of Sultan Galiev's. The primacy of the colonial revolution and the fear that a neo-colonialism, or a neo-paternalism at least, might eventually emerge from within the heart of the socialist world itself have been constantly reiterated themes.

Thus Sultan Galiev's ideas have resurfaced in the two main currents of world communism. Of course, nobody quotes this condemned champion of yesterday's obscure struggles. And yet he can be seen as the first prophet of the colonial struggle against white hegemony within socialism itself, as the first to forecast a break between the Russians' European communism and Colonial communism. He could also be celebrated as the man who first proclaimed the importance of Marxist nationalism in colonial countries, and the international relevance for socialism of those national movements which do not immediately envisage complete class war and socialisation. Mao himself was still adopting this position at Yenan. The future will no doubt pass its own verdict on this first representative of the Third World within the communist movement. Surely it will not fail to recognise his role as an outcast prophet.

NOTES

1. Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Quelquejay, *Les Mouvements Nationaux chez les Musulmans de Russie. 1: Le 'Sultangalievisme' au Tartarstan*, Mouton, La Haye, 1960 (*Documents et Témoignages, 3*).
2. In fact, throughout one of the speeches delivered to the IVth Conference of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, extended to include militants responsible for the republics and national regions, June 9 to 12, 1923. See I.V. Stalin, *Sotshinieniya*, Bk. V, Moscow, 1947, pp.301-312. For important details of this conference, which had been specially called to condemn Sultan Galiev, who had been arrested in late April or sometime in May, see E.H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, Vol. IV, *The Interregnum*, Macmillan, London, 1960, pp.287-9; Bennigsen and Quelquejay express some reservations about the passage. A photograph of the participants in the congress, which was only numbered IVth in order to play down its importance, appears in the official *Istoriya Kommunistitsheskoy partii Sovietskogo soyuza*, Bk. IV/I, Moscow, 1970, p.283. The accompanying commentary makes it clear that the condemnation of Sultan Galiev still persists in the official ideology, and is indeed reinforced by contemporary considerations.
3. For example, Sariddine Aini, *Boukhara*, translated from the Tadjik by S. Borodine and P. Korotkine, Gallimard, Paris, 1956; Moukhtar Aouezov, *La Jeunesse d'Abai*, translated from the Kazak by L. Sobolev and A. Vitez, Gallimard, Paris, 1959.
4. *Premier Congrès des peuples de l'Orient, Bakou, 1920*, Petrograd, 1921, French edn., quoted by Bennigsen and Quelquejay, op. cit., p.140.
5. As he once told Trotsky. Cf. L. Trotsky, *Stalin*, Hollis and Carter, London, 1947, p.417.
6. Walter Z. Laqueur, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959, p.22.
7. 'Summary of a discussion on the right of nations to self-determination' in V.I. Lenin, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, Collected Works, Vol. 20, pp.1-34 (4th Russian edn.), (Lenin's punctuation). For an analysis of how Lenin's position evolved, how it differed from Stalin's and how the problem manifests itself in the Soviet Union today, see H. Carrère d'Encausse, 'Unité prolétarienne et diversité nationale, Lenine et la théorie de l'autodétermination' in *Revue Française de Science Politique*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, pp.221-255.
8. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, various edns.
9. I was probably minimising the problem. See A. Bennigsen and C. Lemercier-Quelquejay, *L'Islam en Union Soviétique*, Payot, Paris, 1968, for an objective account.
10. Remarks on 'nationalities and autonomy'; see *Marxist Quarterly*, October 1956, p.255. 'National apparatuses' refers to the apparatuses of the non-Russian Communist Parties in the Union. **WA**

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