

Workers ***ACTION***

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Firefighters and Iraq

Blair faces revolt on two fronts

Labour and trade union news, US elections, Chechnya, political Islam, Ernest Mandel on the Jewish Question, Jim Higgins on party democracy, and more

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Workers Action welcomes articles for publication and correspondence

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Workers Action – what we stand for

Workers Action is a Marxist tendency in the labour movement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Editorial

Firefighters spearhead industrial challenge to New Labour

Heroism is an ephemeral mantle these days, if the experience of the firefighters is anything to go by. Until the beginning of November, they were a byword for gallantry and courage, their image as modern knights errant no doubt bolstered in the popular imagination by TV programmes like *London's Burning* and films like *Backdraft*. But the last few weeks have seen a determined effort by the government and media to recast their image as selfish macho militants, holding the country to ransom. While FBU strikers are berated for sacrificing innocent lives by ministers contemplating the mass slaughter of Iraqi civilians, the right-wing press sinks to ever-lower depths ('Fire union chiefs are Saddam stooges', read one front-page headline in the *Sun*). And the whole trade union movement anxiously awaits further developments in a dispute whose outcome will undoubtedly have repercussions far beyond the fire service. As we go to press, the third of the planned stoppages has been called off to allow the FBU and the employers to undertake further discussions with the assistance of ACAS. The implications of this move for the outcome of the dispute are not entirely clear at this stage, although it does suggest a slackening of resolve on the part of the FBU leadership. Nevertheless, the dispute has already been enormously significant.

The fire strike is the first major industrial challenge to New Labour's industrial vision of social partnership, but the ground has been prepared by a gradual change of mood within the organised working class, particularly in the public services. As the benefits of the much vaunted stability and prosperity supposedly delivered by Gordon Brown have consistently failed to trickle down, so the risks associated with reviving the long-disused practice of industrial action have increasingly seemed worth taking. A mounting series of stoppages on the railways, in education, in the civil service and – most spectacularly – the one-day strike by 700,000 local government workers on July 17 will have helped to dispel firefighters' doubts and contributed to their nine-to-one vote in favour of action.

The justice of the FBU's claim is clear to those who have looked beyond the tabloid headlines with their emphasis on the figure of 40 per cent. The pay formula established in the wake of the last national strike in 1977-78 has long since failed to achieve its intended aim of preventing wage drift. That formula linked firefighters' pay to the earnings of the upper quartile (top 25 per cent) of male manual workers. While this was a reasonable, if imperfect, measure in 1978, it has little relevance

to today's workforce. As a Labour Research Department (LRD) report commissioned by the FBU demonstrated, average earnings have increased by 370 per cent since 1979, whereas upper quartile male manual earnings have increased by only 300 per cent. The disparity is the result of three key labour market trends: the narrowing of the gender pay gap; the fact that non-manual earnings have grown much faster than manual earnings; and the faster growth of basic pay compared with average earnings. In addition, male manual workers today make up only 25 per cent of the full-time workforce, compared with 40 per cent in 1979.

The LRD report advocates a more up-to-date link to the government's New Earnings Survey, based on the re-positioning of firefighters from the category of male manual workers to the 'associate professional and technical' category. Many other professions within this group earn more than the firefighters' weekly wage of £414, including engineering technicians, building inspectors and physiotherapists. The case for greater recognition for the demands of the firefighters' job is also supported by a second FBU-commissioned report, carried out by the Independent Employment Consultancy. This found that the number of incidents attended by fire services has doubled since the 1970s; the nature of incidents has become more varied and complex, the equipment used more sophisticated and increasingly computer-based; and the knowledge and skill requirements and responsibilities of firefighters have increased significantly.

The FBU submitted its pay claim, drawing on the two reports, in May of this year. It appears that by July the National Fire Service Employers, representing local fire authorities, was close to making an offer of around 16 per cent which might have proven an acceptable compromise. The government, however, effectively vetoed this, despite maintaining the official position that the negotiations were a matter for the union and the employers. It refused to provide new money to fund any pay increase above four per cent. Instead, it initiated the 'independent' review chaired by Sir George Bain, who, as Andy Gilchrist pointed out in the *Morning Star*, set the minimum wage at £3.60 and has 'a basic salary more than that of a dozen firefighters plus umpteen paid directorships'. Bain's recommendation of an 11 per cent increase over two years, linked to 'modernisation', has been widely praised as a 'reasonable' solution by such liberal commentators as Polly Toynbee. While the existing fire service working practices are 'astounding' and 'unheard



But since four per cent remains the maximum increase that the government will pay for, Bain's 'modernisation' measures are, in part, a means of delivering cuts that will allow the remainder of the settlement to be paid for out of existing fire service budgets. Among other things, these would involve having fewer firefighters on duty at night, when most fire deaths take place; changing the shift system to reduce the number of firefighters and make those who are left work longer hours; placing full-time firefighters on call on their days off, again to facilitate cutting numbers; training firefighters to double as paramedics; and merging ambulance, police and fire control rooms into multi-purpose call centres with fewer people, with less specialised skills, fielding emergency calls overall. John Prescott, speaking in the Commons, confirmed that the modernisation is about job cuts when he suggested that the 11,000 firefighters – 20 per cent of the total – who are due to retire in the next couple of years need not be replaced if there were 'more efficient utilisation of labour'.

The extent of the government's intransigence is clear from its eleventh-hour sabotage of the agreement reached by the employers and the FBU leadership in the early hours of November 22, on the eve of the second strike. Despite the government's claim that the deal was unacceptable because it was uncosted and they had no idea what the final cost would be, a spokesman for the employers admitted that the proposals in the draft agreement were fully costed, and all figures were fully available to the government throughout, since – as Channel 4 News revealed – government civil servants were working alongside the employers throughout the negotiations over the previous week. Blair's televised speech the following Monday made it clear how important the dispute is to him, insisting that 'This is a strike they can't win'. Already he has talked about ordering troops or police to break picket lines, only to be rebuffed by both military and police commanders. But in his uncompromising language he has only raised the stakes and forced the firefighters to adopt a more determined posture. For all the abuse heaped on him by the media, Gilchrist has been remarkably moderate throughout – dropping the 40 per cent claim in favour of a 16 per cent figure as soon as the first two-day strike was over. Indeed, the agreement nearly reached on November 22 made significant concessions on modernisation, which would be the precondition for increases above an initial four per cent. 'Binding adjudication' would be imposed on modernisation items where the employers and union were unable to agree. Two

further increases of 3.5 per cent in April and November 2003 and a further 3.5 per cent under a new pay formula, would follow.

Having already stood up to the government for a total of ten days, it seems likely that many firefighters would have regarded this as too much of a climbdown, and indeed five members of the FBU executive apparently voted against accepting it as the basis for suspending strikes. There are calls within the union for the strike now to be made indefinite. Meanwhile, the dispute is costing the government around £20 million every day.

In raising the stakes, the government has further politicised the strike, prompting Gilchrist to say 'I'm quite prepared to work to replace New Labour with what I'm prepared to call Real Labour,' and that it was necessary 'to have a debate about that [Labour-union] link'. These remarks will no doubt be seized on by the likes of the SWP, which is already gleefully claiming that 'there are reports from across Britain of people tearing up Labour Party membership cards and asking why their union gives money to Blair's party'. But Gilchrist's comments were made at an 'After New Labour' event organised by the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, and he is clearly talking about the unions using their link with the party to force pro-union policies on the party leadership, or else replace it with a more pro-union leadership. This would become impossible if the union disaffiliated from the party, as much of the far left wants. The maintenance of the link means that Blair is already under pressure from the collective weight of the affiliated unions, with even a sometime proponent of social partnership like John Monks lambasting the government and publicly backing the FBU. Several unions boycotted a gala dinner in Cardiff addressed by Blair, in solidarity with the FBU, causing the party considerable embarrassment.

Union support for the strike has so far been strong, with Unison and the T&G attacking Blair's handling of the dispute, and the GMB publishing full-page advertisements in the national press supporting the FBU. Billy Hayes of the CWU has correctly said that 'any attempt to defeat and crush the firefighters is an attack on the whole British trade union movement'. The demonstration called for December 7 by the FBU has the official backing of the TUC and this will be a major opportunity to show the government that the entire trade union movement is backing the firefighters. But if solidarity is to be effective it must go much further than this. The FBU is speaking for all public service workers

when it challenges the Government's miserly approach to their pay. If other unions were to pursue their own demands now, it would increase the pressure on the government to a degree that it might prove unable to withstand. The RMT has already taken a strong lead by balloting its own members for a strike over safety that would take place while the fire strikes were underway. This sort of initiative, supported by determined solidarity work, both within the 'official' movement – the unions and the Labour Party – and through the ad hoc Firefighters' Support Groups, could make the vital difference to the outcome of this dispute. The cancellation of the third stoppage may well mean that the FBU leadership believes the Government's determination to win this dispute will outlast that of its members. If some further face-saving concessions have been signalled, Gilchrist and his colleagues may well feel that it would be better to settle for whatever is on offer now, than to be worn down gradually over the next couple of months. It is therefore vital that solidarity efforts are stepped up to stiffen the firefighters' resolve and show them that the trade union movement will not allow them to be starved back to work. If they win, it will represent a huge defeat for 'social partnership' and for the whole New Labour project, and a victory for working people. It is essential that all socialists and labour movement activists work to deliver that outcome.

WA

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Build a mass anti-war movement!

Simon Deville

The United Nations has given its tacit support for the United States to invade Iraq in the scramble for the world's dwindling oil reserves. At the same time, mass opposition has grown throughout the world, with what must be one of the strongest anti-war movements prior to the start of a war ever. Obviously, things could change rapidly once war is declared, and apparent opposition to imperialism can and has been won round behind jingoism, but the stronger the anti-war movement is, the harder such a task would be.

Warmongers get their way

After the US had bribed, bullied and cajoled the less willing member states into accepting its plans, the first week of November saw the UN Security Council unanimously adopt a US resolution on Iraq which hardly differed from earlier drafts that France, Russia and China had refused to support. Even Syria voted for proposals that now clear the way for a US-led war on Iraq.

The new resolution means that any member of the Security Council (in other words, the US) can launch an attack on Iraq for what it perceives, again without any need to refer back to the Security Council, to be a 'material breach' of the resolution.

An example of what the US might interpret to be a material breach of the resolution came within days of the resolution being passed. The US and Britain claim that the 'no-fly zones' that they have imposed over Iraq are in support of UN resolutions, as are the ten years of bombing raids over Iraq that the two countries have carried out. Some opinion might suggest that the fact that there is no mention of no-fly zones or bombing raids in any UN resolution means that these acts by Britain and

the US are illegal. When Iraq fired on a US plane that was bombing Iraq, the US government took a contrary view as it argued that shooting at a US plane that was bombing its country had placed Iraq in material breach of UN resolution 1441.

As it stands, the UN resolution states that the UN inspectors must report back by February next year, though sections of the US administration have suggested that Iraq not declaring its full weapons capability by December 8 would be a breach of the resolution. Iraq's position is that it has no weapons of mass destruction, and former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter backs up this position. The US claims to have 'intelligence' reports that Iraq does have a weapons programme. Since the US can unilaterally determine whether the resolution has been broken, it is possible that it will use its own unsubstantiated view that Iraq is lying as an excuse to start a war.

Whilst the French and Russian governments initially made a stand against the US, that now appears to have been just a bargaining strategy. Behind the scenes the US has been promising lucrative contracts not just for Iraqi oil, but also for the rebuilding of Iraq after imperialism has bombed it back to the stone age. In addition, Chechen resistance to Russian occupation of their country is now accepted by the US as 'terrorism', alongside separatist resistance in China. The poorer countries are much easier to bully into submission with the threat of withdrawal of aid, without the US administration needing to further divide up its anticipated spoils of war.

While the UN clearly isn't going to stand in the way of a war, the anti-war movement can play a crucial role in making it politically difficult for other governments – but first and foremost, the US's key ally, the British government – to support such a war. This, combined with mass opposition across the Arab world, will make it very difficult for a politically isolated US to launch a war for control of the world's oil supplies. At the same time, such an international anti-war movement would also help inspire opposition from within the US itself. Although there is currently an organised US anti-war movement, which has some support within sections of the trade union movement, it is still very small, and support for Bush is at unprecedented levels.

Mass opposition to war

For several months, polls have shown public opinion to be around 50 per cent opposed to war with a significantly smaller percentage positively in favour. The largest demonstrations in Britain for the last decade at least have been those in the last

year opposing the bombing of first Afghanistan and now Iraq. With a claimed 350,000 to 400,000 on the September 28 demo, and even the police conceding that the figure was in the hundreds of thousands, this was by far the biggest left demonstration in Britain for many years. This mood is clearly felt in many other parts of Europe, with somewhere between half a million and a million, making what is claimed to be Europe's largest ever demonstration at the European Social Forum in Florence last month.

Unless a war is declared in the meantime, the next mass mobilisation against the war is set for February 15. In Florence, organisers agreed to build for a demonstration in every European capital on the same day. This will be a crucial show of strength in which it is absolutely possible to build demonstrations of hundreds of thousands simultaneously across the continent. The time between now and then must be used to strengthen local groups, to win over labour movement organisations, to campaign publicly and to mobilise for the demonstration.

The firefighters' dispute has overnight transformed the relationship between the trade union movement and the government. Where the left has for years collectively failed, the government has succeeded in one fell swoop in getting John Monks to rally the labour movement. While this is a separate issue from the war, the radicalisation around the FBU dispute has created a climate in which it is much easier to win labour movement support for the anti-war movement. Paper policies, however, will not be enough. The length and breadth of the labour movement must be publicly and very visibly campaigning against the war, working with all other forces possible.

The combination of these two issues is rapidly transforming the face of British politics and reviving a dormant labour movement. The opportunity the left is currently faced with must be seized upon quickly. The Stop the War Coalition has increasingly developed as the central campaign against the war, though importantly it has been prepared to work alongside other organisations such as CND that are not formally affiliated to it. Inside the Labour Party and affiliated unions, Labour Against the War is of vital importance. All opposition to Tony Blair's war-mongering must be united within the party, and to the broader movement outside.

WA

Labour Party Conference

Pressure on leadership grows

Darren Williams

The 2002 Labour Party Conference, held in Blackpool from September 29 to October 3, showed the bureaucracy at its most cynical and overbearing in its determination to stage-manage the deliberations of the party's 'sovereign body' and subdue growing dissent, particularly over public services and the possibility of war with Iraq.

The conference began immediately after the massive anti-war demonstration in London and the strength of feeling in opposition to a further round of imperialist carnage in the so-called 'war against terrorism' was the constant backdrop to the more prosaic proceedings within the Winter Gardens. On the Sunday night, a 250-strong fringe meeting organised by Labour Against the War heard a series of excellent speeches from the likes of Tony Benn, FBU leader Andy Gilchrist, NEC member Christine Shawcroft, and MPs George Galloway, Bob Wareing, Alan Simpson, Alice Mahon and Jeremy Corbyn. But the star attraction was former UN weapons inspector, Scott Ritter, who has become a high-profile opponent of war and has co-written a book challenging the claims made about Saddam's weapons capacity. This one-time marine, a registered Republican, made an unlikely hero for an audience of British socialists, with his earnest declarations of faith in the nobility of the US national character. But his passionate and well-informed denunciations of the Bush administration demonstrated the breadth of opposition to the war drive.

Despite the media focus on Blair's speech, and the circus surrounding the arrival of Bill Clinton later in the week, the most important political developments of the week were on the Monday – the first full day of conference. These were the debates on the war and on PFI. The fact that these issues were discussed demonstrates the limits of Blair's attempts to sideline conference and enfeeble party democracy by channelling policy discussion into the cul-de-sac of the National Policy Forum.

When there is sufficient strength of feeling on an issue, it cannot be completely contained by bureaucratic manoeuvring, and in this case, the time set aside for the 'contemporary resolutions' slot – paltry as it was – provided an outlet for rank-and-file disquiet. Twenty-eight motions on the war were submitted by CLPs, and this and public services were among the top five issues selected for discussion (along with pensions, manufacturing and the Johannesburg summit) in the ballot of CLP and affiliate delegates.

On public services, conference was presented with a self-congratulatory statement from the NEC; a composite motion from Unison, calling for an independent review of PFI and for the government to 'develop a capital investment framework which will make public financed projects a viable alternative'; and a second composite which declared that PPPs 'are not privatisation' and rejected the suspension of further PFI/PPP projects, while making some noises about the pay and conditions of staff working for PFI contractors. Treasury Chief Secretary, Paul Boateng, was heckled and slow-handclapped during his speech defending PFI, and the final vote saw a heavy defeat for the government, with the Unison composite carried by 67.19 per cent to 32.81 per cent. The second composite and the NEC statement were both defeated, by 58.44 per cent to 41.56 per cent; and 54.62 per cent to 45.38 per cent, respectively.

This outcome is significant less for what was passed – union general secretaries insisted on merely asking for a review of PFI, rather than a moratorium, in order to deliver majority support – than for the fact that PFI, and the party leadership, were clearly defeated. The breakdown of the voting figures confirms that the unions voted more heavily against PFI than did the CLPs, but on the Unison composite, the CLP vote was close, with 42.56 per cent in favour and 57.44 per cent against. This is interesting when compared, for instance, with the last major conference rebellion in 2000, when a resolution was carried calling for a restoration of the link between pensions and wages. On that occasion, the CLPs supported the leadership by a two-thirds majority; it would seem that there has been a modest but significant increase in the willingness of constituency activists to challenge the government. Despite the two-thirds majority for the Unison resolution on PFI, which in the past would have guaranteed its inclusion in the manifesto as policy, party leaders quickly made it clear that they would simply ignore it. The unelected party 'chair', Charles Clarke, dismissed the vote as

driven by 'producer interests' – revealing the extent to which the language and ideology of the marketplace has permeated government thinking – and Blair insisted that it was 'time to increase the pace of reform'. As significant as the vote was, therefore, the unions must be prepared to back it up with action if they are serious about halting the privatisation programme.

The debate on Iraq was equally significant. An NEC statement seeking to give the government carte blanche to go to war was withdrawn because it seemed clear that it would be defeated, mainly because of the omission of key provisions about international backing which had secured the passage of a similar resolution at the TUC. Again, there were two composites; one against war under any circumstances, the other demanding that any military action be 'within the context of international law' (i.e., not even specifying the need for UN support). The *Guardian* suggested that the bureaucracy had manoeuvred to block any resolution insisting that war could be supported only with UN backing because it would win, and it is certainly the case that a motion along those lines from Cardiff West CLP was mysteriously ruled out of order. The debate was grotesquely stage-managed, with a 17-year-old school pupil chosen to second the pro-war motion, so that she could make emotive pleas on behalf of her contemporaries in Iraq, and 15 pro-war speakers called by the chair, compared to only six who opposed the war. Ultimately, the anti-war composite was lost by 58.74 per cent to 40.22 per cent, but this was a far closer vote than might have been expected. In fact, it was roughly the same as the equivalent vote at the TUC, where the anti-war position could have been expected to gain greater support, partly because the major union leaders are less willing to rock the boat at Labour Conference than at the TUC. The voting in several delegations was apparently close (for example, within the CWU delegation, most of the postal side supported the pro-war resolution, though they lost). In fact, the bigger unions had not voted to prioritise the war for debate in the 'contemporary issues' ballot.

Little of interest arose from any of the other debates, and there were no further defeats for the platform – although there were close votes on a couple of minor rule changes. Nor did the left do any better than previously on elections to the National Policy Forum, etc. The 'new generation' of left-wing general secretaries (specifically Derek Simpson, Billy Hayes, Mick Rix and Andy Gilchrist) lived up to their reputation by being noticeably more outspoken than is usually the way with union

bosses at party conferences. For example, Rix made a forthright intervention in the public services debate, condemning PFI as a 'rip-off' for which 'we will still be paying . . . in 30 years' time'. And this sometimes emboldened the more mainstream bureaucrats like Prentis, Edmonds and Morris to speak out as well. There was also strong support among delegates for the FBU, if the number of T-shirts they gave away, supporting their pay demand, is anything to go by.

The control-freakery of the party bureaucracy was demonstrated in a number of ways, some relatively trivial. A long-standing rule allowing the longest-serving NEC member to chair a conference session was suddenly abandoned when it became clear that this would have allowed

left-winger Christine Shawcroft to take the chair. And the most 'off-message' union delegations were allocated hotels as far as possible from the conference centre.

The left fringe meetings were fairly successful and upbeat, with around a hundred at the Labour Left Briefing meeting to hear Benn, Corbyn, Shawcroft, John McDonnell, Bob Crow of the RMT and Rozanne Foyer of the Campaign for Socialism in Scotland. About 150 braved torrential rain to attend the Campaign Group rally, and close to 300 were at the more politically heterogeneous *Tribune* rally, where Benn and Mahon debated with Christopher Hitchens over the war, while Blunkett clashed with Bill Morris on asylum.

The conference demonstrated that, con-

trary to the claims of the Socialist Alliance et al, Blair is not having everything his own way in the party. Dissenting voices are becoming louder and more confident, and are capable of embarrassing the leadership. The bureaucracy, of course, has an array of means at its disposal to obstruct its opponents and unwelcome decisions are often simply ignored, as the response to the PFI vote showed. The clearest lesson to be drawn is that rank-and-file party members and union levy-payers need to organise more consistently in order to keep up the pressure on the leadership. The potential exists for a labour movement coalition strong enough to halt privatisation and the drive towards war. With greater confidence and determination, that potential could be realised.

WA

No blank cheque for New Labour – make the link work!

The following statement is being circulated to bring together those who want to make the case for critical Labour Party affiliation. To add your name to the statement, or for more information, contact petefirmin@gn.apc.org or write to PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

The Labour Party was formed by the trade unions, and those trade unions remain an integral, though autonomous, part of the Labour Party at every level.

The sight of a Labour Government acting against the interests of trade unionists – privatising public services and attacking us when we take industrial action – makes us believe it is time for affiliated trade unions to act collectively and assert our voice within the Labour Party.

Too often our representatives on Labour Party bodies (National Executive Committee, National and Regional Policy Forums, Regional Boards, etc) fail to reflect trade union policy in motions and votes. Significant financial contributions in addition to affiliation fees are given to the party, especially at national level, regardless of whether the campaign or candidates oppose key union policies. MPs promoting policies in conflict with those of the sponsoring union are given support.

We call for a campaign to give trade unions an effective voice for our policies in the Labour Party, based on the dual principle of maintaining affiliation fees in full and renewing trade union participation at every level of the Labour Party with representatives who are accountable to their trade union members, who promote policies in the interests of trade unionists and who refuse to subsidise the anti-union policies of an unaccountable Government.

Initial signatories (all in a personal capacity):

CWU

Pete Firmin, Political Officer, West End Amal branch, Chair, Brent Trades Union Council; Bryan Harrod, Political Officer, South & East Thames Amal branch; Mick Houghton, Branch Officer, CWU West London branch, President Ealing Trades Council; Linda Kietz, Chair & Political Officer, CWU West London Branch; Mick Kyriazopoulos, Political officer, N/NW London branch; Sam Neave, Political Officer, Mount Pleasant branch; Gerry Ryan, Branch officer, London City West branch; Paul Stygal, Secretary and Political Officer, London East branch; Alan Tate, Secretary, London Region Political Committee; Archie Taylor, Political Officer, South & East Thames Amal branch; Colin Tull, Eastern Region Political Officer, Political Officer, Northern Home Counties branch; Lee Waker, Political Officer, East London Postal branch; Tom Walker, Branch Secretary, Northern Home Counties Postal branch.

Fire Brigades Union

Mick Shaw, National Executive member.

RMT

Jeff Slee, President, South East Regional Council; Diana Udall, RMT representative, London Region Board, Labour Party.

GMB

Terry Scott, Lewisham Borough Councillor, Lewisham Deptford CLP; Dave Statham, President, GMB Holborn Branch, Trade Union Liaison Officer, Brent East CLP; Pete Turner, Secretary Hammersmith & Fulham Trades Union Council, and President GMB Fulham 1st branch.

T&G

Jimi Adefiranye, Lewisham Borough Councillor, Lewisham Deptford CLP; Danny Considine, prospective shop steward, Leighton Hospital, Crewe and Nantwich CLP; David Harris, committee member 1/1347 branch, Brighton; Kevin Flack, Secretary 1/427 Branch; Richard Hughes, Branch Secretary, 5 / 610 ACTS (North Staffs Voluntary Sector) branch.

Usdaw

Andy Walker, Usdaw, prospective Labour candidate, Redbridge Council.

Amicus-MSF

Ian Malcolm-Walker, Secretary, Derby General Branch; Roger Stevens, Secretary, North & West Kent branch.

Ucatt

Sean Cullen, Secretary, Harlesden branch.

Unison

Andrew Berry, Deputy Branch Secretary, Islington Unison, London Region, Local Government Executive; Jacqui Brown, Unison Housing Association Branch Political Officer, member London Region Political Committee; Mike Calvert, Assistant Secretary, Islington branch, Convenor, Social Services Shop Stewards Committee, Islington Unison; Gwen Cook, Political Officer Hammersmith & Fulham Unison, member London Regional Political Committee and Hammersmith & Fulham CLP; Luci Davin, Publicity Officer, Camden Unison; Simon Deville, Secretary, Unison Voluntary Organisations Branch; Richard Forth, APF Officer, Birmingham branch; Valerie Graham, Unison, Chesterfield Borough Councillor; Ian Griffiths, Education Convenor, Lambeth Unison; Patrick Hall, Unison, vice-chair Leeds Central CLP; Philip Lewis, Shop Steward, Camden Transport Services, Depot Staff Section; Camden Unison APF Officer; Terry Luke, Islington Unison retired members secretary; Dorothy Macedo, Unison representative, London Region Board, Labour Party; Jon Rogers, Secretary, Lambeth Unison; John Stewart, Publicity Officer, Unison Voluntary Organisations branch; Bob Wood, Unison, Secretary, Leeds Central CLP; Peter Woodward, Branch Chair, Lambeth Unison.

This statement is also supported by Labour Party NEC members Mark Seddon (editor, *Tribune*) and Christine Shawcroft.

Department for Work and

Thousands of jobs under threat

PCS NEC member **Rod Bacon** warns that the continuing rationalisation of Jobcentres and benefit offices will lead to major job cuts and a further deterioration in the service to claimants

The article in the *Times* dated October 11, 2002, has finally let the cat out of the bag. Andrew Smith, the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions, is quoted as saying that up to 20,000 public-sector posts in benefit offices and Jobcentres are to go over the next four years. Back-office jobs processing information would go with the introduction of new information technology. One-stop shops for the unemployed and other claimants will replace the integrated local office. Pensioners will have extended one-stop shopping with the creation of third-age centres, where they will be able to claim benefits and receive help and advice from local authorities and voluntary organisations under one roof. The only jobs available in the locality will be in public outlet face-to-face premises, presumably with minimal or no screened protection for staff.

In addition, we are hearing of the simplification of benefit proposals, and the mass introduction of tax credits, processed at large Inland Revenue processing factories. As always, simplification of benefit means reduced benefit for claimants. The recent leak from the Child Support Agency verifies the government thinking.

The job losses will be absorbed by natural wastage. In reality, this means taking the work away from the locality and telling the staff that they will have to move to another location, often many miles away, if they wish to continue working for the Department. It means massive job losses for the local community, where the DWP is a major employer. It means the loss of experience and expertise. It means the collapse of a genuine local public service.

Centralisation

The writing has been on the wall for some considerable time. The centralisation of pensions processing will be the blueprint for Jobcentre Plus. The result of this blueprint will be that large areas of the country – for example, London and the South East – will have no local processing of benefits at all. Pensions staff will not follow the work to pensions processing centres because of the distance. The loss of expertise in the Agency will be catastrophic. Already, we hear that Bath Pensions Centre has only ten experienced staff out of 300. The flagship Burnley Centre has an error rate of 96 per cent. The same thing happened in the CSA. Centralisation led to increased error rate resulting in visiting officers' pro-active work being pushed aside because of referrals and rectifying mistakes.

In the Stage II Jobcentre Plus roll-out, management are already dismantling the local office service, setting up processing

factories and call centres as a back-up to public outlets. This roll-out will spread across the entire country. Case papers storage is being centralised in Lancashire. Once the principle of centralisation has been established, and regardless of the chaos caused, it will be ruthlessly pursued. The economic sense for the government and the employer is to go for massive centralisation on a national scale in areas where wages are low and recruitment/retention problems are non-existent, resulting in a deterioration of local public service, loss of expertise, and loss of job satisfaction.

Privatisation

Take benefit delivery away from the local office network – what do you have left? Labour intervention work, job broking and public advice centres. Given the government's current enthusiasm for Public/Private Finance Initiatives, these services will be ripe for privatisation. We have already seen plans for local authority and voluntary sector involvement in benefit advice – what will stop the government bringing in the private job broking firms to take over the employment tasks? The service, of course, will be geared to profit rather than public need, but since when was the latter a major priority for the employer? The closure of hundreds of offices, many of them Jobcentres, will increase profits at the expense of public accessibility.

The PCS campaign

Left Unity believes that it is essential that the union sees the big picture. The government proposals are a radical and detri-

Reinstate Candy Udwin and Dave Carr!

The appeal against the expulsion from Unison of Candy Udwin, Deputy Regional Convenor, and Dave Carr, UCLH Branch Chair, took place in November. Due to personal circumstances, Candy Udwin was unable to attend. Despite submissions from her representative, Jon Rogers, the Unison appeal panel refused to postpone the hearing.

Udwin and Carr were expelled as part of a political witch-hunt for their role in organising strike action at UCLH in 1998 against privatisation. Their campaign won the best deal in the country for hospital staff facing PFI, and paved the way for the Dudley hospital strike and further concessions for Unison members from the government.



mental change to welfare provision and public service. At present they are bringing in the changes on a piecemeal basis and there is the danger of the union reacting in the same way. A Staffing and a Pensions Campaign has been launched by the Group Executive Committee, but many members and activists do not, at present, see a crisis, despite recruitment bans, movement of work between offices, domino compulsory transfers of staff, local centralisation, etc. We have to unite all the campaigns under the umbrella of 'Public access for all' and 'Defence of a local service'. We need to make the public aware of the threat to their services. We need to put forward an alternative vision of welfare provision, based upon the needs of claimants and applicants, not on cost cutting. We need to link up with all the major welfare rights groups and create a joint campaign. We should be involved in the most intense lobbying of politicians ever undertaken by civil service unions. We should fight staffing cuts by industrial action, if necessary, and seek the support of other sections in PCS and other unions facing the same battle.

The big changes are going to cause chaos for public and members alike. Stress levels for workers will dramatically increase as they try to provide a decent public service and we should organise a national stress survey. Above all, we should be aware that this is not just an industrial campaign in defence of jobs and conditions, it is a political campaign for a better welfare state for all. That is the big picture, and the campaign starts now.

This article was written for 'PCS Left Unity News'

WA

Defend Chris Ford!

On November 11 and 12, 850 staff at 13 benefit offices in central, north-west and west London took strike action in defence of PCS branch secretary Chris Ford, who is threatened with victimisation. In a vindictive act, management in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has charged Chris with gross misconduct. The charge, which carries the threat of dismissal, arises out of the long-running health and safety dispute in the DWP earlier this year, in which Chris played a leading role.

In the aftermath of the dispute, DWP management has carried out an extensive investigation, claiming to have sifted through over 100 allegations of misconduct by PCS members in the course of the seven-month dispute. Of these 'incidents', only seven are being pursued, all of them in the Brent area. Although the police have confirmed in writing that they are not following up any allegations made against Chris, he has been subjected to three separate investigations spread over eight months. Counter-complaints by strikers regarding their treatment by scabs have been ignored by DWP management.

The real purpose of the charges is nothing to do with conduct; the aim is to target Chris as a leading activist, along with Phil Henry, another long-standing union rep in the Brent area. It is no accident that DWP management has picked on these two reps, since PCS members in Brent Pathfinder were at the centre of the dispute, the aim of which was to secure proper safety conditions at work. Chris's branch - the Central and West London branch - was the largest involved in the dispute.

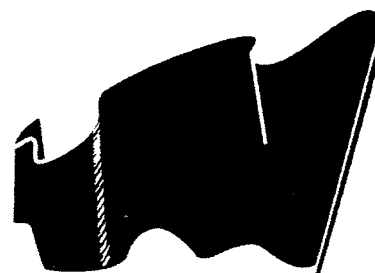
The DWP was formed earlier this year from a merger of the Benefits Agency (BA) and the Employment Service (ES). With the department set to lose thousands of jobs, an essential part of management's strategy is to weaken PCS, and in particular to target effective and popular local reps. The aggressive line taken by DWP management after the dispute is in keeping with the style of industrial relations favoured by both BA and ES management in recent years.

PCS members have responded magnificently to management intimidation, which

included the threat of disciplinary action if they attended union meetings, and voted in a postal ballot by three to one to take action. Although the turn-out in the ballot was relatively low, the action on November 11 and 12 was effective, closing four offices completely, and reducing nine other offices to limited services. One of the strengths of the action was its reliance on an active response to the threat of victimisation, in contrast to defensive methods, such as grievance procedures and industrial tribunal.

Following the action, DWP management sought an injunction to prevent further action. PCS has responded by carrying out a further ballot, starting on December 2 and this time involving 18 offices, calling for further strike action, a work to rule and an overtime ban.

■ Messages of support and collections should be sent to: PCS Branch Secretary, DWP, Government Buildings, Bromyard Avenue, Acton, London W3 7HY. **WA**



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US mid-term elections

Bush goes unchallenged

Mike Calvert

The first and most obvious feature of the November 5 mid-term elections in the United States is the continuing high rate of abstention, which reflects a massive rejection of the candidates of the two establishment parties: the Democrats and the Republicans. The total voter turnout was 38.9 per cent of registered voters. This is just six-tenths of a percentage point higher than the last mid-term elections in 1998, which saw the lowest voter turnout in the post-war era.

Given that a significant percentage of voters do not even bother to register to vote, expressing this same frustration with the lack of choices in the electoral process, it is fair to say that two out of three American adults did not vote. When you take into account the fact that the Democrats and Republicans basically split the vote down the middle, with only a one to two per cent lead for the Republicans, you can see that the so-called 'Republican sweep' of the election was nothing of the sort. The Republicans kept their traditional voting base of about 16 per cent of voting-age Americans. Is that the 'landslide' mandate for Bush's policies loudly proclaimed by the media?

Having said this, an additional factor came into play in this election. Many new, young voters went to the polls for the first time, voting largely for third-party candidates, particularly those of the Green Party. In the state of California, for example, Peter Camejo, the Green Party candidate for governor and former member of the US Socialist Workers Party, won more than five per cent of the vote in this the most populated state of the country. A large number of his 800,000 protest votes came from first-time voters.

The reverse side of the coin (given that the total voter turnout was roughly the same) is the significant drop in the total number of votes for the Democratic Party candidates, both at a local and national level. A large percentage of traditional Democrat voters simply stayed at home in this election, seeing virtually no difference between the so-called 'friends of labour'

and the Republicans. They didn't vote Republican, they didn't vote 'Republican-lite' (as the Democrats are now called), they voted with their feet.

This decline in the Democratic vote and the party's 'lack of identity and vision' has been commented on widely in the media. Every day there are interviews with working class Americans who state, in essence, 'Why vote for the "wannabe" Republicans in the Democratic Party? If I wanted to vote Republican, I would have voted for the true Republicans, not for a poor imitation?'

The Democrats have always been candidates of the ruling class. Their funding comes from the same corporate giants that support the Republicans. But now even the ultra-thin veneer of differences (some real, some orchestrated) that separated the two parties in the past has disappeared. With only an occasional dissident vote, the Democrats in the US Congress have supported Bush's policies. This is true of Bush's tax cut for big business, his undermining of constitutional rights (with the Patriot Act, the Homeland Security Act, and more), and, of course, his war in Afghanistan and now the pending war against Iraq. None of these attacks by the Bush administration could have been implemented without the overwhelming support of the Democratic Party, at all levels.

Following this election, the crisis within the Democratic Party has surfaced for all to see, with some of its leading 'liberals' stating publicly that the Republicans did not win the election, the Democrats lost it. Some, like San Francisco Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, say the task is now to revive 'the heart and soul of the Democratic Party' and show that it is a real alternative to the Republicans. Of course, even this liberal wing has bought into virtually all aspects of the ruling corporate agenda, so this 'revival' – were it to occur, which is not likely – wouldn't produce anything earth-shattering.

Bush has stated openly that the American people in this election have given him a mandate to pursue his 'endless war' policies. The fact is that the Republicans now control both Houses of Congress and feel emboldened to move forward with their destructive agenda, with the Democrats loyally following suit.

All the preparations are being put into place for an invasion of Iraq. Following a good bit of strong-arming by the United States, the United Nations has now given the green light to arms inspections, and to war should Iraq not live up to every jot and tittle demanded of them.

But this is not simply a war against the people of Iraq. It is also a war against the US working class. Using the September 11

attacks as justification, the Bush administration is now driving forward with its plan to create a 'Homeland Security Department', whose first job is to break the 170,000-strong federal employees' union. Administration officials are openly talking about extending the use of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 to other unions – for example to the United Auto Workers when their contract expires next year.

Top officers in the ILWU dockworkers' union report that despite all the talk of a 'tentative agreement' between the union and the Pacific Maritime Association on the issues of the use of new technology and the protection of union jobs, the employers and the government appear to be moving further in the direction of wanting to smash the ILWU altogether – through new demands for concessions and now also through proposed new legislation in Congress. In every arena, workers in the United States can expect a heightened assault on their rights and conquests.

Given the impasse in the electoral process and the lack of a genuine working class alternative (the Labour Party having failed to run candidates), what resistance there is to Bush has mainly taken place on the streets. On October 26, about 80,000 people in San Francisco and 200,000 in Washington DC marched against a new war with Iraq behind banners proclaiming 'No blood for oil!' Smaller demonstrations took place in dozens of cities across the country. In the small agricultural community of Grogan, Indiana – long-considered the heart of Republican country – 1,500 people marched against war. These are the largest demonstrations since the Vietnam war and could mark the beginning of a formidable new anti-war movement. **WA**

The return of Dr Death

News that the well-known war criminal Henry Kissinger has been exhumed from retirement and appointed by George Bush to head an investigation into the September 11 attacks has been greeted with disbelief in some quarters. But Andy Kershaw in a letter to the *Guardian* surely struck the right note: 'So Dr Henry Kissinger is to head an inquiry into mass murders and crimes against humanity . . . Excellent news. I can think of no one better qualified in these matters.'

For details of Kissinger's bloody record in Vietnam, Cambodia, Chile and Cyprus, see <http://www.etan.org/et2001a/february/01-03/00chris.htm>

Self-determination for Chechnya!

Nick Davies examines the background to the Moscow theatre siege

The Russian government's 'solution' to the Moscow theatre siege was blundering, brutal, and surrounded by secrets and lies, but, despite all the evidence to the contrary, it was presented to the Russian people and the rest of the world as a brilliant success. It therefore represented in miniature the approach of every Russian government to the conflict in Chechnya over the past ten years.

Reports suggest that the Chechen hostage takers were still prepared to negotiate when the government ordered the assault. Some hostages had already been released, and, contrary to the allegations made by the government, the Chechens had not carried out their threat to start shooting them. Only one hostage had been shot, when he attacked an armed Chechen woman, and another hostage was wounded in the same incident. At first, even the doctors treating the surviving hostages were not told the name of the gas that had been released into the theatre. Then, when they had been told, they were ordered not to talk to the press. It took reports on blood samples from the bodies of foreigners to bring the truth into the open: that the Russian Special Forces had released into the theatre a lethal concoction consisting chiefly of Fentanyl. This is an opiate gas, which many say should be banned under the International Chemical Weapons Convention. It killed about 120 hostages, with many more left on respirators, their lung function destroyed.

This murderous assault had nothing to do with saving the lives of hostages, and everything to do with preserving the political credibility of President Putin. Putin is yet another Russian politician who has made a career out of being 'tough' on Chechnya, at a cost of tens of thousands of Chechen dead, and hundreds of thousands made homeless. His predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, used the destruction of Chechnya as the means of securing his re-

election in 1996, before he finally disappeared into vodka-soaked oblivion. But even Yeltsin never pulled a stunt like this. However, as the Iraqis can confirm, killing civilians with poison gas is OK if the United States regards you as useful, and so although the European media expressed some unease, in the USA, Putin came up smelling of roses, and it doesn't take a genius to work out why. Putin's reward for a Russian vote in favour of the UN security council resolution on Iraq was a free hand to deal with Chechnya as an 'internal problem', and Putin clearly felt free to take his revenge with a fresh wave of atrocities against Chechen civilians and refugees.

Western complicity in Russian war crimes against Chechnya goes back further than the recent shenanigans in the UN, however. From the start of the Chechen rebellion against Russian rule in 1991, the West, and in particular the USA, has allowed successive Russian governments generous credit facilities, and therefore has effectively subsidised the Russian military campaign. Chechnya lies between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, and is thus an obstacle to any pipeline taking newly extracted Caspian Sea oil westward. It suits 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 a succession of atrocities, including extra-judicial executions, torture, rape and reprisals against whole villages, which have been condemned by organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The next twist in the tale was September 11. In order to build its fraudulent 'coalition against terror', the USA was happy to indulge its own allies who resorted to terror against civilians, and so 'the war against terrorism' became an alibi for war crimes from Colombia to Palestine and from Afghanistan to Chechnya. Putin has jumped on the 'anti-terrorist' bandwagon with a vengeance, claiming a free hand in Chechnya as the price for support for the US attack on Afghanistan. (In fact, there is evidence that Russia has allowed the USA the use of the ports of Murmansk and Vladivostock, as well as the former Soviet rail network, in order to service the military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.)

Preposterously, the Russian government even referred to the Moscow theatre siege as 'Russia's 9/11'. It was nothing of the sort, of course. For over ten years the Chechens have been fighting a war in defence of their right to self-determination, which in their case means the right to separate from Russia. When the USSR fell apart in 1991 its constituent republics asserted the right to independence which, accord-

ing to the Soviet constitution, they had always theoretically enjoyed. Autonomous Republics such as Chechnya were considered to be part of Russia and were not permitted to separate. However the distinction between Soviet Republics and Autonomous Republics was always a fiction: both were victims of Great Russian chauvinism and should have had the right to secede if they wanted to. Putin justifies his actions by smearing the Chechen rebels as al-Qaida, or sympathetic to it. Some Saudi Arabians have tried to muscle in, money has come from Islamic charities, and no doubt the almost friendless Chechens have accepted money and weapons from some fairly questionable sources (although most of their weapons appear to have been sold to them by Russian soldiers), but these are hardly pro-Taliban Muslims if women were taking part in the Moscow theatre siege. It won't escape the notice of Muslims the world over, however, that here is yet another Muslim population being put to the sword, which can only increase the appeal of militant Islam among Chechens or their supporters.

We might not agree with the politics of the present Chechen leadership, most of whom wish only to integrate Chechnya into the global market on their terms. We might not agree with the tactics that leadership adopts in its struggle against the Russians. However, socialists all over the world must oppose the state terror of the Russian government, denounce US and British complicity in that terror, and call for Chechnya to have the right to self-determination.

- Russian troops out of Chechnya!
- Self-determination for Chechnya!
- For an independent socialist Chechnya!

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South Africa

Where now for Cosatu?

Themba Khubeka reports on the recent two-day general strike against privatisation in South Africa and investigates the growing tensions between the trade union movement and the ANC government

On October 1 and 2 this year, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), backed by the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the newly-formed Landless People's Movement (LPM) and Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), held another 'anti-privatisation' strike. Unlike the 2001 strike and previous protests, notably absent were the older civic organisations and the ANC Youth League, which had condemned the strike. On the other hand, the newly-formed hard-left organisations joined forces with Cosatu in mass demos and meetings.

Since 1994, the fate of South Africa's state-owned firms has been central to the ANC-Cosatu relationship. Cosatu believed then that state-owned firms should not be privatised, but rather be turned into strategic developmental agencies. Cosatu also chose a strategy of strongly aligning with the ANC, which involved jointly adopting a rather diluted social democratic accord (called the Reconstruction and Development Programme or RDP) as well as having key trade union leaders in the ANC government as ministers. Using these levers, Cosatu hoped to be a left flank in the ANC; it could perhaps hold the ANC accountable and keep the left agenda alive.

After the second ever non-racial elections in 1999, several ex-Cosatu office bearers continued to hold key positions in government (Trade and Industry, Local Government, and a premiership of Gauteng Province). However, despite this and several further accords, the ANC has had its own way, often ignoring specific commitments made to unions in respect of restructuring state enterprises.

The once ballooning apartheid state sector – Eskom (electricity), Iscor (iron and steel), Telkom (telephones), the airlines and Spoornet (railways) to name a few – had been central supports to capital accumulation in South Africa, although by 1988 the apartheid regime had become committed to the new right, Thatcherite view and promised 'a systematic transfer of appropriate functions, activities and property from the public to the private sector'. The state firms inherited from the old regime had helped build a powerful Afrikaner capitalist class, provided mass employment for poor whites and become bastions of white privilege. For the ANC, these state firms could not be left intact.

When the ANC came to power, the RDP (an accord between labour, civic groups and the ANC) became its major election statement. It promised wide-ranging measures to meet the basic needs of the people, including electricity for all, universal access to telephones, and affordable public transport. The alliance RDP pushed for a mixed

economy: 'We are convinced that neither a command central planning system nor an unfettered free market system can provide adequate solutions to the problems confronting us.' But the alliance accord, a compromise document, argued for a 'thriving private sector, an enabling state and active civil society' based on strong constitutional protections for private property. The ANC, never entirely comfortable with the RDP, stood for vibrant capitalism in which a new black capitalist class could take root. The ANC opposed any ideological commitments: whatever helps 'relieve material hardship and stimulate economic growth and competitiveness' is critical, not 'the legal form that government involvement in economic activity may take'. It argued that 'reducing the public sector in certain areas' must be considered. (RDP, 1994, pp.78-80)

Once adopted, the RDP and the National Framework Agreement of 1995 became holy script for many on the left, who still looked to transforming the ANC. Every year since 1996, Cosatu has threatened the ANC with anti-privatisation strikes. But every major union that took on the ANC in an anti-privatisation strike has been defeated. The anti-privatisation strikes in August 2001 and every other fight by loyal ANC unions against the ANC have moved the organisation further rightward. This has prompted many on the left to suggest that the ANC is dead as a left-wing political vehicle. John Saul, a prominent scholar and ex-ANC loyalist, recently adopted such an analysis, as have many new civics and the Landless People's Movement. Jeremy Cronin, intellectual luminary of the South African Communist Party, spoke critically of the declining internal democracy inside the ANC, describing it as a process of 'Zanu-fication' (a reference to Robert Mugabe's political style) – a comment he later retracted on pain of further public re-priming.

Meanwhile, since 1997, to give one example of ANC restructuring, the ANC government has privatised 30 per cent of Telkom to Malaysian and US firms. Since then, 2.7 million new households have been connected, but of those 80 per cent have been cut off for non-payment of phone bills. Unemployment has risen sharply to 40 per cent since the ANC came to power. Since 1999, Telkom has shed more than 20,000 jobs, and over 2,000 more are to go in 2003. About 100,000 jobs have been lost since the mid-1990s because of privatisation – a common Cosatu-cited statistic. Over 10 million individuals have experienced the trauma of water cut-offs since the ANC assumed power in 1994.

In the run-up to the 2002 strike, Cosatu



broadened its demands to include opposition to municipal forms of privatisation, municipal cost recovery policies and commercialisation of basic services. This is how it put its position:

'Our demands include an end to private provision of basic services, which has seen massive job losses and rising costs of basic services, including education as well as water, electricity, telecommunications and health care. Already, the commercialisation and privatisation of electricity, water and telecommunications have led to mass cut-offs, while the semi-privatisation of education and the health sector has meant that the inequalities inherited from apartheid persist. . . . Attempts to resolve our disputes on these issues with government and business largely failed. In particular, government refused to halt or review its policy on privatisation. As a result, we have officially deadlocked on this issue.'

These demands were supported by the SACP who recently have been trying to reassert their working class credentials by asking Radebe and Fraser-Moleketi, two key government ministers who serve on the SACP central committee, to step down.

Three days before the strike, President Thabo Mbeki, addressed the ANC Policy Conference. 'The ANC is not a vehicle for achieving socialism,' he said, adding that those who disagreed were free to leave the organisation. He then lambasted what he described as an international and national ultra-left conspiracy, which played the same role as the right-wing opposition to the government, since both saw it as their enemy. ANC general secretary Kgalema Motlanthe called the forthcoming action 'a political strike against the government'.

But the utopian reformism of the Cosatu leaders is clearly evident. They hope to pressurise the state and business into a softer approach in the 'boardroom'. The strike was not meant to build independent workers' power so that workers *themselves* can change society in a socialist image, but to promote 'constructive dialogue' and stronger negotiating positions in future talks with employers. As Willi Madisha, the Cosatu president, said in September: 'We realise that one-off strikes will not in themselves bring about the necessary changes in business or government policies. We need to see this strike as part of a broad, long-term campaign to transform the economy and public services. As part of that process, we have agreed with government and within the Alliance to hold a Growth and Development Summit as well as sector summits in the coming year. But you won't win in the boardroom what you can't win in the streets. Only if we can make the October strike a massive success can

we ensure that business and government take the steps we need for a better life for all.'

The strike

Cosatu expected nearly two million workers to heed the call, but according to sympathetic estimates only 60 per cent of the Cosatu membership heeded the call. The South African National Civics Organisation (Sanco), which has been de-radicalised, broke ranks with its leftist allies because it saw the strike as 'unjustified and misguided'. Yet in the previous anti-privatisation strike in August last year Sanco supported Cosatu. The ANC Youth league virulently denounced the Cosatu leaders, calling for rank-and-file unionists to expel their leaders. The ANC not only condemned the strike as a failure, but got key ex-lefties now high up in the state (government ministers Ronnie Kasrils, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi and Alec Erwin) to personally denounce it as senseless and merely providing opportunities for the loony left and the right-wing.

Despite the disappointing national turnout, on day one of the strike in Johannesburg the mood was strikingly militant and the significance of the strike may have to be judged qualitatively rather than by sheer numbers alone. For example, thousands of rank-and-file workers gathered at City Library Gardens in Johannesburg. Unusually, the biggest battalions of workers were miners and metalworkers, but sizeable groups of teachers and municipal workers were visible. By mid-morning a huge crowd of 70,000 sang very angry revolutionary songs punctuated by slogans attacking the sell-outs. They were shouting at some of their ex-comrades, now turned directors and premiers: 'Mbeki bought you', 'shut up capitalist stooge' and 'asikufuni' ('we don't need you'). Of President Mbeki, they sang: 'Thabo does not know what he wants, we gave him a hand, we gave him the whole arm, we gave him our breasts and he still doesn't know what he wants.' There were placards saying 'Privatisation is born-again apartheid', and official Cosatu placards saying 'We did not fight for liberation so that we can sell the assets we won to the highest bidder.'

Present for the first time were contingents of more outspokenly radical township organisations of the unemployed, and of landless and homeless people – the red-shirted Landless People's Movement and the community-based Anti-Privatisation Forum, which has formed branches nation-wide to speak for and mobilise millions of debt-ridden household defaulters suffering electricity and water cut-offs and forcible evictions from their homes. The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), opponents of the state's HIV/Aids policies, also supported the

Cosatu strike, as did the student organisations Cosas and Sasco. But government leaders saw organisations such as the LPM and the APF as 'loony', although these two movements organised a 20,000-strong march against the World Summit on Sustainable Development and are in the lead on most working class social issues.

After the strike

In the days after the strike, Cosatu held back for a week of cooling off, hoping for some softening of the ANC's position, but it also began a predictable series of disclaimers and declarations of loyalty to the ANC. 'Cosatu has never accused the ANC of being neo-liberal,' said an article in *Cosatu Weekly* on October 11. 'No policy or statement can be produced to back up such a charge. We have pointed out that certain aspects of the government economic policies are neo-liberal but there is a vast difference between these two statements. Secondly, Cosatu has never questioned the ANC's bona fides or its commitment to the working class and the poor.'

Also on October 11, in the *Mail and Guardian*, Willi Madisha reassured the government that the Cosatu leadership had no political ambitions, as some senior ANC people had alleged, ruling out the nightmare prospect of Cosatu splitting and forming a workers' party: 'Politics is not our interest. Some of us who were on ANC parliamentary lists in 1999 wrote letters to say we were not interested.'

Cosatu issued diplomatically worded statements, which nevertheless capture the pathetic theatrical tone of current alliance politics surrounding the strike: 'We are concerned that the President's public attacks on an alliance partner, wrongly accusing us of all manner of things, may introduce a new culture into the liberation movement. Some unthinking supporters may interpret these attacks as meaning that trade unions and citizens have no right to disagree with the government on specific issues or exercise their constitutional right to protest, because if they do they are working to unseat the government and therefore must be themselves smashed. . . . It may have communicated a message that criticism from the left of the President is equal to an ultra-left stance.'

Cosatu's general secretary, Vavi, answered the government's charges of ultra-leftism as follows: 'If protesting against electricity cut-offs in Soweto is to be an ultra-left, then we are ultra-left; if protesting against one million job losses is to be an ultra-left then we are bound to be ultra-left.' But Vavi affirmed that they were 'not questioning the good intentions of the government and its aim of building a better life for all'. 'We do not doubt the bona fide of the government,' he insisted, 'but when we disagree on some

policies we must be able to say it and there is nothing counter-revolutionary in that.'

The 'loony' aspect of this is clear enough, since it is implied that the ANC is still a revolutionary organisation opposed to 'counter-revolution'. But this kind of rhetoric reveals clearly that the Cosatu leaders still think it is just a question of specific differences on concrete policies. Moreover, the political theatre also shows just how diabolic the ANC cloaking itself as a genuine (revolutionary) people's organisation has become. A month after the general strike and a day after the devastating Aids report was released, Mbeki graced the front pages of national newspapers with a dare to Bush to beat him at a round of golf.

Meanwhile, overlapping the privatisation and alliance disputes, Madisha also warned the state to stay out of the unions. According to the *Mail and Guardian*, five Cosatu affiliates have reported being infiltrated by intelligence operatives in an attempt to weaken

them.

Realism or historical inertia?

The turnout and tenor of the lively mass assemblies during the strike suggest that millions of workers in South Africa are not blindly attached to the ANC. Their anger with Mbeki is visceral and political, and in this regard the ANC is right to see the strike as political. Over one million workers supported the strike, lost wages and faced the prospect of being vilified as disloyal citizens by the ANC.

The aggressive stance of the ANC government leaves Cosatu leaders with very few options: either grovel (as Cronin did) and rejoin the pseudo-revolutionary family, or get out. Cosatu has to accept that the ANC will not change its economic policy. Failure to see this reality will lead to Cosatu advising its members to vote in the 2004 elections for the ANC – the same party they have accused of bringing poverty and joblessness to the masses.

From the ANC perspective, it wants to draw out and isolate the hard left now before it gets any stronger. This explains its vitriol. The ANC also has to renew its image and its monopoly as 'the only true and responsible champion of the poor'; hence it must denounce all non-ANC champions as simultaneously 'ultra-left' and right-wing reactionary. There is no space for others.

The leadership of Cosatu needs to make a realistic assessment of the ANC: if the democratic trade union movement is to survive it can only do so as a fighting organisation, in alliance with the real left, and only if it allows the angry voices of the grassroots to be heard. Meanwhile, worsening conditions for the working class and new political challengers from the hard left (the APF and the LPM) threaten to overtake Cosatu and, in the long-run, the ANC. With the next general election about 18 months away, a period of heightened class struggle and potential political gains for the left has opened up in South Africa. **WA**

Argentina

Solidarity Campaign

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Zanon – a year of occupation

Zanon is a ceramics factory in Neuquén, south-west Argentina. October 1, 2002, marked the first anniversary of the workers taking control of the plant after the management attempted to sack nearly 50 per cent of the workforce. Four months after the start of the occupation the workers re-established production. They are now able to pay themselves wages of \$800 per month – everyone gets the same amount, even previously unemployed workers who have recently been taken on.

There are about 150 workplaces under occupation in Argentina – some of them managed as co-operatives – and Zanon has been an example for workers throughout the country. The Zanon workers have faced several attempts to evict them, which they have successfully prevented. They have won powerful support from other workers in the community – from teachers, health sector workers, unemployed organisations and the Mapuche indigenous population of the region.

A Zanon worker and the union lawyer are currently on a speaking tour of Italy at the invitation of trade unions. They will make a brief visit to London in December and will speak at a public meeting called by the Argentina Solidarity Campaign (see advert for details).

The strange case of Arthur Ransome

Richard Price

In July this year, the *Observer* ran a story that caused a ripple of surprise and dismay on the left.¹ Papers released by the Public Record Office revealed that Arthur Ransome was a British agent. According to the PRO papers, Ransome, who sent favourable reports of the Bolsheviks to the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Observer* and the *Daily News*, was recruited to the Secret Intelligence Service (forerunner of MI6) by Clifford Sharp, who was editor of the Fabian *New Statesman* from 1913 to 1931, and was assigned the code number S76.

For the left, Ransome has always been something of an enigma. Between 1917 and 1921, he sent frequent reports that gave a truthful account of the situation in Russia, and wrote two pamphlets defending the Bolshevik revolution. He was on friendly terms with a number of the Bolshevik leaders, shared a house with Karl Radek for a while, and married Trotsky's secretary. Once back in Britain he settled down to life with Evgenia in the Lake District, and wrote 12 children's books, of which *Swallows and Amazons* is the most famous. In a long life – he died in 1967 aged 83 – he showed little interest in politics, apart from during this short period, and scarcely wrote about Russia again, except in his posthumously published *Autobiography*.² The great events that shook Europe both before and after Ransome's experiences in Russia seem to have passed him by.

On the face of it, there is something odd about this. It's hard to think of another person among the small British, American and European expatriate community who lived through the heroic period of the Russian Revolution, and then turned his back so completely upon subsequent events. For many, from hostile critics to fellow travellers and converts, the fate of the Russian Revolution remained an abiding interest.

Ransome's biographer and most writers on the left have put this down to Ransome's old-fashioned decent liberalism, and left

it at that. Because Ransome was accused by right-wingers of Bolshevik sympathies, they have assumed nothing more complex lay beneath the surface. Writing the introduction to the 1992 edition of Ransome's revolutionary pamphlets, Paul Foot of the SWP wrote: 'The Russian Revolution is not just the most important event of the 20th century. It is a beacon for the 21st. For English-speaking socialists there is no more eloquent or accurate assertion of that than these passionate essays by one of the century's great writers.'³ The theoretical journal of the spook-obsessed WRP gave Ransome a similarly clean bill of health, describing him as 'a most fervent supporter of the Bolshevik Revolution and its leaders'.⁴

Are we now to assume that Ransome's benevolent attitude towards the Bolsheviks was just a smokescreen for espionage? The truth, I think, is likely to be more complex. But there are enough clues in the published record, even if they have been overlooked by most writers, to give a good indication where Ransome's motives lay, and what was the nature of his relationship with British intelligence.

Prior to and during the First World War, the attentions of Britain's secret services were primarily directed against its main military rival, Germany. Intelligence gathering in those days was something of a cottage industry, under-resourced and controlled by an old-boy network. Its resources in a distant – if Allied – country like Russia were correspondingly weak, and relied to a significant degree on informal sources, of which foreign correspondents were frequently the best placed.

Ransome first went to Russia in 1913, and his chief motive appears to have been unambiguous – to escape his unhappy first marriage. Even in Russia, he wrote to his mother that he lived 'in constant terror of the post'⁵ lest he receive a letter from his wife – hardly the steeled nerves needed by a career agent, you would have thought! He sailed back to Britain after war broke out to try and gain a post as foreign correspondent of a British newspaper in Russia. He returned to Russia on December 30, 1914, with a commission to write a history of Russia, but as yet no newspaper work. After several months spent writing fiction, he took over as correspondent for the *Daily News*, when the incumbent fell ill.

In January 1916, Ransome submitted a written proposal to the British Embassy that a news agency be established in Russia to service Russian newspapers with news from the western front, and thus counter German propaganda. The agency, initially named the Anglo-Russian Bureau and then renamed the British Propaganda

Office, was set up in Petrograd with funds from British intelligence. It was run in Moscow by Acting-Consul General and British agent Robert Bruce Lockhart. Returning to Britain for a short visit in November 1916, Ransome briefed the Foreign Office on the situation in Russia which he argued was likely to lead to major upheavals the following year. At this stage he was still firmly committed to leaving Russia in the war on the side of Britain.⁷

Ransome was present when the February Revolution broke out. He was enthusiastically supportive, from the conviction that a Russia rid of incompetent Tsarism would be a worthy ally in the fight against 'Prussianism', and urged Britain to support Prince Lvov's provisional government. Throughout the spring and summer he hoped that Russia would be galvanised into redoubled war effort, although he saw Milyukov's Cadet Party as a source of disunity. He referred to Lenin and the Bolsheviks, meanwhile, as the 'extremists', and hoped that somehow Kerensky could rally the country, oblivious to the Allies' cover support for Kornilov. Weakened by dysentery, Ransome returned to Britain in October, and as a result missed the Bolshevik insurrection four weeks later. Following an interview with right-wing Foreign Secretary Lord Robert Cecil, Ransome left for Russia in December, entrusted with a diplomatic bag to deliver in Stockholm, and armed with a letter of introduction to the Bolsheviks written by the London-based exile Theodore Rothstein.

On his return, Ransome swiftly got to meet Trotsky. Realising further Russian involvement in the war was hopeless, his reports began to be more favourable to the Bolsheviks. One of Ransome's reports on the Bolsheviks' policy at Brest-Litovsk led the British War Cabinet, although it considered Ransome 'in full sympathy with the Bolshevik movement', to write to the British ambassador in Russia, Sir George Buchanan, to ask Ransome to act as an intermediary with the Bolsheviks.⁸ But while the ambassador was involved in this effort, Colonel Know, the military attaché and 'a rabid interventionist', told Ransome at one meeting that he should be shot.⁹

By this time, Edgar Sisson, an American journalist and secret agent in Petrograd, suspected that Ransome was working for British intelligence. But while Ransome disliked Sisson, he got on well with Colonel Raymond Robins, the head of the American Red Cross, who was also an unofficial US agent. Robins held the view that a Bolshevik-led Russia would be a thorn in the side of Germany, and that consequently the Allies should reach an understanding with them.¹⁰ By early 1918,

Ransome had struck up a friendly acquaintance with Karl Radek, was seeing Trotsky nearly every day, and had begun his relationship with Trotsky's secretary, Evgenia Petrovna Shelepina.

By January, Lockhart was also back in Russia as the head of the British Mission, responsible directly to Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, and for several months he shared Ransome's view that Britain should co-operate with the Bolsheviks. The two met almost daily, and both believed that with Germany threatening to march once more on Petrograd, it might be possible to secure an understanding between the Allies and the Bolsheviks. Lockhart wrote of Ransome in his memoirs that: '... if not a member of our mission, [he] was something more than a visitor... I championed him resolutely against the secret service idiots who later tried to denounce him as a Bolshevik agent.'¹¹ Ransome, meanwhile, was sharing a house with Radek and his family.

The attempts by Ransome, Lockhart and Robins to achieve an agreement between the Allies and the Bolsheviks failed. 'To bring about conciliation between Soviet Russia and the Western Powers, as Colonel Robins, Arthur Ransome and I were trying to do, was becoming increasingly impossible,' wrote *Manchester Guardian* correspondent M. Philips Price.¹² By late July, Lockhart, in spite of his reservations, had swung behind the policy of intervention, and was responsible for supplying the 'master spy' – or as Ransome's biographer calls him, the 'clownishly incompetent' – Sidney Reilly with millions of roubles to distribute to counter-revolutionaries.¹³ On one occasion, Ransome met with both Lockhart and Reilly.¹⁴ According to Lockhart, Ransome believed intervention would overthrow the Bolsheviks. 'Believing that the Allies would land in force,' Lockhart wrote, 'we were convinced that the Bolsheviks would be unable to offer a serious resistance. Even Ransome, whose opposition to intervention without Bolshevik consent had remained constant, told us that "the show was over" and began to make preparations to leave.'¹⁵ Ransome arranged through Lockhart to put Evgenia (to whom he wasn't yet married) on his passport, although they never needed to use it.

Ransome arrived in Stockholm on August 5, 1918, just after the British seizure of Archangel. In Stockholm, he met the British minister to Sweden, who smoothed Ransome's path by assuring a hostile Foreign Office that, if allowed to use Sweden as a base, he could provide excellent information. To this end, Ransome wrote two intelligence reports for the Foreign Office.¹⁶ As if to illustrate just how schizo-

phrenic British policy was towards Russia at this point, the Foreign Office, at the same time as it was seeking to use Ransome, was also considering trying him for treason, as well as conducting its own private conflict with the War Office. Sidney Reilly would experience similar treatment when he returned to Britain in October: '... such was the lack of inter-departmental liaison in Whitehall that, while Cumming was busy arranging for him to be awarded the M.C., the Foreign Office was doubting his bonafides and Bruce Lockhart had to vouch for his loyalty.'¹⁷

Meanwhile, the political situation was moving rapidly and becoming increasingly unstable. In June, the revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion took place. In July, there was the Left SR attempt at insurrection in Mos-



Arthur Ransome

cow, the White Guard revolt at Yaroslavl, and the execution of the Russian royal family at Ekaterinburg. On August 31, Dora Kaplan attempted to assassinate Lenin. On the same day, Lockhart was arrested on suspicion of plotting against the regime. He was later released, re-arrested and released again.

As the main neutral capital of the Baltic, Stockholm was a centre of espionage and counter-revolutionary plots. In September, Ransome was approached by a man called Wyatt on behalf of the Foreign Office to act as an agent. While Ransome referred to this as a 'silly proposal' in his *Autobiography*, in his diary he simply recorded: 'Wyatt made his proposal.' Ransome's biographer writes: 'To be sure, Arthur had already, unpaid, passed on intelligence to HMG and acted as an unofficial intermediary; but it is clear that Wyatt had gone beyond the line. Where Arthur drew that line is nevertheless far from clear.'¹⁸ (Is Brogan hinting here at other material he chose not to include?)

Shortly after his meeting with Wyatt, around the time that Lockhart arrived in Stockholm after his release, Ransome had several meetings with Clifford Sharp, the editor of the *New Statesman*, who in wartime was functioning as the head of Foreign Office intelligence in Stockholm.

Evgenia was meanwhile working for Litvinov, the Russian envoy in Stockholm. Litvinov was expelled from Sweden at the beginning of 1919, and Evgenia returned with him to Russia. Ransome was also expelled, as a result of rumours of his unreliability spread by the US Embassy,¹⁹ and approached Sharp to see if he should follow her. 'I saw Clifford Sharp of the *New Statesman*,' Ransome recalled, 'who was the head of our information service [sic] in Sweden, and asked him to find out definitely whether the Foreign Office wanted me to go back into Russia or not. If they did, I felt I had no right to refuse. The answer was that they thought it would be worthwhile for me to go.'²⁰ And this is the nearest we get to a smoking gun.

Ransome stayed in Russia till March, and the material he used to write *Six Weeks in Russia in 1919* was also used for a report he made to the Foreign Office.²¹ Although Trotsky initially treated him as a spy,²² Ransome was warmly received by Lenin, and left on good terms with the Russian leadership. Back in England, he was met at King's Cross by a plainclothes policeman, and taken for a hostile interview with Sir Basil Thomson, the head of the Special Branch. Only after a second meeting did the left hand of the British state get back in gear with the right hand, and Thomson became another of Ransome's friends in high places. When he delivered his report to the Foreign Office, he was again met frostily, with one official warning him: 'We could damn you with the Left if we let it be known that you have been working with us.'²³ In the event, his report seems to have been disregarded.

Between 1917 and 1921, Ransome had often found himself at the centre of events. After that time, although he continued to send reports from Riga and Reval for a number of years, and visited Russia for the *Guardian* until 1928, he was never again in the political limelight. Part of this was undoubtedly intentional, worried as he was about the position of both Evgenia in Britain – they weren't married until his divorce came through in 1924 – and later of her family in Russia. He was also no doubt less than impressed by his dealings with rival branches of the British state. In any case, with the end of the civil war, relations between Britain and Russia gradually thawed, with a trade agreement signed in 1921 and the MacDonald government's recognition of the Soviet Union in 1924.

To recap: Ransome established a news agency with funds from British intelligence; he briefed, wrote reports for, and passed on intelligence information to leading British politicians; he acted as a diplomatic courier, and as an intermediary; he mixed in circles involving proven British agents; and he was suspected of being an agent by both US intelligence and some leading Bolsheviks. In his *Autobiography*, Ransome tends to downplay this side of his life, while bringing to the foreground the hostility he encountered from those who thought he had 'gone native' and joined the Bolsheviks.

From the above, the view that Ransome was *simply* a well intentioned if naive liberal seems itself naive. Whether or not Ransome considered himself, formally speaking, an agent, there seems little doubt that for several years he carried out a number of activities on behalf of the British Foreign Office and British intelligence, alongside his journalism.

So how does this square with the respect and friendship Ransome openly held towards a number of leading Bolsheviks; the sympathetic and sometimes enthusiastic account of Soviet power in his pamphlets of 1919-20; and the level of suspicion he aroused in British diplomatic and intelligence circles? If this were all just an elaborate cover for espionage, it would have required the kind of monumental duplicity to which Ransome was temperamentally unsuited. David Holloway, reviewing Ransome's *Autobiography* in the *Daily Telegraph*, made the intriguing comment: 'I have a feeling that he was something perilously close to a double agent.'²⁴ But if he can be described as a double agent, it is one of a peculiar kind – one that attempts to bring two sides together.

To make judgements about Ransome based on what competing wings of the British state thought about him is a risky business. Much of the British effort in Russia manifested a severe lack of understanding of the situation, compounded by high degree of incompetence, deeply reactionary politics and inter-departmental rivalry. It would certainly be wrong to underestimate quite how cranky some sections of British intelligence were at this time. For example, papers recently released by the Public Record Office show that MI6 compiled a file hundreds of pages thick on Churchill's eccentric pro-Bolshevik cousin, the sculptor, Clare Sheridan.²⁵

The most persuasive explanation is that while Ransome carried out various intelligence-related activities, the opinions he expressed were nonetheless genuine. Looking back four decades after he wrote *Six Weeks in Russia in 1919* he had no regrets: 'I am glad I wrote that little book

and I think it will remain of interest, as would, if we had it, the book of any Englishman who in 1789 had been able to meet and talk of what they were doing, with Robespierre, Danton, Marat, and Desmoulins. In the eyes of history the names of Lenin, Bukharin, Trotsky and Radek will surely rank with these.'²⁶ The omission of Stalin from the list is also significant.

While Paul Foot makes Ransome out to be a quasi-Bolshevik,²⁷ it would be more accurate to say that he considered soviet power to be the best form of rule for *Russian* conditions. At no time did he consider himself a socialist; he showed no interest in the Labour movement, nor did he make any attempt to join the Communist Party when he returned to live in Britain.

After the October Revolution, Ransome came round to the view that Britain should learn to live with the Bolsheviks because he considered them the only reliable opponents of Germany within Russia. To become embroiled in intervention in Russia while still fighting Germany in the west could prove fatally dangerous to British interests. That this was Ransome's view is borne out by everyone, right or left, that knew him at the time. Once it became clear to him that Russia couldn't continue with the war, he viewed the reconstruction of Russia as central to future stability in Europe.

In 1918, a majority in British ruling circles was temporarily mobilised behind intervention, spurred on by ultra-reactionaries like Churchill and Curzon, who saw it as an essential component of the world war. By 1920, another more pragmatic view had begun to emerge, fuelled in part by rising opposition to intervention in the trade unions and the Labour Party. By taking a more positive approach, Bolshevism could be domesticated, and the threat of revolution in the west would recede. Ethel Snowden, the wife of right-wing Labour leader Philip Snowden, visited Russia in 1920, and came back with the view that: 'When fear is removed from their hearts, the fountains of internal criticism will once more begin to play upon the Russian government. Its rough edges will be smoothed, its corners rubbed off. It will be obliged by facts and circumstances to move still further along the path of honourable compromise with the outside world. There will be much more personal freedom, less hunger, more happiness; at least, so I hope and believe.' Similar views were expressed contemporaneously by H.G. Wells, George Lansbury and J.M. Keynes.²⁸

Although Ransome was much more sympathetic to Bolshevism than many of those around him, the strategic view of Britain's relationship with Russia he expressed was

similar to that expressed a century later by people as far from Bolshevism as Lockhart and Sharp, viewed from the respective. Ransome was the natural bearer of the revolutionary message. He wrote about it. Nor can he be convicted of betraying a cause he had subscribed to ideologically. If anything he was the advance guard of pragmatism towards the Soviet Union.

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The roots of political Islam

The Clash of Fundamentalisms

By Tariq Ali

Verso, 2002, 342pp, £15.00

Nick Davies

After September 11 it seemed that all of a sudden everyone was becoming an expert on Islam. Books on Islam and the Muslim-inhabited world were, we were told, flying off the shelves of bookshops in London and New York. But among what Tariq Ali calls the 'state-intellectuals', the servants of the US state machine, or among what he refers to as the 'power-intellectuals', that machine's propagandists in the mass media, and their respective equivalents in London, there was scant evidence of this new-found curiosity.

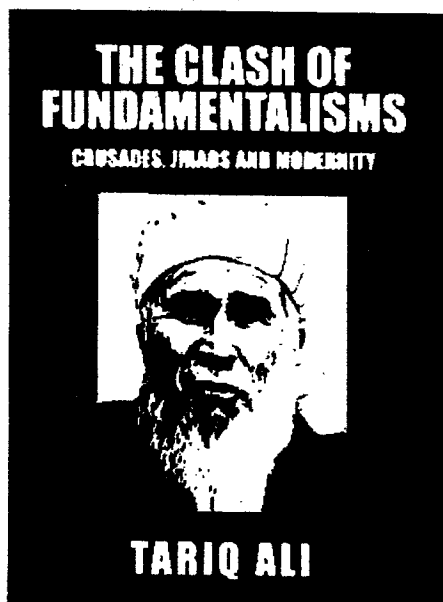
'Islam is a peaceful religion,' we were told. 'We seek no quarrel with Islam,' claimed those who wanted to bomb Afghanistan to a pulp. No doubt this was in order to allow the resumption of peaceful and friendly co-operation between the USA and the Muslim-inhabited world so rudely interrupted by the attack on the twin towers. This was about as subtle as it got, however. The other two arguments – both, in fact, crude variants of the first – were: 'Islam is a backward religion and therefore Muslims need to be yanked into the twenty-first century' (How flattening the few remaining buildings in Afghanistan was going to achieve this was never fully explained) or, 'Islam is intrinsically hostile to the West and therefore . . .' and so on and so forth. Antidotes to this self-serving cocktail of banality and ignorance are difficult to come by, but *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* does the job.

The title is an ironic reference to the thesis of Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, elaborated in his book *The Clash of Civilisations*. Huntington, a former expert in counter-insurgency for the Johnson administration, argued that the end of the cold war brought an end to all ideological disputes. Henceforth, conflict would be along cultural, not economic or political lines. He listed a number of different cultures, with the major divide being between 'the West and the rest' because only the West valued 'individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets'. As Tariq Ali points out, Huntington's recent writings, in which he attributes 'the age of Muslim wars' (sic) to political factors rather than those of religious doctrine, contradict his original thesis. Into Huntington's shoes has stepped his fellow state-intellectual Francis Fukuyama, for whom September 11 was an assault against Western values of modernity and tolerance. While Huntington and Fukuyama only appear by name towards the end of *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, the book is a ferocious, informative and well-argued attack on the current US assault on the Muslim-inhab-

ited world to which they give intellectual justification, and specifically on the audacious hypocrisy at the heart of it. The central theme of the book is how US imperialism, the other 'fundamentalism' of the title, has, in pursuit of its own interests, thrown money and weapons at the most conservative, reactionary, not to say barbaric political forces it can find, and while the current conflict between these two fundamentalisms could bring about the death of millions, they have spent the past fifty years entwined in a reactionary double-helix, seeking to undermine, destabilise and destroy every attempt at secular, reforming, socialist, or even liberal government in the Muslim-inhabited world. It is this phenomenon, combined with, and intimately connected to, the support for the state of Israel that has enabled the United States to impose its will on the Middle East.

Let us begin with Arabia, in 1740. A preacher, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, had just been kicked out of the oasis-town of Uyayna by the Emir, who feared that his own position might be undermined by a growing popular revolt against the implementation of an ultra-strict interpretation by Ibn Wahhab of Islamic law: stoning, amputation and the like. Ibn Wahhab believed that the ruling Ottoman Empire was far too lax in its interpretation of Islam. He harked back to an imaginary seventh-century golden age of Islam. Four years later, he had teamed up with a notorious bandit-emir, Muhammad Ibn Saud, providing the latter with a religious justification for his *modus operandi* of war, looting, political repression, and the conquest of other Arabian tribes. The alliance was sealed by the marriage of one of Ibn Wahhab's daughters to Ibn Saud. However, the blend of religious bigotry and political opportunism that was the Saud-Wahhabi alliance had to bide its time. Only with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, and with the aid of the British and later the USA, was Ibn Saud's descendant of the same name able to establish himself as a regional strongman, gaining control of virtually all of Arabia. Knowing what was in store from a Wahhabi dictatorship, many fled to Iraq or Syria. Once oil was discovered in the 1930s, the Saudis had no scruples about doing business with infidels in the USA, and those same infidels had a staunch ally against the evils of communism or secular nationalism.

Meanwhile, in 1940s British India. Maulana Abul Ala Maudadi was forming Jamaat-e-Islami (the Islamic Party) in opposition to Jinnah's Muslim League, which he despised as secular and blasphemous. Maudadi was influenced by the views of Ibn Wahhab, and the links between



Maudadi and Saudi theologians were formalised after Pakistan's independence in 1947. Pakistan became a key US ally in the cold war and so Wahhabism, the JI, and the Egyptian and anti-Nasser Muslim Brothers became Washington's allies against communism and radical nationalism. As Tariq Ali puts it: 'all the armed Sunni groups who, at the time of writing, are engaged in the jihad against other Muslims and the Great Satan are the children of this constellation'. What transformed the situation was the coming to power of general Zia, who implemented a form of *sharia*, thus giving comfort and encouragement to JI which grew in influence under his rule, but also to a whole number of other Islamic groups. Zia was the key ally of the US in its covert campaign against the USSR in Afghanistan, and so the combination of his patronage, and the steady flow of US money and political support meant that Pakistan-based militant Islamic groups have mushroomed in the last twenty years. Tariq Ali singles out as a creation of the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence service, the small but politically influential Ahle-Hadis, which wants the Saudi model in Pakistan but without the monarchy, and also the Harkatul Ansar, once funded by the USA and backed by the ISI, only to be declared a terrorist organisation by the USA in 2001. Its armed wing, Lashkar-I-Tayyaba, is the leading Islamic militia operating inside Kashmir. Of course, what has transformed the situation still further is the acquisition by Pakistan of nuclear weapons, and the influence of extreme Islamic militancy in the ISI and the armed forces.

'Pakistan was the condom the Americans needed to enter Afghanistan,' declared an obviously embittered retired general to the author, and indeed, Afghanistan was where the action was. We now know that the USA provoked the Soviet Union into invading Afghanistan and the Soviet leadership lumbered into the trap. The enabled Washington to transform what had hitherto been a relatively low-key civil war against the pro-Soviet government into a full-blown jihad against foreign occupiers. Millions of dollars were thrown at an international network of Islamic militia, while any number of reactionary brigands were having their pictures taken with Thatcher, Reagan or Bush Snr. The best-known of these recipients of CIA largesse is a former Saudi building tycoon, Osama bin Laden. Was this holy warrior aware, however, that in Afghanistan, alongside their Egyptian, Saudi and Pakistani counterparts there were present the Israeli intelligence services? Tariq Ali maintains that they were there, and tells the chilling story of the Pakistani journalist who stumbled across

them in the Intercontinental Hotel in Peshawar. These groups were orphaned, so to speak, when the USA lost interest in Afghanistan and, by extension, Pakistan, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and enraged when the USA, in pursuit of its war against the new enemy, Iraq, stationed troops in Saudi Arabia. The fundamentalist diaspora then went on to create mayhem in Pakistan, but also in Egypt, Algeria, the Philippines, Sudan, and elsewhere. In Afghanistan, as we know, the factions turned on each other and into the vacuum stepped the ISI-trained Taliban, the military wing, loosely speaking, of the Deobandi, a bleakly sectarian strain of Sunni Islam which thinks that even the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia have gone soft, and which was denounced by Sunni clerics in Cairo and Shi'ite theologians in Iran as a 'disgrace to the Prophet'.

But what of Iraq, the pulverisation of which is next on Bush's 'to do' list? Saddam Hussein is a secular dictator, not a fundamentalist. But while eloquently and passionately demolishing the rotten edifice of lies, misinformation, material omissions, hypocrisy and double standards that pass for the Bush-Blair case for war on Iraq, and the justification for the mass murder of Iraqi civilians over the past ten years, Tariq Ali points out the considerable attractions which Saddam held for the USA. These are the abandonment of the leftist pan-Arabism that characterised the early Ba'ath Party in favour of what he refers to as Ba'athism's 'gangster wing', the annihilation of the Iraqi Communist Party and

other independent leftists and trade unionists, and hostility towards Iran, fellow-member of the 'axis of evil', after 1979 the USA's greatest enemy in the Middle East, and which is the subject of possibly the most interesting chapter in this book: 'The Anti-Imperialism of Fools'.

It is in this chapter that Tariq Ali attempts an explanation of the rise of political Islam and a political evaluation of it, or at least the Iranian Shi'ite variant of it. Obviously, it did not emerge from thin air. It was, in fact, a largely urban phenomenon. The Shah's 1960s land reform had distributed land to some peasants but the rest had been driven off the land and had fled to the cities. Despite the considerable industrialisation at the time, the factories could not absorb all these ex-peasants. They were forced into a marginal existence, making a living where they could in the informal economy. The Shah's economic reforms had undermined to some extent the urban bazaar class. These victims of the Shah's 'White Revolution' provided the human raw materials for the Islamic Republic. Why was there an Islamic Republic at all? In 1951 a secular-liberal-nationalist regime led by Mossadegh had swept to power only to be removed in 1953 by a counter-coup organised by British intelligence and the CIA, with the Shah as its figurehead. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s heavy repression was meted out to the Stalinist Tudeh Party and thousands of its members, as well as other leftists and dissident intellectuals who were imprisoned or driven into exile. Given the defeat of Mossadegh's

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project, the weakness of the left, and the fact that the secular elements in Iranian society were either implicated in the Shah's regime or exiled (depending on their politics), it is not surprising that at that time and in that context, the redemptive and egalitarian message of radical Shi'ism became the channel for the massive popular discontent which erupted. To a large extent, this explanation serves for the rise of militant Islam in other places. Militant Islam is a result of the failure, be it real or perceived, of the secular nationalist or socialist project in Egypt, Algeria and elsewhere. This failure has three principal causes: firstly, the ruthless and determined attempts of the USA in particular to destroy that project; secondly, the end of the post-war economic boom which removed much of the scope which had existed for strategies for independent economic development and the expansion of health, education and anti-poverty programmes; and thirdly, the corruption, lassitude and general spinelessness of many of the leaders in whom the masses had placed their hopes. The other factors are the ongoing assault on Muslims of many countries by the paramount imperialist power and its surrogate, Israel, and, of course, the racism experienced by Muslim communities in Western Europe.

But of course, militant Islam did not always have its own way in the turmoil of 1979. There were still some leftists in Iran, and some returned from exile when the Shah was deposed. Other, new forces, such as the militant oilworkers, had emerged in the struggle against the Shah. Many tried to stand up to the armed thugs of the revolutionary guards, and paid with their lives, or a spell of torture in Evin prison, followed, if they survived, by exile. Tariq Ali is unsparing in his criticism of those in the Iranian left, principally the Tudeh Party, who took at face value the clergy's references to a 'classless society', failed to appreciate that the mobilisations outside the US embassy were a cover to push through deeply reactionary social policies, and denounced as 'bourgeois' the 20,000 women who demonstrated against the edict that they veil themselves. He makes the acid remark that these leftists obviously believed that the masses following Khomeini were as opportunist as they were, and were not sincere in their chants of 'God is great'. The Tudeh Party discovered too late, and to its cost, that the followers of Khomeini believed every word of it.

While the Iranian left cannot be excused for its stance on the Islamic Republic, it is possible to see how militant Islam, though opposed to socialism and secular nationalism could also fill the space those move-

ments had occupied, or would have occupied had they been strong enough. In his lectures to theology students in the 1960s and 70s, Ayatollah Khomeini preached a message that, while short on specifics was long on populist rhetoric. He accused the Shah of selling the country out to the USA, favouring the rich and exploiting the poor, and wasting resources on palaces and weapons. He advocated 'Islamic justice' to help workers and poor farmers and to stamp out corruption. The fact that the Islamic Republic delivered none of these things and, twenty years on, is repressive, bankrupt and visibly falling apart, does not stop people believing in it, or in some other variant of militant Islam. Hamas may be a violently reactionary movement, but in the Occupied Territories the appeal of its message of social welfare combined with resistance to the Israelis and hatred of America is real enough.

How, then, should socialists respond? This question can be posed on two levels. It can be posed on the general, programmatic level of how socialism should deal with religion, but it can be posed also in day to day matters such as the anti-war movement, which can be seen, somewhat crudely, but not entirely inaccurately, as a coalition between socialists and Muslims. There are those on the European left who fail to challenge Islam politically. This can be for purely opportunist reasons. To take one example: in the Birmingham anti-war movement, the Socialist Workers Party was, shall we say, less vocal than it might have been about proposals for segregated meetings and marches. There is also the influence of cultural relativism, and of postmodernism, according to which the post-enlightenment (sic), anti-modernism in which hostility to Euro-American hegemony manifests itself is accepted as an accomplished fact.

Tariq Ali has no time for this, positioning himself firmly on the side of the 'values of the Enlightenment', as he puts it. A similarly robust view is adopted by the Iranian Marxist, the late Mansoor Hekmat. In *The Rise and Fall of Political Islam*, published last year by his organisation the Worker-Communist Party of Iran (WPI), he offered an interesting analysis of the phenomenon which he calls 'political Islam'. This is his preferred term. He rejects the term 'fundamentalism', regarding the term as a label by means of which the Western powers and their propagandists try to separate the anti-Western branches of this movement from the rest, and points out the inconsistencies in the use of the term. The anti-Western currents are not necessarily the most fanatical, while of course two of the most fundamentalist fac-

tions, Saudi Arabia and the Taliban, are (or until 2001 were) the closest friends of the West. Mansoor Hekmat sees political Islam, of which his prime example is the Islamic Republic in Iran, as being a product of the decline of the secular-nationalist movement. He argues that in Iran, political Islam filled the vacuum created by this decline, took advantage of the confusion of the local bourgeoisie, and emerged as a 'right-wing alternative for the reorganisation of bourgeois rule to confront the left and the working class, which had emerged with the rise of capitalism'. He sees political Islam as a movement which sees Islam as the 'vehicle for a right-wing restructuring of the ruling class and creating an anti-left state'. Of course, Mansoor Hekmat recognises the conflict between the Islamic republic and the USA, arguing that 'political Islam confronts and competes with other poles within the capitalist world, especially hegemonic blocs, over its share of power and influence in the world capitalist order'. In seeing the rise of political Islam as being the result of the failure of secular nationalism he also therefore sees this rise as being intimately linked to the Palestinian question. If reforming secular nationalism could not be allowed by the West to threaten its alliance with Israel, what was going to fill that space, especially as Muslims were subject to daily brutality or military action? Mansoor Hekmat maintains that 'If the question of Israel did not exist, the problems of Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq would have been like that (sic) of Brazil, Peru and Mexico' and political Islam would exist only as a 'peripheral and sectarian movement'. As it is, the bourgeoisie in the Middle-East 'lacks any secularist agenda' and, argues Mansoor Hekmat with an approach analogous to the theory of permanent revolution, 'Hence, the establishment of a secular system is the task of the Socialist and workers' movements.'

In many ways, this analysis is convincing. However on the plane of everyday struggle, problems emerge. When intervening in the anti-war movement in Britain, militants of the WPI have insisted that the movement adopt the position of being 'against political Islam' as a condition for their being involved in it. Many of the left would agree with the WPI's analysis of political Islam but disagree with the demand put on the anti-war movement, on the basis that what is most important is the widest possible mobilisation against the Bush-Blair 'war on terror'. After all, we would not exclude from that movement: Liberals, or nationalist organisations, but instead simply try to prevent the movement from existing on their terms. Now the WPI

may argue that whatever stance supporters of political Islam may take in Western Europe, their role in government in Iran puts them beyond the pale: the equivalent of Nazis, possibly. Would we welcome the BNP into the anti-war movement, simply because they were opposed to the war? Of course we would not. This is in some way analogous to the problems socialists have had in dealing with Stalinists. In Britain, they might be decent allies in a strike or campaign, despite their politics, but in Eastern Europe or China their counterparts would have locked up anyone who started a free trade union. Whatever the consistency of the WPI's approach to political Islam, it overlooks the need to reach out to those, particularly the angry and militant young people who, for whatever reason, have illusions in political Islam. Surely only by breaking them from their illusions in political Islam could a socialist and anti-imperialist movement be built in the Middle East, and for that matter, an effective, socialist anti-war and anti-racist movement be built in Western Europe.

One point made very powerfully in this book is how the rapid growth in militant Islam is in contrast with the poverty of its thought. Tariq Ali examines briefly the origins and rise of Islam, touching on the Islamic world's 'golden age' between, roughly, the ninth and the thirteenth centuries. He sees twenty-first century Islam in an entirely unfavourable light compared to the environment which produced the Persian intellectual Ibn Sina (980-1037) who laid a basis for the study of logic, science, philosophy and medicine, the astronomer and philosopher Ibn Rushd (1126-98) from Córdoba (itself a community offering toleration to Muslims, Christians and Jews), whose works promoted rationalism and anti-mysticism, or the rationalist and sceptical Mu'tazilites. As the author puts it: 'the imams who teach by rote in the hole in the wall mosque schools in the cities of western Europe and North America would probably find it too difficult to acknowledge the existence of the Mu'tazilites. This shrunken perspective is one of the tragedies of "modern" Islam'.

Tariq Ali sees a 'terrible weakness' at the heart of the Muslim world, born of the catastrophe, which befell the Palestinians, years of humiliation at the hands of the imperialist powers and Israel, and betrayal at the hands of corrupt politicians. Celebrating the murderous actions of a dead-end bunch such as al-Qaida is, to him, a sign of a terrible lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, as is the embrace of a seventh-century golden age that never existed. He remarks on the irony of the only Muslim to win a Nobel Prize for Physics, a Pa-

kistani citizen called Abdus Salam. Unfortunately, he was a member of the 'heretical' Ahmadi sect, and so a few years after winning his prize, was deprived by the Pakistan government of his legal status as a Muslim (although, as he remarked, he was still a Muslim in India or Europe!).

In conclusion, Tariq Ali sees a link between the oppression of the Muslim-inhabited world, its lack of success in fighting that oppression, and its failure, or refusal, to open itself up, a process requiring a 'rigid separation between church and state, the dissolution of the clergy, the assertion by Muslim intellectuals of the right to interpret the texts that are the collective property of the Islamic culture as a whole, the freedom to think freely and rationally, and the freedom of imagination'. Revolutionary Marxists would want to go much further than this, although these things are all

prerequisites if there is to be socialism in what presently constitutes the Muslim-inhabited world. The struggle to defeat the fundamentalism of neo-liberalism is as intimately bound up with the struggle for socialism in the Muslim world as are those two fundamentalisms which, whether they are in collaboration or conflict, could finish us all off. **WA**

Revolutionary History

Current issue

Vol. 8, No. 2, Summer 2002

Mutiny: Disaffection and Unrest in the Armed Forces

Armies, navies and other military forces are at the heart of the capitalist state. Engels referred to the 'bodies of armed men' ultimately defending capitalist property. Mutinies, unrest and disaffection in the armed forces have therefore been viewed with concern and alarm by the ruling class – and with great interest by socialists.

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Facts are not enough

Labour Party Plc: New Labour as a Party of Business
By David Osler
Mainstream, 2002, 256pp,
£15.99

Pete Firmin

Dave Osler is to be congratulated on producing an up-to-the-minute, comprehensive digest of the links between the Labour Party and business. It's all here in glorious detail, not just the Ecclestons, Hindujas and Mittals whose donations to the party have caused scandals, but also the companies involved in Private Finance Initiatives, the individuals making the links who appear to move seamlessly from scene to scene, the unelected ministers and quango chiefs, and the lobbyists.

Osler is careful to point out that the Labour Party has always had some links with business, dating back to Ramsay MacDonald accepting a car from a biscuit manufacturer, and that scandals about Labour's business links go back to the 60s and the T. Dan Smith affair. However, he shows that such links have only been systematically developed since John Smith's 'prawn cocktail offensive' in the early 90s through such entities as the Labour Finance and Industry Group.

While there is little that is new here – the quoted source of most of the detail is the mainstream press – having it all available in one volume showing the interconnections is extremely useful, and Osler presents it in an absorbing and entertaining style, decorated with the odd amusing anecdote, such as when he and Derek Draper squared up to each other at a lobbyists' champagne party.

The conclusion Osler draws about New Labour's links with business is far-reaching: 'New Labour is institutionally corrupt, in the same sense that the Metropolitan Police is institutionally racist. That's not an easy or a comforting thing to say, but after a thorough examination of the evidence, no other conclusion can logically be reached.' Certainly, he argues, this is the public perception: 'Before the 1997 election, only 19 per cent of poll respondents described Labour as sleazy, compared to 63 per cent who saw the Conservatives in those terms. By February 2002, Labour was firmly on top. Some 60 per cent found it "sleazy and disreputable", while only 41 per cent had reached the same conclusions about IDS's lot.' But he notes that 'despite its best efforts, Labour is not the party of business. Neither are the Con-

servatives any more. But both can fairly claim to be parties of business. Britain now has a system not dissimilar from the US, where government alternates between two safe pairs of hands, one of them marginally more union-friendly. Much as it craves the love of a good businessman, New Labour's problem is this. The Tories have networks within the establishment that date back centuries. Labour still has no real organic links with the ruling class. After starting almost from scratch, even now its business base is still relatively limited. Accordingly, most of the controversial donations have come not from the FTSE 100 crowd, but from the sort of business people still anxious enough about their social position to pay to shore it up. In some cases, that means they have a definite policy agenda'.

The missing link

This reviewer certainly has no argument with the idea that New Labour is institutionally corrupt in its relationship with business, the flaw in the book is that Osler pays too little attention to the other side of the equation – the union link. It is hardly adequate to say Labour is 'marginally more union-friendly' than the Tories (and try telling that one to the FBU). He does mention union *funding* on many occasions, showing how it still vies with business donations as the major source of party funds, but not the organic union link and the unions' role in what remains of decision-making in the party. Without this we are left with a very one-sided picture.

It is on the question of union funding that I found the only *factual* quibble with this book. Osler repeats the version often reported in the press of the RMT's decision on funding of MPs – that it decided 'that only MPs who sympathise with its core concerns will get any cash in the future'. This is not accurate. The RMT decided to put the money into a campaign fund, to be jointly administered by itself and a sympathetic group of MPs.

Osler gives no real explanation as to how and why increasing links between Labour and business have developed, either in terms of the party transforming itself or in relation to the international balance of forces and the way the big multinational corporations have managed to subsume national governments (hardly unimportant in relation to privatisation and PFI). One is left with the feeling that it has all been one big voluntary act on behalf of a few individuals, rather than arising out of national and international defeats of the working class.

Nor does he explain why, currently, the Labour Party has been promoted from being the second choice of the bourgeoisie, a reserve team for when the Tories get into trouble, to their first choice. And will this last if Labour fluffs the referendum on the euro or the unions continue to reassert themselves in the party?

Apart from a rather silly introduction by Paul Foot where he claims that the whole Labour Party membership is eager to get its snouts in

the trough, the other aspect in which the book is disappointing is its conclusion. Here Osler gives his prescription as to what needs to happen, but almost as an afterthought, rather than a seriously argued thesis. While Osler rejects the notion that there is no difference between Labour and the Tories – he thinks there is still a slight difference – he seems to be saying that we should abandon the party to the Blairites when he writes 'the best answer of all would be the rise in England and Wales of a new socialist political force along the lines of the red and green parties that are now a fixture in most European polities, exemplified by the alternative the Scots already have in the form of the Scottish Socialist Party'. And that's it! No attempt to say how we could get from the here and now to this 'best answer'.

This is the same Dave Osler who five years ago (*What Next?* No.3, 1997) wrote an article headed 'Britain's party of recomposition: why Trotskyists should join Socialist Labour'. In this he eloquently promoted the SLP against the doubters, saying: 'What kind of party will the SLP become? By the time New Labour dumps the unions, possibly less than a year from now, the SLP is likely to have developed sufficient momentum to become an attraction to present Labour Party members.' And further: 'First – and most importantly – it [the SLP] has already demonstrated its ability to win over existing labour movement activists and trade union militants. At last year's TUC conference, over 200 delegates joined, including a trade union general secretary and one of the main leaders of the Liverpool dockers' dispute. A number of Labour MPs are also likely to defect after the election. Second – and not unimportantly – it has also proved attractive to left-wing intellectuals, winning a number of radical lawyers, musicians, entertainers and journalists. Within two or three years, the SLP is likely to find itself a party of perhaps 5,000-10,000 individual members and a wide-ranging periphery at least as large again, grouping together the most advanced workers as "the knuckleduster of the class".'

Dave Osler (like the majority of those early recruits) has since left the SLP in despair and is now a member of the Socialist Alliance. Whether he is as enthusiastic about the Socialist Alliance now as he was in those heady days of the SLP, I don't know, but the fact that all his predictions about the future development of that party proved so terribly wrong is a sign of his confusion. It is a confusion he shares with many others on the left who would like to find a shortcut to the establishment of a party which can truly represent the interests of the working class without confronting the real problems of the labour movement as it exists.

There is an old saying that 'the philosophers have analysed the world, the point is to change it'. The problem with this book is that, readable as it is, it does not advance our understanding of the world, let alone show how to change it.

Meet the new boss

The New Rulers of the World
By John Pilger
Verso, 2002, 246pp, £10

Simon Deville

The *New Rulers of the World* was the title of a film made by Pilger about how 'globalisation' came to Indonesia in the shape of an MI5/CIA-backed coup and the subsequent murder of an estimated one million people in 1965-66 by the Suharto regime. The book of the same name deals with this episode, in a chapter entitled 'Model Pupil', as well as looking at a number of other political developments around the world.

The World Bank described Indonesia as a 'model pupil' of globalisation. Pilger relates how a CIA memo showed that Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and President J.F. Kennedy had agreed to 'liquidate President Sukarno, depending on the situation and available opportunities'. Later, the CIA compiled a list of four to five thousand names of people it wanted 'liquidated', whom the Suharto regime obediently rounded up and murdered.

The British pioneered some of the black propaganda that portrayed the coup as a relatively bloodless affair aimed at dealing with the supposed brutality of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and restoring order. Pilger goes on to explain how representatives of a number of multinational corporations then met with the Suharto government to explain how they wanted the country rebuilt to suit their interests. The introduction to *The New Rulers of the World* describes how, as a result of these model policies, workers live in desperate poverty and appalling, unsanitary shanty towns to produce products for companies such as Gap and Nike in conditions little better than slavery.

The chapter called 'Paying the Price' deals with the impact of UN sanctions on Iraqi civilians, and shows how life expectancy has dramatically dropped and how even basic medical supplies are either banned or endlessly delayed by the US. The claim that such supplies might have a dual purpose leads to the ludicrous situation where something like a wheelbarrow is suspected of being used in the development of weapons of mass destruction. Pilger explains that the US- and British-imposed no-fly zones have no mention in any UN resolutions, despite the fact that the British and US governments constantly claim to be enforcing UN wishes. He goes on to describe how the constant bombing of civilians, allegedly to defend the no-fly zones and protect the Kurds, has been suspended every time that the Turkish army has decided to invade the region in an assault against Iraqi Kurds. As well as showing that sanctions and bombing have caused the deaths of half a million children ('a price worth paying' according to Madeleine Albright), Pilger also outlines

the Western policies that installed and armed Saddam Hussein in the first place.

'The Great Game' looks at the similarities and continuities between the US bombardment of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the 60s and 70s and the assault on Afghanistan after September 11 – not just in terms of imperialist politics, but right down to the B52 aircraft and the cluster bombs that make vast areas unsafe for years to come.

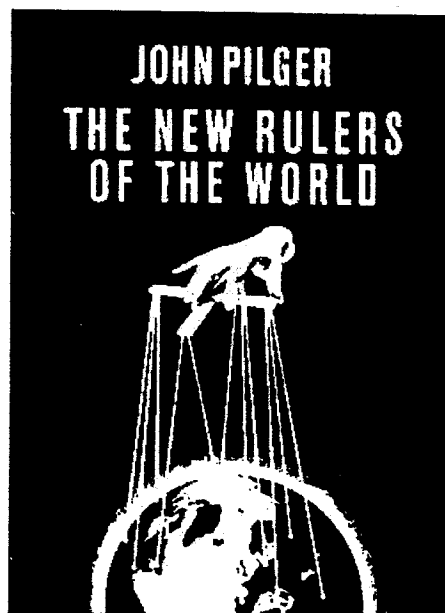
The final chapter of Pilger's book deals with Australian racism towards 'aborigines' and uses as a backdrop the showcase Sydney Olympics where Cathy Freeman carried the torch that lit the Olympic flame. While this culturally correct opening 'came as a relief to those who remembered their nation's contribution to the closing ceremony at the Atlanta Olympics: inflatable kangaroos riding bicycles', it only served to hide continuing levels of apartheid-style discrimination far beyond that of any other Western democracy.

From the struggle against the odds of aboriginal sportsmen and women within white society, Pilger moves on to police brutality, to land rights and to the basic living conditions that the vast majority of indigenous people in Australia endure. He covers the 'stolen generation' of children who were taken from their parents by the white authorities, and the struggle for recognition of the genocide that occurred in a supposedly empty land where the indigenous population was treated as part of the flora and fauna. While some minor gains have been made with regard to legal rights, there has been a significant step back under John Howard's government.

The over-arching theme of the book is a re-assertion of the realities of imperialism and colonialism. For many left activists it will not contain much that is new, although there is little discussion in Britain about the struggles of Australia's original inhabitants. Neither is there a great deal of analysis of precisely what imperialism is, how it works, or indeed how it has changed in the last century. The section on Iraq tends to imply that the author has illusions that the UN could offer a solution if it hadn't been hijacked by the Security Council.

These criticisms are really beside the point, however. *The New Rulers of the World* is eminently readable. For those becoming involved in political activity for the first time it gives a much broader, global perspective than they would get within a single-issue campaign, and it will hopefully encourage activists to find out a lot more for themselves.

WA



Introduction to archive material

Richard Price

The accompanying article by Ernest Mandel appeared under his pseudonym Ernest Germain in *Fourth International*, the journal of the Socialist Workers Party (US), in April 1947. It was intended as a concluding chapter to Abram Leon's classic study *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*, first published in France in 1946. However, it does not seem to have ever been used as such, and editions of Leon's book include instead a biographical sketch by Mandel of Leon, with whom he worked in the Belgian Trotskyist movement during the Second World War. Leon's book was written under the Nazi occupation, and he died aged only 26 in Auschwitz in 1944. Mandel's contribution (dated July 1, 1946) sought to update Leon's analysis in the light of the rapidly changing situation after the end of the Second World War, both in Europe and in Palestine.

A number of the central ideas in this article would find further expression in Mandel's 'Draft theses on the Jewish question today', written in January 1947, and published in *Fourth International* for January-February 1948.¹ Together with the theses, 'The Jewish question since World War Two' contains important strengths and weaknesses.

Mandel emphasised that the Jewish people were 'stricken more sorely than any other people' by Nazi terror and extermination. He located the apparent irrationality of the Final Solution within the crisis of capitalist rule that produced the Second World War, and the most virulent expression of anti-semitism within the peculiarities of capitalist development in central and eastern Europe. Not content with pinning blame on the Nazis, he drew attention to the refusal of the Allied governments to open their doors to Jewish refugees. The commission of Nazi mass murder and the failure of the Allied powers to come to the aid of the Jews of eastern Europe had the effect of greatly strengthening Zionism among the survivors of the Holocaust, and through the main currents of Jewish immigration to Palestine. The article

Mandel also accurately predicted the growth of anti-semitism in the Soviet Union, which would steadily develop after 1948, culminating in the concocting of the 'Doctors' Plot' of 1953.³

The issue of Jewish immigration to Palestine caused rifts within the left internationally – as indeed it continues to do. As the reality of the Holocaust became known, and the shameful treatment of its survivors continued after the war, most social-democratic and Stalinist opinion swung behind unconditional support for Jewish immigration into Palestine. However, Mandel was courageous enough to swim against the stream. The emancipation of the Jewish people could not be won at the cost of the national oppression of Palestinian Arabs within their own country. Mandel posed the issue of Jewish immigration within the context of demands for the independence of Palestine (then under the British mandate), and the election of a Constituent Assembly: 'Only the Arab masses, once they are freed from the imperialist yoke, will have the right to decide whether or not they are opposed to the immigration of Jewish workers.'

But there are also false notes. The article shares with most Trotskyist documents of the immediate post-war period the perspective of irreversible capitalist stagnation and decline, speaking of 'continuously deteriorating conditions from the economic standpoint'. Paradoxically, alongside this position was a tendency to underestimate the weakness of British imperialism, which less than two years after Mandel was writing would withdraw from Palestine. This in turn led the Trotskyists to underestimate the degree to which both British and particularly US imperialism would subsequently underwrite the Zionist project. Mandel thought that US support was purely transitory, and that the British too would 'desert' the Jewish population in Palestine, leading to the conclusion that 'the Zionist cause is lost in advance'.

This prognosis seems to have been rooted in a fragment written by Trotsky in July 1940, in which he argued: 'The attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine can now be seen for what it is, a tragic mockery of the Jewish people... The future development of military events may well transform Palestine into a bloody trap for several hundred thousand Jews.'⁴ A Nazi victory in the Middle East might well have brought about such a scenario. It is also true that British-Zionist relations were very strained during the mid-1940s, leading to armed conflict with the extreme right wing of Zionism. (On November 6, 1944, the Stern Gang had assassinated British Resident Minister for the Middle East, Lord Moyne,

and three weeks after this article was written, the Irgun blew up the King David Hotel, killing 91 people.) However, British imperialism emerged from the Second World War greatly weakened, and it was its fear of the emerging Arab nationalist movements, and in particular the security of its oil supplies, which led it to come down decisively on the side of Zionism.

It is also worth noting that Mandel tends to overemphasise the Arab bourgeoisie's potential for unity against Zionism: '... it is the Arab bourgeoisie of Egypt, of Lebanon, of Syria and even of Palestine, which is beginning to take increasing leadership of the anti-Zionist movement and giving it unity and cohesion. Every new economic development in the Near East can only aid in the formation of an Arab bourgeoisie firmly united by common interests and make the obstacles to the creation of a Jewish state more insurmountable than ever.' Here we can see the germ of Michel Pablo's 'Arab Revolution' – a concept uncritically adopted in the 1970s by 'anti-Pabloite' Gerry Healy. The history of the past five decades has comprehensively disproved this thesis, with the Arab states rarely capable of collective action, while typically allowing themselves to be played off against one another by the West and Israel.

Ernest Mandel (1923-1995) became a sympathiser of the Trotskyist movement at the age of 13, and a full member two years later. He became a leader of the reconstituted Fourth International at the end of the Second World War. With the split in the Fourth International in 1953, he became one of the main leaders of the International Secretariat, which role he continued after 1963 in the United Secretariat of the Fourth International up to his death. He was best known as a prolific writer on economics and political issues.

Notes

¹ Reprinted as 'Zionism and Palestine: 1947' in *Permanent Revolution* 7, Spring 1988.

² On the record of Zionism in eastern Europe during the Second World War, see L. Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators*, Lawrence Hill, 1983, pp.201-264.

³ See Y. Rapoport, *The Doctors' Plot*, Fourth Estate, 1991; also B.D. Weinryb, 'Antisemitism in Soviet Russia' in L. Kochan (ed), *The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917*, Oxford, 1978.

⁴ L. Trotsky, 'On the Jewish Problem', *Fourth International*, December 1945.

WA

The Jewish question since World War Two

By Ernest Mandel

Years of incessant persecution and indescribable humiliation, the life of hunted beasts as the 'normal' form of existence, deportations, 'death trains', gas chambers, crematoriums, anti-tank ditches filled with corpses; massacres in which not a family was spared and a balance sheet frightful in its clarity: five million dead out of six million European Jews – that is what the Second World War has meant for the Jewish population of the old continent.

Human imagination, quick as it is in grasping the horrible, has difficulty in picturing concretely the meaning of this balance sheet. It is impossible to compress this unprecedented crucifixion of millions of human beings into a few vivid images.

Separated from the overall picture of a world in agony, the fate of the Jews not only appears cruel, it seems unbelievable. Reason refuses to admit that material interests could have coldly dictated the extermination of these countless defenceless beings. The fanaticism of the SS, their blind submission to orders of their leaders are called upon for aid in giving the semblance of an explanation for the tragedy which Europe has just lived through. But the interpretations do not even approach the horrible reality. They are based on the assumption that the destruction of European Jewry constitutes a sudden and unique catastrophe in the troubled history of this people. Lack of understanding of the past is transformed into illusions about the future, and all this while a new and terrible threat already hovers over the surviving Jews in the entire world.

The fate of the Jews is a symbol of the fate of humanity

Although the Jews have been stricken more sorely than any other people, they have lived these most tragic hours of their history in a period when all humanity is struggling through a frightful crisis which threatens like a tidal wave to engulf everything that 20th-century civilisation has so slowly constructed. Alongside of five million murdered Jews are 60 million victims of imperialist war. The barbaric treatment of the Jews by Hitlerite imperialism is only an extreme expression of the barbarism of the general methods of imperialism in our period.

As against the Jewish deportations we now find the deportation of millions of Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia. As against the return to the yellow star we now find the branding of all Germans by external markings in many countries in Central Europe. The death trains have again begun moving but this time in the opposite direction and with a different human freight. The burning of books has been renewed by the Americans. All the atroci-

ties of Nazism, from the execution of hostages up to the burning of entire villages 'as reprisals' have been faithfully reproduced by the emissaries of Anglo-American imperialism, whether it be in Indonesia, the Philippines or Korea.

Far from being a phenomenon isolated from the destiny of humanity, the tragedy of the Jews is only the herald to other peoples of their coming fate, if the decline of capitalism continues at its present rate. Maddened by the blood of its millions of victims, world imperialism has progressively brought entire social layers to a point of barbarism where human life no longer has the slightest value and where corpses are as common a sight as pedestrians crossing a street in a great city. This rapid transformation of human reflexes has nothing to do with the specific explanations generally made for it.

The calm of an SS officer playing chess while thousands of women and children are being burnt a few hundred feet away in crematoriums is identical with the calm of a British officer as he steps over cadavers cluttering the road to his night club in Calcutta. The American 'reporter', filled with curiosity, rushes to the ruins of Hiroshima in search of sensational headlines for his paper, but isn't stirred for a moment by the idea that he is walking over the pulverised remains of 100,000 human beings who disappeared into thin air in a few seconds. . . . Humanity has gone a long way since the days when it was outraged by the fate of the victims of the Crimean War.

Responsibility of all governments for the fate of the European Jews

It is not alone the methods of cruel oppression on the part of American imperialism and the barbaric mentality resulting from it that bring it closer and closer to those of Nazi imperialism. The very fate of the Jews of Europe was determined as much by the calculations of American imperialists as by the direct massacres of Hitler. For months hundreds of thousands of Jews could have been saved: in Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and the unoccupied French zone. These hunted unfortunates had their eyes turned towards the only road for escape: across the seas. To every voice which condemns the crimes of Hitler must be added the voices of those who accuse London and Washington. While these governments knew what was being prepared against the Jews and exploited it for their propagandistic ends, they did not make the slightest gesture to help those who could have been saved, but on the contrary bluntly *refused* to grant them passage across the ocean.

Against the few thousands who were able

to escape – the rich, those who had ‘connections’ in the United States – there are hundreds of thousands against whom the door was slammed shut, who were driven back from Palestinian shores and were returned to the Nazi hell.

If Hitler constructed the trap for the Jews, it was the Anglo-Americans who sprang it. The blood of the innocent falls on their heads as well as upon the Nazis.

But the responsibility of the imperialist governments goes far beyond this simple refusal of direct aid. An American diplomatic mission remained in Germany up to the end of 1942. The Red Cross regularly sent its trusted agents and inspectors into German prisoner-of-war camps. Despite numerous cases of violation of ‘international law’, there can be no question that in a general way the lot of war prisoners of all nations, excepting Russia, was ‘tolerable’ in Germany and was very close to that of German prisoners in the United States and England. That is particularly true in regard to the lot of officers. (The class nature of society is nowhere expressed so sharply as in camps.) The imperialists observed the rules of the game insofar as they themselves were involved. *Why was this rule of reciprocity not invoked for the Jews?* Why didn’t the British and American governments, allies of the Polish government, make the German government understand that reciprocity would also be invoked in the case of civil internees, of whom the Germans in Allied countries numbered in the hundreds of thousands? The truth is that in practice the Anglo-Saxon imperialists completely washed their hands of the fate of the unfortunate Jews of Europe, viewing them only as a propaganda subject at the opportune time. They did not even try to exert any one of the great many pressure levers at their disposal in behalf of the Jews.

The epic revolt of the Warsaw ghetto is painted up by the whole democratic press of the world. But in the last appeal that the Warsaw fighters made to the world, they accused the British, Polish and Soviet governments, they accused the ‘official’ leaders of the Polish national resistance movement of *having deliberately refused them weapons that they had been demanding for weeks for the continuation of their struggle against the SS hangmen*. Let their last pathetic words: ‘Brothers, all the governments are guilty,’ be engraved in the heart of each Jewish worker, of every class-conscious worker in the world. The responsibility for the massacre of the Jews is borne equally with Nazism, by all the governments of the earth, by all of imperialism, by the entire regime of capitalism in its death agony as it plunges into barbarism.*

The tragic lot of the survivors in Europe

After the terrible ordeal it has just experienced, European Jewry is reduced to less than a million beings. Of these 900,000 Jews, at least half have lost everything in the tempest: jobs, property, means of existence, families, homes. The vision of these people is clouded forever. The war has brutally cut all the roots that nourished them in their social environment. If they cannot develop new roots elsewhere, these people are condemned to perish.

Those who have been lucky or courageous enough to return to their homes or to come out of their individual hiding places feel themselves surrounded by hidden hostility. It would be ridiculous to hold Nazi propaganda responsible for this. Certainly the latter has left traces in the primitive minds of many layers of peasants and backward workers. But the basis of anti-Semitism, lucidly etched in its social contours and traced back to its historical origins in this book of A. Leon, continues to persist more than ever after this war which has been so devastating for the position of the petty bourgeoisie. ‘The elimination of Hitler can change nothing essentially in the position of the Jews. A temporary improvement in their lot will in no wise affect the continuation of all the profound roots of 20th-century anti-Semitism.’ These prophetic words written by Leon in 1941 have just had their confirmation in the uninterrupted series of pogroms which have rocked Poland, Hungary and Slovakia since ‘liberation’, in which more than 20,000 people have already fallen victims.

After having momentarily ‘softened’ the terrible crisis in which ‘Aryan’ artisans and small business men found themselves in

* At the final minute, prior to their total annihilation, the last survivors of the Jewish people of Poland issued an appeal for aid to the entire world. It has not been heard. ‘We know that you, Jewish workers of Palestine and elsewhere, are suffering cruelly for our incredible martyrdom, unparalleled in the annals of history. But let those who had the means of helping us and failed to do so know that we are thinking of them. The blood of three million massacred Jews cries for vengeance and they will be avenged. And the punishment will strike not only the Nazi cannibals but also all the powers who did nothing to save a people condemned to complete extermination by the Hitlerite criminals. They limited themselves to a few hypocritical phrases. We who are the last to die will never forget that and will never forgive it. May this last voice out over the abyss reach the ears of all humanity.’ (*The Extermination of the Jews of Warsaw*, p.58, published in Brussels by E. Botte.)

Central and Eastern Europe by the closing of Jewish businesses, these strata were in their turn hard hit by monopoly capitalism. ‘Mobilisation for total war’ led to the suppression of several hundred thousand small businesses. Deportations of the entire labour force to Germany uprooted millions of petty bourgeois. Restrictions, red tape, constant contraction of the free market in raw materials and consumer goods, the disastrous effects of inflation – all these contributed during the last years of the war and the first post-war months to make the position of the artisans and small businessmen of Central and Eastern Europe more precarious than ever. But the more precarious their position becomes, the more fiercely do they resist the return of their former Jewish competitors. The newspapers recently reported that all the small shops in Budapest were forced to close their doors because they no longer could withstand the vertiginous inflationary spiral. Is it astonishing that under such conditions their hatred against the small Jewish businessmen is exacerbated when the latter, upon returning from the concentration camps, attempt to reopen their shops and thereby to compete with them for the already too meagre share of the national income? The general stagnation of economy since the war, accompanied even by a slight de-industrialisation, robs the surviving Jews of the possibility of proletarianisation or of passing into other professions, at the same time that it prevents any resumption of their former positions. There is no way out for them. If the high clergy, the dispossessed provincial nobles and other reactionary elements are successful in arousing great layers of the Polish, Slovak and Hungarian population against the Jews as ‘Communists’ and ‘Russian agents’ it is solely because the social base of anti-Semitism remains intact.

‘On the planet without a visa’

The surviving Jews in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, are desperately seeking a way out of their misfortune far from the land which has witnessed tragedy for their families. Even worse is the situation of more than 100,000 Jewish fugitives in Germany who, *one year after their ‘liberation’, continue to live under the infamous conditions of concentration camps*, and are subjected to a thousand and one frauds on the part of the military authorities. This has created a scandal reaching right into the bankers’ circles in New York; and the government of the United States has been compelled to send a Commission for an on-the-spot investigation. The Commission has come and gone, its report has been read and discussed, but the 100,000 expatriated Jews who do not want to return to Poland con-

continue to remain in the German camps suspended between a horrible past and an unknown future. The problem of the surviving refugee Jews urgently demands a solution: the imperialist governments haven't even broached the problem.

When military aims were involved, 48 hours was more than enough in an imperialist staff to decide upon the voluntary or forced displacement of millions of human beings. But a year has not been enough for the 'specialists' of capitalism to find some place on earth where several hundred thousand victims of Nazi barbarism can reconstruct their lives. For every government the cause of the surviving Jews is becoming a shameful instrument of blackmail against a rival power. England and America invite each other to show hospitality by opening the doors of the countries which they control to refugees. But in the calculations determining imperialist policy, the solution of human problems does not occupy the thousandth place.

But this problem also has great economic and social importance. Under present conditions it is excluded that the survivors will regain their former professions. The question is posed of their professional re-education. But it can be posed from the economic standpoint only in countries which are industrially very advanced, in which the integration of two or three hundred thousand men into the process of production is a rather usual matter. If barbaric capitalism refuses to 'take the risk' because of the threat of unemployment, it is for the proletariat, for the workers' movement of these countries, to advance this demand of elementary humanity: *'Open the doors of the United States, of Canada, of Australia, of the five continents to the victims of Nazi persecution!'* The working class, struggling against the plague of unemployment by demanding the reduction in working hours, will have no difficulty in integrating several hundred thousands of Jews. On the contrary, it will thereby make of them very valuable allies for the general struggle against capitalism which is responsible for their fate and for the blind alley in which all humanity finds itself.

The development of anti-Semitism, the result of definite social and historic causes, is producing the spread of Zionist nationalism among the despairing and declassed petty-bourgeois Jewish masses. The brutal equalisation of Jews of all strata in the extermination camps sharpened nationalism even among Jewish workers, in the degree that international solidarity remained too weak on the part of the workers of other nations. It is up to those who find themselves in a favoured position as compared with the Jewish workers to take the leadership now and bring about free-

dom of immigration into their countries for the survivors. This is the best way to win the Jewish workers from the Zionist utopia.

Palestinian immigration is no solution

If thousands of Jews in Europe are now demanding the right to migrate to Palestine, the primary reason for this is that the doors of the rest of the world are closed to them. It is also the product of the incredible persecutions of these past years and of the relative passivity of the world proletariat.

The war caused a brief period of uneasy prosperity in Palestine, as it did in the whole Middle East, as a result of the isolation of these countries from the world market and their transformation into vast military arsenals of the Eighth Army. Wartime 'prosperity' in the United States gave birth to the illusory plans of Messrs Wallace and Company, who forecast at least '60 million jobs' for Americans; similarly, the ephemeral prosperity experienced by Palestine has been the starting point for an ambitious plan aiming to install a system similar to TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority - Ed.] and to make the country habitable for one and a half to three million new inhabitants. But no sooner has the war ended than the forecasts of Leon on this subject have been verified point by point. The problem lies not in the elaboration of plans for rendering the deserts of the world habitable, but in carrying out these projects, in bringing about such new and enormous development of productive forces under the conditions of decaying capitalism, with a world market already surfeited by permanent overproduction, with great international monopolies ready to crush every new competitor no matter where he raises his head. Within one year after the war, the 'prosperous' industry of Egypt is already experiencing a relatively greater degree of unemployment than in the most industrialised countries in the world.

Every little step ahead that Palestinian economy would make while conditions on the world market are not yet normal would be transformed into a supplementary source of economic crises. The central concrete problem for Palestinian economy in the coming years will not at all be that of 'making the country able to absorb 100,000 men per year', it will be the problem of assuring a livelihood to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who will be victims of the economic crisis. We confidently predict that despite the artificial influx of American capital, even this problem will prove insoluble.

If solution of the problem of the Jewish

survivors of Europe is impossible from the point of view of a proletarian revolution, the socio-economic point of view. The forces opposing this immigration are the ruling superiority over the Palestinian land and over world Zionist. The Zionist leaders feel this strongly because and precisely for this reason have entered on the desperate road of terrorist political action.

We must re-read the prophetic paragraph in which Leon analyses these Zionist and Zionist plans in order to understand thoroughly events of the past months confirm what he wrote. 'In Palestine, Jewish nationalism collides with Arab nationalism; economic development of the country produces the growth of the Arab population, its social differentiation, the growth of a national capitalism.' Let us note that whereas the different Arab feudal parties in Palestine succeeded with great difficulty in putting their mutual differences in second place in order to unite before the Jewish 'common enemy', it is the Arab bourgeoisie of Egypt, of Lebanon, of Syria, and even of Palestine which is beginning to take increasing leadership of the anti-Zionist movement and giving it unity and cohesion. Every new economic development in the Near East can only aid in the formation of an Arab bourgeoisie firmly united by common interests and make the obstacles to the creation of a Jewish state more insurmountable than ever.

The illusion of building a prosperous country in the midst of a world in decline becomes the absurd illusion of building a 'Jewish state' in the midst of an Arab nation twenty times as populous and in process of reaching the same state of advancement.

In the past the Zionists counted, even during the war, upon the support of British imperialism. In reality, the latter 'merely uses the Jews as a counterweight to the Arab threat, but does everything to raise difficulties for Jewish immigration'.

Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism

Alfred Rosmer

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No one today can doubt the exactness of this analysis. At the moment when the position of the British empire in the Arab world – decisive link between India and the Mediterranean – is threatened at one and the same time by American imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy, it is a matter of life and death for the City to have the Arab factor on its side. Inevitably British concessions to the Jews will tend to diminish, not to increase. Neither in the name of 'justice', nor in that of 'past promises', nor because of terrorist threats, will the British risk losing their control of the Suez Canal and of their last oil fields.

Disappointed by the English, the Zionist leaders are turning to the Americans, and are prepared even to throw themselves tomorrow into the arms of the Stalinist bureaucracy for a temporary support. Vain attempts. If American imperialism pretends to support the Zionist cause now, it is far less because of the electoral calculations of Truman than as a factor of the systematic penetration carried on by Americans in the Near East. Already strongly entrenched in Saudi Arabia, the oil magnates have likewise turned avid eyes on Iraq, Trans-Jordania, and the entire Arab world. They are ready and willing to gain entry there on the back of the Zionist movement. They are ready and willing to raise difficulties for the British on the Arab side by forcing them to act contrary to the interests of the native population. But their goal is not that of favouring the Zionist cause but that of competing with the British for the 'friendship', that is to say the right of exploitation, of the Arabs. In a general way, the same thing may be said of the Soviet bureaucracy. The choice between 20 million Arabs and less than a million Jews is in no way doubtful. For every great power, temporary 'help' to the Zionists is only a wedge for gaining entry into Palestine only to obtain the support of the Arabs at the next stage. On the international chessboard, the Zionist cause is lost in advance.

The working class movement and the Palestine question

So long as Arab society remained in a primitive state, the domination of British imperialism appeared to be safe. Here the City had a favourable arena for demonstrating its classic and clever art, the product of centuries of experience, of exploiting the differences between various royal dynasties, between various families of landed proprietors, between various religious sects and various desert tribes. Unity of the Arab world against imperialism was never realisable in pre-capitalist society.

The rapid industrialisation of the Middle East and the creation of an Arab bour-

geoisie have overturned the conditions of the problem. Imperialism must withdraw to new positions. The demonstrative departure of imperialist troops from Egypt and Lebanon are a clear indication of what is in process of change in this part of the world. But if the Arab bourgeoisie is able to achieve unity as against Zionism, it is far from being able to do so as regards imperialism. It finds itself in its turn suspended between British rule on one side and the rise of the young proletariat on the other. The great strikes in Egypt, the Jewish-Arab strike in Palestine, the general and insurrectional strike in Iran have clearly demonstrated to the bourgeoisie that the proletariat is threatening. Under continuously deteriorating conditions from the economic standpoint, it is not only incapable of improving the lot of the working masses but finds itself compelled to worsen them further. Rising from the miserable stupor in which he has been living for centuries, the *fellah*, transformed into a proletarian, has become aware of his quality as a man, and is refusing to return to the village. The terrible social crisis which is shaking the Middle East can only end in an alliance of the Arab bourgeoisie, the landed nobility and British imperialism against the threat of the people. Only the Arab proletariat will be able to unite the popular masses of the six countries around itself in order to launch the assault against the imperialist position. Only the Arab proletariat can successfully conduct the struggle for complete and immediate independence of the Arab world.

This consequently indicates the immediate duty of the Palestinian workers' movement: to integrate itself in the overall workers' movement of the Middle East against British imperialism. An obstacle on the road to unity of the Jewish and Arab proletariat, Zionism at the same time bars the road to this integration, and prevents the concentration of all Palestinian working class forces around the slogans: *Immediate and complete independence for Palestine! Immediate withdrawal of all British troops! Election of a Constituent Assembly by direct and secret vote!* All intermediate formulae, such as the 'bi-national state', represent at bottom only the refusal to give up a nationalist position in favour of the general interests of the proletariat and will rebound directly against their authors.

Only a position by the vanguard of the Jewish workers calling for Palestine independence will allow it in the next stage to pose the question of Jewish immigration to the Arab workers in a sovereign Palestinian Assembly. Only the Arab masses, once they are freed from the imperialist

yoke, will have the right to decide whether or not they are opposed to the immigration of Jewish workers. But the division of the Palestinian working class movement along nationalist lines can only act to stimulate opposition by the Arab masses to this immigration. The Jewish workers of Palestine must be forewarned! If they do not integrate themselves into the workers' movement of the Middle East in time, the unity of the Arab world against imperialism may take place over their heads, with the complete destruction of their position. Caught between the Arab hammer and the British anvil, Palestinian Jewry heads for certain ruin if the Jewish proletariat does not take its class road.

The threat of the future

Exterminated in Europe, mortally threatened in Palestine, the Jewry survives in fact only in the United States and the USSR. But even in these two remaining centres, a dark future looms. The massive integration of Jewish petty artisans and businessmen in Russia since the period of the First Five-Year Plan into the lower layers of the bureaucracy exposes them particularly to the hatred of backward layers of the proletariat and peasantry. The rising tide of anti-Semitism in the USSR and the episodic utilisation that Stalin made of it in his fight against the Left Opposition have been sufficiently described so as not to require repetition. They were tragically verified at the time of the Nazi invasion into the Western Ukraine where veritable massacres of the Jewish population took place even before the SS 'resolved' the Jewish question in their own fashion.

The conglomeration of well-to-do peasants and high bureaucratic layers (which include only a tiny minority of Jews), constituting together the nucleus of an eventual exploitative class in the USSR, will unavoidably exploit to the hilt a renewal of anti-Semitic moods in a civil war or an open struggle against the regime.

Like all the other reactionary forces which Stalin has recalled to life, anti-Semitism will rebound violently against himself. Galvanised by the hatred of the new candidates for exploitation, confronted by the 'Jewish authors' of the October Revolution, stirred by a new fanatical religious mysticism, this anti-Semitism may well sweep away the whole Jewish population of Western Russia at the moment when the regime begins to crumble under the combined blows of imperialism and the internal enemy. One can predict with certainty that a breakdown of the Soviet regime will take place over the corpses of Russian Jewry.

In American post-war society the gigan-

tic forces – 15 millions of organised workers on the one side and the greatest capitalist power in the world, Wall Street, on the other – are testing their strength in constant skirmishes that are preludes to the class war which will ultimately decide the fate of humanity. As soon as the working class passes over to organised political activity, the necessity of mobilising the backward and petty-bourgeois strata of the country against the politicised proletariat will become a life-and-death question for the American bourgeoisie. Heir to the 'liberal' and 'humanitarian' spirit of Jefferson and Lincoln, it will not, however, hesitate for a moment to set up its shock troops by exploiting the basest instincts, the mainsprings of the most debased racism and obscurantism that still slumber in American society. The potential presence of these forces is adequately shown by such movements as the Ku Klux Klan, the organisation of Father Coughlin and that of Gerald L.K. Smith.

In 'society', in the polite meaning of the word as well as within the 60 Families, the anti-Semitic spirit is already very powerful. It is practically impossible for a Jew to get into certain 'stylish' universities, to belong to certain clubs or to get a job in certain business and banking houses. Among the lower layers of the petty and middle bourgeoisie, who will on the morrow furnish the most dangerous contingents of American fascism, this sentiment is far less defined, but it developed enormously in the army as well as within the country itself during the war. American Jews are established in certain well-defined branches, whether it be as artisans, businessmen, intellectuals or workers. A violent social crisis, by sharpening competition and increasing unemployment in these branches, would make the militant anti-Semitism of these layers into a terrible potential force which would require only a political party to transform it into a crushing dynamic force.

Let it not be said that 'the Americans will never go as far as the Nazis'. Even a timid semi-liberal like Sinclair Lewis understands 'that it can happen here'. Ruling social classes pushed to the wall, and classes as rich and cynical as the American bourgeoisie, will stop at no infamy or cruelty in order to continue their rule, even if only for a few years.

Let one read the hundreds of published reports on the 'systematic education in cruelty' of American soldiers to the Japanese, which so closely resembles the attitude of the German SS to the Jews; let one study concretely the degeneracy and cruelty – reaching unsuspected depths – of certain American occupation troops in Germany

and Japan, and he will conclude 'that not only is it possible but probable' that an American fascist movement will excel in technical perfection in the exploitation of anti-Semitism.

If the next decade does not witness the proletarian revolution in the United States, it will prepare hecatombs for American Jewry which will surpass Auschwitz and Maidanek in horror.

The Jewish question can be resolved only as part of the solution of the world crisis

These perspectives may appear too sombre, too frightening. They pose as a possibility the complete extermination of the Jewish people in the next decade or two. But what Auschwitz and Maidanek mean for the Jews, the atomic bomb signifies for all humanity. The perspective of the disappearance of the Jews from the earth is part of the perspective of the destruction of the human species.

But if the Jewish tragedy is only the symbol and to a certain measure the 'mirror of the future' for humanity, the only way out which still remains open to humanity is at the same time the solution of the Jewish question. The sombre possibility outlined above is only one of the alternatives posed before humanity. It presupposes a previous defeat of the world proletariat and above all of its most powerful army, the American working class. The class struggles in all the countries of the world, which will decide the fate of humanity in the next decade, will at the same time decide to one degree or another the fate of each people in particular. The peculiarities of Jewish history have only determined a special subordination of the future of this people to the outcome of the unfolding social struggles. Fundamentally, however, they do not make the destiny of the Jews any more dependent on a victory or defeat of the proletariat than is the case with the people of Russia or of China.

It is unnecessary for us to introduce any changes in the solution of the Jewish question as A. Leon has outlined it in the conclusion of his work. That capitalism will first pass through a period during which the Jews will go through a process of assimilation and of 'national-cultural renaissance' – this perspective no longer constitutes a subject for discussion save among incurable dreamers who will continue to discuss such subjects as the sex of angels on the very eve of their being reduced to atomic dust. The problems which are posed before the Jewry, like those which are posed before humanity, demand such radical solutions and are so urgent that no one dares any longer to seek refuge behind a

propaganda for temporary palliatives. But all those who still continue to call revolutionists illusory thinkers will find, if they have not already done so, that there is no illusion worse than an expectation of viable solutions from a regime which is no longer able to introduce improvements in anything except machines for death. The ordeals through which humanity has just passed have stultified many minds and paralysed many wills. The petty bourgeoisie and especially the intellectuals have been the most affected. Those who were in the habit of thinking of the world as 'rational' are themselves losing their reason in face of such irrational decay. But it is not these sceptics who will determine the fate of humanity. The will to struggle of the working masses of the entire world has already affirmed itself more mightily than ever during the year which has followed the end of hostilities. It is upon this will to struggle of the proletariat that the vanguard must fix its hopes and growth.

As the most sorely wounded, the Jews have especially allowed themselves to be carried away by the psychosis of despair and demoralisation, which has been further sharpened by the specific social structure of this people. But in a few years, the immediate effects of the nightmare will disappear. The collapse of Palestinian hopes will become obvious. Whereas for the moment there exist only negative poles which repel each other, by that time the positive pole, that of the international revolutionary proletariat, will have already confirmed its attractive force with striking victories. Since we have no reason to doubt the fate of humanity, let us also not doubt that the Jewish working masses, after passing through a series of disappointing experiences, will recognise that their future is indissolubly linked with that of the proletariat and the revolutionary movement, and that they will again, as in the past, take an important place in this movement, and will owe their final emancipation to a devoted struggle for the cause of socialism.

July 1, 1946

WA

It's time to give left-wing democracy the deodorant treatment

Jim Higgins

If there is one statement that will receive general assent among most gatherings of workers it is 'Politics stink'. When this generalised point of view is directed to the parliamentary parties most left-wing socialists would not dissent.

But similar epithets and ripe descriptive utterances are applied to the Communist Party and to other left groups.

It is an unpalatable fact but a fact nonetheless that the accelerating disenchantment with conventional British politics is not accompanied by noticeable enthusiasm for any left alternative. On the contrary, the left has declined both in influence and numbers in strict time with the growing crisis of parliamentary politics and capitalist economy.

Now this is strange. It has always been assumed in the left movement that a decline in capitalism and the consequent difficulties of capitalist politics would be the opportunity for a major advance of the extra-parliamentary left.

Of course, it is possible to point to a number of difficulties. Increasing unemployment reduces the combativity of the workers; the complete abdication of their defensive role by the trade union leadership; and the small forces of the revolutionary left – all can be brought forward as reasons for lack of growth. While these arguments are true, in general, they still beg more questions than they answer.

Why is it, for example, that the left, which in the years up to 1974 had an unparalleled – in their terms – growth, has not been able to exert much greater pressure within the unions against the collaboration of the leadership with anti-working class policies? Why has it been unable to retain all of the workers who joined in the heady days of the Heath administration?

The answers to these and other pointed questions will trip lightly and with great facility off the tongues of the spokesmen for any of the left groups. If there is one thing they have perfected it is the produc-

tion of excuses. Some of them might even be true.

That last sentence was not written in any spirit of cynicism, but it was written deliberately. Too often the statements of various revolutionary groups are produced to obscure rather than to reveal the truth.

This is done in several ways, the most common being the resort to a form of 'marxese' that only the initiated can understand. Meaning and reality are drowned in a clotted form that cannot be dignified by the word prose.

More seriously, and in a way that is both deceptive and self-deceiving, each of the groups develops a theory of the world that sets its own organisation at the centre of the universe and then proceeds to rearrange the geography to take account of the shift.

Most frequently this is accompanied by a species of hysterical party loyalty that would have been welcomed by the medieval Catholic church. Such a spectacle is both distasteful and incomprehensible to workers unfamiliar with the phenomenon.

Even more distressing is the fact that many workers who are aware of the revolutionary left have a shrewd suspicion that the groups are manipulative, untruthful and undemocratic. All too frequently such critics are right. Militant workers may despise Labour's truckling to capitalism, they may dislike the Communist Party's reformist politics but they also distrust the revolutionary left.

It would be pleasant to say that such fears are groundless but they are not. It is not true that the left never packed a meeting, nor is it true that the left never pushed through their resolutions at the fag-end of a small, unrepresentative trade union branch meeting.

It is true that there is all too frequently a double standard applied by the left. What the left does is all right because it is in the interests of class struggle but what anyone else does is by definition reactionary because it does not accord with some preconceived notion of socialist advance.

Nowhere does this double standard become more apparent than in the attitude to democracy within their own organisations. Basing themselves generally on some largely imagined organisational principles laid down by Lenin under conditions of Tsarist autocracy, they would deny their own minorities the rights they loudly demand in the wider movement.

The argument that capitalism is nasty and we have to be hard and ultra-disciplined in fighting it leaves out of account the difficulty that potential recruits, radicalised by capitalist unpleasantness, are more likely to be repelled than attracted by similar characteristics in revolutionary groups.

The truth is that the left has contributed mightily to its own difficulties. It has lived for too long in a wilderness without influence and membership. In the closed, overheated revolutionary circles, a form of historical playacting has replaced any connection with the real movement of the working class. When at last the opportunity was provided to break out of this isolation it was largely fluffed.

The time is long overdue to break the old outmoded mould. The left leaderships should stop pretending they are some reincarnation of Lenin in October 1917 and the membership should be educated in the traditions and the reality of the British working class.

The old way has failed. A moment's reflection will indicate that it was bound to fail. It is time that some fundamental rethinking was done.

It is true, both in theory and practice, that in times of capitalist crisis the revolutionary left has its greatest opportunity. But it must be a left radically different from the one we have today. **WA**

Jim Higgins died on October 13, 2002, aged 71. He became active in the Communist Party in the early 1950s, following National Service. He left after the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, and subsequently joined Gerry's Healy's 'Group' (which later became the Socialist Labour League). He was expelled from Healy's group in 1959, in a bout of Healyite centralism, and joined Tony Cliff's Socialist Review Group, forerunner of the International Socialism group and today's Socialist Workers Party. A leading figure in IS, he became its National Secretary, and was also a prominent activist in the Post Office Engineering Union. Higgins parted company with Cliff in 1974, after IS too became an increasingly centralised organisation, and turned away from its rank and file orientation in the trade unions. This article, which reflects his experiences in IS, first appeared under the pseudonym Robert James in *Workers News* No.3, April 1976, the paper of the short-lived Workers League.

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