

Workers ACTION

No.9 - May / June 2000 - Price £1.00

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- **Lunatics take over the asylum debate**
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- **Workers and the ANC**
- **Government in a stew over pot**
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No.9 - May / June 2000

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Vote Livingstone!

The elections on May 4 present a tremendous opportunity to punish the Labour government for its anti-working class policies, and could mark the start of a real fight to reclaim the Labour Party from the modernisers. Workers Action has no hesitation in calling for the largest possible vote for Ken Livingstone in the election for London mayor.

The fact that Livingstone looks certain to win is remarkable by any standards. Up to a few months ago, the Blair government seemed unassailable – a huge majority, the longest honeymoon anyone could remember, the most popular government at mid-term since records began, and a parliamentary left in decline and disarray. Now, in the huge, newly-created constituency of Greater London, the largest urban area in Europe, a left-wing independent candidate with no party machine backing him is poised to steal the jewel in the crown of New Labour's fraudulent devolution policy.

Although his election manifesto is only a mild variety of left reformism, Livingstone is widely perceived as representing 'Old Labour' values. This has more to do with his reputation than his performance on the back-benches since 1997, from where his opposition to the government has been less than consistent. Workers remember him for his leadership of the embattled Greater London Council between 1981-86 and for the attempts he made at that time to reduce fares and support minorities. Perhaps more importantly in today's increasingly homogenised Parliamentary Labour Party, he is remembered as the man who stood up to Margaret Thatcher, and who is therefore best equipped to take on Blair and the Millbank machine.

The 'Livingstone phenomenon' arises out of the particular circumstances of the period we are going

through – the succession of defeats for the organised labour movement, the marginalising of socialist ideology, the low level of class struggle, the rightward march of the Labour leaders, the dominance of the market, etc. Voting in elections is one of the few ways currently open to workers to express their discontent, and then only if a candidate emerges with a record of opposing right-wing policies and a high enough profile to present a serious challenge. Livingstone meets both these criteria, and it is precisely because he is, as has often been pointed out, a 'maverick' that he finds himself embodying the hopes of workers to deal a blow to the Labour modernisers – in short, there is no other left Labour MP with the necessary individualism, ambition and flair for self-publicity.

In the election for the 25-member Greater London Assembly, the issues are by no means as clear-cut as in the race for mayor. Here, there is only a pale reflection of the Livingstone effect. There are no workers' movement candidates to the left of New Labour who stand the remotest chance of winning any of the 14 first-past-the-post seats in the Constituency Member section – for the simple reason that there has not been a split in the Labour Party. This, in turn, is connected to the low level of militancy in the working class. The left-wing organisations that are standing have few members, slender bases in the working class and almost no public recognition. This being the case, we would expect most workers who bother to vote at all to vote Labour in order to keep the Tories out, especially since this is in line with Livingstone's advice – and we would support them in doing so. In general, we call for the same line to be followed in the council elections taking place on the same day throughout England. Some workers, and especially activists, may be so repelled by the Labour GLA candidates – handpicked Blairites who all cast the equivalent of 1,000 ordinary members' votes against Livingstone in the selection ballot – that they either abstain or

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Labour Party NEC elections – vote Grassroots Alliance!

It is particularly important this year to mobilise the largest possible Grassroots Alliance vote in order to send a clear message to Millbank that the election gerrymandering and reactionary policies they have put forward in London are not accepted by ordinary party members. Although the union reps tend to vote with Blair, having people sympathetic to the left on the NEC and other party bodies is very important in terms of knowing what is going on and being able to reach out to party members.

The Grassroots Alliance candidates are:

Ann Black
Rosina McCrae
Mark Seddon
Christine Shawcroft
Pete Willsman

Leaflets for your Labour Party cothinkers are available from 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH; Tel/fax: 020 8458 1501

Editorial – Vote Livingstone!

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vote for other candidates. But while casting a protest vote for the London Socialist Alliance in this section would be understandable, it might have the effect of assisting the Tories or Liberal Democrats.

However, there is a good argument for voting for the LSA, or even for Peter Tatchell, in the London Member list, where seats are allocated according to proportional representation. Of the left groupings contesting the election, the SWP-dominated LSA is the largest, and the only one with any chance of winning a seat. The Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, while composed of sincere militants from the rail workers' union, RMT, is too narrowly focused on a single issue and too small to have an impact – it is regrettable that it did not merge its forces with the LSA. Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party and the Communist Party of Britain are irrelevant Stalinist sects that should be avoided at all costs. The weakness of the LSA is that it consists mainly of organisations that have turned their backs on the struggle inside the Labour Party in favour of sectarian 'party-building' projects. It exaggerates the opportunities presented by the election and the extent to which the working class is ready to break its historical ties with the Labour Party. On the other hand, its strength is that it does bring together some hundreds of militants, many of whom are active in the trade unions. Having recently left the

Labour Party, Peter Tatchell is standing as an independent in the London Member section only. Although faced with the obvious drawback of not belonging to an organisation, Tatchell has a left-green programme, a high profile as a gay rights activist and is oriented towards the ongoing fight against the Labour Party right wing.

Voting for the LSA or Tatchell in the London Member list is seemingly at odds with voting Labour in the constituencies since it could deny the latter an additional seat. But we are in favour of it on the grounds that, if successful, it would mean there would be a socialist in the Assembly to campaign on behalf of the workers and the most oppressed, and provide critical support for Livingstone.

Workers Action opposed the creation of a London mayor and Assembly in the 1998 referendum. We argued that, far from extending local democracy, the aim was to increase central government control over policy in the capital. In the event, the mayoral candidate selection process and the contest itself have turned out to be not just a dispute over how to fund the Tube, but a battle for the 'soul' of the Labour Party. A win for Livingstone will be a significant blow against the attempt to reposition Labour to the centre of the political spectrum, the abandonment of the party's traditional working class supporters, the retention of much of Thatcher's legislation and outlook, and the relentless drive to eliminate internal democracy from the party. Make it happen! **WA**

How the GLA voting system works

Voting tactics depend partially on the voting system in use. The GLA will be elected using the Additional Member System. According to the www.london.gov.uk website, this allows as far as possible the share of the GLA seats to reflect the share of votes cast for each party and independent candidate while at the same time retaining a constituency-type link between members and particular areas of London. It is proportional representation, so methods of tactical voting from a 'first past the post' system will be far less effective.

This is how it works: voters have two votes – one in their constituency, where they can vote for one of a set of named candidates to represent their area, and one in the London Member

section, where they vote for a political party or an independent candidate. Effectively the system treats each of the independent candidates in this section as if they were parties of just one person.

The votes in the Constituency Member section are counted first – 14 candidates will be elected by the 'first-past-the-post' system, one candidate for each Constituency. This gives an initial count of seats won by each party.

Then the London Member votes are counted – there are 11 seats to be allocated by proportional representation in this section. *These are the only votes considered when the proportion of the vote cast for each party is calculated.* The Constituency Member section votes are ignored when working out the pro-

portionality.

Candidates will be elected from the London Member section according to the De Hondt formula. This works as follows:

First, the number of seats gained by the parties in the Constituency Member section of the vote is taken to give an initial allocation of seats.

Then, the number of London Member votes cast for each party is divided by a number that is one more than the number of seats that the party has been allocated (the reason for adding one to the number of seats is to allow the calculation to work for parties that have not won any seats). The party that has the largest result from this calculation – that is, the party with the least seats per vote – is allocated one further seat. This calculation is repeated, each time filling one further seat and thereby changing one party's allocation, until all the seats have been shared out. ■

The case for voting for the LSA

How to vote in the Greater London Assembly elections has turned out to be a controversial question. Here, **Charli Langford** argues for a vote for the London Socialist Alliance in both sections

Labour's candidates for the Assembly have been chosen for their loyalty to the leadership faction and its pro-capitalist projects, and have already proved that loyalty by being part of Millbank's gerrymandering of the mayoral candidate selection process.

Standing against them from the left are trade unionists and worker militants. Labour candidate Meg Hillier, a former mayor of Islington, presided over the sacking of several workers – one of whom is now the LSA candidate contesting the same seat – in an action now condemned as explicitly racist and sexist. Similarly, the LSA's Candy Udwin is standing against the personnel officer from her workplace, University College Hospital, where she is involved in an industrial dispute. The two Labour candidates involved are not the worst of the bunch, but merely the ones who have been forced to choose most publicly which side they are on.

The stitch-up of the Labour candidacy is public knowledge and there has been a huge reaction against it among workers in the capital. The role of Labour candidates in disputes is less well known, but is common knowledge among a small but important section of the working class.

To call for a vote for Labour to keep the Tories out is not a tenable position in this election. That tactic only works in a 'first-past-the-post' electoral system – the proportional representation used to elect the Assembly will ensure that any imbalance in the votes to seats ratio in the constituencies will be resolved by allocating additional seats in the all-London list.

The GLA is a largely pointless body – its only major function is to pass or reject the mayor's budget. Important policy for London will be decided at a

national level, and that means Labour GLA members will spend all their time defending the government's record, while other members will use the position to push their respective parties' views. For this reason, it would be far better to have an LSA member putting a socialist view than an additional New Labour member.

In this election, a majority of Labour supporters are likely to vote against their own party in the mayoral ballot. Given the Labour GLA candidates' role in selecting Dobson, we are unlikely to cut our links with Labour members and

supporters by calling for a vote against Labour. There will be a clear blow against Blair in the mayoral election, and we should be campaigning to maximise the hit against New Labour in the Assembly as well. All this is not to say that the LSA is the perfect choice – as other articles in this issue explain. But for all its faults it is clearly ahead of the rest of the left in its activism and breadth of support.

Peter Tatchell? The political case against him is that while his manifesto is a left one, he has given no indication of his ability to deliver the goods. He has shown no willingness at all to work with the left, and he has not involved himself in attempting to organise broad campaigns, preferring one-off stunts.

The LSA needs only about 3.8 per cent of the vote in the all-London list to have a member elected. There is a possibility that this figure can be reached, although the chances would be improved if the other left slates withdrew in favour of the LSA.

- Vote Ken for mayor!
- Vote LSA for the Assembly! ■

For another view on voting see Letters, p24

Book bargains

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

Year One of the Russian revolution

Victor Serge, 456pp, Pluto Press

£6.50

Britain, World War 2 and the Samasamajists: The Secret Files

Edited by Wesley Muthiah and Sydney Wanasinghe, 259pp, Young Socialist Publication

£6.00

The early homosexual rights movement (1864-1935)

J Lauritsen & D Thorstad, 121pp, Times Change Press

£5.95

Prices include post and packing to mainland British destinations

Workers Action

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Beyond euphoria

Livingstone, the left and the London elections

by Neil Murray

The London elections on May 4 are certainly something new. Not only will they produce Britain's first directly elected mayor and the new Greater London Assembly, but also, regardless of the precise outcome, they will create shockwaves lasting for some time, at least in the London labour movement. The main factor in this has been the candidacy of Ken Livingstone, first for the Labour Party nomination and now in his fight as an independent to become mayor.

The elections come at a time when the government was already in trouble. Not that the Tories have any credibility, but the government has inflicted several major wounds on itself. Its policies are far from popular with the working class – coming under attack from even such right-wingers as Kilfoyle – and are exemplified by the protestations that the government can do little about the massive redundancies expected at Rover in the face of the laws of the market. Last year's elections for the Welsh Assembly, Scottish parliament and European parliament showed what can happen when these pro-capitalist policies are combined with an effort to impose candidates on the party and electorate. Party activists refused to campaign and the electorate stayed away in droves or voted SNP, Plaid, Liberal Democrat or Green in protest. Labour lost heartlands like the Rhondda and the Tories got more votes than Labour in the Euro-elections.

Far from learning from this, the Blairites persisted in vetting-out popular candidates for the GLA. The fact that Rhodri Morgan eventually became leader of the Welsh Assembly after Michael lost support forced Blair to accept that he had been wrong

to block Morgan, but not to accept that he was repeating the same mistakes in London.

The proposal for a directly elected mayor, alien to the British tradition in local government, is a Blair import from the USA. Included in the 1997 election manifesto and passed by conference on the 'take the package or reject the whole' principle, the opposition of virtually the whole of the London labour movement was brushed aside. Having created the post of directly elected mayor, the Blairites created their own problem of finding a candidate with a suitable profile and popularity. Blair toyed with the idea of a businessman, but was quickly made to see that this would produce massive resistance in the party. In the meantime, Ken Livingstone, having opposed the idea of a directly elected mayor, declared his interest in seeking the nomination.

Blair has not spent his time since election as Labour leader marginalising the left and building on the Tories' legacy only to want to see it undermined by the party choosing a lefty – however maverick – as candidate for the position with the biggest popular mandate in the country. Blair's fear was that whatever the formal limitations on what the mayor could do, Livingstone would use the position to attack the government's policies from the left. Not only was Livingstone popular with Londoners for defying control freakery, but he had identified the single most important issue in the election – transport, in particular the state of London Underground and how improvements were to be financed. The government, continuing its love-in with capitalism, intends to hand large sections of the Tube infrastructure and staff over to private companies (Railtrack, Balfour Beatty, etc) for up to 30 years under its Public Private Partnership (PPP) pro-

posals – privatisation in all but name. Livingstone's opposition, calling for the improvements to be funded by a bonds issue if the government was not prepared to directly fund them, hit a chord not only with Tube workers but also with all those disgusted with the performance of the privatised rail companies, particularly after the Paddington crash.

The electoral college

To stop Livingstone winning, the Blairites went through every trick in the book. They delayed the selection process time and again while desperately seeking a candidate who could defeat Livingstone. Eventually Frank Dobson, who had said publicly many times that he would not stand, agreed to do so. But they still faced the problem that Dobson was unlikely to defeat Livingstone in a straight one member one vote ballot of the London Labour Party membership. Such a method of selection had not only been called for by an overwhelming vote of London Labour Party conference, but also promised by Nick Raynsford, Minister for London, in the House of Commons.

The party machine was split between those who thought Livingstone couldn't be beaten in the selection and that less damage would be caused by excluding him, and those who thought that if they rigged the selection sufficiently Dobson could 'win'. Up until the last minute it was unclear which of these would win out. It looked as if the interviewing panel might keep Livingstone off the shortlist for his refusal to endorse the PPP. In the end they let him through, calculating the fuss would be too much, but rigged the selection process anyway.

No longer one member one vote, the electoral college consisted of one-third individual party members, one-third affiliated organisations (mainly the unions), and one-third Greater London Assembly candidates, London MPs and London MEPs. Given that both the MEPs and GLA candidates had been subject to Blairite vetting, they were almost certain to vote 100 per cent for Dobson – and they did. Patronage, and the fact that it was not a secret ballot, kept the number of MPs willing to vote for Livingstone down to a hard core. Lo-

cal councillors were not included, despite the fact that they will have at least as much to do with the mayor as the MEPs, because it was known they weren't as 'reliable'. The inclusion of this section in the electoral college meant that the best part of one-third of the votes were sewn up for Dobson in advance – it was always going to be an uphill struggle to overcome this disadvantage.

What surprised the Blairites, though, was the willingness of most unions to ballot their members on their choice of Labour candidate. They had hoped that union leaders would assist in blocking Livingstone by deciding how to cast their vote at leadership meetings – a tactic which was decisive in choosing the ill-fated Alun Michael as Welsh leader. The clause in Labour's rules that requires that all affiliated organisations ballot their members was not invoked, as was done when Blair was elected leader. London region TGWU broke the dam with its announcement that it would ballot and recommend a vote for Livingstone. Most London regions of unions then followed suit, although many made no recommendation. Of those organisations with any weight, only the AEEU and the South London Co-op Party refused to ballot.

To assist Dobson further, rules were found to keep several unions out of the ballot on the grounds that their affiliation fees had been paid late, even though this had been common practice for years. An attempt by leading London MSF members to challenge this in the courts failed, not helped by their general secretary, Roger Lyons, giving a statement for the Labour Party! The London Transport District Council of the RMT, whose members were most affected by the PPP proposals, went ahead and balloted anyway, resulting in a huge vote for Livingstone. The print union GPMU was not even told that it was excluded until after the ballot result! At the same time, individual members in arrears were given extra time to pay up and be able to vote.

Dobson effectively refused any attempt to win union votes and concentrated on trying to win the individual members' section of the electoral college, which would at least give him some

credibility. In this he was assisted by the decision of Blair, Prescott and Brown to hold several meetings – at party expense – at which they lectured members on why it would be folly to select Livingstone, not all of which were well received.

Dobson obtained party membership lists not available to Livingstone or Glenda Jackson; party officials were suddenly working for Dobson; Pauline Green, an MEP who had resigned, was still allowed a vote, etc, etc. All this only served to reinforce the view that Dobson is Blair's puppet. The government's failed attempt to block a free mailing for mayoral candidates was also interpreted as an anti-Livingstone manoeuvre.

All to no avail. While Dobson 'won' overall by four per cent, Livingstone won in both the affiliated society and individual member sections. Every union which balloted, whether recommending for Dobson, Livingstone or neither, saw their members voting by upwards of 60 per cent (in the case of the FBU, 91 per cent) for Livingstone. No independent commentator described the result as anything but flawed.

Livingstone went into purdah, declining interviews, saying he was 'listening to Londoners', and calling on the party to 'see sense' and get Dobson to stand down in his favour. Apparently, correspondence ran 98 per cent in favour of him standing as an independent, although 'close colleagues' were much less in favour.

Livingstone's campaign

From the start, Livingstone's campaign for the Labour candidacy, and now as an independent, has been politically weak. The strong points of his platform have been the financing of London Underground and opposition to its privatisation, and the elimination of racism in the police force, but beyond that it has little to say beyond worthy statements to distinguish him from other candidates. Contradictory statements were made about not using the position of mayor to challenge the government at the same time as, for instance, lambasting it for the level of funding for London Councils. This eclecticism continues during his in-

dependent campaign, with conciliatory statements towards Blair made on the same day as attacks on the IMF and World Bank – and later backtracking to say he only meant US capitalism, not the London-based variety.

Weakest of all, however, was the nature of Livingstone's campaign. Early on he established a campaign committee consisting primarily of actors and comedians. Involvement from labour movement activists was always kept carefully to a supportive role. Thus several large 'organising meetings' were held, but these consisted of Ken and his assistants telling people what they wanted them to do and taking little notice of additional suggestions put forward.

Little attempt was made to organise support. In the unions, Livingstone relied instead on a few well-placed London bureaucrats. Offers by activists in several unions to organise support were generally ignored or they were even told to desist. Material was not made available for use in the unions and attempts by many to organise hustings were ignored. London Labour Left, run by Livingstone loyalists, has not met once since before Labour's shortlist of candidates was drawn up.

Different explanations circulate for these failures. Lack of resources is the most frequent and ongoing, yet there was a refusal to delegate organisation within localities and unions. 'Key people' were appointed in some boroughs, but often without others knowing or being contacted by them. Fear of the campaign in the unions being swamped by the far left (in particular the SWP) was often given as the reason for not organising there, but this does not explain the situation in those unions where the far left is weak, nor the fact that if Livingstone himself had called meetings it would be the far left itself that was swamped.

At the point at which the question of Labour's manifesto for London became crucial, the party admitted this still had to go out to consultation in the CLPs and affiliated organisations. Yet there was no attempt to circulate either a model response or even a short

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Livingstone, the left and ...

Continued from previous page

resolution on the PPP. Instead, as so often, it was left to chance as to whether individuals took the initiative.

The pattern that emerges is not that Livingstone wanted to keep the far left at a distance (although he did), but that he did not want direct involvement in 'his' campaign by any who might raise criticism or want to go beyond its limitations. Instead of using the opportunity to politicise the fight in the CLPs and unions, Livingstone wanted it to be primarily about himself.

When it came to the decision as to whether to stand as an independent, again involvement was not wanted beyond individually writing in to say what you thought he should do. He even announced his candidacy the day that another 'organising meeting' was to take place, which he promptly cancelled.

All this continues with his campaign as an independent, with no attempt to organise supporters. They are merely asked to send money or buy merchandise and put up posters. What campaigning there is on the ground is taking place regardless and independently of this, but is being starved of resources, there being at present no plans to produce a leaflet which could be used on street stalls or door-to-door leafletting.

Instead, the independent campaign consists primarily of media appearances, buying up poster sites and a battle bus. The basis of Livingstone's campaign has become 'Livingstone for London', with very little of a direct appeal to the needs of the working class.

Support despite all

To most labour movement activists it was clear from the start that Livingstone should be supported, both in the Labour Party selection process and as an independent candidate. Not because of some starry-eyed view of him as the best thing since whatever, but because warts-and-all he embodies opposition to the government's kowtowing to big business and has opposed many – though by no means all – of the government's worst policies. Support for the bombing of ex-Yugoslavia was a low point, but it is

hardly the first time that the left has had to give support to someone with whom they have serious differences. The attempts by the Blairites to block his candidacy served to show that this was also a fight around labour movement democracy, something in short supply in recent times.

It was necessary for the left to throw its efforts behind Livingstone, despite all the shortcomings, because of the issues raised. The best possible outcome for the furtherance of the movement, not just the organised left within it, was for Livingstone to become the official Labour Party candidate, given what this would represent in terms of a blow for democracy and a defeat of Blair's policies.

When the electoral college produced the result the bureaucracy wanted, there was confusion as to what to do, not least because no clear indication was coming from Livingstone himself. Some simply argued for him to stand independently, some recognised that the immediate aftermath of the ballot should be used to call for Dobson to stand down for Livingstone. While the latter appeared to be Livingstone's preferred option, there was certainly no central push, and some activists were actually discouraged by Livingstone from putting forward such a proposal.

Speculation was rife in the media that Livingstone was going to stand with a slate of 'personalities' or some kind of cross-party alliance. While these proved unfounded, Livingstone did little to deny them, adding to the confusion among his supporters.

When there was no sign of Dobson or the Labour bureaucracy reacting in this way to either the media ridicule of the result or discontent in the movement, Livingstone was right to declare his independent candidacy. Rolling over and accepting his exclusion would have been far worse for the movement. But again, Livingstone took this decision without discussion with the rank and file of the movement and little serious advice as to what he wanted them to do. He announced that he was not forming a new party, or even a network of supporters, and was calling on people to 'stay in and fight' rather than leave the Labour Party.

If Livingstone *had* put together a labour movement-based slate and *had* called on his supporters to organise, then it is quite likely that this could have provided the impetus for the formation of a substantial alternative to the Labour Party, initially in London. It would have attracted considerable trade union support, as well as from those who have left the Labour Party in disgust in recent years or have been hanging on for lack of any alternative.

Livingstone's advice though, was the worst of all worlds. While calling on supporters to stay in the party and fight, he has not offered them any perspective as to what to do. Again, everything is left to individual initiative, with the danger that many of his supporters will drift out of the party anyway, with no lead on offer.

Similarly in the unions, with no call to support him (though no doubt he has welcomed the support he has received), with a few notable exceptions the national bureaucrats who lost control during the ballot have managed to regain the initiative and assert that only official Labour candidates can be backed. The revolt which has taken place, primarily in the CWU, RMT and FBU, would undoubtedly have been much more widespread if Livingstone had given any indication that this was what he wanted. In its place caution and worries about sparking a witch-hunt by the bureaucracy have taken over.

Labour's campaign in disarray

While pushing ahead with Dobson's candidacy, the Labour Party has essentially recognised he cannot win. Blair, the architect of the whole fiasco, took some time to agree to be even seen as part of his campaign, not because he finally realised Dobson was being seen as his puppet, but because he doesn't like being associated with failure.

Meanwhile, the bureaucracy has unofficially let it be known that it will not take action against those members who put up Livingstone posters or 'covertly' campaign for him. In certain constituencies, notably Brent East, they have even let it be known that they know they cannot mount the usual ward-based

campaign, but are merely asking for volunteers. Effectively, most activists are on strike, refusing to work for Dobson or Labour's GLA candidates, even if Livingstone is not offering any alternative activity.

Simple answers are no solution

In this complex situation, various easy, though very different, answers have been offered by sections of the left. On the one hand are those who argue everything is up in the Labour Party and a left alternative can be put together now, on the other are those who act as if little had happened.

Among the latter are those who argue that Blair has already suffered his defeat (the electoral college result); it only has to work its way through the structures. Resolutions for conference, policy forums, etc, are their agenda. Perhaps this strand is best exemplified by *Socialist Appeal's* attitude that Livingstone was wrong to stand as an independent and 'desert the labour movement'. Their analysis of a crucial Brent East CLP General Committee meeting after Livingstone announced his independent candidacy is telling. For them, the majority showed the correct instinct in wanting to declare their support for Dobson as the official candidate and staying and fighting. In fact, this majority voted not even to take resolutions submitted by three branches calling on Dobson to stand down, and was led by leading Councillors, local party apparatchiks and those hoping they might become Brent East's MP in place of the expelled Livingstone.

Those who say everything is up correctly stress how much the Blair government is acting in the interests of capitalism and how the mayoral selection illustrates how much the democracy of the movement is ignored. No doubt they will seize on the fact that a third of CLPs have not elected delegates to conference as further proof. Yet they choose to overlook the continued affiliation of most unions to the Labour Party, the extremely low level of class struggle in response to the government's policies, and the fact that support for any kind of left alternative is low.

The far left and Livingstone

While most activists immediately lined up behind Livingstone when he announced he was seeking the Labour Party nomination, much of the far left saw things differently.

Perhaps most consistently, given its view that the Labour Party is just another bourgeois party like the Tories and Liberal Democrats, the Socialist Party refused support for Livingstone in the selection process. Slowly and falteringly, it now seems to support him as an independent.

Much of the rest of the far left only really woke up to the issue after the electoral college was announced, realising that here was an opportunity for them to campaign in the unions, having by and large turned their backs on involvement in the Labour Party.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty spent months denouncing Livingstone in the most intemperate terms, saying that there was no way that the left should give him its support. Then it suddenly switched after the electoral college was established, to announce a 'Socialist Campaign for a Livingstone Victory'. A critical campaign raising issues ignored or downplayed by Livingstone *might* have played a useful role but was a derisory irrelevance given its sole supporters were a tendency which had been telling everybody not to support him.

Socialist Outlook announced its support but said it could not have supported him during the bombing of ex-Yugoslavia, failing to point out that its resolution saying so was actually passed after the bombing was over.

The Socialist Workers Party threw its weight behind Livingstone's campaign. However, it did this in the crassest possible way, playing into Livingstone's preferred distancing from the far left by setting up local 'trades unionists for Livingstone' campaigns consisting almost entirely of themselves.

The CPGB (*Weekly Worker*) seems to have prevaricated over supporting Livingstone until he declared as an independent. Statements indicating that support would depend on his platform seem to have been forgotten, since his platform as an independent candidate is

the same as that on which he stood for the Labour nomination. What is seen as crucial is that Livingstone 'has broken with Labour'.

That Livingstone has 'broken with Labour' is a constant theme of many on the far left. Yet on a political level it is meaningless. Livingstone's politics have not changed with his decision to stand as an independent. If anything, some aspects are worse – the appeal to 'Londoners', for instance, rather than any class or socialist appeal. He has no more of a coherent critique of the Labour Party than before his expulsion. He has made it clear that he will argue for his reinstatement into the Labour Party after the election and has appealed for his supporters to stay in the party. He has even gone so far as to tell high-profile supporters that he would publicly denounce them if they came out in support of him. He has explicitly said he has no intention of forming even a network of supporters. The 'break with Labour' is more of a myth allowing some to jump on a popular bandwagon than a reality.

Looking for rich pickings

The unusual circumstances of the London election have produced a plethora of left candidates.

One of the first into the ring was the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation. Much has been said on the left about the shortcomings of this slate – its essential limitation to the single issue of Tube privatisation, its appeal almost exclusively to Tube workers, and the narrow political range of the candidates. At one stage it seemed the range would be even narrower, when the CATP's leadership attempted to bring political fellow travellers with no connection with the campaign onto the slate.

However, the real problem with this slate runs much deeper. The CATP emerged from the London Transport District Council of the RMT as an attempt to broaden awareness of, and opposition to, the government's plans for the London Underground. Intended to complement industrial action, the leaders of the LTDC initially dragged their feet on a 'political' campaign because of

Continued next page

Livingstone, the left and ...

Continued from previous page

their leftist hostility to involvement in the Labour Party. Eventually the CATP was established and became almost a substitute for industrial action when this ran up against court decisions and the difficulty of sustaining action.

Despite having won the affiliation of some non-RMT union bodies and Trades Councils, it was suddenly decided to transform the CATP into an election campaign just as Livingstone's campaign for the Labour nomination was giving the anti-PPP forces a much higher profile than the CATP had ever been able to do. A single-issue campaign which *could* have won wide labour movement support, including in the Labour Party, was turned into something completely different – an election campaign, which the rules of union branches and Trades Councils, and especially Labour Parties, prohibit them from being part of.

Despite resolutions being passed in favour of working with other socialist and trade union forces, the CATP is adamant that it will only concentrate on one issue and therefore cannot link up with the London Socialist Alliance, for instance. It is difficult to see what the forces behind the CATP hope to prove by standing in the election. Opinion polls show that a large majority of Londoners are opposed to the PPP plans, yet a campaign standing on that one issue will probably get a derisory vote – serving, if anything, to discredit that opposition. It will also be difficult to rebuild a broad campaign against the PPP after the election.

The attitude of the CATP to the fight in the Labour Party is probably best shown by one event. A hustings attended by many hundreds in London's Friends House took place the evening after the first day on which Labour's shortlisting panel met. The panel could not decide whether to allow Livingstone onto the list and invited him back later in the week. In this situation, Patrick Sikorski, effective leader of the CATP, could think of nothing better to do than call on Livingstone to stand as an independent alongside the CATP slate. Apart from the lunacy of hoping Livingstone would give a public 'yes', thus destroying his chances of winning the Labour nomination, it also

shows how little concern there was with a victory for the whole of the left rather than one small section.

Not quite dead yet

Derisory votes will probably be obtained by the Socialist Labour Party and the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*). Arthur Scargill, who has declared that he would not support Livingstone 'to be mayor of Toytown', heads the SLP list. Having been unable to persuade people of standing in the movement like Bob Crowe, assistant general secretary of the RMT, or Dave Rix, general secretary of ASLEF (who has reportedly now left the SLP), to be on the slate, it is 'representative' of a sectarian rump with virtually no members left.

The CPB/*Morning Star*, no doubt following its usual course of not upsetting trade union bureaucrats, initially denounced Livingstone for standing as an independent. After an internal struggle the line was changed to 'qualified support', although not without a significant delay between the decision and reporting it. The CPB is also standing a slate in the election with no more chance than the SLP of a substantial vote. Apparently the CPB gave no thought at all to unity with others on the left standing in the election. Like the SLP, the CPB's decision to stand seems more about indicating that it still exists and not ceding ground to the London Socialist Alliance than offering any serious perspective to the London working class.

The LSA

By far the most serious of the left-of-Labour challenges – in terms of the standing of at least some of its candidates in the movement and the dynamism of its campaign – comes from the London Socialist Alliance. An alliance of six far left organisations (Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Alliance for Workers Liberty, Workers Power, International Socialist Group and CPGB), it has agreed a basic common platform of demands that it regards as central for the working class at the current time. Some in the alliance (Workers Power, CPGB) wanted a revolutionary platform, but have remained and have candidates on

the slate. The alliance has worked well in terms of non-sectarian co-operation and joint campaigning on issues beyond the election (victimisation by rail companies, Rover, etc).

The LSA has managed to capitalise far more than the other left slates on the turmoil caused by Livingstone's exclusion as Labour candidate. When it decided last summer that it would stand candidates, it did not expect to be able to stand in every GLA constituency nor to leaflet the whole of London. The fact that it can now hope to do so has to be ascribed more to its good fortune and the shenanigans of the labour movement bureaucracy than its own tactical astuteness.

The LSA is hoping to repeat the success of the Scottish Socialist Party in the Scottish parliamentary elections. It seeks the votes of those protesting against the exclusion of Livingstone, those who oppose the privatisation of the Tube, and those who might have voted Green or Liberal Democrat in the Euro-elections when there was no credible left alternative. However, this is a tall order when the LSA is hardly a household name even among many activists.

The inadequacies of the LSA lie elsewhere. While it supports Livingstone and is calling for a vote for him – although it can no longer do so in its election material because of electoral law – it has not related to the turmoil in the Labour Party and unions around his candidacy beyond simply calling on people to support the LSA.

In fact it did not take a position in support of Livingstone until *after* Labour's selection procedure was over, ostensibly for fear of upsetting the Socialist Party. One version has it that the LSA could not have added anything to that fight anyway – surely more a statement of the LSA's impotence than anything else. Nor did it have any interest in pushing resolutions calling for Dobson to stand down to make way for Livingstone. Rather, the immediate call went out for Livingstone to stand as an independent. While we are told that the LSA called on Livingstone to stand with a labour movement slate, there was certainly no concerted drive to pressurise him to do this through the unions or CLPs.

Under present circumstances, many

Labour members and supporters may vote for the LSA as part of their protest vote for Livingstone. The LSA may even get a place in the Assembly, as sections of the media predict. But the LSA offers no perspective for turning that vote into something more substantial, indicating to union members and normally Labour supporters how the fight goes forward. An indication of this is that while the LSA has won the support of quite a few London union branches, it has made no attempt to drive this into the unions' regional bodies. In this respect, Livingstone

supporters have had much more success. The LSA implicitly recognises that it would get nowhere in a fight with the bureaucracy over support, but then, for its own reasons, refuses to concentrate on support for Livingstone, which has much more purchase.

We are frequently told that the LSA is simply an alliance for the election around a set of demands and that it cannot be expected to have a common strategic approach. But in this election, more than any other for a long time, such an approach is essential. Without a com-

mon approach, the LSA is left with the lowest common denominator – that is, no approach whatsoever. LSA material talks of Labour 'representing the interests of big business' as if that was the sum total of its understanding.

If the LSA as a whole does not have any answers, what about its component organisations?

Here the picture is little better. Most of the far left press has not even been interested in getting to grips with what is happening within the Labour Party, or the dilemmas facing those members who support Livingstone. *Socialist Worker's* answer is simply to call on people to leave the Labour Party. Others seem merely to bemoan the fact that Livingstone has not called for a new party or network without wanting to worry themselves about the situation this leaves.

No doubt the LSA, or at least its component parts, will grow out of this election campaign, but at the expense of being blinded by this success to the real situation in the labour movement today.

After the London Elections

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So what happens now?

All socialists should want to see Livingstone win. But what then? The fight will be on to make him accountable to the labour movement, to ensure not only that he sticks to his opposition to the PPP and a commitment to properly funded public services, but that he remains a thorn in the side of a government carrying out the bosses' agenda, rather than compromising with Blair. To this end, the left should be demanding Livingstone's reinstatement as a Labour Party member (and MP) on the basis of left policies and no conciliation.

In many ways, what is more important is to ensure that the defeat inflicted on Blair in the selection battle and the election is built on. This will not happen of its own accord. The left has to put forward an agenda which links a fight through the structures of the movement with the building of an opposition within both the unions and Labour Party, and action to resist the anti-working class policies of the government. Neither over-cautiousness nor recklessness is the answer, but a strategy that attempts to get to grips with *all* the complexities of the situation. ■

What next for the Labour left?

Several groups of socialists have recently pulled out of the Labour Party around the London mayoral elections. **Matthew Willgress**, joint youth officer of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, gives his personal reasons why he differs

There is widespread discussion amongst socialists about what direction the Labour left should now be taking. However, a combination of incorrect perspectives and a misunderstanding of the current level of consciousness has led many on the left to advocate a seemingly simple, but totally unrealistic, solution to the problem.

The preferred 'solution' of groups like the SWP, the ISG and Workers Power – which is supported by a small number of former Labour left activists such as Mike Marqusee – is that lefts should simply leave the Labour Party. The general consensus of those who hold this view seems to be that people should then build electoral alternatives such as the LSA, although some just call on socialists to leave the Labour Party without telling them where to go.

But there is an obvious problem with this in that it ignores the general, national mood of the Labour left. It is not realistic to think that the 55 per cent of London Labour Party members who voted for Ken Livingstone, or the 50,000 plus members who voted for the Grass-roots Alliance in the NEC elections, will just leave their party because the far left tells them to. Of course, this is not to deny that a space may be opening up to the left of Labour in certain areas, but the central point is that on a national scale there is still a struggle to be waged inside the party.

Undoubtedly, there were many activists who were unsure of where to turn following the result of the mayoral candidate selection process. In this situation, it is important to study what the people to whom these activists would normally look for answers are saying. Ken Livingstone himself has said that he wants his supporters to fight in the

Labour Party to make sure that such an election fraud never happens again, and Tony Benn has echoed this call. Indeed, not one MP has come out in favour of a new party. That the hard left can ignore this and form a substantial breakaway party anyway is surely wishful thinking.

And it is not just MPs who are advocating staying in the party and fighting. In April's *Labour Left Briefing*, Geoff Martin argues that this 'is no time to walk away from the party and leave the political collateral and the assets to the small band of hijackers who seized control'. NEC member Christine Shawcroft adds that 'standing up for the democratic rights of party members doesn't entail leaving their company as soon as practicable. It means remaining and fighting on'.

She is also correct in her response to the criticism that Livingstone should have formed a new party, which was made by the ISG amongst others. This position made the error of misunderstanding the political level of the battles taking place in the labour movement at this stage. It also ignored the question of Livingstone's politics and why people were voting for him. Comrade Shawcroft is right to think that it 'is a very odd take on the struggle for socialism' to think that the far left and a few isolated people from the Labour left can 'force Livingstone into starting a new party in the Scargill mode'. Her article is a useful read as it clearly represents the views of a class-conscious layer of the best activists inside the Labour Party.

It is also true that many of the traditional arguments for the Labour left staying in and fighting remain valid. The trade union link is intact, with the unions still holding 50 per cent of the votes at Conference, and there is a contradic-

tion between the largely Old Labour membership and the New Labour (ie, anti-Labour) leadership, as the Livingstone candidacy has clearly illustrated. Blair has not yet succeeded in his bid to turn the Labour Party into an out-and-out bourgeois party in the mould of the US Democrats.

However, despite being correct, this analysis can lead to passivity in the face of a rightward-moving leadership. Even if they do not openly say so, the political tactics of some on the left can sometimes imply that there is little difference between Blair and former right-wing leaders of the party. By underestimating the change in the situation, these comrades make the opposite mistake to those who call on people to leave the party. Their argument goes something along the lines of 'when the economic conditions get worse, Blairism will be defeated and the Labour left will regain its strength and influence'.

This view manages to be both pessimistic about what can be achieved in the Labour Party today, and over optimistic about what might be achieved 'the day after tomorrow'. It also underestimates the connection between what the left does now and what we will be able to achieve in the future. Many of those who make this error were also amongst the most vocal in calling on Livingstone not to stand as mayor as an independent. The *Morning Star*, for example, used a one-sided analysis to draw a parallel between Livingstone's situation and that of Arthur Scargill. But Livingstone has wide support in the labour movement and in the working class, whereas the formation of the SLP was backed by only a relatively small number of activists.

Another problem with a passive

attitude is that it can lead to abstention from practical activity in specific situations where Blairite policies pose a threat to, for instance, party democracy, in favour of general propaganda.

The tasks that we should take up include organising the left in the party in an effective way, applying the tactic of the united front by making alliances with those disaffected with New Labour but placed politically to our right. We must be trying to break the cosy alliance between the union tops and the Labour leadership.

In the next few months, we need to start organising activity on this basis by building on the anger that exists over the mayoral selection and the tremendous support Livingstone has received inside the trade unions. There is likely to be a campaign to reinstate him as a member of the Labour Party if he wins on May 4, and whatever the result of the election we must wage a relentless struggle against the privatisation of the Tube. Both of these are potential focal points for linking up the opposition in the party with that in the unions, and putting forward an agenda of working class politics and representation that can cause the Blair 'project' further problems. There exists an opportunity which, although it shouldn't be exaggerated, it would be reckless to throw away. ■

LM, ITN and the libel laws

by Nick Davies

Last month, in the High Court, ITN won a £375,000 libel case against *LM* magazine. The victor is a giant news corporation. The output of its ITV division is, for the most part, a stupefyingly banal diet of dumbed-down news management, dominated by the doings of the Beckham and Windsor families. The perfunctory international coverage portrays most of the rest of the world as victims or lunatics. On the other hand, *LM*, formerly *Living Marxism*, is an independent publication with a claimed circulation of 10,000. Losing the case means likely closure for the magazine, and bankruptcy for its editors. A typical story of the libel laws being used by a giant corporation to destroy a small opponent?

Yes, but there was more to it than that.

ITN went to court to defend the integrity of its two journalists, Ian Williams and Penny Marshall, who, in August 1992, reported from Bosnia on the concentration camps at Omarska and Trnopolje run by Serb Nationalists, in which Muslim and Croat prisoners were starved, tortured and killed. Five years later, *LM* ran an article entitled 'The picture that fooled the world' claiming that the camps were in fact refugee centres, and the barbed wire was in fact around the camera crew, not the prisoners. ITN sued, *LM* pleaded a defence of fair comment. ITN produced witnesses, including former camp inmates; *LM* did not, and lost. Believe it or not, British justice does sometimes deliver the right result.

But why did it need Lord Justice Moreland and 12 angry men and women to 'prove' what millions already know to be true? And should socialists regard the judgement as an attack on press freedom, however much they might disagree with *LM*, or should they applaud the silencing of those who seek to deny the mass killings, torture, rape and displacement of Muslims and Croats?

We need to go back a bit. *LM* had its origins in the Revolutionary Communist Group, which was expelled from the International Socialists, now the SWP, in the mid-1970s. The RCG itself split not long after, when the forerunners of the RCP formed the Revolutionary Communist Tendency, which published *Revolutionary Communist Papers*. Adopting the title Revolutionary Communist Party, which in itself demonstrated a decidedly shaky grasp

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LM, ITN and the libel laws

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of political reality, the RCP nevertheless grew to a few hundred and brought out a journal entitled *The Next Step*. This was well written and well produced, but in its content displayed an utter sectarianism towards the labour movement, in particular the GLC under Ken Livingstone and the NUM during the miners' strike. RCP members were energetic in their Irish solidarity work, which at the height of the campaign for political status for Republican prisoners was no bad thing, but this work was conducted in the most sectarian and provocative fashion possible with the apparent intention of excluding any possibility of meaningful united front work around the issue.

In the same vein was the RCP's valuable contribution to the struggle to defend the NHS, which can be summed up as 'Why campaign to save the NHS? Isn't it obvious that you'll never get a decent health care system under capitalism?'. Despite, or because of, this obvious contempt for the concerns of working class people, the RCP had little difficulty in attracting the young, the well educated, and, unusually for the British left, the well dressed. These guilt-tripped, well-heeled recruits were happy to pour some of the parental pennies into the glossy *Living Marxism*.

By the 1990s, the RCP was losing its bearings, not to say its marbles, eventually winding itself up. Its half-life, launched by a clique around the former leadership, was *LM*, a 'new current affairs magazine, post politics'. Like many of those disenchanted with Marxism, the remains of the RCP sought refuge in post-modernism and an individualistic brand of libertarianism. Its fellow travellers were behind the Channel 4 series, *Against Nature*, a hatchet job on environmentalism which made common cause with the free-market cornucopism of the anti-environmentalist right wing. Obviously the unpalatable message of environmental activists was something of a spectre at the feast to *LM*'s many friends in the media, who were gorging themselves on designer chic and consumerism. As for the article which

provoked ITN's libel action, it was written by Thomas Deichmann, a regular contributor to *LM* and self-styled seeker after truth, who appeared as a defence witness for Dusko Tadic, the first person to be convicted in The Hague for crimes against humanity.

If ITN had initiated an attack on the RCP, the grounds for socialists defending it would probably have been much clearer. The RCP had at least a toe-hold in the workers' movement, where it is unfortunately not unusual for some fairly rancid opinions to be aired – take, for example, the worshippers of Stalin and Mao, the apologists for the crackdown on Solidarnosc and the massacre at Tiananmen Square. These are problems to be dealt with within and by the labour movement. The last thing we need is for the courts to come muscling in. As it was, the RCP's energetic pursuit of a campaign of ethnic cleansing denial muddied the waters considerably.

Of course, belonging to the labour movement is not the sole criterion for being defended by socialists. *Private Eye* is not part of the labour movement, but the fact that the rich, arrogant and powerful, such as Robert Maxwell and James Goldsmith, were forever using the libel laws to try to close it down should tell us that the *Eye* has often done a good job! On the other hand, we would not defend someone guilty of racist violence on the grounds that he or she was a paid-up trade unionist.

Libel laws are a weapon of the rich and powerful, and libel lawyers don't come cheap. You cannot get legal aid for libel. The huge damages are designed to intimidate opponents, or drive them into bankruptcy. We might think that *LM* had it coming. Its refusal to countenance an out-of-court settlement made the outcome inevitable, and its freedom of speech defence bent the stick substantially: as socialists we do not campaign for the right to tell lies!

That being said, a strong note of warning is necessary. The libel laws do not divide the critics of the capitalist media into principled labour movement activists or journalists on the one hand, and ex-Marxist, libertarian dilettantes on the other. It would be easier to decide if, for example, News Corporation was

suings a trade union which had claimed that *Sun* journalists lied about a strike, but often we are stuck with a 'difficult' case such as this.

Even after establishing that the libel laws should not be used to finish off *LM*, we should remember that socialists do not defend press freedom unconditionally. We are against any platform for fascists, racists and holocaust deniers. Was *LM* merely trying to outsmart ITN for the fun of it, to show that the journalists took short cuts for the sake of a story, or was there a seriously pro-Serb nationalist agenda at work? (It appears that the latter was the case, or at least it was during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, when *Living Marxism/LM* relied on the simplistic argument that during the Second World War Croats were fascists and Serbs were anti-fascists. It appears that *LM*'s intellectuals had never heard of the collaboration of Mihailovic and his Serb Chetniks, or the pro-German Serbian government of General Nedic.) Should the carnage wrought by Serb (and Croat) nationalists in Bosnia against the Bosnian Muslims be equated with the Nazi holocaust, the difference being only one of degree? If so, should *LM*'s attempt at historical revisionism deprive it of the right to freedom of speech? Does support for the Serbian nationalist position necessarily mean denial of the historical fact of Omarska and Trnopolje?

In dealing with these questions, revolutionary Marxists are forced to face up to the extent of pro-Serb sentiment in the labour movement, whether it be based on the illusion that Serbia is 'socialist' or on a belief that if the bourgeois media reports something, it must always be a lie. This is behind the suspicion among some of the left that the massacre of Kosovo Albanians at Racak was some kind of Gulf of Tonkin incident, designed to justify NATO intervention. But, under conditions of full or limited press freedom it has been organs of the bourgeois media, or individual reporters, which have brought to the attention of millions events in South Africa and Vietnam, or the activities of the British army in the north of Ireland, or the Contras in Nicaragua. Unfortunately for pro-Serbs in the labour movement, even ITN can tell the truth, sometimes.

Rover workers need action, not words

by Pete Bloomer, Jude Harris and Steve Revins

On April 1, we witnessed the largest workers' demonstration that has been held in Birmingham in living memory, and probably the largest in Britain since the pit closure crisis of 1992. Following the announcement by BMW that the Longbridge car plant was to be sold, local historian and right-wing populist Carl Chinn (along with the anti-union daily rag, the *Evening Mail*) called upon the 'people of Birmingham' to march in a show of solidarity and 'Brumminess'. The trade unions fell in behind this call, and on the day an estimated 80,000 people – overwhelmingly workers – turned up.

The general secretaries of four national trade unions (the TGWU, AEEU, MSF and GMB) addressed the rally at the end of the march, but workers listened in vain for their leaders to propose a single action that might prevent them losing their jobs. It was clear that all four had already accepted the sell-off as inevitable, and the best that Tony Woodley, the TGWU motor industry negotiator, could muster was that Rover 'wouldn't go quietly'. There were no local trade union officials or shop-floor representatives of the Longbridge workers on the platform, and the only speaker to give a lead was Carl Chinn, who called for a blockade of the factory gates should any attempt be made to asset-strip the plant. Workers showed what they thought by leaving the rally in large numbers after each speaker.

Under BMW ownership, Rover workers have already experienced two waves of redundancies – 1,500 jobs went in 1996 and 2,500 in 1998 (which actually became more than 3,000 due to an over-subscribed voluntary redundancy deal). Writing in the TUC Workers Soli-

darity Committee newsletter, *Unity*, we said that the TGWU leadership was selling out the Rover workers: 'Without a hint of combativity the union leaders' strategy is to act as agents of BMW' and 'seek to persuade the Longbridge workforce of the need to accept substantial redundancies'. The subsequent spectacle of the joint union/BMW mass meeting to urge acceptance of the deal was a dark day in the long history of the bureaucracy's collaboration with the bosses.

Make Labour nationalise Rover!

Placing demands on Labour to nationalise the whole Rover Group has to be the central feature of our work over the next few weeks. The emphasis of many left organisations has been to call on Rover

workers, particularly those at Longbridge, to occupy. Occupation is a necessary and central part of a much-needed militant campaign by Rover workers to force the government to nationalise the group, yet this quantum leap in workers' consciousness and action has surely got to be built for! Although the steps towards occupation will have to be rapid, nevertheless steps will have to be made. For this reason, Workers Action, in a leaflet distributed on the demonstration, called for the Rover workers and the labour movement to formulate a programme of action, which we argued would lead to the necessity to occupy all threatened plants.

By the process of advancing demands within the labour movement, making real the pledges of solidarity from all sections of the movement – from gen-

Continued next page

Meanwhile, at Ford ...

As we go to press, it looks increasingly likely that Ford will soon be announcing the end of car production at its Dagenham plant in east London, with the loss of an estimated 3,000 jobs. The company, which has already announced plans to lay off 1,350 assembly line workers, is expected to concentrate its European operations in Germany – it has already confirmed that the new Fiesta will be built at its Cologne factory rather than at Dagenham. Under the latest plan, the engine and body press lines at Dagenham would be retained.

The TGWU is talking about industrial action to defend jobs at Ford. While this is to be welcomed, workers have a right to be sceptical – the same union leaders have refused to mount any form of industrial action over the sell-off of Rover, and only organised a small contingent out of the more than 7,000 workers employed at Dagenham to attend the demonstration in Birmingham on April 1. Ford workers must launch a campaign for support in the labour movement, demand that their leaders fight for the nationalisation of Ford's UK plants, and prepare to take independent action if necessary.

WA

Rover workers need action ...

Continued from previous page

eral secretaries to the thousands of rank-and-file trade unionists – and through demonstrations, rallies and mass pickets, Rover workers can gain the confidence to take action.

Birmingham TUC adopts militant position

Birmingham Trades Union Council Executive has adopted a statement which calls for the nationalisation of Rover. The statement is by no means a blueprint, but it gives the left in Birmingham official sanction to launch a labour movement campaign, which should be used to assist the push within the TGWU, AEEU, MSF and GMB for action. At their April meeting, Birmingham TUC delegates passed a comprehensive resolution for solidarity with Rover workers that initiated the call for a London demonstration to demand the nationalisation of Rover. It pledges the TUC to play a role in organising such a demonstration and urges Longbridge workers to occupy the plant.

The executive of Birmingham TUC has yet to agree the implementation of this position, and is compromised due to the role of its secretary who is also a member of Birmingham City Council's executive. The council has accepted that there will be mass redundancies, without even a statement in opposition to them, and is a crucial part of Blair's 'Taskforce' which will attempt to relocate Rover workers to other jobs.

The left should maximise pressure on the Birmingham Trades Council leadership in order to force it to act as a centre for solidarity and to fight for a national campaign to take Rover into public ownership. The threat of mass redundancies at Longbridge should be an issue in the May council elections, in which the Socialist Party is standing against Labour in the Longbridge ward – with what could be great possibilities for a 'No redundancies, nationalise Rover!' candidacy. The demand on Labour candidates must be to break with Blair's policy and support a labour movement campaign of this type. As the Birmingham TUC statement says, 'Better to sack Blair than the Rover workers!'

Open the books – expose BMW's lies

BMW claims that its Rover operation has been making massive losses, yet a true accounting would show the approximately £2 billion development costs of two new Rover models (the 'Super Mini' and the new 2 series) as assets rather than losses. Reportedly, even development costs at BMW-owned Rolls Royce have been included in the figures! The trade unions must demand access to the accounts to expose BMW's lies, because these lies are the basis of the bosses' and government's argument that mass redundancies are necessary.

For a Rover-wide strike now!

Since BMW announced its plans for Rover there have been no mass meetings of workers at Longbridge. It is essential that mass meetings take place, as it is clear that the union leadership will not call for action unless it is demanded and fought for by the membership. Some left groups have failed to call for a Rover-wide strike, but Workers Action believes that such a call should be made. Production at Rover is continuing, earning BMW revenue and providing continuity of lines for future buyers. The current intention is that the plant at Cowley will remain under BMW ownership, with production of the new Mini transferred there from Longbridge. The Works Committee at Cowley and the local media are peddling the line that the future of the plant is secure because it has higher productivity levels and has been 'trouble free'. But is the Works Committee seriously saying that you can rely on the word of the BMW bosses? The reality is that they will have no compunction in closing Cowley if it suits their plans – there has already been talk of building the new Mini at one of BMW's German plants. Anyone can see that the future of Cowley is actually in the balance, and that pretending otherwise only divides one plant from another and plays into the bosses' hands.

The establishment of strike committees, if strikes are called, would give Rover workers more power to conduct a fight for nationalisation, and would massively amplify the argument for an occupation of Longbridge. They would

also provide an organising focus through which to fight for solidarity strike action.

The argument put forward by the CPGB and others that going on strike would save BMW money is incorrect. A Rover-wide strike would crystallise the crisis and could bring the rank and file into a position of ascendancy. The biggest problem right now is that the workers have not met to consider what their unions should do to fight redundancies, closures and asset stripping. The national Joint Shop Stewards Committee has met, but, like the Longbridge Shop Stewards Committee, seems unable to propose any meaningful action. Presided over by Tony Woodley, the national JSSC, as is now well known, has discussed having a campaign for nationalisation – but *only* after attempts first to persuade BMW to retain ownership, and second to find a buyer who will keep the Rover Group together. Currently, it seems that the goal is to get an alternative buyer to Alchemy who will give some assurance of retaining most of the jobs at Longbridge.

Woodley, then, may call publicly for nationalisation – but only after the sell-off is announced as fact! Such a position is a complete sell-out. Stewards must be urged to break with this shambles of a policy and call mass meetings to organise action for nationalisation. Holding to discipline with the bureaucrats is the short road to disaster. The pinnacle of activity that has been reached so far is the demonstration called by Carl Chinn and the *Evening Mail*. Given the massive response, the bureaucrats are running scared and have persuaded the national JSSC not to call a London demonstration which would put pressure on the Labour government to intervene, but to call a lobby of parliament instead!

As we write this article, the future of tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs in the West Midlands hang in the balance. The cowardice of the union leaderships in refusing to call for action means that the responsibility now falls on the Rover workers themselves to force the unions to act. Given recent history, the prospects cannot be said to be bright. However, only militant action can transform the situation. We argue that the best form of action would be for the occupation of Longbridge. If the numbers who were mobilised on April 1 can be brought out again in support of a programme of action, then all things are possible. We cannot give up the fight!

WA

No redundancies, no closures, save Longbridge!

Nationalise Rover!

Big demonstrations like today's can help create the conditions of confidence on which to build for workers' action, but demonstrations by themselves cannot resolve the issues. A programme of action must be formulated by Rover workers and the labour movement, to stop redundancies and prevent closures. The likes of Carl Chinn and the *Evening Mail* will not demand the action that is needed. The Rover workers have to organise themselves to take up the fight.

The super-concentration of ownership of car production is increasing pressure on workers to pay the price for global restructuring. Twenty-five per cent more cars are being produced than are being sold. Through take-overs and closures, analysts predict the survival of only three car manufacturing companies in 20-30 years' time. The workers should fight to retain jobs, pay and conditions and make the bosses and their governments pay.

We hold the Labour government responsible. No job losses are acceptable, let alone the mass unemployment which would be caused by closure. The Labour government/Birmingham City Council task force will not produce an alternative. Their immediate acceptance of mass redundancies is spineless cowardice, and we must demand that the council joins the campaign to keep the car industry in Birmingham alive.

Tony Woodley and the trade union leaderships have always been in a cosy relationship with the bosses, based on a maximising of profits through a

worsening of the wages and conditions of workers. Any attempt at a 'deal' with BMW, Ford, Alchemy or any other group of gangsters must be rejected. The Rover Group should be kept together and nationalised as a whole, without compensation to BMW or shareholders.

The bosses run industry to make profit not to benefit the workers. Production in the plant should be taken over by workers, working to a plan for need rather than profit. Only state ownership of Longbridge can guarantee the future jobs and conditions of the workers there. The Labour government has the money – Gordon Brown boasts of £14 billion in the 'war chest'. The government has just announced it is to give £500m to British Aerospace for its 'Super Jumbo' project. So why not nationalise Rover to save the 50,000 jobs which could be lost?

Action now!

We believe that a Rover-wide strike is necessary as an organising centre and a focal point for wider solidarity action. Whilst Cowley may have been given a stay of execution, if Longbridge closes the writing is on the wall for the rest of Rover.

We could now be days away from the asset-stripping of Longbridge. It is necessary for Longbridge to be occupied in order to prevent the removal of plant and machinery. This action should involve as many Rover workers as possible, but has to happen now. We should campaign as widely as possible

for solidarity action rather than waiting for the union leadership to get off its knees!

Stop the sell-out! Make the union leaders fight!

The unions are supposed to represent the interests of their workers. Yet, last time the bosses demanded mass redundancies at Longbridge (about 18 months ago) the union leaders argued for the workers to accept the deal. Now Woodley & Co are spouting nationalist, anti-German rhetoric, but it was British bosses and governments that oversaw decades of lack of investment and de-industrialisation.

We have more in common with German workers, such as the workers at Alcatel Kabelwerk in Berlin and Heosch in Dortmund than we have with British bosses and the owners of the *Evening Mail*. These workers occupied threatened factories to prevent closure at the end of last year, with successful outcomes. British trade unions need to be allied to their German counterparts and car workers internationally. We need rank-and-file links to co-ordinate international action to retain jobs and conditions and to stop closures.

- For a Rover-wide strike now!
- Make the trade union bureaucrats fight for a labour movement campaign to force Labour to nationalise!
- Build links with German unions!
- All threatened plant must be occupied! Take control to stop the asset strippers! A workers' plan of production – for need not profit! **WA**

This leaflet was produced and given out by Workers Action supporters at the Rover car workers' march through Birmingham on April 1

Just say no to Labour's war on drugs

by Richard Price

It's not very often that it's possible for a socialist to find a measure of agreement with the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Telegraph*. It's almost as rare to find *Evening Standard* columnist Brian Sewell talking sense.

The occasion for this unprecedented state of affairs was the publication on March 28 of *Drugs and the Law*, the report of the Police Foundation inquiry chaired by Viscountess Runciman, which found that upholding Britain's drug laws is more dangerous than drugs themselves, and recommended the reclassification of cannabis as a class C drug, and of ecstasy and LSD as class B drugs. It also recommended the abolition of prison sentences for possession of class B and C drugs, and a corresponding lowering of penalties for dealing in them. While it fell short of legalisation, or even decriminalisation, the report's proposals, drawn up by a group of eminently respectable public figures, constitute the most authoritative review yet of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act.

The predictable response of the government, backed by the Tory opposition, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and hapless Drug Tsar Keith Hellawell, was to dismiss the report's detailed analysis out of hand. The Home Office issued a statement rubbishing its findings, arguing that: 'The government has a clear and consistent view about the damage which drugs can cause to individuals, their families and the wider community, the link between drugs and crime – and the corresponding need to maintain firm control.'

In the past, a united front of politicians and police chiefs would usually be enough to leave any proposal for the liberalisation of drug laws dead in the water. Whatever the immediate and predictable response of politicians, this one isn't going to go away half so easily. The media has refused to jump to attention, as it did so often in the past. In their March 29 issues, the *Guardian* warned: 'We have

been waging a US-style war on drugs for too long. All that has been achieved is a war on our children.' The *Daily Mail*, while not endorsing liberalisation, called for 'hysteria-free and rational examination' of the arguments on both sides, while the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* cautiously welcomed the report. Anne McElvoy, writing in the *Independent*, which for some time has campaigned for the legalisation of cannabis, said bluntly: 'The drug laws aren't working, and the Runciman report gives the government all the evidence it needs to change them.'

Brian Sewell, after a laboured attempt at humour to describe his caffeine addiction, strikes a surprisingly sane note: 'There is now a widespread belief that the Government's repressive policies cannot work and that we should at least be more permissive with recreational drugs. Let me suggest a more radical response. Let us take the profit out of illegal drugs by making them all legal. Let the addict walk into any pharmacy and pick up a clean needle and a measured dose of heroin or crack for much the same as it costs to buy a ticket on a London bus. With no law broken, there would be no consequent adrenal thrill, no one to whom to sell drugs for a profit, no point in shoplifting or prostitution, and cannabis can grow on the kitchen window-sill.' (*Evening Standard*, April 11)

There are clear divisions among senior police officers in the face of the manifest failure of the 'war' on drugs. While ACPO is towing the official line, some police chiefs favour decriminalisation of 'soft' drugs, while Cleveland police authority has called for a debate on legalisation. The *Police Review* (March 31) went so far as to criticise Hellawell for 'performing a huge U-turn on the more enlightened approach he adopted as a senior police officer'.

Collectively, these types of responses reflect a huge shift in public opinion, behind which lie powerful social changes. So long as drug taking was defined very largely by class, so were rul-

ing class responses to it. There was no great public scandal surrounding cocaine in the 1920s, when it remained an upper class pursuit. When the first waves of the counter-culture lapped against Balliol College, Oxford, in the mid-60s, Howard Marks was able to establish a 'dope-smoking haven, enshrined and protected by College and University' (*Mr Nice*, Minerva, 1997). While purple hearts and other stimulants were available in the more working class atmosphere of dancehalls, it was only in 1968, when drug taking threatened to become a mass phenomenon, that there was a series of high profile drug busts intended to intimidate the burgeoning youth culture.

Cocaine may have been the drug of choice of rock stars in the late 70s and 80s, but its price placed it beyond mass consumption. But the exposure of masses of young people in Britain to ecstasy from 1988 onwards transformed the situation. The hysterical reaction of the Tories to the rave scene, with its massive gatherings of youth in defiance of the law, resulted in punitive legislation and a huge dispersal of police resources into combating promoters of illegal raves.

But this too proved counter-productive, and an uneasy truce was declared in the early 90s. By granting clubs licences, the Tories hoped to domesticate an underground scene which was beyond their control, and channel it into legitimate, old fashioned capitalism. To some extent they were successful, and the UK dance scene has been a seemingly endless source of profits for record companies, clubs, tour operators, security firms, merchandisers, publishers and others. On the other hand, this success remained heavily dependent on an illegal drug culture, which the government and the state professed to be at war with.

This ambiguity was apparent in New Labour's attempt to rebrand itself as the spearhead of Cool Britannia. Inviting the likes of Oasis for drinkies at No.10 sits a little uneasily alongside a policy which says that all drug consump-

tion is equally bad and anti-social. Leaving loop-holes for tobacco advertising in Formula 1 racing for New Labour-donating Tony-crony Bernie Ecclestone was another high profile exercise in government hypocrisy.

The pervasive spread of drug taking throughout society makes it near-impossible to get away with the old, knee-jerk responses. While British society has become increasingly relaxed about recreational drug taking, it has also become more sophisticated in distinguishing between different types of drug. At one end of the spectrum, cannabis is widely recognised as largely benign – ‘No victim, no crime’ as a sticker on many underground stations proclaims. At the opposite end, heroin and crack remain off-limits to the vast majority of drug users. (Leading dance music magazine *Mixmag* reported in ‘Britain’s biggest-ever survey’ of drug use (February 2000) that only 1.3 per cent of respondents used heroin, and only 2.1 per cent used crack.) Between these two poles, lie other substances like cocaine, ecstasy and LSD, which are seen as carrying some risks, but fewer than many freely-available substances like alcohol and tobacco.

New Labour’s drugs policy not only lags way behind public opinion in general, but, judging by the responses of the *Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Express*, behind even the Middle England constituency to which it tailors its every utterance. On the day that Ken Livingstone declared his independent candidacy for London mayor, Frank Dobson attempted three times in a televised debate to accuse him of being soft on drugs – as if this is the major concern of Londoners at this election; as if, indeed, the mayor has greater responsibility for drug use in London than, say, the government, or its pet enforcer Hellawell. Even the most timid statements in the past by Labour politicians like Mo Mowlam and Clare Short that the police should concentrate on targeting ‘hard’ drug use and supply have been jumped on by Millbank minders, and immediate disclaimers issued to the effect that the government views *all* drug use as equally harmful. It turns out – not surprisingly – that Livingstone (who unlike Home Office minister Charles Clarke does *not*

admit to inhaling in his youth) holds considerably more sensible views than Dobbo. In an interview with *New Musical Express*, quoted in the *Guardian* (April 11), Livingstone says: ‘I do think we could consider decriminalising things like ecstasy and cannabis, but I would never do anything to encourage people to take drugs any more than I would encourage people to drink.’

Of course, there has been for some time a right wing-libertarian justification for across the board legalisation. The Federation of Conservative Students in its most right-wing period under Thatcher embraced such a policy. It’s the moral equivalent of the ‘Let-the-mad-Paddies-kill-each-other’ support for withdrawing troops from Ireland. But this shouldn’t blind us to the issues involved. It’s hardly surprising that the battle lines of public debate aren’t clearly drawn. We have a labour movement whose soul is divided between Methodism, cold water and abstinence on the one hand, and drowning its sorrows on the other; we have a bourgeois establishment torn between promoting individualism, and repressing and controlling the young.

As I have argued elsewhere, (‘Drugs, Socialists and Morality: A Rejoinder’, *What Next?*, No.13, 1999) socialists should not set themselves up as guardians of public morality in areas of personal choice which do not harm other people. In any case, the sheer scale of drug use means that a policy of prohibition is doomed to failure, and only serves to strengthen gangsterism and the criminalisation of youth. (*Time Out* recently (April 12-19) claimed – somewhat implausibly – on a lurid front page that ‘one in three Londoners go to work on drugs’.)

Any situation where there are wildly differing sentencing policies, depending upon where people are arrested, which force does the arresting, and which court hears the case is manifestly unjust. No less absurd is talk of a ‘war’ on drugs when they are freely available at clubs up and down the country. Blair’s talk of a war is not only absurd; it is positively dangerous. Firm evidence that purely negative and unrealistic portrayals of drug use on television are counter-productive has

come recently in a report commissioned by the British Broadcasting Standards Authority. In a survey of 11-35 year olds, reported in *Newsnight* (April 13), it found that the crude anti-drugs propaganda used in most soaps and televised drama was unconvincing, and that a less negative, more educational approach was more credible.

Beyond Labour MP Paul Flynn – consistently the most intelligent and outspoken person in parliament on the subject – dissenting voices are few and far between. Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy and Labour MP Ian Gibson have called for a Royal Commission to consider decriminalising some forms of drug use. But whatever liberalisation such an avenue might bring, it would take years, in which time hundreds of thousands of recreational users would continue to be arrested, fined or jailed.

More alarming still is the evidence emerging on the consequences of poor drug education, particularly among working class teenagers. While society at large may be better educated on drug use, the message rammed home in schools up and down the country that all drugs are equally dangerous can itself have lethal results. A recent study by Manchester University researchers, funded by the Department of Health and carried out on behalf of the charity DrugScope, found that the average age for first experimentation with heroin had fallen from 17-18 in the late 1980s to 15 today. They found that heroin no longer carried the same stigma that it had in the past, that hard drug addiction is spreading to many towns and cities previously untouched by heroin epidemics, and that some youngsters believed heroin was similar to cannabis (quoted in the *Guardian*, April 13).

For all these reasons, socialists must abandon the traditional ‘just say no’ approach of much of the left, and campaign for legalisation combined with a wide-ranging programme of drug education, advice and, where appropriate, treatment. Anything less threatens a disaster for the small but alarmingly growing number of young addicts, and an unbridgeable gap opening up between the left and millions of recreational drug users.

Repeating racist history

by Simon Deville

The Labour leadership and the Tories are locked into a competition to outdo each other in playing the race card around immigration and asylum. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) – neither of which are generally known as hotbeds of anti-racist militancy – have both condemned the language being used by both parties as whipping up racism.

Tony Blair and Jack Straw have repeatedly droned on about 'bogus' asylum seekers and 'economic migrants', leaving the Tories scraping around to sound more draconian than the Labour front bench – a fairly tough task since what Blair and Straw have been saying could just as easily have been said by Enoch Powell 30 years earlier. Straw seems to go further than Powell in that he at the same time argues for asylum seekers to live on less than 70 per cent of benefit levels, denies them the right to work and then tries to stop them begging or making a few pounds cleaning car windscreens. Powell on a good day at least conceded that some black people could be 'assimilated into British culture', whereas Straw seems to have a strategy of starving all asylum seekers to death. Indeed, the parallels to, and lessons to be learnt from, British anti-immigration legislation in the 1950s and 60s are staggering. Whilst the UNHCR, the CRE and others have criticised the language used by the government and the Tories, the real problem lies much deeper.

During the late 1950s, a small minority of racist thugs was able to play a leading role in changing state legislation in their favour and in aiding the growth of the far right. The response of the mainstream of the Labour movement simply played into the hands of the right. When groups of fascists went on the rampage through Notting Hill in 1958, the racist media had a field day over the fact that certain sections of the black community defended themselves against these violent thugs. For the racist media this was simply a foretaste of problems being stored up by

the state allowing mass immigration. Over the next ten years, a governmental consensus has emerged that has shaped the framework for British immigration laws since.

This consensus argued that the key to good 'race relations' was to limit immigration. Obviously what was meant was black immigration from the Caribbean and Asia in particular. By the end of the 1960s, large-scale immigration had been brought to a halt, though further rounds of anti-immigrant legislation were introduced by successive Labour and Conservative governments. The climate that this discourse created simply led to the growth of the far right throughout this period, with the National Front reaching its peak in the mid-to late 1970s. The NF subsequently declined in the face of a growing and increasingly militant anti-fascist movement, whilst at the same time much of their traditional ground was taken up by the Conservatives under Thatcher. Although many Labour MPs from the time have expressed regret at their role in various aspects of the shaping of immigration laws, the Labour Party today seems intent on repeating its predecessors' actions.

Having pretty much ended most forms of immigration, the only thing left to have a go at is asylum legislation. Four years ago, the Tories introduced their racist Asylum and Immigration Act which removed the right to benefits from 'in house' asylum applications – that is, from people who apply for asylum anywhere other than at their port of entry into Britain. Alongside this were a number of other measures designed to make life harder for those fleeing persecution, and giving the state greater powers to snoop on and harass anyone suspected of being an 'illegal' immigrant. The worst aspects of Tory legislation were subsequently watered down in the courts, where it was ruled that local authorities bore some responsibility for asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute under the National Assistance Act and the Children's Act.

At the time, the overwhelming majority of the trade union movement opposed all these measures outright.

But the Labour Party in opposition was much less forthright. Although numerous MPs were part of the Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill, the Labour front bench refused to condemn the Tories' racism outright. Even so, the Labour leadership did feel under sufficient pressure to make some concessions to the wider labour movement. Amongst such concessions was a pre-election promise that benefits would be restored to all asylum seekers if it could be shown that the chaotic voucher system was more expensive to administer than benefits. Since then, Labour has conceded that the voucher system is more expensive to administer, but has decided to keep it anyway and extend it to all asylum seekers, or at least those that aren't incarcerated in prisons or the Orwellian named 'reception centres'. With the most recent round of asylum legislation, Labour has gone much further than the Tories thought they could get away with, with barely a whimper of opposition from the mainstream of the labour movement. Disgracefully, only two Labour MPs actually voted against Labour's Immigration and Asylum Bill last year.

With the financial responsibility for supporting asylum seekers placed predominantly on local authorities, this simply encourages the argument that services are being cut due to areas being 'swamped by immigrants' (despite the fact that councils have cut services apace regardless of levels of asylum seekers). Forcing asylum seekers to live in areas where they are relatively isolated, with little or no support structures, can only serve to heighten racism.

Whilst all anti-racists should bloc with the CRE, Bill Morris and even Simon Hughes and the UNHCR when it comes to criticising the language used by the likes of Jack Straw or William Hague, we must recognise that changing the language they use will not get rid of the mountains of racist legislation that the state has accumulated as part of its armoury. To really combat racism will involve picking apart all immigration controls and dismantling racist institutions throughout Britain and Europe. ■

Zimbabwe

Yes to land reform, no to Mugabe's thugs

by Nick Davies

In 1980, Zanu-PF leader Robert Mugabe was the popular and overwhelming winner of newly-independent Zimbabwe's first election. Twenty years down the line, he is in trouble. The honeymoon ended with the military repression in Matabeleland in the 1980s. Then there were attempts to limit freedom of the press, attacks on trade unionists, harassment of gays, and the expensive and futile involvement in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

His biggest problem is Zimbabwe's economic meltdown, due as much to corruption and cronyism as to the depredations of the IMF and the fluctuations in price of imports and exports. With his popularity in freefall, he proposed a constitutional change giving him more power, including the power to order the take-over of white

farms. In February, this was rejected in a referendum, and his opponents, principally the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), have been taking to the streets. Elections are due in May, which he looks like losing. His last resort has been to mobilise his base among the veterans of the independence war in and around the ruling Zanu-PF party, using the vexed issue of land reform as an excuse to confront his opponents, declare a state of emergency, and so save his own skin. The burning of white farms has got more to do with Mugabe's political survival than with a genuine desire to democratise the land. So far, it has failed. His opponents are more determined than ever to get rid of him, and there are rumours of an impending coup within Zanu-PF.

In Zimbabwe there is an obvious need for land reform. About 4,500 white farmers own 11 million hectares of the best agricultural land. About one million blacks are crowded into about 16 million hectares, often in the less fertile areas. The white-owned land was stolen from the Africans when Zimbabwe was a British colony. The white farmers were the backbone of Ian Smith's racist regime overthrown in 1980. But now, many white Zimbabweans, especially those not even born during the Smith regime, openly disavow that era, and at least claim not to be racists. And what use is a

torched farm dwelling to anyone? Mugabe has tried to portray opposition to the land seizures as a throwback to the days of white rule. For some white farmers it probably is, although many whites support the overwhelmingly black MDC. Mugabe accuses the MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai of being a white stooge, but Tsvangirai is a former leader of the trade union body ZCTU, and much of his support is from young people in the towns. The analysis of most of the British media is a mirror image of Mugabe's propaganda. They wind up their readers and viewers with images of innocent whites being killed or beaten up, and yet there have been more black MDC supporters than white farmers killed by Mugabe's goon squads. They just don't get their pictures in the *Daily Mail*, that's all.

Zimbabwe needs not Mugabe's violent manoeuvring but genuine, democratic land reform, under the control of the workers and rural poor. This means that the land goes to those in need, not Mugabe's cronies, and the redistributed land is not the poor land that the white farmers don't want. For real redistribution, roads and drainage are needed. Farmers will need interest-free credit to buy machinery, seed, fertiliser and livestock. White farmers who can demonstrate genuine hardship will have to be compensated. Tony Blair claims that British governments have provided £44m since 1980 to pay for land redistribution, but there will be no more because the land all went to government officials. Whether this is true or not, it is clear that there will be no real land reform under Mugabe's corrupt regime. But it will not be enough to kick him out. Even a government with the best of intentions will have trouble funding land reform, as well as basic health and education programmes, so long as the world financial institutions such as the World Bank, WTO and IMF, with its 'structural adjustment programmes', keep their stranglehold over Zimbabwe, subjecting its economy to a massive debt repayment schedule and ensuring that its people have no effective control over its resources. **WA**

Contrasts

The racist hatred that Britain affords to most asylum seekers stands in stark contrast to the response offered to those who might be considering fleeing the near-civil-war in Zimbabwe. A Slovak Roma, Kurd or Kosovar can look forward to harassment and starvation under Jack Straw's voucher scheme – or even worse under William Hague's concentration camps. Zimbabweans are free to enter Britain without question – provided they have at least one grandparent born in Britain. However, if all their grandparents were born in Rhodesia, normal racism will apply.

WA

Seattle

Rattled but not routed

by Laurence Barrett

‘Workers, students, activists rout WTO’ (Workers Action No.8) by Steve Zeltzer was certainly a lively and vivid account of the Battle of Seattle. Who could not relish the alliance of workers and environmentalists taking to the streets, the union bureaucrats squirming under pressure from their rank and file, and the thieves of the WTO having to cower behind lines

of cops? The Seattle action and the others around the world in solidarity with it mean that if millions of people were not aware of what the WTO is up to, then they know now.

The problem is, Steve lets himself get carried away. He is wrong to say that the demonstrators ‘stopped the WTO in its tracks and sent its 133 trade ministers home in utter defeat’. While the talks were delayed by events outside, what finally scuppered the WTO Seattle round was the

failure of the WTO to agree, principally on the question of agricultural subsidies. It would be nice if Steve were to be right in saying that it is ‘almost impossible for the WTO to take major new steps to further drive down wages, working conditions and environmental standards throughout the world’, but he is not, and, unfortunately, the WTO will be back.

Steve more or less correctly describes the WTO as the ‘organisation where the multi-national corporations and

RUC GC

by Charli Langford

The George Cross is the highest award the British state can give to a non-military person for heroic actions. Leave aside that the bourgeoisie have to be several degrees less heroic to win it; leave aside that with your medal usually comes a tiny invalidity pension rather than a worker’s wage; winning it is serious recognition. Probably the best-known GC for a worker was that of John Axon, a steam engine driver who was scalded to death while stopping his runaway damaged engine and train.

The collective award of a GC has occurred only once before – to the island of Malta, recognising the hardship and attacks it suffered as the only allied base in the Mediterranean during much of the Second World War. The British government has now awarded a second collective GC – to the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

It is hard to understand what pos-

sible heroic actions the RUC can claim. Since its formation it has operated in a totally partisan fashion. Other British police forces, despite their racism and homophobia, have always given lip-service to ‘equality before the law’. The RUC has tolerated loyalist mobs in the Six Counties and has joined with them in attacking Catholic areas; it has permitted its barracks to be attacked and robbed of weapons by loyalist terrorists; it has turned a blind eye to the murders of Catholics. It has run torture centres against Catholics whom it thought might have even the most tenuous links with Republicans, for which it has been found guilty of ‘cruel and inhumane treatment’ by the European Court of Human Rights. Its officers have provided information that has enabled loyalist paramilitaries to assassinate Republican ‘suspects’.

Given this catalogue of crimes against the nationalist community, it is very easy to understand the outrage felt in the Six Counties at the award. Britain has chosen to ignore the RUC’s brutal and sectarian history and highlight the casualties it has taken in its war against the IRA. It is a massive insult to the RUC’s victims.

But underlying all this is the most cynical political agenda. To allow New

Labour’s project of normalising the Six Counties for capitalism, the ‘peace process’ must continue. The social instability caused by overt discrimination against what is now 40 per cent of the population must stop. The Catholic middle class must be allowed to flourish and the normal class exploitation of the working class by the employers must be allowed to take place. This means that a police force will be needed to suppress all forms of working class dissent without sectarian fear or favour.

None of this can happen while the RUC is still operating overt anti-Catholic discrimination, nor will nationalists accept a 99 per cent Protestant, not to mention loyalist, police force. A new police authority is required – one that Catholics can be persuaded to join in order to give it some legitimacy. The RUC has to change, but the change will only be cosmetic. Out will go the loyalist symbolism of ‘Royal’, ‘Ulster’ and the crown and harp insignia. In return, the nationalists will be expected to drop their demands for the disbanding of the RUC. As for the Unionists, a piece of ribbon and a few ounces of metal is a small price to pay to buy their acceptance.

WA

their servants in governments come together to secretly map out how they will increase their control over the world's economy'. He describes how the past round of trade negotiations and decisions organised by the WTO has led to massive privatisation and deregulation of the banking, telecommunication and utilities industries, as well as massive cuts in education, housing and healthcare.

That the WTO is able to do this is precisely because of a 20-year onslaught against the world's working class and rural poor, led initially by Thatcher and Reagan, and now by Clinton and Blair. If the working class in the USA *had* been able, in alliance with environmental groups, to defeat the WTO in the way Steve describes, then there would not have been a WTO, at least in its present form, in the first place. The demonstrations, while important and impressive, actually showed the weakness of the working class in the US. When the working class *really* shows its power, the results are impressive. We don't have to go back decades for examples of this. In 1993 there was a one-day general strike in Belgium. No planes left Brussels, no ships left Antwerp. You couldn't even make a telephone call. If the working class in the US had the capacity to rout the WTO in the way Steve describes, it would have shut down Seattle.

This is not to belittle what did happen in Seattle. Neither is it to say the important mobilisation which did occur is of no consequence because it did not achieve a crushing victory (although Steve says it did!) – otherwise, we would be forever committing the sectarian folly of dismissing every strike because it did not end with the overthrow of capitalism. It is necessary to get events in their proper perspective, building on what was achieved, and learning from what was not. What was achieved in Seattle was the biggest protest by US workers in over two decades. A valuable gain was the building of links between workers and environmental activists, in a country where, due to the weakness of socialism and the labour movement, the utopian, petit-bourgeois and at times anti-working class aspects of environmentalism have been prominent. Pictures flashed around the world showed robo-cops beating up protesters, when the WTO great

and good had been hoping for a photocall and a quick press conference, telling us that they were doing this for our own good, before arguing about how best to exploit us. What was really positive was the series of demonstrations all around the world, in solidarity with the one in Seattle. We should make sure that the WTO is harried everywhere it goes.

In Britain, there is widespread anger at the greed of the fat cats, the huge profits made by privatised utilities and the culture of shareholder greed. Even the right-wing press is getting in on the act in condemning the activities of the high street banks. The anger at the attempts of the biochemical industry to control the food-chain has sent Monsanto into a tail-spin from which it might never recover. New Labour has been embarrassed by the catastrophic effects of its beloved free market in closing or mothballing high-tech factories in the north-east and South Wales. The imminent collapse of Rover has shown that while New Labour is proud to listen to business, business doesn't listen to New Labour. Blair and Byers are said to be 'furious' that BMW lied to the British government and that it is only interested in investing where there is maximum profit – whatever next! Meanwhile, the tens of thousands facing the dole are furious with BMW for pulling the plug on Rover, and furious with New Labour for letting them do it.

So far, the anger against the seemingly out-of-control multinationals has not translated itself into working class *action*, as opposed to street protests (important as they are), but that must be the crucial next stage. Any struggle against the depredations of the multinationals involves an international struggle against the secretive world government at the core of the new free-market order. Seattle was a start – a good start, but only a start. **WA**

Rage against the machine

Continued from page 26

campaign. An elderly relative of Julie Morgan bumped into him and announced: 'I know you. You're that Lionel Blair.'

Incompetent generals often lose battles because they are too busy fighting the last war. The Millbank clique is haunted by the party splits of the 1980s. This partly explains the control freakery and the attempt to build a leader-cult around Blair. They still haven't realised that voters, including Labour Party members, are now recoiling from this. New Labour's robotic hacks are often mocked in the media, and it is not just because of the rigged election that Livingstone is riding high in the opinion polls.

But the control freakery is not just a character defect of Tony Blair, or a political misjudgement of the leadership. For Blair and his clique it is an urgent necessity. As leader of the Labour Party he wants to build on Thatcher's project of liberating the rich from the poor. Most Labour Party members are in the party because they have the opposite perspective. Therefore, Millbank has the twin task of lowering expectations and reducing participation. However, in almost every index of 'social exclusion', New Labour's euphemism for poverty, Wales has the worst, or almost the worst, record in Britain. It also has a strong labour movement tradition. Last year, Labour Party supporters in Wales blacked New Labour's eye. This year, in London, they look set to black the other one.

If you don't know whether to laugh or cry at New Labour's inept and catastrophic arrogance, then this book will make you do both. **WA**

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London elections

Dear comrades,

Perhaps the easiest (and most important) choice socialists have in this election is how to cast their mayoral vote. But does voting for Livingstone for mayor give a guide as to how to vote in the elections for the Greater London Assembly?

In the constituency section of the GLA election, most class-conscious workers will vote for either London Socialist Alliance or Labour candidates. Clearly the LSA candidates are standing on a far better programme, but in reality they are unlikely to have much effect in this first-past-the-post section of the election other than perhaps handing the Tories the odd seat. I think most will – reluctantly – follow Livingstone's advice and cast a vote for Labour in this section, if only to stop the disaster of a Tory revival.

In the list section, however, there may be a slight chance of a left-wing alternative to New Labour being elected who would be a useful ally for an anti-Tube privatisation mayor. The Socialist Labour Party and the Communist Party of Britain are both engaged in sectarian projects and will receive little support. The LSA probably has a bigger campaign than the two other choices – the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation list and the independent, Peter Tatchell. However, there are political problems with supporting the LSA, whose list is topped by Paul Foot of the SWP – an organisation which has been engaged in a campaign to encourage socialists to desert the Labour Party. If this campaign was successful, it could be damaging for the class and the labour movement.

The record of Pat Sikorski of the CATP on this issue is little better, and despite the support of figures such as Suresh Grover and Chris Rogers, the former Labour Council leader in Hillingdon, the CATP may well be heading for a far lower vote than the LSA. Nevertheless, those who do vote for the CATP or for the LSA will be expressing their solidarity with the working class and opposition to Blairism.

So the real choice is likely to be

between the LSA and Peter Tatchell. Both of them are standing on similar manifestos and it may be that who gets the most votes on the day could be down purely to luck. However, Tatchell has pitched things in a better way on the issue of Labour than the LSA. He is asking Labour supporters to vote for him in the list section of the ballot to 'show Tony Blair that grassroots members want the party to return to its core socialist values of public ownership, social equality and redistribution of wealth'. A success for Tatchell, in spite his political weaknesses, would send the same message to Blair and give a mayor opposed to Tube privatisation the same help as Foot getting in. But it wouldn't have the bad effect of assisting an 'SWP party-building project'.

There are pros and cons for supporting both the LSA and Tatchell. It

could be argued, against supporting Tatchell, that Foot would be more accountable to the working class, but it is hard to see how this could take place through the structures of the LSA.

However, it may well be that neither the LSA nor Tatchell will get a seat in the London Assembly. Whatever happens, we will need to find a way to mobilise the discontent of those who cast protest votes for any of the left slates, and of those traditional Labour supporters who express the same anti-Blairite feeling by loyally following Livingstone's lead and voting for the Green list, for further battles in the trade unions and the Labour Party against Tube privatisation and New Labour in the period ahead.

Nick Law

Leicestershire

Needed - a programme by and for youth

Dear comrades,

In this period of reaction, there is no mass party to represent the interests of young people and therefore no challenge to the injustices that we suffer. What we need to do is fuse the interests of youth with the interests of the labour movement and the struggle against capitalism. We need to effectively convey the link between the injustices experienced by youth and the capitalist system. Movements such as J18 and against GM crops and tuition fees have shown that there is a willingness to challenge reactionary ideas based on putting profit before people.

Also, the future of any movement

depends on its attracting support amongst young people. Nothing could demonstrate this better than the present degenerate state of the labour movement.

There are many issues confronting us, although obviously our programme should be mainly in the context of young workers and students. We should begin with an analysis of the situation today and include social, economic and material factors. What is important is that this is a youth programme created by the youth – what we create at first must be a basic structure than can be updated with the democratic participation of as many people as possible.

Owen Jones

Stockport

owen.jones@ultramail.co.uk

Against 'Holocaust Day'

Comrades,

I have just read issue No.8 and at least you are still active and thinking. However, this is not the case with the small section you have on agreement with the establishment of Holocaust Day.

What will this 'serious reminder' consist of? An explanation of how big business funded certain strands of fascism in order for its profits to be extended?

At 'best' it will be a tepid moralising event with much pseudo-liberal hand-wringing and tut-tutting. At worst it will be an excuse for an orgy of anti-German xenophobia – both positions resting upon a 'misreading' of the state of Germany during that period.

We may well ask why only Holocaust Day? Why is there not, for example, Irish Famine Day or Dresden Day? Is the answer not that the Jewish bourgeoisie form an integral part of the ruling class and that Holocaust Day is a conscious or organic outgrowth of this fact?

Yours for socialism,

SD

Gloucestershire

Richard Price replies:

Comrade SD's letter seems to lack a sense of proportion. If 'Holocaust Day' becomes a fact, then it will appear sectarian in the extreme, not to mention insensitive, for socialists to denounce it on the grounds he suggests: (i) that it is not informed by a Marxist understanding of fascism and (ii) that peoples other than the Jewish people have suffered genocide.

The Holocaust remains the single greatest crime of fascism – one of the few cases in modern history where an entire people has been singled out for extermination – and one that is seared into the consciousness of workers internationally. To preserve this memory for future generations – however inadequately – in the face of rising nationalism, xenophobia and ethnic cleansing is to be welcomed.

Within that context, socialists have a number of duties. They should point to the inadequacies of liberal explana-

tions of fascism and totalitarianism. They should demand that the other victims of Nazi persecution – among them Romanies, gays, the disabled, socialists and communists, as well as the millions of eastern European and Russian workers who died in the course of the Second World War – are similarly honoured and remembered. They should use the commemoration as a springboard for action today against racism and fascism. Nor will they for a moment drop their opposition to the national oppression perpetrated by the Israeli state today against Palestinians.

We doubt such an approach will win many friends in the Israeli ruling

class. But such solidarity does make possible a dialogue with ordinary Israelis, and Jewish workers internationally. Will Holocaust Day lead to an outburst of anti-German xenophobia? At present, that is purely hypothetical; if it arises, then socialists would combat that too. But Berlin municipality has erected a Holocaust memorial – surely a limited but progressive step – and hatred of the Nazi legacy is a healthy feature of broad sections of German youth today. On the other hand, there is a medium-sized industry of Holocaust deniers at work – witness the Irving trial. Socialists cannot remain neutral.

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Rage against the machine

Dragons Led By Poodles by Paul Flynn, Politico's Publishing £7.99
Reviewed by Nick Davies

Outside Wales, Paul Flynn, MP for Newport West, is probably best known for campaigning against the criminalisation of cannabis. *Dragons Led By Poodles* is sufficient evidence for a charge of possession of a mind of his own and of a strong sense of the ridiculous, both serious offences in New Labour's Welsh nightmare.

This hugely entertaining book recounts the hamfisted operation by the Millbank bunker and its Cardiff Bay satellite to impose Alun Michael as Labour's candidate for leader of the Assembly, in defiance of the wishes of the vast majority of the ranks of the labour movement. Zigzagging between skullduggery and farce, the *Stitch-Up*, as Flynn refers to it, brought the Labour Party in Wales into disrepute and left the party membership bitter and demoralised. Indeed, the book gives a vivid impression of the mutual incomprehension between the Millbank wonks with their pagers and Armani suits, and the party members from Pontypridd or Llanelli who had loyally given huge tracts of their lives to the Labour Party because they thought it would bring better schools, better health care and an end to poverty.

The basic storyline is, of course, well known. But even those who thought they'd seen it all will be appalled by the cynicism of the Millbank machine. Take this letter to Peter Hain, allegedly from Peter Mandelson, and note the casual anti-Welsh abuse: 'Get rid of the suntan, Pete. Standing next to you, Alun looks even more like a corpse. Rhodri has not only swallowed all this bollocks about democracy. He has persuaded some of the Taffies to do the same.'

Running through this book is a seam of tragi-comedy. Two of the

victims of the electoral backlash against New Labour which followed the *Stitch-Up* were the candidates in Llanelli and the Rhondda. In Llanelli, Ann Garrard, on learning of her defeat began to shed tears. Immediately, her pager went off. It was a Labour Party Wales press officer telling her to pull herself together. Didn't she realise she was on television? In Rhondda, Labour stood Wayne David, who gave up a massive Euro-majority and meal-ticket-for-life to fight the Assembly seat – 'my country needs me'. He squandered a vast majority, losing the seat to Plaid Cymru. His mam had rearranged her hip operation because she assumed she was going to meet the Queen.

Possibly best of all is the spin on Alun Michael's standing for the list seat in Mid and West Wales. Despite re-opening the selection process in the constituencies, the leadership couldn't foist him on anyone, and after a session with the calculators, it was decided that Mid and West Wales was Labour's best chance of a top-up regional seat. Michael announced that being from North Wales and having a seat in Cardiff, as a leader, he ought to be a bridge between the two, evoking the legend of Bendig-eidfran, the ancient British king who used his body as a bridge between Wales and Ireland. As Flynn points out: 'Undiluted 100 per cent copper-bottomed baloney. For one thing, Bendigeidfran was a giant.'

Several party figures come out of this whole debacle utterly discredited. The book pulls no punches on George Wright and Terry Thomas, who delivered the votes of the TGWU and GMB respectively to Michael without a ballot, although knowing their record it would have been surprising had they done anything else.

Equally unsurprisingly, Michael emerges as a loyal drone, promoted above his abilities because he couldn't say no to Blair. As for ex-left Peter Hain, read the book! In fact, the key figures are all given a score of 1-5 flames or pompoms, depending on their degree of independence or subservience.

Sadly, the book came out too early to deal with the eventual downfall of Alun Michael, although it would make a good postscript for a second edition. Powerfully suggestive of what may happen in London, an official Labour candidate who was neither popular nor legitimate led the party to relative defeat in the Assembly. Labour's shilly-shallying over the match funding for the Objective One money from the European Union gave Plaid and the Lib-Dems an open goal. All Gordon Brown needed to do to keep his ally Michael out of the shit and to defuse Plaid's allegations that the money for match funding was being diverted into tax cuts for middle England was to make an appropriate statement, but he did not, and so Blair's man was kicked out. At the third time of asking, the Labour rank and file have got the leader they want. Rhodri Morgan.

As we pointed out in *Workers Action No.6*, there's little political difference between Michael and Morgan. Morgan has more of a base in the labour movement, and he is more independent minded, although that in itself is enough to put him 'off-message'. The rumour was that Millbank found him 'too Welsh' (sic) and Blair found him too untidy. The story has it that when leader of the opposition, Blair stayed the night at Morgan's house during a by-election

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South Africa

Workers and the Alliance

Since the ANC took over as the government of South Africa following the 1994 elections, over 500,000 jobs have been lost. There has also been a huge increase in the proportion of casual, sub-contracted, sweatshop and temporary jobs, and the army of working poor is growing by the day. It is in this context that the Confederation of South African Trades Unions has called, in its press release of April 12, for 'a thoroughgoing national debate on the crisis'. But while the union leaders are making militant noises, they are not questioning the basis of the Alliance – the longstanding relationship between Cosatu, the South African Communist Party and the ANC. 'We are not targeting our ANC government through this campaign,' the statement continues. 'Rather, we want a change in the business sector. It is business that has been throwing workers into the streets since 1984. Unless business and government meet our demands, we must go ahead with the National General Strike on May 10.' **Darlene Miller and Greg Ruiters** report on a recent discussion forum in Johannesburg on the state of the ANC-Cosatu-SACP Alliance

A meeting attended by activists at the Workers Library in Johannesburg on March 25 replayed a familiar mid-1980s scene with activists from various left groups reading their well-rehearsed lines. In a room with no more than 25 people, each main actor had also brought along a few chorus line members who, together with some individuals, made up the participants of this forum on the Alliance.

The poor turnout and the absence of rank-and file-workers was already a bad sign. In contrast to the 1980s when a vocal anti-Stalinist left had a powerful voice inside Cosatu, the tendency now is for the left to speak from outside the ranks of the organised

working class. The pro-ANC forces are very confident of their control over the unions: in the last five years, the SACP and nationalists have successfully flushed out honest fighters, labelling them as anti-ANC and 'ultra-left'. Today, the union leaders we have are not visionaries as many used to be, but ministers and state bureaucrats in waiting. South African unions may be firmly on the path to business unionism. Many unions face internal collapse, most no longer have newspapers and educators, and many face serious financial problems, declining or stagnant memberships and threats from break-away, non-Cosatu unions. But the debate at the Workers Library did raise many important questions

about the future direction of class politics in South Africa. This article proposes to look at some of these questions.

Over the last three years, the left groups in South Africa have been in disarray. Exchanging scripts, former ANC entryists now speak of the need for a working class mass party and former 'independistas' speak as entryists. The left on the whole is becoming increasingly frustrated with workers and its attitude to them can be summed up in the question: 'What will it take to make you leave the ANC?' An Alliance loyalist, a guest speaker at the debate, defended the party of Madiba 'Rolihlahla' Mandela as the only party whose members were prepared to, and did in fact, die for freedom. To desert this party now is to ask too much of the masses, he argued.

Unlike four years ago, none of the left groups defended any residue of political integrity in the ANC. Unpacking the discussion returns us to a number of key issues which have dogged left-wing politics in South Africa for decades, and which continue to cause problems. Despite the attrition within this layer, it still represents a sizeable portion of intellectuals committed to radical change. A survey of the positions taken by various participants in the meeting crystallises the concerns of this diminished intelligentsia. We recount some of the arguments here, and add some of our views on these issues since we share a familiarity with many of these debates.

Three issues surface on the future of working class politics in South Africa:

1. What space exists to influence ANC policy and make the Alliance work for the masses?
2. What is the class character of the

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Workers and the Alliance

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ANC?

3. The readiness of workers to oppose the ANC government.

The space to influence ANC policy ...

Having won political power, the differences are over whether political institutions of the state should be contested or abandoned, given the governing ANC's collusion with capital. Is the space for pressuring the ANC a hangman's noose or a place where the working class can wring concessions?

Arguments presented in favour of not breaking with the Alliance went along the following lines:

- i) Through the ANC victory, workers have won a positional space in government. Through their government representatives they have some power. They can influence policy. To give up the Alliance is to give up this space for workers to influence the conditions of their lives.
- ii) Most people who died for the struggle were MK people. For this reason we can trust the ANC.
- iii) We cannot fight our new government. It is the source of power. Class struggle will always be there.
- iv) Workers have to improve their material conditions in whatever way they can. They have families and they want better lives for their kids. Any possible opportunities for betterment should be utilised. By pulling out of structures, we are robbed of this opportunity.
- v) The SACP is tied to problematic policies. That is the reason why Moleketi and other comrades end up in a contradictory position. If we can change the policies, we can use our left-wing leverage and our left-wing comrades more effectively. If the policies are wrong, we are to blame. It means we are not using pressure effectively.
- vi) A familiar entryist position added to the capitalist defence of the Alliance is the influence that the debate on the Alliance was not a central is-

sue: that socialists must stay with the class, especially through the anguish workers would feel in breaking with their organisation as it disarms and attacks them.

Those against the Alliance made the following arguments:

- i) The dominant party in the Alliance, the ANC, has pro-capitalist, neo-liberal policies.
- ii) Economic power relations in South Africa have not changed and, instead, white economic power is becoming stronger. Profits are growing and white-dominated companies are the beneficiaries.
- iii) Workers are the main ones sacrificing in the new South Africa – through flexibility, redundancies, housing, social policy. In every area of workers' lives they are under attack. The new government is a pro-capitalist government. The Alliance is protecting this pro-capitalist pact.
- iv) The Alliance only gets used when a crisis erupts, when workers challenge their leaders and they need to be disciplined.
- v) When the Alliance meets, neither power nor debate is equal. Cosatu is there to take instructions from the ANC, which mostly means stopping any worker-based challenges to government policy.

Class character of the ANC

The debate on whether the Alliance should be broken relates to whether there is any hope for the ANC to act against capitalism. Is the nature of the ANC such that Alliance partners can force working class policies onto the ANC under present conditions, as has happened in the past? A number of groups splintered their small numbers over this question at different points since the 1980s. Different takes on the class character of the ANC – whether it is a working class organisation or a party of the bourgeoisie – underpin arguments for or against the Alliance. Even those who recognise the pro-capitalist policies of the ANC have differing notions of the current role of the ANC. One approach sees the ANC as caretaker for capital, rather than itself being a capitalist party. This

presents the ANC as a cross-class organisation. A divergent argument is that the ANC has been transformed into a capitalist party, probably from the early 1990s. Therefore, the ANC is no longer a mass party.

The implications of these differences hark back to past splits in South Africa's 'ultra-left' groups. Within each group, splits occurred at different points over whether the ANC could be placed onto a radical path for power or not. If the ANC was always bourgeois, it had to be opposed resolutely. If it was a petty-bourgeois party, the majority presence of the working class created the possibility for an insurrectionary programme to be adopted by the ANC. The SACP belatedly had to deal with these questions within its own ranks as the betrayals of the ANC became more apparent to its membership. Cronin then posed the debate as a struggle for the 'soul' of the ANC. These differences continue into current socialist debates on the formation of a political alternative in South Africa, the contours of which many of us are all too familiar.

Readiness to oppose ANC

The left has different assessments of the capacity of workers to break from their leaders, evidenced again in differences in the discussion. The extent of working class disaffection or identification with the ruling party is interpreted from acts of resistance to company or government policies. From the same acts of worker resistance, however, very different political conclusions are made, deepening the left's fragmentation. For example, the recent strikes by Numsa members in Uitenhage and the springing up of independent unions nationally are cited as cases of workers who are ten steps ahead of those who advocate pressuring the Alliance as their principal tactic. Municipal workers in Johannesburg threatened and swore at their high-ranking ANC provincial official, Kenny Fihla, during a march against privatisation. Some socialists see this as a decisive indicator of workers reaching the limits of their tolerance with the ANC's politics.

But a very different interpretation of the same event says that workers have not broken emotionally with the ANC. Attacks on ANC leaders could be against those individuals who workers believe have no place in ANC ranks, rather than against the ANC as an organisation. This rejection of individuals becomes an affirmation of workers' loyalty to their organisation, in that they want to clean it up. The louder they reject bankrupt individuals, the more it shows their desire to defend the ANC as their own. Also, a march against privatisation can be seen as a specific, targeted action and is therefore not necessarily evidence of a more generalised disaffection with the ANC.

One can be over-optimistic about, or dismissive of, current worker militancy, depending on your vantage point. If you believe workers are ready to dump the ANC, any acts of resistance will be construed as rupture. If you believe wresting workers from the ANC will take more time, you will see the threads of loyalty running through their complaints and actions against their leaders. Very different interpretations can be read off from the same events.

The irony of these different interpretations is that they are both correct in different ways. The unevenness of capitalist accumulation is reflected in the unevenness of working class formation. Workers are different by gender, by race, by cultural practices identified as ethnicity, by their position in the division of labour, and also by their political consciousness. Such unevenness influences the extent of their loyalties to the dominant parties. Differences in the constitution of the proletariat create very different segments within the working class. While these differences do not determine political affiliation, they have a bearing on how workers align or decline their political affiliation. Contingent historical processes may allow workers in one geographical entity to be many steps ahead of workers in another locality. It is how this unevenness is brought together, or whether divisions are entrenched into political structures, that deepens or

smooths the contours of uneven political consciousness. Some workers are waiting for a new opportunity; others are welded to past practices. To counterpose these two realities is to miss the unevenness of consciousness and the ambiguities that can reside even within the same ANC worker, who attacks Fihla without being certain whether it is Fihla or the ANC that he wants to renounce.

The political wilderness inside the Alliance

One of the questions left out by the forum's consensus on the pro-capitalist policies of the ANC was the actual nature of an opposition to the ANC – the kind of opposition that should be formed and the policies of such an opposition. Beyond a few bald assertions about alternative political parties, very little time was given to the character of an alternative. With murky proposals for an alternative, and the support-base for such an alternative, it is perhaps little wonder that workers are hesitant to bite this withered carrot. In the absence of a safe alternative, Adler and Webster are able to present life outside the Alliance as a political wilderness, a step into a greater unknown at a time when economic and political forces are buffeting the working class from all sides.

'It is difficult, first of all, to imagine that life would be easier for Cosatu in the political wilderness or that it could exit the alliance without suffering a debilitating internal split. And unless one can sketch a credible alternative to the alliance, calls for its dissolution amount to little more than posturing.' (Adler and Webster, *Southern Africa Report*, Vol.15, No.2, 2nd Quarter 2000, pp.3-4)

It would appear eminently reasonable that workers should not risk their bird in the hand for flurries in the bush. Conservatism amongst the South African working classes is strongly evident in this period. Greater social and economic insecurity impels workers to look to political certainties, such as the organisation that has been their representative for nine decades. In a time of global uncertainty for work-

ers, there are a few things that they do know – one being the organisation that they brought to power. It is also true that there is a particular structure of feeling that welds working class masses to their leadership, even when they are being clubbed senseless by these very leaders. Can the certainty of the ANC, an organisation that has taken the reins of powerful political and economic institutions, be exchanged for a handful of untested left-wing groups? A reasonable caution, especially when your life depends on it. While they acknowledge that the Alliance has failed to deliver the goods and that Cosatu has been at the receiving end of harsh treatment, Adler and Webster's approach warns against any step outside of the Alliance.

A second option is that Cosatu simply opposes GEAR and risks open confrontation with government and business, leading to a degenerating economic stalemate. (Ibid., p.4) What Adler and Webster miss in their account are the turbulent political currents that are deactivating workers within the Alliance. The need for the South African working classes to face the challenge of a new transition is made necessary by the political wilderness that they currently inhabit. Three arguments are made here in favour of this step into the unknown.

First, the reality for working class South Africans is that they are already in a political wilderness, a wilderness that is also economic and social:

- a) Workers are politically bewildered by the rapid self-enrichment of their revered leaders and the frequent charges of corruption against them. The only theoretical analysis of the corruption of revolutionary leaders that has percolated downwards is a religious argument about the intrinsic corruptibility of individuals. This argument sees human beings as innately bad, and that any access to wealth and power will make them sin. Revolutionaries are seen as no exception in this regard, quickly forgetting their poor constituencies. No considered account challenges this depoliticising view of political

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leaders. (Hence the meeting's scepticism about what would happen to these very socialists if they were sent to parliament.)

- b) The economic ravages of neo-liberal policy create the insecurity of never having enough money and engaging in an everyday battle to 'make ends meet'. Bassett and Clarke show how the policies of organised labour already plunge workers into an abyss, with no economic concessions accruing to workers. If what Adler and Webster mean by 'political wilderness' is the marginalisation of organised labour in macro-economic policy making and implementation, then Cosatu is already in 'the political wilderness'. (Ibid., p.8)
- c) The social wilderness is the daily crime and horror of working class life.

Second, the claim that confrontation leads to an economic stalemate is historically inaccurate. One of the most important historical compromises was the post-war consensus in Europe and the USA that led to a new period of economic expansion. This 'labour-friendly' international regime arose as capital's response to militant, violent working class rebellions between the two world wars. (Arrighi and Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World*; University of Minnesota, 1999) The political threat that workers' rebellion in the face of economic crises posed to capital forced capital to compromise with labour, to buy over the unions and institute business unionism, and to side-line and ridicule left-wing socialists. South Africa's own class compromise and negotiated settlement today is an outcome of working class insurrection in the 1980s. If one wants to argue against revolution and in favour of reform under capitalism, as Adler and Webster clearly do, history shows that you should in fact advocate confrontation. To sustain their argument, Adler and Webster need to show how conditions have changed so that labour militancy undermines class compro-

mise. The advocates of neo-liberalism use the threat of globalisation to achieve working class collaboration. Marginalisation from the global economy, workers are told, is a jump into the abyss of famine, ethnic conflict, AIDs, etc. If history shows that class compromise and a renewed phase of economic growth followed class warfare, Adler and Webster would need to demonstrate what in present-day conditions shows that confrontation will lead to an economic stalemate.

A third contention is that a fear of the unknown is never a convincing case against change. Social democrats like Adler and Webster are correct to point to the threat of degenerative conflict that insurrectionary politics could unleash. But if the present is bad and the prospects of improvement are unlikely, then a step into the unknown is unavoidable. To foreclose the possibilities of change is profoundly conservative. It is conservative because it argues that any radical alternative to the present cannot be countenanced, and so workers are to stay in one kind of political wilderness to avoid the insecurity that comes with a step into the unknown.

This conservative sentiment runs contrary to the feelings of the workers in Zimbabwe, which are infused with the promise and challenge of change. It is understandable that South Africa and Zimbabwe's working classes have very different political imaginations at this juncture. Their histories are moving in opposite directions. But to advocate stability and managed change is to reinforce the political defeatism and depoliticisation that currently corrodes South African working class sensibilities. The danger lies in the social barbarism that accompanies the political vacuum that adherence to ANC policies in the Alliance opens up. In the ex-Soviet Union, the decline of an active working class and the unleashing of unregulated, individual attempts at self-enrichment has given rise to Mafia-style capitalism. Not to act and not to seek a radical alternative now is to tinker while social barbarism descends.

Conclusion

The central question, then, is not to convince workers that their leaders have lost their way. They already know this. The central question is how to provide a political alternative with some hope of success. The forums of the Workers Library could perhaps be more productive if more time were spent giving substance to the political alternatives that socialists are advocating:

1. How to develop an opposition within Cosatu. Union rank-and-fileism can be built in different ways. One tactic is formal caucuses within the union, such as the American Teamsters Democratic Union. How could such a movement be built in the Cosatu affiliates, given the present tight bureaucratic control of the union leaderships?
2. How to build an electoral opposition to the ANC. What would the timetable be for building an organisation that can stand in elections with credible candidates?
3. What would the economic policies of an alternative opposition party be?
4. How could current shifts and the formation of militant mass parties in the Southern African region bolster the formation of an opposition party in South Africa?
5. How could pluralist sentiments in other African countries help the formation of a South African opposition? Which countries would be most likely to throw their weight behind such a formation?
6. On what basis could small left-wing groups present a united alternative to a divided, demoralised and besieged South African working class?

There is ongoing discussion of the everyday struggles against privatisation, redundancies, municipal service cuts, etc, which fuel, and are the precondition for, the revitalisation of the South African working class. But at present the lack of answers to the big political questions undermines the reconstitution of both a national opposition movement and a socialist alternative. ■

Reconsiderations on Western and classical Marxism

Perry Anderson has recently returned as the editor of *New Left Review* with the aim of addressing the problems faced by today's left. But, as **Jonathan Joseph** argues, his ideas from twenty-five years ago are far more stimulating

Twenty-five years ago Perry Anderson wrote his influential essay *Considerations on Western Marxism*. This work is slightly strange in that it represents a stark condemnation of the Western Marxist tradition by someone who is most heavily influenced by those very same ideas. However, some sort of project was behind this book: Anderson, at this time, still aligned himself with the Trotskyist tradition, was a former member of the International Marxist Group and, as editor of *New Left Review*, was a colleague of others thus inclined. (Ironically, now that they are more disoriented, Anderson, Robin Blackburn, Peter Gowen and Tariq Ali are all back on the new editorial board of the revamped *NLR*.)

Most readers of Anderson's book see it as a commentary on the Western Marxist tradition and theorists like Gramsci, Lukács, Korsch, Adorno, Marcuse, Sartre, Colletti and Althusser. However, this book is as much about 'classical Marxism' and Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, who are set up in opposition to Western Marxism. Anderson clearly wants to compare and contrast the two traditions, but his negative appraisal of Western Marxism seems slightly dishonest, given his own heavy borrowing from theorists such as Gramsci and Althusser. But more interesting than this is what the book has to say about classical Marxism and, subsequently, what Anderson had to say about his own assessment.

Anderson sees Western Marxism in terms of the mutation of classical Marxism. Its turn away from politics and

class struggle, its emphasis on philosophy and culture and its pessimistic outlook is linked to the real world triumphs of fascism, Stalinism and later the effects of post-war capitalist society. At first the break is gradual. Lukács, Gramsci and Korsch were all major political leaders who played an important role in mass struggles. But they became isolated. Lukács suffered as a result of the defeat of the Hungarian revolution followed by the triumph of Stalinism. Gramsci was imprisoned by the fascists. The Nazis closed down the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and the likes of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse went into exile. Walter Benjamin attempted to flee the Nazis but committed suicide. In other words, this historical period of fascist terror, the Stalinisation of the Communist Parties and war helped bring about the divorce between theory and practice. For the theorists it is a period of failure and isolation. As Anderson remarks: 'The hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is thus that it is a product of defeat.' (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Verso, London, 1976, p.42)

As Western Marxism developed it increasingly turned to philosophical issues. Again, Anderson makes a good point when he writes that 'Western Marxism as a whole thus paradoxically inverted the trajectory of Marx's own development'. (p.52) The Western Marxists rediscovered idealism. Hegel made a comeback. This is particularly strong in Lukács who sees the proletariat as the Hegelian subject-object of history. Ultimately it triumphs through its own

self-realisation. It overcomes its alienation to discover its 'true' essence. We can see, therefore, that for Lukács the emphasis switches from social being to social consciousness.

Such a view is consistent with *historicism*, a position held by Lukács and Gramsci that adheres to a mono-linear theory of history, culminating in the triumph of proletariat. They combine this with the view that objectivity is in fact no more than a universal subjectivity so that reality is relative to the historical subject. This is rightly rejected by those like Althusser who are on the structuralist side of Western Marxism. But the result of Althusser's efforts is to make society ahistorical and to turn social agents into the mere bearers of social relations.

Despite their pretend contempt for Western Marxism, many on today's left borrow heavily from the Western Marxist errors. The subjectivist version of Marxism found in Lukács lends itself particularly well to the anti-theory activism of groups like the SWP. This is well illustrated by the treatment given to Lukács by John Rees in his recent book *Algebra of Revolution*. Lukács's focus on class consciousness as a means of overcoming reification or human estrangement is consistent with the SWP's simplistic reduction of political issues to the need to 'unite and fight'. The SWP, like much of the rest of the left, adheres to a simplistic mono-linear and mono-causal theory of history that denies social complexity and leaves it unable to deal with difficult issues like women's oppression, the influence of

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Labourism and the national question. As in Lukács, emphasis is shifted away from the dialectical structure of social reality and instead focuses of the problems of consciousness.

These errors stem, in part, from the complex problems generated by the development of capitalism after the Second World War. But if confusion has resulted from the fact that the expected collapse of capitalism has failed to materialise, is it possible to go back to the work of the classical Marxists in order to rescue Marxist theory? This is certainly the view of Anderson in the main part of his book. As we have said, he links the philosophical attitude of Western Marxism to its separation from practical activity – first through political isolation, then as a result of academicism. As a Trotskyist sympathiser, Anderson is keen to assert that the superiority of classical Marxism is guaranteed by its unity with the struggles of the working class. This is certainly the case with the first generation of ‘Eastern’ Marxists and it should, objective conditions permitting, be the same today. Unfortunately, formally correct though this may be, it does not explain much about the terrible state of today’s classical Marxist left.

It is the ‘Afterword’ of Anderson’s book that makes the most interesting reading today. Qualifying his previous arguments he admits it was an error to reduce theoretical questions to the unity of theory and practice; representing an attempt to shield classical Marxism from critical scrutiny. ‘In other words,’ he writes, ‘classical Marxism should be submitted to the same rigorous scrutiny and critical appraisal as the post-classical tradition that derived from it.’ (p.112) He raises the problems caused by the veneration of the old masters. Instead of worshipping every word of these works we need a combination of scholarly knowledge and sceptical honesty. It would be wrong to make any prior assumption of correctness however much we may agree with the overall views of these writers.

Two problems are raised by the formula of the unity of theory and practice. First, it allows the left not to take

theoretical questions seriously since these will somehow be dialectically resolved through action. The motto of such an approach might be ‘don’t think, just do it’ or ‘let the struggle decide’. Second, the idea that correct theory is produced through the unity of theory and practice might well help explain the historical development of theory, but it also presents the danger of historical relativism – in other words, it relativises knowledge by turning it into the product of a social group. Theory is no longer defined according to its explanation of a social object, but becomes instead the expression of a subject. The danger then is that we judge social theory not according to whether it explains the world but according to who produced it. And the idea that only the working class – because of its social position and practice – can really understand society soon turns into the view that only the self-appointed representatives of the working class – the Spartacists, Workers Power, the Socialist Party, etc – can really understand society. The key question for theory is no longer what it can explain, but who is trying to do the explaining.

Addressing the theoretical weakness of contemporary Marxism, Anderson writes that ‘the most important responsibility for contemporary socialists may be to isolate the main theoretical weaknesses of classical Marxism, to explain the historical reasons for these, and to remedy them. The presence of errors is one of the marks of any science: the pretence of their absence has merely discredited the claim of historical materialism to be one’. (p.113) Anderson then turns to the work of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and makes some suggestions for future investigation.

First Anderson looks at Marx’s writings on the capitalist state. His argument is that while Marx wrote much on Bonapartism, he did not produce sufficient material on the political structures of bourgeois class power. Thus we have to supplement Marx’s views on the state with a developed position on the operation of bourgeois democracy and the institutional complexity (and durability) of the modern state.

Lenin’s theory of the party was an important development of Marxist

theory, but it is based on the need for an ultra-centralised and clandestine organisation operating under Russian conditions. Furthermore, Lenin’s work does not combine his position on the role of the party with his views on the power of the soviets. His position was never adjusted to give an account of party organisation in the bourgeois democracies. Lenin did emphasise the distinction between east and west but did not develop it. Instead, works like *State and Revolution* give a very general account of state power. And in failing to distinguish between the feudal autocracy in Russia and the bourgeois-democratic state in the advanced capitalist countries, Lenin created confusion among later Marxists who proved incapable of developing a coherent revolutionary strategy.

Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, like Lenin’s theory of the party, is formally correct. But he generalised the schema of the Russian revolution to include the entire colonial and ex-colonial world. As a result, he and subsequent Trotskyists have argued that there could be no successful bourgeois revolution in any backward country and no stabilised capitalist phase of development prior to a workers’ revolution. But the Algerian revolution did achieve independence, and the Bolivian revolution did deal with the agrarian question while India has a stable (albeit corrupt) form of representative democracy. Meanwhile, for the advanced capitalist countries, Anderson recognises that Trotsky’s writings on fascism in Germany represent the most developed analysis classical Marxism has produced of a modern capitalist state. But it is not a typical form of bourgeois state, and we do not find in Trotsky a systematic account of bourgeois democracy.

Anderson concludes the ‘Afterword’ to his book with a series of questions which are worth quoting in full:

‘What is the constitutive nature of bourgeois democracy? What is the function and future of the nation state? What is the real character of imperialism as a system? What is the historical meaning of a workers’ state without workers’ democracy? How can a socialist revolution be made in

the advanced capitalist countries? How can internationalism be made a genuine political practice, not merely a pious ideal? How can the fate of previous revolutions in comparable conditions be avoided in the ex-colonial countries? How can established systems of bureaucratic privilege and oppression be attacked and abolished? What would be the structure of an authentic socialist democracy? These are the unanswered problems that form the most urgent agenda for Marxist theory today.' (p.121)

But why bother taking up questions raised by such an old book written by someone who has subsequently gone off the rails? In a certain sense, any old book will do: the problem is not the oldness of the old, but the failure of the present. What is startling about Anderson's book, though, is the relevance of the questions posed. This only further highlights the failure of contemporary Marxist theory to develop its positions.

The problem that Anderson implicitly begins to formulate is this: if we reject the various errors of Western Marxism – such things as Lukács's views on reification and class consciousness, or Sartre's constitution of the totality through scarcity and praxis, or Habermas's Kantian separation of system and lifeworld, or Althusser's scientism – if we reject these views, what have we left to fall back on? Does the

classical Marxism of the post-war period have the necessary degree of scientificity and explanatory power, or is it also infested with schematic positing? Part of the problem perhaps is that since the beginning of the last century, all the alternatives to Stalinism and reformism have been categorised as either 'Western' Marxist or 'classical' Marxist, as if the two were entirely separable. This means that the philistines of classical Marxism can rule out any examination of Western Marxism as heresy, while the academics of Western Marxism can rule out a proper dialogue with classical Marxism because of its dogmatism.

But perhaps the point is not so much to argue for a better relationship between the two traditions, but to question the idea of tradition itself. It is the spirit of tradition and orthodoxy that has led today's left to adopt a conservative and backwards-looking approach to theoretical questions. Consequently, the classical Marxist left is unable to deal with contemporary questions of theory *and* practice; in fact it is unable to deal with the questions posed by Anderson *twenty-five* years ago. So maybe it is time to abandon the idea of classical Marxism altogether. Maybe it is time we rediscovered the critical but inventive spirit of plain old Marxism, just as the original classical Marxists intended it to be used. **WA**

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