

Workers ACTION

No. 24
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Trust Blair? No way!



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Cover: National student demonstration in London against university top up fees, October 26, 2003
Photo: Molly Cooper, molly.photos@ntworld.com

Workers Action – what we stand for

Workers Action is a Marxist tendency in the labour movement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Editorial

Top up the opposition to Blair

When Tony Blair announced that he does not have a reverse gear, he was, for once, telling the truth. New Labour's right-wing juggernaut rumbles on and on. The Labour leadership lost the vote at Conference on foundation hospitals, despite a crude attempt by John Reid to divide health workers from health service users, and survived the Commons vote with a majority of only 17, yet as if to goad its growing number of opponents, immediately announced that a fresh wave of hospitals were to get foundation status.

Following the Queen's Speech, Blair looks likely to provoke the third huge Commons rebellion inside a year, this time on university top-up fees. Despite New Labour's utterly cynical use of the language of egalitarianism to defend top-up fees (middle class students should pay for their education, and without these fees, fewer people will be able to have a higher education), this measure is an attack on the welfare state. Higher education will be once again the preserve of the well off or the lucky, with the best teaching and research concentrated in an elite of rich universities. Top-up fees are an attempt to fund higher education other than by taxation. They can also be seen in the context of the World Trade Organisation rules concerning liberalisation of the market in services, the aim being to create a top tier of universities that are internationally competitive, with a second tier for domestic consumption.

The attacks on civil liberties are just as alarming. New Labour's asylum policy is driven by the *Daily Mail*, although even some *Mail* readers might choke on their cornflakes at the prospect of the children of 'failed' asylum seekers being taken into care after their family's benefits have been withdrawn, as a little incentive for their parents to leave 'voluntarily' for Kosova or Afghanistan. The chances of being frog-marched onto a plane will be greatly increased by the government's plan to 'massively restrict' the flow of legal aid to asylum seekers.

Blunkett's blandly titled Civil Contingencies bill will increase the government's emergency powers, widening the definition of a state of emergency to include threats to the 'political, administrative and economic stability of the UK'. People in the USA are starting to wake up to the fact that the 'war on terror' is a smokescreen for an attack on civil rights. Their hopes of unseating Bush will have taken a knock when Blair, taking time off from his usual job as a procurer for dodgy builders Jarvis, or the biotech industry, did a three-day stint as George Bush's election agent. The TV pictures of Bush at Buckingham Palace will be beamed from sea to shining sea be-

tween now and November 2004.

But as New Labour steps up its attacks, the resistance steps up as well. The largest demonstration on a working day for decades told Blair exactly what he could do with the 'special relationship'. The series of massive parliamentary rebellions betrays the anxiety of Labour backbenchers, and that of Labour Party members, thousands of whom are sick of having a government that they have to apologise for. In this issue of *Workers Action*, we analyse critically how the fight was taken to the Labour leadership at the 2003 Conference, looking at the successes, but also at where lessons might be learned for the future, and Vince Mills shows how Gordon Brown, despite his conference speech pitching for the Old Labour constituency, is up to his neck in the New Labour project, and offers no alternative should Blair's health problems offer him the excuse for a dignified exit.

As well as opposition to New Labour on the conference floor, we are seeing further signs of a fightback in the workplace. At the Royal Mail, management tried to impose new working conditions and resorted to crude intimidation of union members. The response was a wave of unofficial strikes, spreading out from London. Under pressure from the government to settle, management agreed that changes in working practices would be subject to national negotiations, with no victimisation of union activists. This victory should give confidence to other unions that they can defend their jobs and their union against management and New Labour.

In this issue of *Workers Action* we also look at the resistance met by the Bush-Blair neo-liberal agenda internationally, whether it be privatisation at the point of a gun in Iraq, or at the point of a pen at the World Trade Organisation, as well as trying to engage critically with the ideas of anti-globalisation activist George Monbiot. In *Workers Action* No.23 we examined the growing resistance in Latin America to the domination of the US and the IMF. In this issue, we look at the spectacular uprising which ejected Bolivia's US puppet of a president. We also consider an issue which New Labour, preoccupied with the invasion of Iraq, has allowed to drift: that of the euro. We look at the crisis besetting the reactionary Stability and Growth Pact, and argue for Labour movement opposition to the whole project.

The government's continuing difficulties with Europe and the euro are causing cracks in the New Labour coalition. The Murdoch press says it might ditch new Labour because it is too pro-euro and not sufficiently hostile to the constitutional changes currently being debated in the EU. Sections of big business, on the other hand,

are getting frustrated because New Labour is delaying euro entry. The middle class is angry about top-up fees and GM foods. Trade unionists are sick of being treated with contempt and the services they run and use being treated only as a potential profitable opportunity for multinationals. They, and socialists in the Labour Party, would prefer a little less of New Labour's Big Conversation, and a little more action on the defence of public services and the repeal of the anti-union laws.

Although Labour will probably win the next election, the coalition between Labour's natural voters and sections of the middle class and business community, which brought the last two thumping victories, may be falling apart at the seams. The thing is, the more the opposition to the government gathers strength, with even formerly loyal MPs lining up in the no lobby, and the more unpopular the government is in the country, the more determined Blair and his clique appear. It is almost as if Blair is determined to saw off the branch on which he's sitting.

Socialists in the Labour Party who are thinking of tearing up their cards need to consider their options. Chasing their votes, in England at least, are the anti-trade unionist, shamelessly opportunist Liberal Democrats, and the spectacularly ineffectual Socialist Alliance. The fact that in the

Brent East by-election the Tories managed to get almost ten times as many votes as the Socialist Alliance must tell us something. In every election, Westminster or council, whatever the quality of the candidate, wherever the seat, its vote is poor. This is not a reflection on the sincerity or hard work of the Socialist Alliance activists on the ground, but on the nature of the project itself. Despite its rhetoric, the Socialist Alliance actually sets its sights very low: mopping up the socialists driven to desert the Labour Party by Blair's policies.

However, to win over serious socialists, it is necessary to convince them that you have an approach that can win over bigger sections of the working class on a long-term basis. Many socialists weigh up the Socialist Alliance and find it wanting, seeing it as an attempt to short-circuit by way of proclamation and electoralism the systematic propaganda and intervention which is necessary to rebuild the left. In any case, it is possible that the SWP, by far the biggest component in the Socialist Alliance, is turning its attention to George Galloway's 'unity coalition'. If ever there was a castle built on sand, this is it. While we oppose unconditionally Galloway's expulsion from the Labour Party, a political alternative to New Labour won't be built on the basis of Galloway's oratory and the anti-war movement.

We have never argued that carrying out a fight against New Labour within the party was going to be easy. Against us we have a well organised clique, with its hands on the apparatus of power. It knows exactly what it wants, and if it cannot use the machine it has created to get it, it will make up the rules as it goes along. However, in the words of the last British right wing leader with delusions of political immortality, There is No Alternative. **WA**

Saddam Hussein arrested

As we go to press, news is breaking of the arrest near Tikrit of Saddam Hussein by US forces. The effect this will have on the situation in Iraq is difficult to gauge, as is the real level of support that Ba'athism retains among the population. The extent of Saddam's crimes against Kurds, Shi'ites, trade unionists and other opponents of the regime is such that many will breathe a sigh of relief.

But there is little likelihood that attacks on Coalition forces will fall away since only a proportion of them are being carried out by Saddam's supporters. US forces claim to have identified 15 different insurgent groups. In any case, Saddam clearly has not been able to direct the attacks while living in hiding.

Saddam Hussein became a CIA contact in the early 1960s and remained an American ally until the late 80s. We can be sure that when ever he is tried, the prosecution will not want to focus upon crimes he committed during this period.

DWP dispute brewing

Civil servants in the largest government department, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), have voted by an overwhelming majority to reject a wage-cutting offer. PCS, the largest union with 90,000 members, voted by 94 per cent to 6 per cent to reject an offer worth less than 3 per cent to most members. They also voted by an even bigger margin to reject a new performance management system. Even more remarkable were similar votes for rejection by the specialist grades union Prospect and FDA, the senior civil service union.

The DWP's notoriously hardline management also proposed that staff who take any time off apart from annual leave and bank holidays – even if it is for bereavement or maternity – would receive a lower pro-rated performance pay award. It has proceeded to impose the offer on the department. Union members responded to the provocation magnificently with hundreds walking out of work on November 21.

PCS will hold a two-week ballot of its members in the DWP, starting on December 29. It is recommending support for a two-day national strike on January 27-28, followed by various other forms of industrial action.

■ PCS members in the Home Office, who have been offered a 1.3 per cent cost of living increase, have voted by 81 per cent to reject the offer.

Workers News Theoretical Supplements

The Fourth International and Yugoslavia (1948-50)

Correspondence from Jock Haston on behalf of the RCP to the IEC of the Fourth International, with an introduction by Bob Pitt.

The centenary of Andrés Nin

'The open letter of the Communist Left and the party congress' by Nin, first published in March 1932, and an account of the murder of Nin by POUM leader Julián Gorkin.

How Stalin aborted the Chinese revolution

Max Shachtman's 1931 introduction to the collection of Trotsky's writings on China, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*.

Vietnam: Stalinism versus revolutionary socialism

An outline of the struggle of the Trotskyists against the Vietnamese Communist Party written by Al Richardson (Richard Stephenson) in 1972.

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Say no to the euro!

Laurence Barrett calls for socialists to step up their opposition to the single currency

Given the tumultuous events of the past two years, it is difficult to imagine how, at the start of Tony Blair's second term, the euro, and whether or not Britain should join it, was seen as a major test of his credibility. The issue has become rather lost, resurfacing briefly over the summer with the admission that there would be no referendum in this parliament. This announcement has caused some demoralisation among the pro-euro faction in New Labour and in big business. But this is not a sign that the anti-euro camp in the Labour Party and the wider labour movement has won the argument, more a recognition by the Labour leadership that a referendum now would not deliver a yes vote. If and when that yes vote appears attainable, the five 'economic' tests would be 'passed', and be revealed for what they are, a blatantly *political* manoeuvre.

Divisions over Europe appear to be at the heart of the latest instalment of the Blair-Brown feud. Brown's lecturing the other EU governments on the need to make their economies more 'flexible', and on the evils of tax harmonisation, reflects a degree of caution on his part towards the euro, as well as a need to prevent his position being undermined by criticisms of the economy, and resentment at Blair's plan to make the pro-euro (and pro Blair) Peter Mandelson New Labour's man in Brussels.

Recently, there have been signs that the opposition to the euro within the labour movement has rather lost its focus, with the tone of the opposition campaign being set by right-wing Tories and the United Kingdom Independence Party. However, support in the labour movement for the euro is wide spread, with many trade unionists being convinced by the argument that euro-entry will help manufacturing industry and result in the higher living standards enjoyed for decades in Germany and the Netherlands. No doubt, many are being driven to support entry into the single currency, or at least to abstain on the question, by the arguments of the British eurosceptic right which range from sentimental nationalism to open preference for the US over the EU as an economic model.

Many base their position on the mistaken belief that there is something inherently progressive about a single currency. They see only what appear to be the positive aspects: ease of travel and the breaking down of barriers between nation states. Most importantly, currency unification is not seen as an immediate danger by workers in Britain because those attacks on jobs and the welfare state which threaten workers in France, Germany or Italy have, in Britain, already been successfully carried out.

The no vote in the Swedish referendum in September was highly significant. In favour of the euro were the big beasts of Swedish politics and big business. Against were the left and the Greens, with voters of the ruling Social-Democratic Party splitting 50/50. It is true that the Swedish far right is also against the euro, but it was the left that set the tone of the no campaign. Many of those interviewed by the British media gave as their reasons for voting no the danger posed by entry to the euro to Sweden's still generous welfare state. The lesson British socialists can draw from events in Sweden is that it is possible to campaign against the euro from a non-nationalist, socialist standpoint, despite the existence in Britain of a wider culture of opposition to the euro, and the EU as a whole, in the mainstream right of British politics.

The focus of that socialist opposition to euro-entry is the stability and growth pact (SGP). This was agreed at the Dublin summit and enforces the Maastricht treaty's convergence criteria for monetary union. Governments are prohibited from running a deficit of more than 3 per cent of gross domestic product. The penalties for non-compliance are huge fines. Thus, even if they want to, governments are prevented from borrowing money, above a certain level, to spend on public services, welfare and job creation. And if they don't want to spend money on these things, governments have a gilt-edged excuse, which is that they are not allowed to. The SGP makes fiscal austerity and deflation a corollary and a precondition for monetary union, setting in stone the Thatcherite creed that governments should not spend themselves out of a recession. It is therefore no mere detail, which could be amended out of existence (although at the moment, maybe some French and German politicians, beginning to realise what they've signed up to, wish that it could be), but is at the heart of the monetary union project.

Why? Because the euro, to serve its purpose as a competitor to the currencies of the other two economic blocs, the dollar and the yen, needs to be a 'hard' currency. For it to be viable, in these terms, currency union requires attacks on public services, welfare, social security, and the right to organise. It involves privatisation, the liberalisation of markets, casualisation, and 'flexibility'. In

short, it requires the dismantling of a whole swathe of valuable gains made by the working class across western Europe since the Second World War.

What is more, the existence of a single currency over most of the EU has aggravated already existing uneven economic development. Advanced production is being concentrated more and more in certain areas – the 'golden triangle', taking in northern France, western Germany, the Low Countries and south east England, and the 'golden banana', extending from Catalonia across to northern Italy. The consequence is a relative and, in some cases, an absolute decline in other areas, resulting in an increase in poverty there, an increase in inequality throughout the EU, with the poorer regions ending up as exporters of migrant labour. These problems, bad enough already with the EU's existing weaker economies such as Portugal, Greece, and parts of Britain, will only worsen with the accession of the likes of Poland, Slovakia and the Baltic States next year.

Of course, you won't find any of these arguments against the euro being used by the eurosceptics in the Tory party, or the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. On the contrary, the British eurosceptic right, as well as its free-market fundamentalist co-thinkers in the USA, sees the EU's social chapter and, in particular, Tony Blair's least favourite piece of European legislation, the working time directive, as proof that the EU is at least semi-socialist. This view is given plausibility by the struggle waged by Blair and Berlusconi within the EU for 'flexibility', in other words, to reduce labour costs and social provision, making the EU more like the 'Anglo-Saxon' economies of Britain and the USA.

However, the various laws and regulations operating in the EU do not contradict the free market, they merely give it a legal and institutional basis. They reflect the strong influence of Social-Democratic and Christian Democratic parties in the foundation of the original EEC. In the context of the cold war they wanted to defend the market economy, and, in the case of the Social Democrats, their own position in the labour movement, against the perceived threat of communism (sic) – hence the emphasis on welfarism and full employment. This in turn was made possible by the pump-priming policies of reconstruction following the Second World War, aided by the US dollar, in the form of Marshall Aid, in the context of the long, post-war, economic boom. The boom disguised to some extent the fundamentally free-market nature of the EEC and its successor, the EC. This nature was laid bare by the end of the post-war boom which pushed to the fore the deflationary and deregulatory nature of the project. In any event, as Will Hutton demonstrates in *The World We're In*, it is possible to believe in capitalism, while recognis-

ing the damaging effects on a capitalist economy of low taxation, poor infrastructure, poor education and health care provision and high rates of poverty, such as exist in the USA. In giving the EU 'socialist-democratic' credentials, its apologists in the British labour movement show only that they have accepted the eurosceptics' propaganda.

But if the European capitalist model, with the project of currency convergence at its heart, is just a different way of maintaining capitalism, why should we be opposed to it? Shouldn't we be neutral between two different modes of exploitation? One obvious answer to this question is that if, anywhere in the EU, gains made by workers are threatened by the effects of the SGP, then those gains must be defended and the austerity measures enforced by the SGP opposed. An analogy is privatisation: we do not have to believe that nationalisation represents socialism in order to oppose privatisation, as privatisation clearly damages the interests of workers and users.

There is, however, another reason why we should actively oppose the euro, and that is the democratic deficit. British eurosceptics harp on about the handing over of the powers of parliament and the judiciary to unelected bureaucrats. Clearly, the 'mother of parliaments' and the (unelected) judges did not do a great job in defending jobs, living standards and public services from the ravages of the Thatcher and Major governments. But just because the right-wing eurosceptics raise this issue for their own cynical ends, is no reason for the left to ignore it. Voters throughout the EU are not being xenophobic simply because they still see politics and citizenship as being in a national context, despite, or possibly because of, the efforts of the EU to create political institutions as counterparts to the economic and financial ones. Voters see themselves as having power to influence developments in that context, or at any rate to protest that that power is being taken away from them. The Swedish referendum showed that they want the right to elect a government which promises to borrow money to spend on job creation and welfare, and if that takes the budget deficit beyond 3 per cent of GDP, that's just too bad. Of course, we must not be blind to the dangers of the far right raising these issues in support of the idea that voters should be able to vote for an anti-immigration party, but soft-peddalling on the euro won't make these dangers go away.

The establishment of a European Central Bank to take the management of the euro away from elected politicians is no mere blip, or administrative accident. Over the past 50 years, the process of European integration has involved the establishment of non-accountable supra national institutions, in recognition of the fact that capitalist property relations could no longer be adequately de-

fended purely within the framework of a French, German or Italian state. European integration has, from the outset, been an elite project, seeking to reconcile formal democracy with technocratic government, by which real decision making is effectively insulated from the democratic process – hence the fairly limited powers of the European parliament. This is not to say that the EU is unpopular. With the partial exception of Britain, it is generally popular, but this popularity is based to a large extent on people seeing it as representing international co-operation, the free movement of goods, ease of travel, and an alternative to war. After the ravages of two wars in 30 years, European unity, in any form, had enormous reservoirs of goodwill to draw on.

The idea of an independent (i.e., non accountable) central bank comes from Germany. One of the central ideological pillars of the German Federal Republic is that the best way to avoid rampant inflation is to keep financial policy away from politicians. A sign of the Blair government's commitment to the euro project, despite not joining in the first wave, was Gordon Brown's handing over the control of interest rates to the Bank of England, in line with the requirements of the convergence criteria. Even New Labour's enemies on the right hailed this as a 'masterstroke'. Suddenly, 'unelected bureaucrats' did not seem so threatening! Thus European technocratic government converged with New Labour's managerialism: what is important is not ideology, but 'what works'. While no states are keen to allow too much democratic accountability in their financial policy, there was at least a measure of formal accountability. Tory chancellors were at least elected politicians. Now, formal accountability is replaced by formalised unaccountability. Whether in the eurozone or not, the sacred business of finance has been elevated above mere politics.

Logically, ought we not to oppose not just the euro, but the whole shooting match? Shouldn't we be calling for withdrawal from the EU? In the 1970s, some on the far left in Britain attempted to give the withdrawal demand a socialist coloration with the slogan 'Down with the bosses' market'. While it certainly *is* a bosses' market, in Britain the campaign for withdrawal is generally found in the most reactionary sections of society, and in much of Wales, the EU is popular among workers, partly because it is thought to be providing the economic assistance not provided by London. So where in the labour movement would a campaign for withdrawal gain any resonance? If some workers take at face value the social chapter and see the EU as a lifeline to rescue them from the brutality of US-style economics, they won't be convinced simply by a call to withdraw.

Instead, socialists should be trying to build

solidarity with other workers throughout the EU, against the effects of the common currency. A key demand on governments must be that they should ignore the convergence criteria when setting budgets, and when threatened with fines, refuse to pay them. The French economy is threatening to go into recession, but prime minister Raffarin, defending a projected 3.7 per cent deficit budget this year, has stated that his main priority is the French economy and that the eurozone budgetary rules should be applied more flexibly. In Germany, Gustav Horn, of the German Institute for Economic Research, has declared that the SGP 'doesn't work' when economic growth is weak: 'Who looks at the stability pact? France neglects it, Italy neglects it, and Germany will neglect it too because you can't go on with it . . . it's the wrong strategy.' Obviously agreeing with him, the EU finance ministers agreed on November 25 to tear up the rule book and not impose fines on France and Germany for their breaches of the convergence criteria. Governments in Spain, Finland, Austria and the Netherlands, which did stick to the convergence criteria, now have the job of explaining to their populations why it was all worthwhile.

Raffarin is not even a social-democrat and his stance, and that of his counterparts elsewhere, is motivated by national interests rather than support for the working class, but their reaction to the difficulties of the SGP shows the potential for opposition to it. This opposition can and should be broadened out from 'national interest' to encompass other demands. We must be clear that our internationalism of workers' solidarity has nothing in common with the 'internationalism' claimed for the EU by its apologists. The Schengen agreement removed all customs controls between a number of EU states, which sounds an attractive enough proposition, but it strengthened the external borders, reinforcing a fortress Europe. What kind of 'internationalism' involves support for the EU in its present form, a form which, to its creators, is fundamental to its very existence? Support for the euro, and therefore support for right-wing economic policies and a stifling of democracy, on the grounds that it is better than narrow nationalism, is surely the internationalism of fools.

- No to the single currency!
- Scrap the stability and growth pact!
- Fight for the defence of jobs, services, benefits and workers' rights throughout the EU!
- No to fortress Europe! Down with the Schengen agreement! Equal status and full rights for all immigrant workers and asylum seekers throughout the EU!
- No support for Bush's wars! End the occupation of Iraq!
- For a workers' Europe, not a bosses' Europe!

Hard Labour in Bournemouth

Cardiff West CLP delegate
Darren Williams looks back at
the Labour Party conference

The 2003 Labour Party conference demonstrated the complexity of the political situation in the party and the broader labour movement, delivering mixed messages about the extent of Tony Blair's control and the strength of the opposition. The well-publicised vote against foundation hospitals delivered a welcome rebuke to the government and gave the lie to the claims of the Socialist Alliance *et al* that the fight in the party is over and Blair has won. On the other hand, there were signs that Blairite control over Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) had been further tightened and the organised left kept safely on the sidelines. The union 'awkward squad' deserves most of the credit for such victories as there were, yet even they played an equivocal role, suggesting that they might be readier to compromise with the government than many had assumed. If this were an inquest, it would have to return an open verdict.

Vacuous debates

The conference – which outwardly resembled a trade fair held inside an armed camp – lasted for four and a half long days, from September 28 to October 2. For most of this time, its agenda comprised 'debates' that were remorselessly bland and vacuous. In keeping with the 'Partnership in Power' set-up introduced in 1997, these were, of course, organised not around actual motions, but around lengthy sections from the National Policy Forum report, grouped under a series of catch all headings, some of them almost Orwellian: 'Democracy, Citizenship, Political Engagement and Equalities'; 'Prosperity for All'; 'Britain and the Global Economy'; 'Sustainable Communities, Better Transport'; 'Enhancing the Quality of Life'; 'The Best Education for All'; 'Improving Health and Social Care'; 'Britain in the World'; 'A Modern Welfare State'; 'Justice, Security and Community'. With each section of the agenda covering such a broad remit, the debates were not just inconclusive, but meandering and unfocused, with consecutive speakers often addressing unrelated issues.

With the exception of 'Britain in the World' (of which, more later) there was almost no disagreement expressed, and many speakers simply reeled off lists of the government's achievements, sometimes in language that possessed a suspiciously familiar ring – as if copied from party briefings, or even written to order by party officials. Consensus was achieved, painlessly and repeatedly, on (to give just a few examples) the need to challenge the far right; the importance of engaging more young people in politics; the need to consolidate the government's gay rights reforms; and the need to offer greater protection to those suffering from anti-social behaviour (although in this last debate, one speaker dared to sound a discordant note by arguing that criminalising children might not be the best way of addressing such problems). To maintain the semblance of conference sovereignty, every debate ended with a vote on the relevant section of the NPF report – each conducted on a 'take it or leave it' basis (unsurprisingly, therefore, there were usually no votes against). Delegates' only opportunities to make a meaningful choice and exert some influence were contemporary and emergency resolutions; constitutional amendments; and the elections to the National Policy Forum (NPF), the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) and (for the unions) the National Executive Committee (NEC).

Priorities ballot

Under the rules as they then stood, the four 'contemporary issues' under which resolutions could be discussed were determined by a priorities ballot on the first day of conference. The issues that qualified – 'Health'; 'Occupational Pensions'; 'Manufacturing and Industry'; and 'Employment Rights' – were those collectively chosen by the big four unions (Unison, Amicus, the T&G and GMB) – who conspicuously excluded Iraq from their list, having reportedly struck a deal with Blair. It should also be borne in mind, however, that following a decision made last year, a fifth issue could have been discussed if more than 50 per cent of the CLPs had voted for it, thus offsetting the capacity of the major unions to determine the outcome of the ballot by voting *en bloc*. The fact that Iraq was not among the subjects chosen was therefore not simply the responsibility of the big four unions, but of the majority of CLP delegates (only 39 per cent prioritised Iraq).

There were various stories circulating around conference which sought to explain this in terms of the kind of pressure which was put on CLP delegates – especially first-time delegates – by the bureaucracy. Delegates were told at regional briefings at the start of conference that there was no need

to prioritise Iraq for contemporary resolutions, as there would be a debate in any case, under the 'Britain in the World' document. Some were taken to meet (unelected) Party Chair Ian McCartney, who impressed upon them the need to put the party's interests first. And in at least one case, a helpful official reportedly explained that it was against party rules to vote against an NEC recommendation!

What kind of CLPs?

Such experiences simply beg the question, however, what kind of people are representing CLPs at conference? And, for that matter, what kind of CLPs are sending them? Even allowing that several CLPs give every GMC member a turn as delegate, one would surely expect them to offer some friendly advice to the uninitiated – and, above all, to give them a clear mandate on every major decision. If GMCs' wishes were *not* frustrated, on this occasion, by the inexperience of their delegates and the unscrupulousness of the bureaucracy, then a disturbing number of constituencies must have been content for their delegates to support the leadership. The other factor that may have played a part is the number of CLPs that were not represented at all. In the case of Wales, for example, only 30 out of 40 CLPs had sent delegates. There were, no doubt, a variety of reasons for the absences, including simple disorganisation – but many CLPs will have concluded that a conference in which there is so little scope for genuine decision-making does not represent a defensible use of constituency funds, or of members' time and effort.

The big unions, for their part, argued that Iraq was no longer a priority and that they

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had prioritised issues of direct relevance to their members. This argument was delivered most unapologetically by Derek Simpson of Amicus – who last year was the left's hero of the hour after beating Blairite Ken Jackson in the general secretary's election. Simpson used his speech on manufacturing to rebuke scathingly those who had been impudent enough to reproach him and his fellow bureaucrats for their actions. Yet the ostensible rationale for dropping Iraq holds little water when one considers that even when conference approves a resolution these days, this rarely produces any results. It makes more sense, of course, to argue that the value of debating an issue at conference is to rehearse the arguments in front of the entire labour movement and the media-watching public. But even in these terms, the impact of the unions' 'strategy' is questionable. With the exception of foundation hospitals, the resolutions they favoured offered generous praise for the government's achievements and only very mild admonitions for its failings. The same was true of Simpson's speech moving the manufacturing resolution, for all the bombast accompanying the national demonstration of manufacturing workers staged by Amicus at conference that day. The measures called for – improved employment rights for UK workers, a review of government procurement policy, a cabinet minister for manufacturing, and support for long-term investment – were worthy but hardly radical. Similarly, the resolution on employment rights, moved by Bill Morris, called on the government to take a number of measures to build on its 'Fairness at Work' legislation – most notably by ending employers' right to sack striking workers after eight weeks of industrial action. And on occupational pensions, moves to provide greater security to workers were welcomed, and a list of further measures suggested by which this might be built on.

The health debate

All the above resolutions were carried *nem con*, so that the only really controversial resolution based debate was on health. Here there were two composite resolutions: one (composite 4) from (among others) Unison, which acknowledged the government's investment in public services but raised strong objections to the proposal for foundation hospitals and called for the relevant section to be deleted from the Health and Social Care Bill. The other resolution (composite 3) praised the government's achievements without making any direct reference to foundation hospitals. Dave Prentis's speech clearly set out the many objections to the policy, which threatens

to undermine the principles of the NHS, and the wellbeing of patients and staff alike, through introducing marketisation and competition. He received strong support from, among others, Bill Morris, in his last conference speech as T&G general secretary, which won him a standing ovation. In defending the government's policy, the Health Secretary, John Reid, caused widespread anger (and provoked the conference's first instance of heckling) by accusing the unions of selfishness and suggesting that those who opposed the government's policy were indifferent to the suffering of elderly people waiting for operations. Composite 4 was overwhelmingly carried on a show of hands, while composite 3 went to a card vote and was defeated by 56 per cent to 44 per cent (although it was carried in the CLP section).

Real divisions

The other policy debate that exposed real divisions was, of course, on Iraq, although with no clear proposition to vote on, the best that could ever have been achieved was to allow views to be aired, without conference coming to a collective conclusion. In the event, there wasn't even an authentic exchange of views, as the vast majority of speakers called supported the government's actions – the exceptions being Alice Mahon MP, Jimmy Elsby of the T&G and Mick Hogg from the RMT. (The RMT had attempted throughout much of the conference to have an emergency motion on Iraq debated – this ultimately failed after key unions quietly withdrew their support.) At a seminar on 'Britain in the World' that morning, almost every speaker from the floor had opposed the war, which suggests either that speakers in the plenary debate were chosen in advance (as seems likely), or that anti-war delegates saw little point in speaking when there was nothing to decide. (In an intervention timed to influence any delegates doubtful of the justice of the 'war against terrorism', the debate had been preceded by an address from the 'international fraternal speaker', the puppet President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, who expressed gratitude for the 'liberation' of his country.) Ultimately, few delegates bothered to vote against the 'Britain in the World' documents, which had been made as bland and uncontentious as possible to avoid presenting a credible target.

Ironically, there was arguably more evidence of dissension in the conference session on constitutional amendments than in most of the policy 'debates' put together. Thirteen rule changes had been proposed, some by the NEC, others from CLPs, and under the rules, all had to go to a card vote. Many were uncontroversial, although there were a few notable exceptions. One was

an NEC recommendation (supposedly on the basis of undisclosed legal advice) that people in Northern Ireland be allowed to join the party, which threatened a further implicit endorsement of the Unionist agenda, but was nevertheless passed. Another was a motion from Glasgow Kelvin CLP calling for the Scottish and Welsh conferences to be able to decide the arrangements for electing their respective leaders. This would have been no more than following devolution through to its natural conclusion, but the NEC thought otherwise and the motion was duly lost. Another defeat for democracy was the failure of the proposal to increase the number of CLP seats on the NEC from 6 to 10. On the other hand, the most important development was the success of a long sought rule change enabling the top four contemporary resolutions chosen by the unions *and* the top four chosen by the CLPs to be debated in future. This was passed, against the NEC's recommendation, with the support of the unions – although ironically a majority (58 per cent) of CLP delegates voted against giving themselves more say. This last was the only constitutional vote where the NEC didn't get its way; indeed, in most cases it won more than 95 per cent of the vote.

The elections held at conference provided further evidence of the patchy representation of the left among constituency delegates. The National Policy Forum elections, divided up geographically, saw Grassroots Alliance candidates elected only in the South-East, Yorkshire and the East Midlands. And in the Conference Arrangements Committee election, the two Grassroots candidates – Alice Mahon MP and George McManus – were beaten by the incumbents, who were both ministers: Yvette Cooper and Stephen Twigg (hardly offering much hope that the committee will be independent of the government). Nevertheless, the gap was closer than last year: Mahon, in third place, polled 77,980 votes, while Twigg got 91,155 to come second – hardly an unbridgeable gap.

Fringe meetings

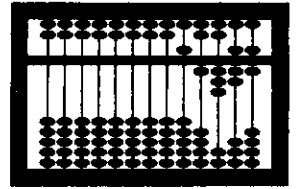
The left was in its element at the various fringe meetings that were held throughout conference week. These consistently attracted a healthy turn-out – a minimum of 50-60, going up to 200-plus for Labour Against the War on the Sunday and for the Campaign Group rally on the Wednesday evening. Left MPs like Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott; union leaders like Mick Rix and Billy Hayes; and – of course – Tony Benn delivered a series of often quite powerful speeches designed to raise the spirits of the faithful, and provided a sharp and witty commentary on developments on the

conference floor, not least the 'two leaders' speeches' by Brown and Blair (Alan Simpson responding to Blair's statement that he had 'no reverse gear' with the oft-repeated observation that a car with no reverse gear would certainly fail its MOT). These meetings were heavily platform-dominated, however, with little debate from the floor, and while there was welcome talk of moving beyond a purely defensive posture to develop an alternative policy agenda, it seemed that this job was to be left to the 'professionals' (the left MPs and union leaders) while the activists got on with being active. The only organisational initiative to emerge from the left leadership – a much-heralded announcement by Mick Rix of a new Labour Representation Committee – seemed to have fizzled away by the end of conference. Conversely, the CLPD/Save the Labour Party meeting at the end of conference was strong on learning lessons in terms of organisational tactics, but didn't situate this in a broader political analysis. In fact, the Labour left, from the elected politicians to the GMC activists, needs to become more adept at linking the elaboration of socialist policies with the development of the organisational strength necessary to pursue them through the party.

Ephemeral victory

The mood of the left at conference swung from anger and disappointment following the 'priorities ballot' result, to a more upbeat outlook after the foundation hospitals vote. The latter, although it offered welcome evidence that the fight within the party is far from over, has already proven a somewhat ephemeral victory – just like the similar vote on PFI last year. The '4 plus 4' rule change on contemporary resolutions should, however, have a more lasting impact. It is telling that its success relied so heavily on the unions, and the failure of the majority of CLPs to uphold their own interests in this instance underlines the need for left-wing constituency activists to organise much more thoroughly in future if the opportunity created by the potential for extra debates is not to be lost. And while the importance of the party-union link was reaffirmed in a positive way over foundation hospitals and '4 plus 4', the Iraq debacle demonstrated the ever-present danger that the bureaucracies on both sides of the movement may do deals behind the backs of the rank and file. The lesson here is that even 'left' bureaucrats cannot be trusted too far, but must be held rigorously to account by those who elect them – and that campaigns on issues like the war have to be fought on a number of fronts: in the party, in the unions and outside the traditional labour movement altogether. **WA**

FIGURING IT OUT



WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT: In 1984, 58 per cent of women of working age were in work compared with 77 per cent of men. Today, the proportions are 70 per cent of women and 79 per cent of men. The proportion of women with children under the age of five who work stands at 54 per cent, up from 41 per cent in 1990. A report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development shows that women earn on average 20 per cent less than their male counterparts, and work an average 39.6 hours a week. The Fawcett Society, meanwhile, reports that women earn 72 per cent of male salaries. Another report, from Datamonitor, says that British women are on average paid a third less than men. This year, the average pay of women working full time has risen above £20,000 per year for the first time. This amounts to an hourly rate of £10.56. At 82 per cent of male earnings – compared with 80 per cent five years ago – the gender gap is now at its lowest since modern records began. It remains, however, the widest gap in the EU. The difference between male and female earnings appears to be greatest in well-paid white collar occupations, where women earn less than half as much as their male counterparts.

TWO NATIONS: The richest 1 per cent of adults owns 23 per cent of the country's wealth.

INTERNET ACCESS: According to figures from Ofcom, half of all homes in the UK – 12.5 million households – are now connected to the internet. This figure includes 750,000 homes which had been connected between July and October.

HOUSE PRICES: According to Cambridge Econometrics, the average house price to earnings ratio in London has soared higher even than in the property boom of the late 1980s. Then, house prices were typically six times earnings. They are now 7.5 times earnings. Despite predictions of a slowing down, house prices across the UK rose by 19 per cent over the past year, with those in the north increasing three times faster than those in the south, according to figures from the Halifax. However, government figures put the annual rate at 14 per cent in the year to August, down from 14.6 per cent in July and 22 per cent in February. The cost of owning and running a house has risen four times faster than the rate of inflation over the past ten years, partly as a result of soaring council tax bills. Since the 1993/4 tax year, the average council tax bill in England for a Band D property has increased by 94 per cent, or £534.

JOBS FOR LIFE: A job for life is increasingly a thing of the past. A study by Mintel has found that the average person now stays in a job for just two years. However, the number of people working above the age of 65 is rising significantly. Over the past year the number of people working beyond the normal retirement age has risen by 16.2 per cent to 339,000. This reflects not only an element of choice, but also the pensions crisis and labour shortages in some branches of the economy.

CALL CENTRES: Call centres employ about 500,000 people in the UK, a majority of them women. However, 10,000 jobs have already moved abroad, with India emerging as the favourite place for companies to set up new call centres. HSBC has moved 4,000 jobs to India, China and Malaysia. The TUC has called on the government to set up a commission to investigate the outsourcing of jobs to Asia.

MIGRATION: One in 35 people world-wide is a migrant, and, in 2000, Britain had the eleventh highest number of international migrants. In 2001, an estimated 480,000 people arrived to live in the UK for at least a year, while 380,000 left to live elsewhere.

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT: About 86,000 new jobs were created in the public sector in the year to June 2002. Over 20,000 of these were permanent civil servants, whose numbers rose to 512,400 in the year to April. The number of top jobs in the public sector that pay £100,000 for senior managers has risen sharply, while some now pay twice that figure. Figures released in October show public sector wages rising by 5.6 per cent compared with 2.9 per cent in the private sector. But according to PCS, the main Civil Service union, over a quarter of civil servants are paid less than £13,250 per annum. The Equal Opportunities Commission has decided to support PCS's claim for equal pay across government departments.

'Empiricist'

Blair or Brown: organ grinder or monkey?

There's nothing much 'Old Labour' about Gordon Brown's commitment to neo-liberalism, argues Glasgow Kelvin CLP member **Vince Mills**

To understand the current debate about whether Gordon Brown would shift the party left, it is necessary to remind ourselves about the formation of the New Labour project. The New Labour government, elected in 1997, came to power on the back of a considerable ideological shift in the Labour Party – at least as far as formal policy went. As Panitch and Leys point out in *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, this process was a long one covering the leadership of Kinnock and Smith. In particular, the abandonment of the goal for full employment from the party's 1990 policy statement *Looking to the Future* marked a clear abandonment of classic social democratic policy objectives. Labour were no longer intent on a strategy of intervention in the economy by creating employment and therefore linking skills to employment inevitably depended much more on market conditions than government action.

Smith's death and Blair's accession to leadership led to even more profound and more rapid change. Essentially it meant that New Labour, while still in opposition, accepted that economic globalisation meant a macro economic framework hardly distinguishable from that of the ruling Conservative party – low inflation, low social costs, no boundaries to the movement of capital or labour. Low taxation was an inevitable corollary since globalisation works on the assumption that the enterprise culture – reward for work and risk – must incentivise those who are most entrepreneurial and punish those who are not. This underpinned New Labour's general thinking on social cohesiveness. There were to be no rights without responsibilities. However, there was a strong desire to attack the effects of poverty through worklessness by increasing the capacity of the unemployed to find work.

Within these strictures then, New Labour had to set out a strategy which both differentiated it from the Conservative Party, a task which commentators and sometimes supporters found increasingly difficult, and which was also compatible with the new realities as the New Labour leadership would have seen them. Blair declared that he had a passion for education, and education and training measures were promoted as a key supply side policy area for the new government. Indeed, supply side solutions were largely all that was on offer.

The aims of these measures were employability and social inclusion – a response to the accusation that the government was impotent in the face of the globalisation agenda and that nothing separated the two main parties. New Labour's recourse to supply side approaches as a defining difference not only sought to dis-

tinguish them from the Conservative Party but also the Social Democratic and Socialist aspirations of previous leaderships.

Of course, the concepts of 'globalisation' and 'employability' are both hotly contested, although they are often presented as unproblematic by the New Labour government and its supporters.

I would argue that 'globalisation' used by New Labour is not so much a description of a set of relationships, but a political construct, consciously designed to generate the best possible conditions for the development of international corporate capital while presenting this set of relationships as necessary. According to Robert Kuttner in his contribution to *On the Edge* (2000), New Labour accepted the version of globalisation promoted by the neo liberal right:

There is one true path to the efficient allocation of goods and services. It includes above all, the dismantling of barriers to free commerce and free flows of financial capital. To the extent that there is a remnant regulatory role to protect property, both tangible and intellectual; to assure open, non-discriminatory access; to allow any investor to purchase or sell any asset or repatriate any profit anywhere in the world; to remove and prevent subsidies and other distortions of the Laissez Faire pricing system; to dismantle what remains of government industry alliances.

This set of arrangements is not an immutable law of economics. It is a political choice. From this perspective, when Mandelson and Liddle wrote in *The Blair Revolution*,

... the new international economy has greatly reduced the ability of any single government to use the traditional levers of economic policy to maintain high employment ...

they were both accepting unnecessary levels of constraint and contributing to the currency of the notion that, short of supply side remedies, there was little that could

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be done to intervene in the economy. Furthermore, 'globalisation' is no longer used in a descriptive but in a normative way by New Labour ministers. It is not only that this is how the world is, but that this is how the world should be. Wendy Alexander, Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning in the Scottish parliament till 2002, stated in a *Sunday Herald* newspaper interview:

The role of government is to say that instead of providing a safety net – we can't guarantee you a job for life – we can provide you with a trampoline that makes you feel confident and makes you feel secure enough to move between jobs. My entire skills strategy is about making that trampoline.

Alexander is a fervent supporter of Gordon Brown and her words expose a political shortsightedness in some commentators, including some on the left, that the ideological shift towards neo-liberalism, which I have just described, has less than the full hearted support of Brown.

In this they are much mistaken. It is Brown who is the architect of New Labour's version of neo liberalism. It is Brown who unfettered the Bank of England, the better to allow capital to decide how it would like the rate of interest set, free from democratic control. A decision, incidentally, which has meant that, as under the Tories, a period of apparent growth and stability has actually been sustained by excessive borrowing. Here is Michael Coogan, director general of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, writing in the *Sunday Herald*:

The recent growth in credit (or debt, depending on your viewpoint) has been nothing short of phenomenal. The mortgage market has grown from less than £493 billion at the end of 1999 to around £750 billion by the end of this year – a 50 per cent increase in four years. With £168 billion of consumer credit on top of this, UK borrowers owe more than £900 billion. That is nearly £20,000 for every adult in the UK.

It is Brown who has insisted on workfare approaches – the notion that workers should receive support to get them into work – no matter how poor the wages or demeaning the job. Here he is in 1998 launching a New Deal scheme in Tayside, Scotland. This and other speeches can be accessed at the Treasury web site:

From now on in Britain, young people will have new opportunities and a new contribution they can make under the New Deal. Rights go hand in hand with responsibilities and for young people offered new responsibilities from today there will be no option of simply staying at home on full benefit doing nothing.

And of course we have Gordon Brown's adamant support for PFI. Not only that but in advance of last year's conference he made it clear that no matter how conference voted on PFI (it did, in fact, support a review), it would go ahead. Brown's insistence that the private sector has a major stake and extracts major profits from public sector investments, and his refusal to consider, for example, changing the rules along the lines of the General Government Financial Deficit (GGFD), demonstrate a commitment to the dominance of capital at least as fierce as that of Blair. (The GGFD is the accepted European standard of public sector borrowing. It excludes net borrowing by the public sector for investment purposes from its measure of debt and hence would allow public bodies to borrow without affecting the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement.)

Brown's rhetoric is that of social democracy. His conference speech this year emphasising 'Labour values' and arguing for 'equity' is a good example. In fact, it disguises an economic philosophy which puts capital in the driving seat and consequently denies the possibilities for the economic intervention that is necessary to achieve the very goals Brown argues are important.

That is not to say that a successful challenge on Blair would not create some opportunities for the Labour left. Depending on the balance of forces, it might be possible to wring some concessions from Brown on say, party democracy.

But in terms of political philosophy, by replacing Blair with Brown we would only be substituting the organ grinder for the monkey. **WA**

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Scottish nursery nurses demand fair pay

Tower Hamlets Unison nursery
nurse steward **Lizzy Ali** reports
on an impressive demonstration
in Dundee

Two thousand striking nursery nurses and their supporters from across Scotland demonstrated in Dundee on December 11. They have been in dispute since April and have been seeking regrading, a recognised career structure and wage parity since 2001.

At the rally following the march, leaders of Scotland's 5,000 nursery nurses, who are mainly organised in Unison, stressed that they would continue the dispute until they won. There was also an enthusiastic response to solidarity from parents and from nursery nurses in east London, who won a historic victory in July (reported in Workers Action No.23).

Since April, Unison members have been working to rule and taking selective action. A leaflet from the Renfrewshire Local Authority branch points out that:

- The job of nursery nurse has not been reviewed since 1988.

- Since then, the job has gained significant new and increased responsibilities. Numerous policies and responsibilities have been introduced by the Scottish Executive and by local councils.

- Between January 2002 and January 2003 the number of local authority pre-school places increased by four per cent yet staffing dropped by 13 per cent.

It also points out that there are major inequalities in pay between different local authorities in Scotland: 'What we cannot understand is why we cannot get the same wage for a nursery nurse in Edinburgh as a nursery nurse in Highland or a nursery nurse in South Lanarkshire. A nursery nurse is a nursery nurse no matter where they work, and their value to a child's education is exactly the same no matter which part of the country they work in. Wage parity will not be achieved through local bargaining, which is why we launched a national claim.'

There is growing pressure among Unison members for all-out action which, along with community support, proved decisive in the Tower Hamlets dispute. **WA**

Safety down the tube

The part-privatisation of the London Underground system will seriously compromise safety, says **Charli Langford**

On Sunday October 19, a northbound London Underground Northern line train derailed entering Camden Town station. The rear car separated from the train about 30 metres into the tunnel. Seven passengers were hospitalised, one suffered a broken thigh. The suspected cause of the accident was a faulty set of points which had been maintained by Tube Lines, a private contractor, the previous night.

Two days previously a Piccadilly line train derailed between Hammersmith and Baron's Court. This accident was caused by a broken rail, one which the interim report on the incident described as ten years old and having been degenerating for the last two years. The rail had been inspected by Metronet, a private contractor, the previous night.

On January 25, 32 people were taken to hospital after the last four cars of a Central line train derailed at Chancery Lane. The cause was a traction motor which had fallen from the underside of the train after the mounting bolts had sheared. Central line trains are 1992 stock – the newest on the underground.

All these incidents were caused by failures of essential equipment which should be subject to frequent inspection.

On October 23, at a crisis meeting of the Greater London Assembly's transport committee, London Underground (LU) claimed that track is inspected every 72 hours and that the number of broken rails and derailments has dropped. But the RMT union challenged this, claiming that no figures were kept, and pointing out that the number of staff making track inspections has dropped – from 26 people to 6 on the Central line between White City and Ealing Broadway, for example.

Four days later, confidential documents dated last May from the Health and Safety Executive were leaked to the BBC programme *Kenyon Confronts*. It seems that the HSE had served an improvement notice on the tube track network because it believed that the standard of engineering safety breached regulations and that there were 'thousands' of incidences of non-compliance. The HSE described the situation as 'staff struggling to maintain and improve an inherited asset in poor condition . . . Large amounts of resources are diverted for patching up substandard components. This erodes resources available for preventive maintenance and contributes to a cycle of deterioration'. LU admitted that there were 15,500 examples of non-compliance, and said it could not inspect track as often as required 'due to the lack of competent staff to perform the inspections'. LU said that record keeping is also poor, with some records 'only held in the memory of inspectors and maintenance

personnel'.

LU said after the Hammersmith and Camden Town derailments that it would increase ultrasonic testing of track, which would increase the likelihood of broken rails being detected. The HSE report shows that LU was being urged to do this six months ago.

The traction motor bolts which caused the Chancery Lane accident were a known problem. In September 2001, two motors fell off a train at Hainault – an incident which led to LU scheduling mounting bolt checks every 90 days. Twelve months later, at Loughton, another motor fell off and derailed a train. The check frequency was increased to every five days, and was extended to cover safety bracket bolts as well.

However, it seems that despite ordering these checks, LU was extremely negligent in performing them. The RMT documents many problems, including:

- Inadequate training of agency and casual staff doing the checks;
- Tools supplied did not fit over the bolts because of the retaining wires and tab washers and, due to the tight angles involved, were too cumbersome to reach the top bolts;
- Tools were cut down in length, which meant they could not supply enough force to tighten the bolts;
- Ring spanner heads had pieces cut out of them to fit over the tab washers and around the retaining wires, which caused the spanners to fail to grip the nut;
- The expected work rate of six trains per shift gave only 24 seconds to check each bolt.

The RMT claims that the poor quality of the checks is due to them being carried out under heavy time pressure by too small a number of staff, many of whom are non-unionised and intimidated by management. The blame for this is put on staff-shortages created in the run-up to privatisation. Recruitment is on hold until BCV (Bakerloo Central Victoria lines) is taken over by the Metronet consortium, and this safety-critical work has gone out to inexperienced contractors.

Prior to the Chancery Lane derailment, maintenance staff carrying out the checks were a mixture of ex-LU employees and agency staff. The experienced staff found many motor bolts loose and complained about the tools, procedures and the time in which they had to check the bolts. By contrast, no agency staff are on record as having complained, or of finding loose bolts during this period.

The three incidents described show what happens when safety on the tube is downplayed. They have to be seen against a background of anti-safety practices by LU. Last January RMT general secretary

Bob Crow accused LU of running a 'regime of fear', where train drivers are routinely bullied and threatened with disciplinary action if they refuse to move trains on safety grounds. The performance scheme on the tube, where drivers are fined for late running, also exerts a very strong pressure against safety.

It is not just passengers that are threatened by LU's attitude to safety questions. In January 2002 LU was fined £225,000 and had to pay £15,600 costs after being prosecuted for breach of workers' safety standards, when it ordered track maintenance staff to work in the dark, often while it was raining, with the track current switched on. One of the workers who was electrocuted as a result was detained in hospital for nearly four hours wired up to a heart monitoring machine.

The factor behind this lack of concern with safety is the part-privatisation of the tube. The government's intention is that the publicly owned London Underground will run the trains, but the infrastructure - track, signals, stations - will be privatised. Metronet, who failed to spot the two-year degeneration of the Hammersmith rail, are one of the private companies in line for the contracts.

Tube Lines, who were maintaining the points at Camden Town, are part owned by Jarvis, the company which has just ended its maintenance contracts with Network Rail (the successor to Railtrack). This followed an incident in which a Glasgow express leaving King's Cross on September 16 derailed because Jarvis had left a set of points switched to a track section where the rails had been removed. Jarvis was also the track maintenance contractor responsible for the faulty points that caused seven deaths and scores of injuries in the Potters Bar disaster on Network Rail on May 10, 2002. Steven Norris, the Tory candidate for London mayor, was appointed to the £100,000 per annum two-days-per-week job of chairman (sic) of Jarvis on November 25. Norris has said he will step down from the chairman post if elected mayor next year. He has not commented on what he will do if he remains in the London Assembly, nor has he indicated whether he will resign the non-executive directorship of Jarvis which he has held since before the Potters Bar incident.

Bob Crow says:

Over the last four years LU's established structures and chain of command have been systematically dismantled and replaced with chaos and constant bickering between Infracore BC/Metronet and LU. Today we are no longer even sure exactly who owns or controls parts of the infrastructure and therefore who is responsible for its safety.

We warned that these companies were being handed guaranteed, risk-free super-profits worth billions. Now we are told that, however badly they perform, however shoddy their work - and presumably however many lives they destroy - the private infrastructure companies will be limited to fines of £4 million.

That is not a partnership - it is irresponsibility bordering on the criminal.

The RMT has just won a ballot for action on safety, with 81 per cent in favour of action and 55 per cent willing to go as far as strike action. Its demands are a return to daily track safety inspections, speed restrictions applied for any fault discovered, and all track maintenance and renewal to be done by qualified LU staff. The third demand is in direct opposition to the government's tube track privatisation policy.

While the RMT decision deserves full support, we have to go much further. The national rail network has shown what happens when transport systems are privatised; considerations of safety and even function are secondary to profit. Repairs are costly and are therefore not done, leading to speed restrictions and delays. The catalogue of accidents above shows that the same is happening to London's tube.

On national rail, even the private train companies joined the chorus demanding renationalisation of Railtrack. To be sure, their reason was simply that they wanted the repairs necessary to be paid for by taxation rather than by themselves in increased costs for using the track - but hearing Britain's leading capitalists demanding nationalisation should indicate that something is wrong to even the most enthusiastic privatiser.

We should not accept any of this. The effective renationalisation of Railtrack by the back door is not in the interests of workers in Britain. It is a means of boosting train operators' profits. The operation on London Underground - where the trains are kept public and the infrastructure is privatised - is also not in workers' interests. London Underground will simply be charged proportionally far more for track usage than the national train companies were, and so the balance of profitability will swing to the infrastructure companies.

A rail transport system is a unitary system. Trains and all the elements of infrastructure - signals, track, stations, bridges, tunnels - are needed and are dependent on each other for the system to function. Arbitrary distinctions and splits of responsibility are tricks perpetrated by capitalists in order to create profitable sub-systems by artificially assigning overall costs to other parts of the system. Transport systems are a service, and the fares charged are lower than that required to pay for the system. Most users of the system are workers travelling to and from work, and so the artificially low fares are a subsidy from the owners of the transport system to the employers who make profit from those workers. That is why the world over most transport systems are state-owned.

The London Underground - and also the national rail network - must be kept wholly state-owned. The safety and upgrading of the networks should be funded from an increase of tax on the companies that benefit from the subsidised fares. At present it is only a matter of time before London Underground emulates national rail with a spectacular accident that costs many lives.

WA

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Operation Iraqi privatisation

The US-led invasion promised freedom and democracy. **Richard Price** looks at the attempt to asset-strip the Iraqi economy

In the run-up to war, the Bush administration strenuously denied it had any economic motives in targeting Iraq. Journalists and academics were wheeled out to ridicule any idea of a war for oil. To underline the altruism of it all, it was stressed again and again that Iraq's oil revenues would be used for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

The rhetoric spoke repeatedly of an abstract freedom, but what the neo-conservatives in the White House had in mind was the imposition of ruthless free market economics under a military administration. While little planning went into how Iraqis would be supplied with food, water, power and medicines, senior US officials were plotting how they would carve up Iraq's post-war economy behind the smokescreen of 'reconstruction'.

Laying out the ideological agenda in advance was the Heritage Foundation – a right wing think tank with close links to the Bush administration. At a conference held in September 2002, it claimed: 'To rehabilitate and modernise its economy, a post-Saddam government will need to move simultaneously on a number of economic policy fronts, utilising the experience of privatisation campaigns and structural reform in other countries.' This was echoed by the Thatcherite Adam Smith Institute in Britain in a paper issued in March 2003, which asserted: 'Privatisation is a *sine qua non* for successful reform in Iraq . . . In Iraq there is much to privatise, as a considerable part of the economy is state-owned.'

Having subjected Iraq to a massive bombardment there was no thought of restoring Iraqi institutions. The physical degrading of much of Iraq's public sector infrastructure was followed by a purge not only of Ba'ath party senior cadres, but of nominal members, which displaced much of the professional and managerial strata. At the same time, widespread looting, largely unchecked by the occupying forces further undermined the ability of indigenous forces to mount any recovery.

All of this suited the US game plan. With total rebuilding costs estimated at anything up to \$100 billion, and an uncertain economic situation in the US, what better tonic than to channel contracts into the very corporations that are political allies of Bush? Under the guise of reconstruction, US multinationals were able to get their claws into Iraq's economy at an early stage, and size up ways and means to asset-strip it. In April, with the war still taking place, Naomi Klein wrote that 'Rather than rebuilding, the country is being treated as a blank slate on which the most ideological Washington neo-liberals can design their dream economy: fully privatised, foreign owned

and open for business.'

The Bush administration has reportedly set up ten task forces to plan the privatisation of major sectors of the Iraqi economy, from agriculture and banking to airports, schools and hospitals.

The United States Agency for International Development set the ball rolling by inviting US multinationals to bid for a host of infrastructure contracts. The US company Stevedoring Services was awarded one of the first, worth \$4.8 million, to restore the port of Umm Qasr. The biggest players are Bechtel and Halliburton, who are acting as planners, consultants, contractors and accountants. Bechtel is a world leader in the privatisation of water services, and one of its subsidiaries was active in Bolivia until the popular rebellion upset its plans to massively hike water prices.

Halliburton is virtually joined at the hip to the Bush administration. Vice President Dick Cheney was its chief executive from 1995 until the 2000 presidential election. When he stood down, he got a \$30 million golden handshake, and has since received deferred payments of \$180,000 per year.

The US Army Corps of Engineers – the agency charged with oil restoration work – has so far awarded Iraq reconstruction contracts currently worth about \$2 billion to Halliburton, and they could rise in the future. In 2001, the company won a ten-year 'field service' contract worth \$1 billion. In March this year, its subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root was secretly awarded a contract to repair damage to oil infrastructure initially worth \$600 million. Despite a furore over the lack of competition, the contract was confirmed in October, again without being put out to tender, and its value rose to \$948 million. KBR has previously been fined \$2 million for fraud at a US air base. By September, Halliburton was said to have received payments of \$247 million.

In December, a Pentagon audit found that Halliburton subsidiaries had overcharged the government by \$61 million for delivering petrol to Iraq and \$67 million for building army canteens there. KBR defended its price of \$2.64 per gallon – more than twice that charged by other suppliers – on the grounds that importing fuel by road from Kuwait was dangerous.

As if this level of cronyism wasn't enough, in August Bush appointed one of his chief fundraisers, Tom Foley, as director of Iraq's public sector development. Foley is the chairman of NTC Group – a venture capital company that specialises in leveraged buyouts. He is charged with drawing up a plan to privatise Iraq's 200 public sector enterprises that currently employ half a million people. The initial

scrutiny will be of 52 companies and 186 factories across seven sectors – textiles, food, construction, chemicals, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals and engineering – and is headed by Yaqub Shonia, a former Iraqi official brought out of retirement.

Among the first sectors to face privatisation is the Iraqi pharmaceutical industry. Originally a privately owned firm, Kimadia provided cheap medicines under the oil for food programme, under which Iraq was allowed to sell oil in exchange for food and humanitarian supplies, including medicines. Under the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), Kimadia has been administered by Colonel Scott Svabek. With most oil for food contracts expiring in November, new private contracts have replaced significant parts of its work, although some existing contracts run into 2004. The prospects are for more expensive medicines for a population already suffering from high levels of unemployment and disease – a prospect described as a disaster by the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières.

Next on the list of priorities appears to be textiles and food, although Shonia says that 'privatisation will be opened for all sectors, including electricity and telecommunications, but with the exception of oil extraction'. It could take various forms – sale, the creation of joint ventures, share holding companies, and the renting out of enterprises. The stock market, which was looted and burnt when the Ba'athist regime fell, is set to reopen shortly.

Of course, most international lawyers consider the privatisation of the state assets of an occupied country with no representative institutions illegal. Yet the CPA has enacted a law permitting full foreign ownership. The main aim of the US appears to be to set in motion the privatisation process to the extent that by the time any elections take place, it looks irreversible, to be the only show in town. Beyond that, US state officials and corporate planners hope that privatisation could take hold in neighbouring Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, thus enabling US oil firms to directly dominate the entire region.

The lion's share of contracts will be going to US companies, although one British company, Crown Agents, is working as a sub-contractor to the US firm International Resources Group in providing technical assistance to reconstruction, and another, De La Rue, printed the new Iraqi banknotes. Among the 10,000 personnel working for private military and security contractors in Iraq are more than a thousand from the west London-based company Global Risk Strategies.

In a controversial move, which the EU believes may break World Trade Organi-

sation rules, the Pentagon has declared that only companies from countries that either participated in or supported the invasion of Iraq will be allowed to bid for primary contracts, and that French, German, Russian and Canadian companies will be limited to sub contracting work totalling \$18 billion.

For the neo-conservatives, the privatisation of Iraqi oil is the big prize. Another key objective of the CPA is the destruction of the rationing system that has operated since 1990, and is an affront to the free market fundamentalists. Prior to the war, the team of house trained Iraqi exiles around Fadhil Chalabi, whom the Bush administration hoped to parachute into power, openly came out in favour of oil privatisation. The realities of post-Saddam Iraq, however, are such that early privatisation of the oil industry seems unlikely, even though it is overseen in the meantime by Philip Carroll, a former chief executive of Shell. Nonetheless, with oil production beginning to recover, it remains the jewel in the crown for US imperialism. More than any other factor, oil privatisation could unite the vast majority of the country against the Coalition carpetbaggers.

The march of privatisation has only served to further discredit the Iraqi Governing Council, which is widely seen as squabbling and ineffectual on the one hand, and as collaborating with the occupying forces on the other. However, the transition to a wholly dependent neo-colonial regime will be far from smooth. Daily attacks not only on Coalition forces, but on UN personnel and NGOs are creating an environment that is hardly conducive to long-term stable investment, and it is clear that such opposition extends well beyond the 'remnants of the Ba'athist regime' constantly referred to in US propaganda.

By far the most progressive expression of this opposition have been the courageous efforts to build independent trade unions in the teeth of opposition not only from the military occupation but also from former state-controlled trade unions and from the Iraqi bourgeoisie. Iraq – once the most secular Arab country with the strongest workers' movement in the Middle East – can yet prove to be an enormous obstacle to the drive for US global hegemony. This struggle, beset by enormous difficulties, deserves our strongest support and solidarity.

WA

Gladstone on the right of self-defence against imperialism

In 1879-80, during the famous Midlothian Campaign, Liberal leader W.F. Gladstone attacked the imperial adventures of the Conservative government led by Benjamin Disraeli, who had recently been made Earl of Beaconsfield. The following is from a speech made in Dalkeith on November 26, 1879. Maybe next time Charles Kennedy agonises over whether it is possible to oppose a war once it has actually begun, he should refer to it.

'Go from South Africa to the mountains of Central Asia. Go into the lofty hills of Afghanistan, as they were last winter, and what do we there see? I fear a yet sadder sight than was to be seen in the land of the Zulus . . . You have seen during last winter from time to time that from such and such a village attacks had been made upon the British forces, and that in consequence the village had been burned. Have you ever reflected on the meaning of these words? . . . Those hill tribes had committed no real offence against us. We, in the pursuit of our political objects, chose to establish military positions in their country. If they resisted, would not you have done the same? And when, going forth from their villages they had resisted, what you find is this, that those who went forth were slain, and that the village is burned. Again, I say, have you considered the meaning of these words? The meaning of the burning of the village is, that the women and children were driven forth to perish in the snows of winter. Is not that a terrible supposition? Is not that a fact which . . . rouses in you a sentiment of horror and grief, to think that the name of England, under no political necessity, but for a war as frivolous as ever was waged in the history of man, should be associated with consequences such as these? . . . Remember the rights of the savage, as we call him. Remember that the happiness of his humble home, remember that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan among the winter snows, is as inviolable in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own.'

The fall of Saddam

The War We Could Not Stop
 Edited by Randeep Ramesh
 Faber and Faber 2003, 303pp,
 £7.99

Richard Price

Among the first in a growing pile of Gulf War 2 literature, this is an attempt at instant history. Essentially it's a narrative collage of *Guardian* and *Observer* journalism from the two papers' numerous correspondents, both inside and outside Iraq. It's a format, however, that's not without problems. The rush to get into print tends to inhibit detailed analysis, and so this is much more about the impressions of those witnessing the fighting than it is about the motives of the key players.

The build-up to war is dealt with in barely 50 pages. There is a useful summary of the neo-conservative agenda in the US and how it seized the opportunity immediately after 9/11 to link Saddam to al-Qaida and implement its long-cherished ambition of regime change in Iraq. But there's correspondingly less on the development of the anti-war movement, and it's also light on the diplomatic stand-off between the US, Britain and Spain on the one hand, and France, Germany and Russia on the other.

Many Iraqis were understandably reluctant in the first phase of the war to reveal what they thought of the Ba'athist regime, for fear it would recover as it did when it defeated the Shia and Kurdish uprisings the coalition had incited in 1991. It's also dangerous to generalise too much about the consciousness of 'most Iraqis', given the ethnic and religious mosaic that makes up Iraq. Nevertheless, the picture that emerges from the fragments of interviews this book contains confirms that many opposed *both* Saddam and the invasion and subsequent occupation.

This should hardly have been earth-shattering news, you might think. Yet it was something the finest brains in the Bush and Blair administrations hadn't allowed for.

It also didn't match the scenarios traditionally painted by the left. Some on the left fantasised about an 'anti-imperialist united front' of Iraqi workers with the Ba'athist apparatus. The AWI, in late Shachtmanite mode, decided that since US bourgeois democracy was preferable to Iraq under Saddam, then the US occupation of Iraq was preferable to any indigenous force that might replace it in the short term.

Both positions have been confounded by events. As we predicted, few outside the Ba'athist hard core were prepared to fight and die to defend the regime. But with the fall of Saddam, the occupation has created a cauldron of opposition.

As in 1991, the Coalition cynically played the Palestinian card. Then, Bush Senior had used it to bring Arab states on board. But in 2003, hardly any Arab states that mattered could be pulled on board. The appearance of the roadmap was aimed more at heading off the growing awareness

in the West that while the Coalition was demanding Iraq comply with UN resolutions, it had encouraged Israel to flout them for decades. The book quotes Aluf Benn, writing in the liberal Israeli daily, *Ha'aretz*: 'The more public opinion in their countries opposes the war in Iraq, the more Blair and [Spanish premier] Aznar grasp the Palestinian issue as a political life saver . . . They have to prove to their constituents in Europe that they care about ending the Israeli occupation of the territories, to win legitimacy for their occupation of Iraq.' (p.227)

A chapter called 'War Games' stresses just how far military technology has progressed, even since the first Gulf War. Those who seek to defeat imperialism with strategy and tactics derived from the early part of the last century would do well to read it, since it underlines the futility of much that passes for anti-imperialist politics in the West today.

Just as Engels at the end of his life felt moved to remind fellow Marxists that modern artillery had made barricade fighting outmoded, so today conventional warfare against an enemy that can launch battlefield strikes from hundreds of miles away is even more redundant.

Was Gulf War 2 a war for oil, as anti-war placards insisted? You'd think such an important issue would warrant some treatment in a book of 300 pages. But the first casualty of getting a war book into print again seems to be analysis. Yet the post-war smash and grab raid by US corporations on the Iraqi economy underlines that while the war was by no means *only* about oil, oil is without doubt a key factor in the US drive to establish strategic, political and economic dominance over the entire Middle East.

More perceptive is a closing remark: 'Whether America chooses to remake its enemies or simply destroy them will shape the course of world events for decades to come. In doing so, it may force the pace of European integration – to produce a post-national entity with enough clout to tackle the United States.' (p.272) This largely unforeseen by-product of the war appears to have already gained some momentum with a report in the *Guardian* on November 13 that 'France and Germany are publicly discussing the possibility of a "Franco-German union" that would allow them to co-operate more closely in such areas as education, social affairs and the economy and even merge their defence and foreign policies'.

The book concludes with a helpful chronology of events and a glossary of Coalition jargon, but irritatingly there's no index. Overall, it's a book that's useful, but thin in places.

Bolivia

Gas war ignites revolt

Nick Davies examines the background to the uprising of workers and peasants which led to the fall of the Bolivian government in October

In 2001, the people of Argentina threw out their president in a bitter protest against his IMF-dictated economic policies. In 2002, the poor of Venezuela took to the streets to defeat a US-inspired coup against their elected president. In 2003, it was the turn of the Bolivians to rise up against neo-liberalism and its political representatives. On October 17, after hurriedly offering his resignation to Congress, President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, his family and hangers-on fled to that favourite bolt-hole of discredited right-wing Latin American politicians, Miami. The only downside was that in order to make his exile as comfortable as possible, he looted \$85 million from the Bolivian Central Bank.

Lozada's removal was the culmination of an eleven-day general strike and demonstrations estimated at 500,000 (Bolivia's population is about 8 million) led by miners and peasants from the city of El Alto, and supported by peasants and miners from elsewhere, by workers, coca growers, taxi drivers, street-vendors, students and sections of the middle class. Faced with an insurrectionary movement as massive in scope as this, the new president, former vice-president Carlos Mesa, was forced to adopt a conciliatory tone in his inaugural address: 'I want to create a country for all Bolivians... where we can respect the equality of everyone.' Aware that he may suffer the same fate as his despised predecessor, he admitted: 'I am only going to be the president if I serve you because if you end up serving me, you will kick me out.' Equally aware of his lack of freedom to deliver any real reforms, Mesa was careful not to promise too much. The jury is still out, the insurrection leaders having

agreed to a 90-day truce to give him a chance to deliver on at least some of his demands.

So, how and why did Lozada get kicked out, and is his removal merely a change of personnel, or a step forward in the fightback against neo-liberalism in Latin America?

It was gas that sparked off the insurrection. Bolivia has the second biggest reserves of natural gas in South America. The gas war began with the government's plan for a \$5.2 billion dollar natural gas pipeline project, controlled by a consortium of energy multinationals, in order to export Bolivian gas, via Chile, to the United States. Although the media in Britain, so far as they covered the story at all, saw significance in the fact that the territory crossed by the pipeline was lost by Bolivia following defeat in the War of the Pacific in 1880, most of the anger sprang from the knowledge that, yet again, one of Bolivia's natural resources was to be extracted for the benefit of Europe and North America, leaving Bolivians poor.

Because of privatisation, and the rules concerning private investment, exporting \$1.2 billion worth of natural gas to Brazil has brought in a mere \$90 million in revenue. But if the price of gas exported to Brazil is \$1.77 per thousand cubic feet, the price for export to the US would be only 70 cents, and Bolivia would receive only 18 per cent of that. It did not take a genius to realise that, once again, Bolivians were being ripped off by an international trade system not designed for their benefit.

Mass demonstrations

Demonstrations called by the Coordination in Defence of Gas mobilised 30,000 in Cochabamba, and 50,000 in La Paz. Within a month the gas uprising threatened to become an all-out civil war. Government troops massacred 84 protestors and killed 15 conscripts who had refused to fire on demonstrators. It was the unreliability of some of the armed forces, and the government's loss of the support of sections of the middle class, which finally did for Lozada. Mesa has promised a referendum to consult the population on whether or not, and if so how, the gas should be exported. Mesa has said that he wants the petroleum companies to give 50 per cent of their profits to Bolivia. Even if he is sincere in this, the companies are extremely unlikely to agree to it. Instead, there is a widespread demand that the gas industry be nationalised.

The gas war did not come from nowhere. It followed the 'water war' of 1999-2000. In 1999, the World Bank pressurised the Bolivian government into privatising the water companies. It refused credit to the

public company which ran the water services, insisted that there be no subsidies to mitigate the effect of price hikes, and turned the whole supply over to a subsidiary of International Water Ltd, owned by Bechtel, the US company currently profiteering from the destruction of Iraq. In Cochabamba, price hikes of \$20 per month (in the wealthy Washington suburbs they only pay \$17 per month!), and the requirement that peasants had to buy a permit to collect rainwater from their own wells and roof tanks were met with massive demonstrations, forcing the water profiteers, eventually, to abandon Bolivia.

Coca leaf eradication

But, in turn, the 'water war' did not come from nowhere either. Central to Bolivian culture is the coca leaf, long used as an appetite suppressant and to combat altitude sickness. For several years now, coca growers have been involved in a struggle for survival against US policy in Bolivia, which is based exclusively on the eradication of the coca leaf. All US economic aid, and aid from international organisations in which the US participates, is dependent on coca leaf eradication. The US's hard line on coca growing prevents the Bolivian government granting concessions to coca growers even if it wants to, and may result in the downfall of the Mesa presidency. Coca growers have demanded a pause in eradication, the modification of the anti-drug laws and a study of legal coca markets. The leader of the coca growers, Evo Morales, has warned that if there is no progress after the 90 day truce there will be direct action.

When, in 2002, Morales ran for president, the ex-US ambassador Manuel Rocha threatened Bolivia with a loss of international aid if Morales won. Rocha's intervention pushed Morales's vote to within 1.5 per cent of the winner, Lozada. In January and February 2003, a mass-mobilisation of coca-growing peasants demanded

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the suspension of coca eradication, nationalisation of privatised industries and services, and an end to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA – the projected Alaska-to-the-Andes playground for US multinationals). Although the security forces wobbled, briefly, they remained loyal, repressing this movement, with 20 dead. As in Colombia, there is a counter-insurgency strategy of coca-eradication, involving the military, devised by current US ambassador David Greenlee when he was a CIA agent in Bolivia, and, as in Colombia, this has involved the violation of human rights and resulted in large-scale poverty in areas where growing coca leaves is the only way to survive. In the meantime, the price, purity and availability of the cocaine snorted by Americans remains unaffected.

Tin miners

Many of the coca growers used to be tin miners. Tin used to be Bolivia's chief export until the price crashed in the 1980s, partly due to the release by the USA onto the world market of its tin reserves. The tin miners had always been the most militant sector of the Bolivian working class. In 1985, Víctor Paz Estenssoro privatised the tin mines that had been nationalised under his first presidency following the revolution of 1952. His right-hand man was none other than Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, then an up-and-coming US educated technocrat, who went on to serve as president from 1993-97. Neo-liberalism's arrival in Bolivia was swift and bloody. The mines were privatised, the miners' union, with a long and proud history of militancy and courage was crushed, and 20,000 miners were 'localised', in other words, sacked and dispersed. Such was the defeat of the tin miners and the thoroughness of the privatisation programme that it was not until the water wars and the subsequent near-victory of Morales that the tide began to turn.

Destruction of state sector

Bolivia was always the poorest, or one of the poorest, countries in South America. Unquestionably, the neo-liberal assault has made it poorer, destroying the state sector, increasing unemployment and underemployment, and weakening the social protection that kept many Bolivians from starvation. Seventy per cent of Bolivians now live in poverty. Bolivia's rich natural resources are looted by US or European multinationals. In the name of the 'war against drugs', Bolivians are prevented from making a living in one of the few ways they can. In the name of the 'war against terrorism', money in Britain's aid budget earmarked for, among other countries, Bo-

livia, has been diverted to pay for the occupation of Iraq. Tony Blair would surely be disappointed at how stubbornly unconvinced Bolivians are about the merits of globalisation.

The workers and poor of Bolivia have scored an important victory. Lozada was certainly Washington's man in Bolivia, and the US continued its loyal defence of him until his position became hopeless. But isn't the USA's recognition of the new president a sign that he is a safe pair of hands, and that nothing, really, has changed? Yes and no. It is still only a change in personnel, but the 90-day truce is a ticking time bomb. Either the masses will turn out Mesa, or he will resort to repression to stay in power, or attempt to buy off or out-manoeuvre the leaders of the insurrection. If Mesa makes no move on the gas or the coca issues, his time may be up, but only if the mass movement is not demobilised, and if it is armed, both physically and politically. This requires the creation of a movement more cohesive than the loose coalition that has existed, based around the minimum demands for nationalisation of the gas industry, for the right to grow and sell the coca leaf, for rejection of the FTAA, and an end to the multinationals' domination of Bolivia's natural resources and public services.

Tradition of insurrection

This movement needs, as it already has, to draw on Bolivia's rich tradition of insurrection, exemplified by the tin miners, who in 1969-1971 and in 1980 resorted to strikes and occupations in support of leftist governments threatened by military coups. The COB trade union confederation, in which the miners' union was prominent, was itself heavily influenced by revolutionary Marxism. It is in those traditions in which a new movement should be created, building on the victories of the past three years. In the past, due to the militancy of the tin miners and the strategic importance for the Bolivian economy of the tin industry, the Bolivian working class was able to take the lead role in the struggle against US imperialism and its local agents, the Bolivian elite. Now, with there being far fewer miners than before, and Bolivia's working class a small one, that leading role is more difficult to achieve, but no less important.

While the USA's back is turned, busy trying to enforce its brutal occupation of Iraq, events in Bolivia will have been watched closely in Venezuela and Argentina. The region which the USA likes to think of as its own backyard could be where the fightback against Bush and Blair's neo-liberal world order really gets under way.

WA

After Cancún

Following the breakdown of the talks on world trade in Mexico, **Simon Deville** looks at the threat to US hegemony posed by the rise of China as an economic power

September's World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Cancún broke up without agreement after China, Brazil and India led the 'G21' group of poor countries in resisting the agenda of the richer states. The fact that poorer countries have been able to resist the demands of the richer nations is a very positive step that could signal the beginning of a growing trend.

When Lula was elected president of Brazil, US trade representative Robert Zoellick said that if the Workers Party government did not comply with US plans for free trade it would find itself 'trading with Antarctica'. But however much the US may wish to control every aspect of the world economy, there will be a growing tendency for states to negotiate their own terms of trade with partners of their choice.

Since 1995, when it replaced GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade signed in 1947), the WTO has been the body which oversees global trade relations. Far from presiding over free trade, it has been a vehicle for the dominance of US and European multinationals, and for the penetration of markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The growing realisation of what the WTO is really for has resulted in its meetings having to be conducted behind lines of armed police.

The 'development round', launched in Doha in November 2001, is the WTO's attempt to look as if it is addressing the needs of the poor. But negotiations at WTO meetings are dominated by the 'Quad': the USA, Canada, Japan and the EU. They take place in the 'green room', with other countries being involved on a 'take it or leave it' basis. Needless to say, immense pressure is put on the representatives of poor, small countries by teams of diplomats and corporate lawyers from the rich world. At Cancún, however, China, Brazil and India were able to make common cause in resisting pressure from the Quad. Though it

is likely that a deal will be done eventually with the G21 countries, the stalemate will have almost certainly knocked the planned timetable way off course.

The central point of contention was the EU's insistence that the meeting should discuss investment, competition policy, government procurement and trade facilitation rather than the topics that were already on the agenda - agriculture, services, e-commerce and the environment. The intention was to reach agreement on specific issues that would assist multinationals in getting an even greater penetration of the poorer countries. The practice of dumping cheap (and massively subsidised) agricultural products in third world countries means that peasant farmers are unable to sell their locally produced goods and are driven out of business. It has already led to the ruin of a number of economies. It has been estimated that two poor cotton-producing countries in west Africa, Mali and Burkina-Faso, lose more as a result of US subsidies to its own cotton farmers than they receive in aid.

The significant thing about the Cancun talks is that for the first time the poorer countries felt able to work together in opposing the proposals of the rich countries. While the governments of India, China, Brazil and other G21 countries undoubtedly have their own reasons for acting together, the fact that this has happened at all should be welcomed by socialists. It marks a new stage in which the US, despite its status as the world's only superpower, may not get such an easy ride as it attempts to advance its own economic interests at the expense of smaller capitalist states. This is compounded by the Bush administration's tendency for self-serving unilateralism, whether in relation to the Kyoto agreement, steel tariffs or its illegal wars.

Many commentators, including many of Bush's key advisers, have pointed out that the US may not continue to maintain its absolute domination in the economic and political fields. Underpinning the Project for a New American Century is a recognition that precisely because it is losing its grip in these areas, the US needs to maintain its dominance through its overwhelming military superiority. By taking control of the world's oil resources, by force if necessary, the neo-cons believe they can secure prosperity for the US well into the future. But such acts betray a degree of desperation. Motivated by the threat of China's growing economy overtaking the US, the White House is now taking the risk of encouraging the growth of new alliances against the US in order to consolidate its own power.

Throughout the capitalist world, the 20th

century was truly the 'American Century'. As the European empires declined throughout the first half of the century, the United States emerged as the dominant power in the economic, political and military fields. Following the Second World War, it remained unchallenged in this position for the next half a century. It is important to note, however, that it did not achieve this position primarily through coercion. Of course, every US administration has used violence and coercion wherever and whenever US interests have been threatened, but that is only a small part of the story.

Capitalist elites around the world have deferred leadership to the US because they have seen it as being able to defend their interests as well as its own. Throughout the cold war, the US held the line against the 'threat of communism', defending capitalist property relations world-wide. A whole series of international agreements and institutions have been set up to ensure the stable accumulation of capital, from the Bretton-Woods agreement to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation. Through these organisations, agreements are established between ruling elites to ensure their respective profits are safeguarded.

The downside of deferring to US leadership is that it is clearly not an equal relationship; these organisations were not set up to establish stable rule in the abstract, but in the interests of the US. Trade rules are established to benefit the most powerful nations at the expense of the weakest, although even in the latter the indigenous ruling class gets a small slice of the cake to win its support. They are reinforced through investment with strings attached, to ensure that weaker states structure their economies in a way dictated by the more powerful countries - primarily, but not only, the US. This world system of inequality is mediated through the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO.

Neo-liberalism has temporarily helped to resolve a general crisis of over-accumulation of capital in the West by forcing poorer countries throughout the world to open up their economies both to an influx of goods, and to the creation of new investment opportunities for otherwise idle capital. This in turn has placed the burden of economic crises in the West upon poorer countries. Thus US- and European-based farming can sell off its surplus of state-subsidised produce to third world countries, undercutting indigenous farmers and leaving them unable to sell their produce and impoverished. At the same time, poorer countries are forced to open up their economies - selling off national assets and welfare services, and giving multinational corporations new markets in which they can invest their

surplus capital to generate greater profits. Countries that do not go along with this system are threatened with withdrawal of aid, capital flight or economic blockade.

This imperialist system does contain contradictions, however; it is not an uncomplicated, one-way power relationship. In order to open up the economies of poorer countries, governments are given loans through the World Bank and the IMF on the condition that they develop the infrastructure necessary to allow the multinationals to thrive. This in turn generates a strengthened internal economy that can enable a country to force itself onto the world stage as a capitalist power, and develop trade relations with countries other than just the imperialist superpower.

Since China has opened its markets to capitalist investment, its economy has grown massively. While it has a long way to go to catch up with the US, there is every indication that it will do precisely that, and that the US will then have to face an even more serious capitalist rival than it does in the EU, Japan or Russia. The more the US resorts to military force rather than political leadership, the more the likelihood of blocs forming among its competitors.

Socialists must recognise the importance of the situation that is now emerging. Of course, our task is not to choose a favoured capitalist power to support. But if the world economy is no longer dominated by a single power shaping the rules of engagement in its own interests, there is far greater space for countries to break out of their economic straightjacket and plot their own course. And greater divisions between capitalist classes around the world will provide more space for the workers' movement to intervene and impose its will on the course of events. **WA**

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Al Richardson 1941-2003: historian of the revolutionary movement

The sudden and unexpected death of Al Richardson on November 22 at the age of 61 comes as a great shock to his friends, comrades and the readers of *Revolutionary History*, both in Britain and internationally. As an authority on the history of the revolutionary movement in the 20th century he had few, if any, rivals, and he leaves a gap that will be almost impossible to fill.

Al was born in 1941 in Barnsley. His father held a supervisory job in a colliery. Despite failing his 11 plus, Al attended grammar school and went on to Hull University where he gained a first class honours degree. By his own account in an article for this journal on the 30th anniversary of 1968, he first came into contact with Marxist ideas in 1964, while he was a research student.¹ After a short period of lecturing at Exeter University, he moved to London, where he joined the SLL Young Socialists organised around *Keep Left*. He stayed for about six months, by which time he'd had enough of the SLL's dogmatic sectarianism, and met up with the International Marxist Group, then operating in the Labour Party. He found the IMG, though much smaller, altogether more interesting and dynamic. From a small base, the IMG managed to launch the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, whose influence rapidly mushroomed, and Al became one of its leading lights in north-west London.

The IMG put on a growth spurt, but one that led it out of the Labour Party and into the radicalised student and middle class milieu. From this his disillusionment with the IMG was to grow. In May 1968 he went to Paris to witness the revolutionary events unfolding there. Profoundly unimpressed by the role of the main Trotskyist groups in the May-June events, he returned to London, where his differences over the IMG's orientation deepened. By 1969 he was out of the group, the result of organisational manoeuvres he remained bitter about for decades.

In May 1970, he became a founder member of the Chartist group, which was composed of small numbers of ex-members of the IMG and Militant and a sprinkling of independents. In contrast to the prevailing trend on the left, the Chartists aimed to orient to the Labour movement – although in retrospect they too seem to have had a dose of ultra-leftism, and were given to making strenuous denunciations of 'Pabloism'. Nevertheless, they produced some interesting material, including Al's pioneering study of Vietnamese Trotskyism, published under the pseudonym Richard Stephenson in 1972.² In 1973, Al left the group he had helped found, apparently disillusioned by its failure to make significant progress. This seems to have been the last time he took part in organised activity on the left.

Had he left it at that, it would have been a modest and fairly short-lived contribution to left politics. But it proved to be the launch pad for a vast amount of historical research. One early result was a slim pamphlet containing five unpublished letters from Trotsky to Reg Groves.³ Together with Sam Bornstein, who had joined the movement in the late 1930s, Al set about excavating the history of British Trotskyism. Over the next decade, convinced that history couldn't be understood merely in terms of the documentary record, they interviewed dozens of Trotskyists who had been active in the 1930s and 40s. They kept in touch with a wide circle of pioneer Trotskyists, from members of the Balham Group to casualties of the break-up of the RCP in the late 1940s. A number who had dropped out of activity decades earlier were encouraged to write about their experiences and debate with the younger generation.

Path-breaking volumes

From this work flowed three co-written books: a history of the Communist Party from 1935-45,⁴ and two path-breaking volumes covering British Trotskyism from 1924-1949.⁵ The impact of these volumes shouldn't be underestimated. Until then, aside from a short effort by Jim Higgins, there was no history of the movement accessible to the thousands on the left who considered themselves Trotskyists. All that those who adhered to one group or another had to go on were the highly partial accounts handed down by the leaders of the different fragments of the Fourth International, most of whom had a vested interest in covering up various aspects of the history.

When I first picked up *The War and the International* in a somewhat shell-shocked post-Healyite frame of mind, some of its ideas struck me as outrageous – in particu-

lar, the claim that "'Trotskyism" is merely the form taken by Marxism during the epoch of the defeat of the world proletariat',⁶ and its insistence on the futility of attempting to bypass a unitary Labour movement by 'independent' party building. Yet, when I read it properly, its account of what had happened with the break-up of the RCP in the late 1940s lifted scales from my eyes, and chimed with my own tentative attempts to reckon with the 'IC tradition' from which Healyites, Lambertists, Morenoites and Spartacists claim descent.

Sure enough, neither volume won many friends among the leading lights of the Trotskyist left. The preface to *The War and the International* didn't pull any punches: '... it seems to have been missed by practically all the Trotskyist groups that our first volume was written to hold up the past as an accusing mirror to their present politics'.⁷ Yet the two books did achieve a wide circulation, and became recognised as the starting point for serious study of the period. All these years later, with the left much smaller but for the most part even more convinced of its messianic role, the warning seems prophetic.

Parallel to his analysis of the crisis of the British Trotskyist movement, Al developed the view that the Fourth International had to all intents and purposes collapsed as a revolutionary organisation in the 1940s.⁸

Revolutionary History

Al helped form Socialist Platform, which operated both as a vehicle to gather together the many old-timers he had befriended and as an independent Trotskyist publishing house. In 1988 the first issue of *Revolutionary History* appeared, with Al as editor. It was conceived as a collaborative journal of the left, aimed at activists rather than academics, and initially at least Al managed to persuade some of the most incompatible groups on the left to participate in its editorial board. Over 15 years, it has become the most authoritative journal of its kind in the world, and in the course of some 30 issues it has provided a host of rare archive material illuminating many aspects of the revolutionary movement internationally.

In recent years, Al's output as an editor was phenomenal. In addition to taking the lead role in editing issues of *Revolutionary History*, many of them book length, he produced a steady stream of books under the imprints of Socialist Platform, Porcupine Press and Francis Boutle. All of this work was done in the spare time his job as a schoolteacher allowed.

Al hated hagiography as much as he loathed pomposity and pretentiousness. In this spirit, it's fair to say that Al wasn't always the easiest of people to coexist with.

He cultivated a gruff, curmudgeonly exterior that was part defence mechanism and part self-parody. Where others had bent the stick towards sexual politics, black nationalism, Third Worldism and ecology, he bent it in the opposite direction. He tended to see popular frontism and the dilution of class politics lurking behind attempts to address issues of racial, national and sexual oppression. He would take delight in denouncing what he described as the politics of 'Don't nuke gay whales'. Needless to say, it wasn't always a stance destined to make friends and influence people, and tended towards class reductionism.

Orthodoxy

Al's distance from political activity frequently led him into a form of orthodoxy, whereby he would attempt to deduce current positions from the Marxist classics, even though he had warned in *The War and the International* that '... the cultivation of a Trotskyist "orthodoxy" is the most amusing phenomenon, for orthodoxy is a religious attitude, not a materialist or a revolutionary one'.⁹ Sometimes the breadth of his historical understanding really could illuminate a contemporary issue. His critique of sect building, which he set out in this journal,¹⁰ generally left those around the Socialist Alliance struggling for an answer.

Given that his knowledge of the Marxist classics was immense, he could frequently outline well thought out strategic positions, but fail to grapple with how these could be put into practice. His knowledge of Balkan history led him to reason that only a Balkan Socialist Federation could resolve the historic antagonisms between rival nationalisms.¹¹ On this basis he wasn't prepared to give even the most critical support to any side in the wars in ex-Yugoslavia. But although this was undoubtedly true at the level of strategy, it was also highly abstract when, for instance, Bosnian Muslims were on the receiving end of ethnic cleansing, mass rape and massacres. To be fair, though, when growing evidence emerged of mass graves and systematic rape, he acknowledged that his earlier view that these had been deliberately exaggerated by the Western media was incorrect.

But it would be wrong to see Al as a prisoner of blind orthodoxy, because in other respects he showed a flair for original thinking. In 1995, his introduction to a volume of Bolshevik writings, written under the impact of the collapse of Stalinism, showed that he had moved beyond a wooden repetition of Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet state.¹² It was motivated in part by the failure of almost any brand of Trotskyist orthodoxy to anticipate the debacle. A theory that lacked any predictive

power, he reasoned, was flawed.

More recently, in the introduction to a book documenting the role of Trotsky's early supporters in the French Communist Party, he argued cogently that the origin of much that passes for democratic centralism in Trotskyist circles is in fact descended from the period of Zinoviev's 'Bolshevisation' of the Comintern.¹³

On the Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982, he held that it was correct for socialists on both sides to oppose the war, and disagreed with those Argentinian Trotskyists who supported the Junta's war. Although he did not consider himself well versed in economics, he believed that European capitalist integration was possible, as against the traditional view that this could only be accomplished under socialism.

Beneath the bluff professional Yorkshireman exterior, there was a soft interior. Although he had some pet hates, Al valued all sorts of comrades who had made some contribution, even if they held very different views from him. For someone who criticised most existing forms of Trotskyism so sharply, he was also extraordinarily loyal to it. He was prepared to acknowledge the role that had been played by groups as disparate as anarchists, Bordigists and Brandlerites. Al's house (or a suitable pub!) was a natural port of call for many socialists passing through Britain. In the early 1990s, Al was very supportive towards the group of South African exiles and trade unionists who were working with the WUJ at that time.

Inspiring teacher

Beyond that, Al was an expert on Egyptology, could read ancient languages, and had an extensive knowledge of ancient and medieval history and world religions. He spoke French fearlessly, without the slightest regard for pronunciation, and, despite latterly acquiring an ancient word processor, continued to distrust any technology more recent than the manual typewriter. For over 35 years he taught history at London secondary schools, the last three decades at Forest Hill where he was widely admired as an inspiring teacher.

One of the more distasteful aspects of memorials and obituaries are attempts to claim the deceased for a particular group they didn't belong to, and I don't want to do that. It is true, however, that Al said on a number of occasions that he felt – in spite of our disagreements on some issues – closest to Workers Action. Indeed he always took a bundle of the magazine, and insisted those around him buy it! He contributed a number of articles to Workers Action over the years, and before that to Workers News, spoke at meetings and debates we organised, and would even moderate his own

views in public on some issues where we disagreed out of comradely loyalty. Whether Al was cut out for belonging to a group I doubt. I tend to think he was best at doing what he was already doing.

Al was the kind of guy you could ring up in search of a quotation, and who, after he had finished his marking for school, would spend however long it took to hunt it down and then ring you back with the information. He had a great eye for detail. For nearly 15 years he was a very loyal friend. He had a very moral sense of how people should and shouldn't be treated. He was able to work with the most diverse group of people in the interest, as he saw it, of theoretically arming socialists. More than that, he was one of the most stimulating people I have met in over 25 years on the left. Arguing with, and bouncing ideas off, Al gave you endless food for thought. I shall miss his hospitable, irreverent, irascible self enormously. He was a real one-off.

Richard Price

■ The funeral of Al Richardson took place at Mortlake Crematorium on December 3. It was attended by about 150 family, friends, comrades, work colleagues and former and current pupils. A memorial meeting has been provisionally arranged for March 13, 2004.

NOTES

¹ Al Richardson, '1968 revisited', *Workers Action* No.3, June-July 1998.

² Richard Stephenson, 'Vietnam: Stalinism versus revolutionary socialism', *Workers News Supplement* No.7, December 1992 January 1993.

³ Richard Stephenson (ed), *The Early Years of the British Left Opposition*, 1979.

⁴ Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Two Steps Back*, Socialist Platform, 1982.

⁵ Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Against the Stream*, Socialist Platform, 1986, and *The War and the International*, Socialist Platform, 1986.

⁶ *The War and the International*, p.239.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

⁸ Al Richardson, 'Fourth International? What Fourth International?', *Workers News*, October-November 1990.

⁹ *The War and the International*, p.239.

¹⁰ Al Richardson, 'How are revolutionary parties formed?', *Workers Action* No.22, Summer 2003.

¹¹ Al Richardson, 'Nation and class in the Balkans', *Workers Action* No.7, June-July 1999.

¹² 'Introduction' to Al Richardson (ed), *In Defence of the Russian Revolution: A Selection of Bolshevik Writings, 1917-1923*, Porcupine, 1995.

¹³ 'Introduction' to Al Richardson (ed), *Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism*, Francis Boutle, 2002.

Edward Said 1935-2003

Roland Rance pays tribute to the
Palestinian scholar and activist
who died on September 25

Edward Said, who has died following a long battle with leukaemia, was perhaps the best-known and most articulate spokesman of the Palestinian struggle. Through a series of books, articles and lectures, he eloquently argued the case for Palestinian rights and against the state of Israel. His advocacy was so persuasive that the Zionist propaganda machine several times sought, unsuccessfully, to discredit his character, since they could not refute his arguments.

Said was born in Jerusalem, to a bourgeois Christian family, during the British mandate over Palestine. With the establishment of the state of Israel on the ruins of Palestine in 1948, he and his family became refugees. Ironically, the family home, in the smart Talbieh neighbourhood, was then seized and occupied by Professor Martin Buber, the theologian and philosopher vaunted by Israel's apologists as the model of an alternative, 'humane' Zionism. After attending school in Jerusalem and Cairo, Said completed his education in the USA, where he attended the Juilliard School of Music, and gained a PhD from Harvard with a dissertation on Joseph Conrad. He was thus fully integrated into western society and academia, and when it became difficult for his detractors to challenge his ideas, they attempted to challenge his credentials by claiming that he was not a Palestinian at all, but an Egyptian. Interestingly, the Zionist lobby attempted to argue similarly against Yassir Arafat's credentials; in both cases, the attempt failed.

Said wrote several books about Palestine; notably, *The Question of Palestine*, *After the Last Sky* (with photographer Jean Mohr) and *Blaming the Victim* (with turncoat Christopher Hitchens). Initially associated with Fatah and Arafat, he became ever more critical of the political and moral decline of the Palestine liberation movement. In powerful polemics such as *The End of the Peace Process*, and *Peace and its Discontents*, and in countless articles and speeches, Said witheringly exposed the failure of the PLO to achieve any tangible results for the suffering Palestinian people, despite their increasingly supine response to Israel's intransigence. Said argued for democracy throughout the Arab world, as a necessary element of the struggle for Palestinian and Arab liberation.

It was this commitment to democracy, and consistent opposition to reactionary Arab leaders, which made Said such an inconvenience for Israel's apologists. Unable to stigmatise him, because of his Christian origin, as a fundamentalist, they were also unable convincingly to argue that he was a supporter of secular dictators such as Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi. They tried, nevertheless. In 1989, *Commentary* – a magazine published by the

American Jewish Committee, with close links to the CIA – dubbed him 'The Professor of Terror' after he was photographed in Lebanon throwing a stone towards an Israeli watchtower. Said withstood the attacks, and demands for his dismissal as Professor of Comparative Literature at New York's Columbia University.

As a literary critic, Said made a major contribution to our understanding of 'the literary canon', and literature as a whole. In his major works *Orientalism*, and *Culture and Imperialism*, Said showed, through a close reading of the texts, that Western literary classics are not value free, and that they reflect the political values and economic circumstances of the societies in which they were produced. He was again attacked; it was alleged that he denounced Jane Austen, for instance, as an imperialist. This is to ignore the great love Said had for her writings. His intention was not to condemn, but to understand and explain the interplay between the texts and the societies which produced them.

Said's writings on culture, and his championing of writers from third world countries and cultures, have affected all subsequent literary criticism, and have helped to establish a new 'post-colonial' discourse. This, even more than his advocacy of the Palestinian cause, may prove to be his lasting legacy.

In recent years, Said turned to his first passion, music, in an attempt to achieve peace and justice in the Middle East. Together with Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim, he established the West-East Divan, an orchestra for Palestinian and Israeli youth. Barenboim, attacked in Israel for playing concerts in the occupied territories, and for playing Wagner in Israel, has movingly described how Said spoke to an audience of Israeli, Palestinian and German youth in Weimar, the home of Goethe, about the lessons of the neighbouring Buchenwald concentration camp.

Said was one of a number of activists who, in recent years, moved from support for two states in Palestine to the recognition that only a unitary, democratic and secular state could possibly bring peace with justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. He died at a time when this understanding is gaining an increased hearing. His contribution to this cause will be sorely missed; but the many who were inspired by his writings, his activism, and his example, will continue the struggle. As he said in one of his last statements: 'Remember the solidarity shown to Palestine here and everywhere . . . and remember also that there is a cause to which many people have committed themselves, difficulties and terrible obstacles notwithstanding. Why? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for equality and human rights.'

Orwell's legacy

In the centenary year of George Orwell's birth, **Darren Williams** assesses his contribution to British socialist thought

It is a backhanded compliment to George Orwell that, at the centenary of his birth, one of the most influential pop culture phenomena of recent times – the TV series, *Big Brother* – is based on a trivialised version of a concept from his last novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. A more serious manifestation of his enduring influence has been the recent profusion of new books and articles reappraising his life and work. These have tended to focus either on assessing his qualities as a writer or on trying to make sense of his complex character. While both of these endeavours are perfectly worthwhile, and can often make for fascinating reading, the most pressing task for the left in relation to Orwell, I would argue, is to explore the political significance of his work and assess his contribution to socialist thought in Britain.

Orwell never pretended to be a theoretician of any kind, yet his influence on the political thinking of the British left has remained strong more than 50 years after his death. There are a number of reasons for this: the absence of a strong theoretical tradition on the left in Britain; the world-historical character of the events through which he lived and on which he commented; and the lively and accessible style in which he wrote. His resolutely independent-minded approach to politics, and the often dramatic changes of tone and emphasis that characterised his work, have meant that his legacy has been contested since his death in 1950, with not just socialists (reformist and revolutionary alike), but also liberals and conservatives, claiming him as their own.

Orwell, whose real name was Eric Blair, came to socialism relatively late in life, with no background as a political activist, or any personal ties to the labour movement or the working class. He was born, in 1903, into a family which he meticulously described as 'lower-upper-middle class'. His father was a colonial official, in the Opium Department of the Indian civil service, and after prep school and Eton, the 18-year-old Blair went in 1921 to Burma,

where he served as an officer in the Indian Imperial Police until his resignation in 1927, by which time he had a passionate hatred of British colonialism – as his novel *Burmese Days* (1934) demonstrates. This shift from functionary to critic of the British Empire was highly significant in terms of his political development, turning his natural rebelliousness towards a specific target, but at this stage he did not develop a general critique of capitalist society. His decision to become a writer was motivated entirely by literary – not political – goals. Even the poverty that he described, from first-hand experience, in his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), was undergone voluntarily for the purpose of social investigation, and was the poverty of tramps and drifters, not of the working class as such.

It was not until 1936 that Orwell became convinced of the necessity for socialism, seeing it as the only hope for a world beset by economic crises, fascism and the threat of another major war. Living at the time in Hampstead, and mixing with the middle-class intelligentsia, he seems to have been influenced by friends who belonged to the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.). The first literary expression of Orwell's socialism was *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), commissioned by the Left Book Club, in which he built a critique of capitalism on a vivid first-hand depiction of the poverty of the Lancashire and Yorkshire mining communities. Before the book was published, he went to Spain to fight for the Republican side in the Civil War. His actions, and the resulting book, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), confirmed him as an active and passionate advocate of the socialist cause. He responded to Britain's entry into the Second World War with the same vigour, arguing in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941) that the military defeat of fascism and the construction of socialism in Britain were mutually interdependent. As the course of events falsified this prognosis, Orwell's political writing adopted a less strident tone, and he became less of an activist and more of a commentator. In his last years, the main focus of his politics was negative – his opposition to Stalinism – rather than positive, and after the publication of *Nineteen Eighty Four* he felt it necessary to declare publicly his continued support for socialism and for the Labour Party, to correct the contrary impression spread by his American publishers.

Anti-imperialism

To analyse Orwell's distinctive – and not entirely coherent – version of socialism is not a simple task, and it may be useful to summarise at the outset its principal features, as I see them. I would argue that these

are his anti-imperialism; his consistent fidelity to the principle of freedom of thought and speech; his belief in the necessity of intellectual honesty and clarity; his faith in the 'common decency' of ordinary people; and his preoccupation with Englishness. These themes run through his writings, intersecting in complex ways and producing the rather jumbled collection of ideas and arguments that constitute his political legacy.

Colonial rule

Chronologically, the first of these was his anti-imperialism, which predated his socialism, and was first given literary expression in *Burmese Days*. As a novel, the latter does not, of course, present a systematic critique of imperialism – rather, it exposes the parasitic and hypocritical character of British colonial rule by displaying it in action through the eyes of John Flory, an English timber merchant in Burma – whose character is clearly based to a large extent on the young Eric Blair. Through Flory, Orwell insists that the British are not in Burma 'for any purpose but to steal. . . . The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets'.¹

Later, Orwell's commitment to the liberation of the colonial peoples was woven into his conception of socialism. In the essay, 'Not Counting Niggers', he wrote:

What we always forget is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Asia and Africa. It is not in Hitler's power, for instance, to make a penny an hour a normal industrial wage; it is perfectly normal in India, and we are at great pains to keep it so. One gets some idea of the real relationship of England and India when one reflects that the *per capita* annual income in England is something over £80, and in India about £7. . . . This is the system which we all live on. . . .²

By no means all of the contemporary British left were prepared to recognise this, as Orwell noted, berating those professed socialists who were prepared to overlook the national oppression and super-exploitation exercised by the British over their colonies, as long as the 'greater evil' of fascism presented itself. This was published in July 1939, when Orwell strongly opposed the coming war. By the time he wrote *The Lion and the Unicorn*, two years later, he supported the war effort and, as a consequence, had moved a little way towards those he had formerly criticised, arguing that granting immediate independence and withdrawing military protection from India and the other colonies would simply lead to their reconquest by other powers. Nevertheless, he insisted that the existing exploitative imperial structure

should be replaced, forthwith, by self-government within a Commonwealth, with the right to secession immediately after the war.³

Undoubtedly the fact that he had personally witnessed the workings of the British Empire at 'ground level' assisted Orwell in developing a critical understanding of capitalism as a whole system, in which the affluence of the metropolis was dependent on the exploitation of the colonies (although the limits of that understanding are clear from his statement that Asians and Africans were part of the 'British proletariat'). It was when he was able to stand outside British society for a while, and free himself from some of its preconceptions, that he was politically at his sharpest.

Impassioned

The other major opportunity for him to do this was, of course, in Spain, and this experience produced his most radical and impassioned book, *Homage to Catalonia*. Orwell went to Spain to help defend the democratic Republic against fascism, only to discover that there was effectively a second war taking place behind government lines, with the Communist Party, the liberals and the right wing socialists on one side and the left socialists, the anarcho-syndicalists and the POUM⁴ (in whose militia Orwell fought) on the other.

His first visit to Barcelona in December 1936 convinced Orwell that a social revolution was taking place:

Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists . . . Every shop and café had an inscription saying it had been collectivized. . . . Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal . . . In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. . . . There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognised it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for.⁵

For the Communist Party, however, the revolution was endangering its Popular Front with the liberal bourgeoisie, which it saw as essential to win the war. Whereas the non-Stalinist left saw the war and the revolution as inseparable, the Communists insisted that the revolution would have to wait until Franco was defeated. In the meantime, private property had to be protected, in order to reassure their liberal allies.

Street-fighting

On Orwell's second visit to Barcelona in May 1937 it was clear that bourgeois 'normality' was being restored. When politi-

cal tension erupted into street-fighting between the two forces on the side of the Republic, the POUM was suppressed and its members, along with many anarchists and other revolutionaries, were thrown into prison, tortured or murdered by the Stalinist-controlled secret police. Orwell himself narrowly escaped. The experience convinced him that the 'official' Communist movement was a counter-revolutionary force, which consistently subordinated the interests of the world proletariat to the dictates of Soviet foreign policy, with its alliances of convenience with bourgeois powers. Moreover, it was prepared to wipe out large numbers of fellow socialists if they would not abide by the Moscow line. It was this negative experience – as much as the positive example of his first visit to Barcelona – that radicalised Orwell. When he first became aware of the conflicting strategic perspectives of the two camps, he admits he was more inclined to favour the Communist line as a sensible way forward. Yet he fought alongside men who were committed to making a social revolution here and now – many of whom paid for this with their liberty or their lives, often at the hands of their supposed allies.

During and immediately after his experiences in Spain, Orwell moved as close as he ever came towards revolutionary socialism, joining the ILP in June 1938 because it was 'the only party . . . likely to take the right line either against imperialist war or against Fascism when this appears in its British form'.⁶ On the eve of the British declaration of war, however, he shifted fairly swiftly to a position of supporting the war effort. The catalyst seems to have been the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which confirmed his worst expectations about the treachery of which Stalin and his followers were capable. Subsequently, Orwell moved steadily away from the quasi-revolutionary stance that he had adopted in Spain. Yet his hostility to Stalinism remained as a source of continuity – becoming, indeed, the most characteristic feature of his political outlook during the last decade of his life, and providing the theme for his two most famous novels, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949). Whereas his earlier critique of Stalinism had come clearly from the left, he came eventually to a position where he saw the USA as the lesser of two evils in the Cold War.⁷ Most notoriously, he compiled a blacklist of prominent intellectuals and public figures – including Charlie Chaplin and Isaac Deutscher – whom he considered 'suspect' because of their supposed pro-Soviet sympathies and handed this over to a friend who worked for the Information Research Department, 'a semi-secret department of the Foreign Office'.⁸

Orwell's revulsion at Stalinism was motivated not only by its treachery and brutality, which he had experienced in Spain, but by the gross dishonesty of its propaganda. The spokespersons of the Spanish Communist Party and its allies justified the suppression of the POUM by the appalling slander that its members were Franco's Fifth Column, deliberately disrupting the Republican war effort with their attempts to promote socialist revolution. These lies were unquestioningly accepted by Stalinists and their fellow-travellers in Britain, and were given credence by many on the left who were by no means themselves Stalinists, but were either inclined to give the official line the benefit of the doubt, or were willing to overlook uncomfortable facts because they did not want to harm the war effort by permitting public criticism of the Spanish Republican government, its Soviet ally or the 'official' Communists. This kind of thinking appalled Orwell, who was prepared to accept that even socialists sometimes had to do unpleasant things, especially in wartime, but felt that it was important to be honest about this. Increasingly, his opposition to Stalinism focused on its persistent disingenuousness, its readiness to malign opponents and rewrite history. It was not, of course, alone in this: the fascists were equally contemptuous of any standards of objective truth or intellectual consistency – but so (for example) were nationalist movements generally, and the Roman Catholic church.

Party line

Against the distortions of any rigid party line, Orwell defended the importance of intellectual honesty and the need for critical, independent thought. In one of his greatest essays, 'Politics and the English Language', he wrote:

Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.⁹

It was in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, of course, that Orwell most memorably depicted this principle carried to its logical conclusion; indeed, it is from this that we have the widely-used adjective, 'Orwellian'. He had long been concerned

about the dangers of people surrendering their capacity for critical judgement by adopting an all-encompassing ideology – whether it be Catholicism or Communism. In doing so, he argued, they were also giving up any individual moral responsibility, for any act or idea – however morally dubious it might appear – must be defensible if it was sanctioned by the official ‘line’ to which one subscribed. The problem with this was not just that it was morally and intellectually corrupting, but that it cut one off from others who did not see the world through the same ideological filter. In the second half of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell sees this as part of the explanation for the weakness of the socialist movement in Britain. While the bankruptcy of capitalism is plain to see, he argues, its overthrow seems unattainable for the foreseeable future, due to the apparent inability of socialism to find favour with ordinary working people: ‘in the form in which it is now presented to us, [it] has about it something inherently distasteful – something that drives away the very people who ought to be flocking to its support.’¹⁰

Bohemian

The main reason for this, he says, is that the principal leaders and thinkers of the left are middle-class intellectuals whose bohemian ‘crankiness’ repels potential supporters (at least, in the case of the I.P.) and/or rigid ideologues who are preoccupied with abstract ideas (in the case of the Communists). Both types are incapable of relating to the concerns of those they seek to win over. Even those workers who do become socialists want only ‘to abolish poverty and [do] not always grasp what this implies’.¹¹ While there is no doubt some truth in Orwell’s description of the English left in 1936 – or at least, those sections of it that he had encountered, the argument is both spitefully dismissive of socialist activists and intellectuals, and patronising towards the ‘warm-hearted, unthinking’ socialist-inclined workers. It is ironic that Orwell reserves special contempt for bourgeois socialists who attack their own class, when this is effectively what he is doing himself. Above all, his distrust of theory – his belief that adherence to any comprehensive worldview is incompatible with a simple love of ‘justice and common decency’ – is a major weakness. In the context of the 1930s, it is easy to understand a wariness of worldviews that claim to explain (and excuse) anything, but an approach to politics that is based wholly on ‘practical common-sense’ will only get you so far.

Nevertheless, Orwell’s main prescription for the way forward still carries considerable weight. He argues that if the cause of

socialism is to succeed, its organisation and propaganda must be rooted in the experiences of the common people, taking account of the specific social circumstances of each country. In England, this means, for example, recognising the complexity of the social structure and the undue significance accorded to small gradations of rank and status in the popular consciousness. Socialists must appeal not just to manual workers, but to those large numbers of people in the intermediate social strata who do not consider themselves part of the working class but who nevertheless have an interest in the replacement of capitalism by socialism. Their class prejudice will ultimately be broken down, Orwell argues, only by involvement in political struggles alongside the proletariat. This argument resembles the Gramscian idea that the working class must break the other ‘subaltern’ classes from the sway of the bourgeoisie and establish its own ‘counter-hegemony’. It is a shame (although not surprising, given his dislike of theory) that Orwell did not develop the idea more fully.

Another thing that Orwell had in common with Gramsci was a recognition that socialists had to take seriously the significance of national culture. In Orwell’s case, however, his preoccupation with Englishness was arguably the defining feature of his worldview, influencing and enveloping everything he wrote or thought or did.¹² This is clearest in his wartime pamphlet, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, which is certainly not his greatest work but is arguably his most characteristic. It is full of the kind of forthright arguments and vivid images that typified Orwell’s writing, beginning with the immortal opening line: ‘As I write, highly civilised human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me.’¹³ But it also demonstrates Orwell’s weaknesses as a political thinker and the limits to his socialism. And, together with the experience of Stalinism, it enables us to make sense of Orwell’s shift to the right in the last ten years of his life.

Transition

Superficially, there are continuities between Orwell at his most radical in *Homage to Catalonia* and the position he expounds in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. In both cases, he argues that the war against fascism and the transition to socialism are inextricably linked: neither can succeed without the other. He even talks of ‘revolution’ in the context of England, 1941, as he had earlier with regard to Spain. Yet this revolution is of a very particular sort, as becomes clear when he announces:

The English revolution started several years ago, and it began to gather momentum when the troops came back

from Dunkirk. Like all else in England, it happens in a sleepy, unwilling way, but it is happening. The war has speeded it up...¹⁴

This ‘revolution’, it transpires, amounts to the growing understanding, on the part of ‘multitudes of unlabelled people’ that ‘something is wrong’. It is reflected in the development of a newly inclusive popular culture and a political convergence of the ideas of left and right. The almost inevitable consequence is a move towards ‘a classless, ownerless society’, which alone can guarantee the economic and social modernisation necessary to defeat Hitler. Thus, while the agency of change must come ‘from below’ and have ‘the mass of the people behind it’, this is explicitly *not* a revolution in the Marxist sense – or, indeed, in any recognisably socialist sense – rather, it is the rapid modernisation of the nation-state and economy, in response to a crisis; and it is driven by a process of *national* cultural renewal.

Patriotism

The tools for this ‘revolution’ already exist in the form of the best elements of the country’s culture and traditions, now rejuvenated: the distrust of unaccountable power, the belief in democracy and fair play, the ‘common decency’ and also the patriotism that Orwell sees as a progressive, not a conservative force, ‘since it is a devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same’.¹⁵ The task is the removal of the ruling class, which is anachronistic and talentless, and therefore a barrier to the

Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism

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necessary change. It is notable that it is not the existence of class stratification as such that seems objectionable to Orwell, but the fact that the ruling class, by its 'decay of ability', has ceased to justify its own existence. Here he pays the price for his distrust of theory: he does not see the origins of the class structure in the organisation of production; the contours of British society and even the state itself do not, for him, have a fundamental class character. Indeed, he foresees a socialist government taking over the existing state apparatus largely intact and even 'quite probably . . . not abolish[ing] the Monarchy'.¹⁶ Yet he imagines that measures like the 'nationalisation of land, mines, railways, banks and major industries', and the imposition of strict limits on income inequality can be carried out without major social confrontation, because ultimately, England is a family – albeit one 'with the wrong members in control'.¹⁷

Sentimentality

Wigan Pier's perceptive observation that a viable English socialism must reflect its social and cultural background if it is to take root is lost amid an outpouring of nationalistic sentimentality:

[T]here is something distinctive and recognisable in English civilisation . . . it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature. What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person. And above all, it is your civilisation, it is you. . . . Good or evil, it is yours, you belong to it, and this side of the grave you will never get away from the marks that it has given you.¹⁸

This, more than anything, is what undermines Orwell as a political thinker: his attachment to a misty-eyed, a-historical idea of English national identity, which he sees as something natural and organic, rather than the construction of a particular historical period, reflecting the interests of a particular ruling class. While Burma and Spain allowed him for a while to see the world through different eyes, he was ultimately too wrapped up in the conception of Englishness that he had learnt from childhood. It prevented him from understanding the national question in the British state (Scotland and Wales are given a single, rather dismissive sentence in *The Lion and the Unicorn*) or even the relationship between Britain and its Empire – despite his very real and commendable sympathy with the oppressed colonial masses. And it left him with a superficial

conception of class, based on custom, tradition and social mores, obscuring the real configuration of power relations beneath the surface.

Justified admiration for Orwell, as a man of courage and principle, a scourge of hypocrisy and a passionate and engaging writer, has led to his being accorded a heroic status almost unrivalled on the British left (although the absence of many other well-known candidates for the honour no doubt plays its part). From *Tribune* to *Socialist Worker*, his life and work are held up as an example for today's socialists. This has, unfortunately, reinforced the tendency of the mainstream British left to disdain theory and base one's politics on 'practical commonsense' – which often entails an uncritical acceptance of many of the prevailing ideas of bourgeois ideology. In particular, the tendency to accept a basically liberal view of the state as a neutral arbiter is one to which even the most fiery radicals often eventually succumb. Similarly, to attack class society is still widely seen as no more than championing meritocracy against snobbery and elitism. And while one can agree with Orwell that there are progressive and democratic traditions within the English national culture (as in any other national culture) his glorification of English virtues has helped to relieve his successors of the duty of comprehending England's subjugation of so many other nations.

Relevant

But, for all Orwell's faults, any idea of him as an entirely negative, reactionary influence on today's left would be no more appropriate than to see him as some sort of secular saint. Even buried within his stinging social patriotism is the inarguable idea that any credible socialist movement must relate to its own specific national culture. Moreover, his exposure of hypocrisy and doubletalk is more relevant today, in the age of 'spin', than ever before. And these lessons apply to the far left as much as to anyone else: so many papers and journals which purport to address the working class still speak a convoluted language that guarantees they will never win an audience among real workers. Moreover, the misuse of language in the service of propaganda still allows atrocities to be euphemistically excused when they are committed by those deemed 'progressive'; and the charge of divergence from orthodoxy can be enough, in some quarters, to damn any one beyond redemption. Finally, while Orwell was wrong to imagine that it was sufficient for the left to connect with the basic instincts of ordinary people, this is nevertheless an essential part of developing a socialism that stands any chance of

achieving its goal.

Ultimately, then, it is necessary to examine his literary legacy carefully and critically, in order to distinguish the many ideas still worthy of consideration from those that should be rejected. Fortunately, the sheer quality of his writing means that the effort is hardly onerous. **WA**

NOTES

¹ *Burmese Days*, Penguin 1967, p.38.

² *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* (hereafter *CEJL*), ed., S. Orwell and I. Angus, Penguin 1970, Vol. 1, p.437.

³ *CEJL*, Vol. 2, pp 119; 122-24.

⁴ Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers Party of Marxist Unification).

⁵ *Homage to Catalonia in Orwell in Spain*, ed., P. Davison, Penguin 2001, pp.32-33.

⁶ 'Why I Joined the Independent Labour Party', *CEJL*, Vol. 1, p 374.

⁷ See, for example, 'Letter to Victor Gollancz', *CEJL*, Vol. 4, p.355. However, he never made a complete conversion to the politics of the right, unlike the many intellectuals who switched from being card-carrying CP members to becoming prominent apologists for capitalism. In November 1945, for example, he turned down an invitation to speak on the platform of the League of European Freedom at a meeting opposing the Communist takeovers in Eastern Europe, on the grounds that he could not associate himself 'with an essentially Conservative body which claims to defend democracy in Europe but has nothing to say about British imperialism. . . . I belong to the Left and must work inside it, much as I hate Russian totalitarianism and its poisonous influence in this country.' ('Letter to the Duchess of Atholl', *CEJL*, Vol. 4, p.49)

⁸ T. Garton Ash, 'Love, death and treachery', *Guardian*, June 21, 2003, which includes the full annotated list. While Orwell has rightly been condemned for this act, it should be borne in mind that (as Garton Ash makes clear) his intention was no more than to argue that those he had listed could not be trusted to write official propaganda for the government and the BBC.

⁹ *CEJL*, Vol. 4, p.166.

¹⁰ *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin 1962, p.150.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.159.

¹² I owe my appreciation of this point to some typically enlightening discussions with my good friend, Ed George. Nevertheless, he should not be held responsible for my treatment of this issue and would undoubtedly dissent from some of my other judgements about Orwell.

¹³ *CEJL*, Vol. 2, p.74

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.112.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.127.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.125-26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.76.

Good questions, wrong answers

The Age of Consent

By George Monbiot

Flamingo 2003, 274pp, £15.99

Nick Davies

This book's subtitle, 'A Manifesto for a New World Order', tells us something of the author's ambition. Arguably the best known, and one of the most articulate propagandists of the anti globalisation movement, George Monbiot is attempting to set out what he believes that movement should be fighting for.

What is uncontroversial is Monbiot's account of how the international organisations which hold sway over the lives of millions, often directly influencing whether they live or die, are controlled by and operate for the benefit of a handful of rich countries, and the multinational companies based in those countries. By virtue of weighted voting, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are creatures of the United States. The business of the World Trade Organisation is controlled by 'The Quad', consisting of the United States, Canada, Japan and the European Union. The United Nations is under the control of the five permanent members of its security council, essentially a Second World War victory parade. Even the superficially attractive formal democracy of the UN general assembly, with each member state having one vote, is tainted by the bullying, bribing and blackmail of the weak nations by the strong, as shown by the efforts of the United States to garner support for its invasion of Iraq.

Equally uncontroversial is Monbiot's view that these international bodies are characterised by an almost total absence of democracy, transparency or accountability. The free-market fundamentalists of the IMF can impose their disastrous economic prescriptions on countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America whether their governments agree or not. IMF imposed liberalisation of currency markets means that speculators can wreck a country's economy within a matter of a few days, without the government, still less the people, being able to do anything about it. Under WTO rules, public services and strategically important industries in any given country are fair game for the profiteers from multinationals in the US and Europe. In virtually no case has anyone given his or her active consent or agreement to this. Even liberal democracies suffer from what Monbiot calls 'photocopy democracy': just as in successive photocopies, the image becomes less distinct, so the democratic 'image' fades the further away the decision-makers get from the direct democratic process.

Monbiot's interpretation of the term 'globalisation' is possibly controversial. His own description is of a number of simultaneous and connected processes: the removal of controls on the movement of capital, the removal of trade barriers, and

the increased power of multinational corporations. Between them, these processes have generated debt, inequality, ecological damage and the destruction of previously healthy economies. This is true, so far as it goes, but it is difficult to see 'globalisation' as an accurate description of this process. Perhaps a more accurate, but less elegant term is that used by the economist Robert Went: 'triadisation'. Far from a truly homogenous unification of the world's economies, we are seeing a vertical restructuring of the world economy around three poles, the so called triad of the US, the EU and Japan, with the rest of the world – the so-called third world, eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union – remaining marginalised. Ironically, it was in reviewing George Monbiot's previous book, *Captive State*, that we took issue with his then conception of globalisation:

'Monbiot is only half right in what he says about a new era of corporate dominance ... he argues that they [corporations], not nation states decide. But are nation states ceasing to regulate, or is it simply a different kind of regulation? Bodies such as the WTO have recently acquired sweeping powers, but they are made up of representatives of nation states, and dominated by the most powerful states, predominantly the USA. The USA, particularly, presents its own agenda, the agenda of its leading corporations, as an international agenda. Globalisation represents the internationalisation of the policies of deregulation and privatisation pursued domestically by Thatcher and Reagan during the 1980s. They pursued these policies as the political representatives of their domestic capitalist classes. So, in the WTO, disputes are fought out not between companies, but between governments.' ('Flaws in "globalisation" thesis', *Workers Action* No.12, June July 2001)

We do not know whether George Monbiot reads *Workers Action*, but whether he does or not, he appears, in a somewhat distorted fashion, to have been persuaded by us! Monbiot now believes that there is too much internationalism – in other words, relations between nation states – and not enough real globalisation – in other words, interaction between people, unmediated by the state. 'Globalisation is not the problem,' he explains. 'The problem is in fact the release from globalisation, which both economic agents and nation states have been able to negotiate. They have been able to operate so freely because the people of the world have no global means of restraining them. Our task is surely not to overthrow globalisation, but to capture it, and use it for humanity's first global democratic revolution.' (p.23) 'We must harness the power of globalisation,'

he argues, 'and, pursuing its inexorable development, overthrow its institutions, replacing them with our own. In doing so, we will, whether or not this is the intended outcome, bring forward the era in which humankind ceases to be bound by the irrational loyalties of nationhood.' (p.15)

This is where Monbiot's thesis is controversial. It has caused something of a fallout in the anti-globalisation movement, or, as Monbiot, significantly, prefers to call it, the global justice movement.

Monbiot attacks both implicitly and explicitly the localisation strategy of Colin Hines (*Localisation: A Global Manifesto*, Earthscan 2000), whose ideas have influenced a number of national Green parties. Hines advocates discriminating in favour of the local, by means of protectionist barriers, import substitution and so on, in order to reverse the globalisation process which forces workers into a destructive spiral of competition. Hines and his co-thinkers wish to combat the 'export or die' mentality which pervades economic policy in many poor countries, and the 'ecological footprint' made by flying imported goods half way round the world. Monbiot's reply is that this approach would benefit rich nations far more than poor ones, and would lock poor countries into a system where they produced what they could, generally raw materials and agricultural produce, in order to raise the foreign exchange to buy what they could not, either because of a lack of capital, or the lack of a sufficiently large internal market to make such high value manufacturing worthwhile – very like the situation which now exists, in fact.

Monbiot's example of anti-globalisation activists who campaigned for protectionism and at the same time denounced sanctions against Iraq because they made it poorer suggests that he has logic on his side – in other words, are those particular activists in favour of trade or not? On the other hand, to fail to support the struggle in Bolivia against water privatisation, the attempt by the government of Sri Lanka to ban genetically modified crops, or the attempts to ban the import into Europe of US beef treated with growth hormones, on the grounds that they were 'protectionist', would amount to an unforgivable sectarianism towards the struggles of millions against the activities of the multinationals. Of course, Monbiot does not lapse into the same abstract musings as Hardt and Negri who in their long-winded tome *Empire* argue, essentially, that national boundaries have become irrelevant, and we should get over it. National boundaries are still extremely relevant for those trying to stop multinational profiteers from wrecking their public services, and destroying their

living standards, where *they* live. Although ultimately, socialists are internationalists and have no country, we have to come to terms with the fact that, to a large extent, political struggles are still fought out in a national context. Monbiot accepts this, supporting, for the time being, the attempts of poor countries to combat the manifestly unfair terms of trade dictated by the rich world.

World parliament

Where Monbiot has provoked the most controversy is in some of his specific proposals. In the book, he starts from those proposals that are the most abstract and works back to those which are more concrete. (On his own admission, he has written the book backwards!) Monbiot starts with his proposal for a world parliament, consisting not of representatives of nation states but of representatives of constituencies of ten million people, which would not conform to national boundaries. Representatives would not have a national mandate, but a 'species mandate'. Presumably, the need to seek a mandate from, say, a constituency consisting of Austria and Hungary, would help to erode the national loyalties which Monbiot regards as so destructive. When a national government refuses to allow such elections, they can take place underground, or among the ex-

ile community. If the parliament's rulings are ignored, then ultimately, the transgressor will be bound, by the parliament's overwhelming moral mandate, to comply.

It is difficult to know where to start with this. It is a nice idea. Maybe one day, a socialist planet will work along these lines, but in any sense other than as utopian propaganda the idea makes little sense. Regarding the alleged moral imperative, Monbiot cites the USA seeking a mandate for the Iraq war from the United Nations. So, the argument goes, even Bush felt that he had to have some mandate from the international community. But as Monbiot himself points out, the USA felt able to work within the parameters of the UN because it felt that it could control it. Monbiot's belief that representatives elected on a 'species ticket' are less liable to corruption and manipulation than those elected on a national or class ticket is, under present conditions, impossible to sustain. Would class considerations and economic interests, as if by magic, cease to have any relevance, in favour of those of the species? On that basis, getting rid of the Bush regime because it is putting the planet, and therefore the species, in danger, should, objectively, present no problem! Monbiot complements his parliament idea with a replacement of the UN security council, consisting of national repre-

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sentatives, albeit weighted according to population and their level of democracy, the implication being that a democratic China and India would have around one-third of all votes between them, and presumably Finland (democracy, small population) would have a relatively larger number of votes than, say, Iran (neither).

Elsewhere, Monbiot presents some slightly more concrete proposals. One is a revival of Keynes's concept of an International Clearing Union, proposed after the Second World War but never established due to US opposition. Keynes's idea was that creditor nations be forced to inject their surplus money into the economies of debtor nations. Any national bank using more than half its overdraft allowance (i.e., going too far into trade deficit) would be charged interest on its overdraft. It would also be obliged to reduce the value of its currency by up to 5 per cent, making its exports more attractive. Any nation with a trade surplus would be subject to the same pressures. A credit balance more than half the size of its overdraft would attract interest. It would be obliged to increase the value of its currency. If its credit balance at the end of the financial year exceeded the total value of its permitted overdraft, the surplus would be confiscated and, along with the interest payments, placed in the Clearing Union's Reserve Fund. Monbiot also proposes a comprehensive international system of regulation of corporations, backed up by sanctions imposed by an International Criminal Court. Corporations would lose their freedom to move about at will, and be subject to common, international standards of health and safety, employment rights and environmental protection. They would thus be prevented from externalising the costs of production by using cheap, non-union labour in poor countries, and leaving behind them an environmental disaster.

Political vacuum

The idea of an International Clearing Union is at least thought provoking, and no socialist worth his or her salt would have any difficulty at all in supporting in principle any measure aimed at the betterment of the conditions of workers anywhere in the world, and at combating the increasingly rampant lawlessness of the multinationals. The problem with these proposals is that they are put forward in a political vacuum, with no indication at all as to how, and by whom, they would be fought for, brought into being and defended. Just about the only demand (and it is a good one) with any resonance in today's very difficult conditions, which involves something that people can do *now*, is the call for a mass, simultaneous threat by debtor

nations to default, as a form of blackmail against the rich nations. As a negotiating tool, and as a demand on governments, it has much to recommend it.

As for the other proposals, the difficulties with them are not accidental. The lack of any strategy for getting to a situation where his proposals can be implemented reflects the streak of utopianism in Monbiot's politics. This utopianism is behind Monbiot's preoccupation with the *form* of democracy, such as in his proposal for a world parliament, as opposed to its *content*, and his enthusiasm for an international legal framework without saying whose interests it will reflect or serve. It is an exhortation for people, all people, to change their ways and be better people, even if they are shamed and humiliated into doing so. Incidentally, he shares this with his opponent Colin Hines, whose localisation manifesto involves an elaborate mechanism of checks and balances: administered by whom, however?

While having some kind words to say about Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism, Monbiot rejects, with some force, the programme in the *Communist Manifesto* as a prototype for bureaucratic dictatorship. However, it is worth considering what the *Manifesto* had to say, over 150 years ago, about those 19th-century equivalents of Monbiot, the utopian socialists: 'They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favoured. Hence, they habitually appeal to society at large, without distinction of class... For how can people, when once they understand their system, fail to see in it the best possible plan of the best possible state of society?'

Monbiot's enthusiasm for democracy in the abstract – 'the least worst system' – comes in part from his horror at the results of 'communism' under Stalin or Mao. Monbiot says that a command economy does not work, and on that evidence alone it is difficult to blame him. We should be acutely aware that Monbiot, no socialist, dominates the current thinking on 'globalisation' issues not just because he is an articulate and at times an original thinker, but also because of the collapse of Stalinism and the weakness of non-Stalinist, democratic socialism. While it is not good enough for socialists to be dismissive of Monbiot, he is wrong when he regards Marx's programme as a prototype for that of Stalin – Marx said very little indeed about the nature of society after a socialist revolution. Monbiot is also mistaken in attacking the class content of Marxism, alleging that it attempts to systematise people by means of a binary code defining them as workers or bourgeoisie. Now it is true that there are difficulties in

reducing the social gradations in any society in this way, and many of Marx and Engels's observations on those social layers which are neither bourgeois nor proletarian do not stand up terribly well at the start of the 21st century, but Monbiot's objections are couched in purely moral terms: if the workers are not interested in exercising power, then Marxism must be a utopian fantasy, and if they are, then it will surely go wrong, and what is so special about the working class anyway?

'Democratic impulse'

Monbiot's views represent part of a trend away from class politics. Just as Hardt and Negri substitute the 'multitude' for the working class as an agent of change, so Monbiot substitutes a democratic impulse. As against Monbiot's 'least worst option' of 'democracy' involving corporations which behave themselves, we should pose the best option: workers' democracy, a democracy of those involved in the process of production, distribution and exchange. Therefore, the primary focus of any serious struggle against the effects of the processes known as globalisation, and for a better society, has to be the labour movement, because of the relationship of workers to the production process. Once the working class feels able to use its position in the production process not only to challenge the power of capital, but to emancipate itself and those others oppressed by capitalism, then there will occur what Monbiot calls the 'metaphysical mutation' which changes the way we think forever.

The task for us is surely to transform this project from the purely aspirational, and to give it flesh. This involves looking critically at some of the received wisdom regarding how such a democratically planned economy can be built. In particular, can we learn anything, if only in a negative sense, from past attempts to reform, in a socialist direction, 'planned' economies? How are the economic problems and the problems of political democracy related? How do socialists approach, both on a theoretical level, and on a practical, agitational basis, the current arguments between neo-protectionism, localisation, 'free but fair' trade, and the perspective of 'globalised democracy' (or 'democratised globalisation')? More immediately, how can super-exploited workers in Asia, Africa and Latin America build effective organisations with which they can defend their interests against the multinationals, and how can workers in Europe and North America organise meaningful solidarity with them? Monbiot's book ends up asking more questions than it answers, but plenty of those questions are questions that we should be asking ourselves. **WA**

The real Vietnamese revolutionaries

**The Revolution Defamed: A
Documentary History of
Vietnamese Trotskyism**

Edited and annotated by Al
Richardson
Socialist Platform 2003, £6.00

Bill Leumer

The Vietnamese Trotskyists of the 1930s and 1940s, along with the Revolutionary Workers Party of Bolivia in the early 1950s and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in Ceylon in the early to mid-1960s, were the three Trotskyist groups that succeeded in exerting a major political influence in their respective countries. The Vietnamese Trotskyists, however, distinguished themselves from the two others by consistently maintaining principled opposition to any form of class collaboration on the part of the working class with any of the political forces defending capitalism. These principled politics were responsible for winning massive support from the workers and the oppressed in the southern part of what is now known as Vietnam.

The Revolution Defamed is a defence of the revolutionary integrity of the Vietnamese Trotskyists. The book clearly documents the recognition on the part of the Vietnamese Trotskyists of the indispensable role of a revolutionary working class party. These Trotskyists understood that an objective, revolutionary situation, by itself, will not produce revolutionary change. As long as national liberation movements and even deformed workers' parties adhere to a policy of class collaboration with capitalist or imperialist forces, the revolution will be derailed. Only a revolutionary working class party aimed at leading all of the oppressed towards establishing a workers' and farmers' government is capable of winning genuine national liberation.

Article after article (some of them were recently translated for this volume) starkly contrasts the revolutionary politics of the Vietnamese Trotskyists to those of the Ho Chi Minh Stalinists. These articles make abundantly clear the crucial fact that the

Trotskyists were able to win the mass support of the workers and farmers precisely because of their class struggle, revolutionary politics.

Citing a 1930 article by Ta Thu Thau, a central leader of the Vietnamese Trotskyists who was murdered 15 years later by Ho Chi Minh's Stalinists, and by Huynh Van Phuong, author Daniel Hemery indicates the strategic point of reference for the revolutionists, namely the struggle was not for a bourgeois democratic revolution but one that was against both the native bourgeoisie and the French colonisers. Hemery quotes them as arguing: 'Stemming from the conquest [i.e., the conquest of Vietnam by France in the 1860s], which was a real economic revolution replacing production in small plots with capitalist production, it [the native bourgeoisie] could only live and develop within the system established by the conquest.' Consequently, it was supremely important to make 'a resolute break with this self-satisfied elite, whose inevitable bankruptcy it is necessary to demonstrate'. Hemery concludes: 'For all these reasons, the era of bourgeois revolutions had come to an end.'

The political significance of this analysis is its opposition to the Stalinist assertion that Vietnam remained 'feudal' so that the national bourgeoisie could still play a progressive role in national liberation. This then justified the Stalinists limiting the struggle to a bourgeois stage, thereby indefinitely postponing a socialist revolution.

In a later article in the book, Ta Thu Thau attacks the Stalinists for providing political support to the French Popular Front government, which became a crucial distinction between these two competing political parties, especially after 1937. Prior to that year, the Trotskyists, led by Ta Thu Thau, had organised a form of united front with the Stalinists in the Saigon area that upheld the Marxist advocacy of class struggle and the political independence of the working class from the colonialist and capitalist forces. Ta Thu Thau's rejection of supporting the Popular Front government was based on the recognition that it was merely 'another form of capitalist domination', and he insisted that supporting the French colonialist government meant that the Stalinists were prepared to subordinate 'the perspectives for the proletarian revolution to democratic abstractions'. Continuing in this polemical attack, Ta Thu Thau pointed out to his Stalinist interlocutor that 'the danger of fascism only disappears along with capitalism', and that he was 'not discussing today the nature of revolution in Indochina. I say that it will either be proletarian, or that it will not happen at all'.

The Stalinists argued that it was neces-

sary to unite the workers with the peasantry and the middle class and that to accomplish this they must join with the leaders of these forces in a common, multi-class, bourgeois democratic government, a policy that they attributed to Lenin and the Russian Bolshevik Party. In response, Thau argued that 'The Bolshevik Party was able to get the peasantry and the middle classes by struggling against their leaders, and by refusing any Popular Fronts.'

The Popular Front, for the Trotskyists, was 'preventing the proletarian revolution and by holding back the workers and peasants ... [was] saving the capitalist system and keeping the fascist threat in being'. They argued that 'it is not a matter of breaking up the French Popular Front. It is a question of saying to the workers, peasants and middle classes: "The Popular Front is defending the capitalist system. You have to carry out the socialist revolution." We must now as from today prepare the working masses "ideologically" and practically for the proletarian revolution. ... To refuse, under whatever pretext, to prepare the proletariat and the working masses ideologically and practically for this means to betray them, and to encourage the victory of Fascism'.

This volume contains the defaming of these courageous Trotskyists by Ho Chi Minh. In a series of letters sent to the Stalinist cadre, Ho Chi Minh accused the Trotskyists of being in league with, and in the pay of, the Japanese imperialists and of sabotaging the workers' movement, and he concluded with this dire directive: 'As regards the Trotskyists, there must be no compromise, no concessions. All available methods must be employed to unmask them as agents of Fascism. They must be politically exterminated.' As a result of this policy, hundreds of Trotskyists were murdered by the Stalinists.

Unfortunately, the book was unable to deal in detail with the August 1945 revolution that erupted with the Japanese surrender. There were massive demonstrations in Saigon with demands of national independence. Over 300,000 demonstrators marched, and the Trotskyists received massive support for their slogans calling for a workers' and farmers' government, for the peasants to seize the land and the workers to seize the factories. The Trotskyists were winning the workers to the revolutionary policy of opposing the French reoccupation that Ho Chi Minh welcomed. This revolutionary policy alone was what led to their slaughter at the hands of the Stalinists.

This book is a 'must read' for Marxists who want to study the relation of revolutionary theory to revolutionary practice.

Hell on earth

Berlin: The Downfall 1945

By Antony Beevor

Penguin 2003, 490pp, £12.99

Richard Price

Reviewing the paperback edition of a book that has already been a best seller might seem hardly worth it. But Antony Beevor's account of the battle for Berlin and the appalling carnage that accompanied the final months of the Third Reich is not just a superb sequel to his earlier *Stalingrad*. *Berlin: The Downfall 1945* is primarily a narrative history with a strong military slant, which has been praised by reviewers across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, it contains plenty of food for thought for socialists.

Marxists are accustomed to thinking of war as 'the locomotive of history'. There can be no doubt about the far-reaching changes issuing from the Second World War. Not only did the events of the spring of 1945 determine the outcome of the Second World War; they also created the geopolitical framework that would dominate Europe, and to a considerable extent the world, down to 1989.

But for those inclined to use the phrase in a benign sense – that war accelerates historical progress – this book underlines the extent to which 'total war' depraves the human spirit and reduces human existence to the most desperate struggle for survival.

In his final years, Trotsky repeatedly dwelt on the prospects facing the Soviet Union in the event of war with Nazi Germany. He predicted that the Nazi-Soviet pact would only delay the inevitable conflict in which he stood unequivocally for the defence of the Soviet Union. This 'defence' didn't stem from any progressive qualities on the part of the Stalin regime – at one point he endorsed the view that 'the Soviet bureaucracy has adopted the political methods of fascism' – but from the need to defend the residual gains of the Russian Revolution in the shape of its nationalised property. He opposed annexations on the part of the Soviet Union, but in 1939–40, faced with the dismemberment of Poland, the annexation of the Baltic states and war

with Finland, he argued that these reactionary measures took second place to the need to defend the Soviet state.

Trotsky's heirs, however, found it harder to remain united around this central thesis. Some, for instance, maintained that the actions of the Red Army – as against those of the party bureaucracy – were inherently progressive. Others declared that the Soviet bureaucracy and all its works were 'counter-revolutionary through and through'. In any case, the emphasis on *defence* left the question of how to react when the Soviet army moved onto the offensive open to interpretation.

Berlin: The Downfall 1945 gives us a blood and guts account of the Red Army's advance from the borders of East Prussia in January to the final desperate battle for Berlin in April that year. By any standards, the picture painted of the Soviet army, red in tooth and claw, but not in politics, is shocking.

Not for nothing did the Stalinists call it the Great Patriotic War. When the enemy had been at the gates of Stalingrad, the call to kill all Germans could be taken as a battle cry for survival against the fascist invaders. But with the rapid advance of the Red Army, spurred on by the bloodcurdling articles of Ilya Ehrenburg, it became a Russian war of revenge on the German nation. Not until the Red Army was about to enter Berlin was there any attempt to distinguish between Germans in general and Nazis – and by that time the idea that all Germans deserved to be ruthlessly punished had burnt itself into the consciousness of most soldiers and officers.

For all its iron discipline in combat, the Red Army was totally undisciplined and lawless in most other respects. Drunkenness and looting were rampant and officially sanctioned. Revenge was directed indiscriminately against the civilian population in retribution for the terrible acts of the Nazis in the east. The mass rape of women was its direct expression. From girls as young as 12 to grandmothers, hundreds of thousands of women were gang raped – not only German but Polish women, Ukrainian, Russian and Belorussian girls liberated from slave labour, and even Jewish survivors. Rapists were only punished if they caught a sexually transmitted disease, in which case it was because their fighting capacity was impaired. 'Immoral events', as mass rape was referred to, went unpunished. When Berlin fell, Soviet troops went on a drunken rampage, and the total number of German women raped has been estimated at two million, with many undergoing multiple rapes. Within the Red Army, there was a proprietorial attitude towards women, with generals being allowed to keep 'campaign

wives' in a thinly disguised form of prostitution.

The Soviet authorities were equally ruthless when it came to politics. Non-communist resistance forces in Poland were indiscriminately treated as 'fascists'. Surviving members of the German Communist Party were arrested by Smersh units who demanded to know why they had failed to join (non-existent) partisan units. Russian prisoners of war were either arrested as unreliable – for allowing themselves to be captured – or immediately sent to the front, despite their weakened health. German civilians were deported to forced labour battalions or concentration camps. German factories were dismantled and shipped east.

As the Red Army pressed forwards, the exodus of Germans fleeing westwards became a vast flood, totalling 11.5 million by the end of the war. Most left with few or no possessions. The Nazi authorities had no viable plans for evacuating the civilian population, with the result that the death toll was enormous.

At Yalta in February, Stalin made it clear he would control Poland in exchange for curbing the French Communist Party, then emerging as the country's most powerful political force. His unspoken message to Churchill was: '... you must not thwart me over Poland, because I have kept the French Communist Party under control. Your lines of communication have not been disturbed by revolutionary activity in France by the Communist-dominated resistance movement.' (p.81)

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The lot of ordinary soldiers on both sides was appalling. With Smersh and NKVD execution squads behind Red Army lines, and the SS carrying out on-the-spot executions of suspected cowards and traitors in the German rear, there was no escape from the terrifying slaughter. As the Soviet armies rolled forward, it became clear to all but the most fanatical Nazis that defeat was inevitable. German troops, aware of the bestialities carried out in the east, and the retribution that awaited them, fought to the limits of endurance, with the desperate hope that a separate peace could be concluded with the Western Allies. Even in its death throes, the German army was still capable of inflicting enormous casualties – losses to which Soviet generals were indifferent, given their vast reserves of manpower. At the end, even Hitler Youth bicycle units armed with an early version of the rocket powered grenade were sent into action against Soviet tanks. Non-German fascists, including members of General Vlasov's collaborationist 'Russian Army of Liberation' fought up to the end.

Stalin emerges from this book as a more competent military leader than other studies have allowed, though every bit as ruthless and cunning. He stimulated conflict and competition between his generals, with the ever-present threat of arrest if they failed. The result was tens of thousands more Soviet casualties as generals jockeyed for position. Stalin's demand that the Reichstag building be taken on May 1 – to coincide with the May Day parade in Moscow – was paid for in huge casualties. The speed with which Stalin demanded his generals take Berlin wasn't only motivated by the needs of propaganda. Advance squads were sent to search for Germany's nuclear and chemical weapons programmes. In a final act of ingratitude, shortly after the German surrender, Stalin had Marshal Zhukov, the ruthless if highly effective organiser of victory, removed from public life, where he remained for the next two decades.

The Nazi leadership meanwhile began to disintegrate. Hitler withdrew to the bunker and effectively ceased to lead anything. Instead he raged against his generals, who he believed were betraying him. Bormann and Himmler schemed against each other constantly. Knowing Himmler aspired to military glory, Bormann arranged for him to take command in the field. Himmler set up his HQ in a luxurious train; it took until 10.30am for him to complete his ablutions and enjoy a proper breakfast. In a short time, even Himmler became aware of his own incompetence, and went back to SS duties. It would be Himmler – the author of the countless executions for desertion and retreat – who would attempt to open

secret negotiations with the Western Allies behind the backs of the rest of the Nazi leadership through the intermediary of Count Bernadotte. Apart from some SS fanatics, few of the 'golden pheasants' of the Nazi leadership chose to fall in battle. While they demanded the German population die for the Führer, most tried to save their own skins. Only Goebbels, who regularly visited Berlin neighbourhoods hit by devastating Allied air raids, retained any credibility.

This is an important book. The author synthesises a large amount of material into a gripping narrative that criss-crosses from one side of the battle to the other, using memoirs and diaries, many of which were previously unpublished.

It gives the lie to the myth portrayed in many films of the honourable Wehrmacht officer as opposed to the vicious Nazi. US intelligence officers who interrogated over 300 generals reported:

These generals approve of every act which 'succeeds'. Success is right. What does not succeed is wrong. It was, for example, wrong to persecute the Jews before the war since that set the Anglo-Americans against Germany. It would have been right to postpone the anti-Jewish campaign and begin it after Germany had won the war. It was wrong to bomb England in 1940. If they had refrained, Great Britain, so they believe, would have joined Hitler in the war against Russia. It was wrong to treat Russian and Polish [prisoners of war] like cattle since they will now treat Germans in the same way. It was wrong to declare war against the USA and Russia because they were together stronger than Germany. These are not isolated statements by pro-Nazi generals. They represent the prevalent thoughts among nearly all these men. That it is morally wrong to exterminate a race or massacre prisoners hardly ever occurs to them. The only horror they feel for German crimes is that they themselves may, by some monstrous injustice, be considered by the Allies to be implicated. (p.429)

In the run up to the war against Iraq, as the Bush administration got more and more annoyed with opposition from Chirac and Schröder, it came up with the idea that only the United States had rescued old Europe from fascism. If anyone needed more proof that the defeat of the German armies in the east was the critical factor in defeating Nazism, this is the book.

Pacifists portray war as senseless. The logic of the war on the eastern front – destroy or be destroyed – was remorseless. It was a war between two incompatible social systems, both of which had extremely ruthless leaderships. The result was the most brutal conflict in the history of humanity. **WA**

Introduction

Richard Price

The modern state of Iraq was born with the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. With the parcelling out of spoils to the victors, the League of Nations placed Mesopotamia under a British mandate. Britain aimed not only to get access to Iraq's oil reserves, but by building a transcontinental railway to the Persian Gulf to establish a direct trade route to India.

Like other Arab leaders, the Hashemite family of Hussein ibn Ali had been promised independence in return for fighting Ottoman rule. Instead, the British installed branches of the Hashemites as kings in both Jordan and Iraq. Emir Faisal ibn Hussein became the king of Iraq in 1921 and Britain pursued a policy of also supporting tribal sheikhs against the emerging urban population. Iraq was created by amputating three Ottoman provinces, and lacked any coherence, either ethnically or geographically as a 'nation'.

In 1927, huge oil deposits were discovered near Kirkuk, and the rights were granted to a British-dominated company, the Iraqi Petroleum Company. The British mandate ended in 1932, and Iraq became formally independent. Faisal died in 1933, and was succeeded by his son, Ghazi I. Three years later, the government of Yasin al-Hashimi was overthrown by a military coup led by General Bakr Sidqi. He in turn was murdered by another military faction in August 1937. Ghazi threatened to annex Kuwait – another artificial creation by the British – in 1939, but was killed in a car accident.

During the Second World War, there was an intense struggle between rival factions of Iraq's ruling class. Regent Abd al Ilah (who ruled until Faisal II was 18 in 1953) and political strongman Nuri as-Said were strongly pro-British, while Rashid Ali al-Gaylani was an anti-British nationalist who looked to closer ties with Nazi Germany. Coup and counter coup succeeded each other, until a British army drove out Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and his supporters, and reinstated Abd al Ilah as regent and Nuri as prime minister.

The post-war regime remained firmly in the British orbit at the point where pan-Arab nationalism was beginning to develop in much of the Middle East. Differences developed between Abd al-Ilah and Nuri over union with Syria. In 1955, Nuri, who opposed the union, took Iraq into the Baghdad Pact – a mutual defence pact involving Iran, Pakistan and Turkey – which was

aimed at isolating Nasser's claim to lead the Arab world. After Egypt and Syria announced the short-lived United Arab Republic (UAR), the two branches of the Hashemites called for a union of Iraq and Jordan as a counterweight. Rising discontent was dealt with by strongly repressive measures.

Such was the unpopularity of both the monarchy's foreign and domestic policy by this stage, that a military coup on July 14, 1958, led by a Free Officers' Movement (modelled on Nasser's), was able to sweep it away with little resistance. King Faisal II, Abd al Ilah and Nuri as-Said were all executed and a republic proclaimed.

The overthrow of the monarchy was hugely popular in urban areas, and was greeted by tens of thousands in the streets. Kurds too were enthusiastic, and exiled Kurdish leaders were allowed to return.

The new regime, headed by Brigadier Abdul-Karim Kassem and Colonel Abdul Salam Aref, lacked a coherent ideology or a plan of where it was going. A provisional constitution declared that Iraq was an integral part of the 'Arab nation', but that 'Arabs and Kurds are considered partners in this homeland'. Power vested in a Sovereignty Council and a cabinet was effectively in the hands of the army. Kassem and Aref quickly fell out. Aref was sympathetic to Nasser, championed the Pan

Arab cause and advocated joining the UAR.

Kassem's opposition to union with the UAR was supported by the Iraqi Communist Party and the Kurds, and he later attempted to revive Iraq's longstanding claim to Kuwait. Kassem carried out a number of progressive reforms, but his regime balanced between the urban masses led by the Iraqi Communist Party, and the Pan Arabists. He released ICP prisoners and supported the formation of an ICP-controlled militia. In March 1959, an attempted coup by nationalists in Mosul (referred to in the following text) was put down with ICP support. Clashes between ICP-led Kurds and Turkomans in Kirkuk the same year, however, led to a cooling of relations between Kassem and the communists, and the militia was suspended. At the same time, the Ba'athists made an attempt on Kassem's life. One of the would-be assassins was a young Saddam Hussein.

In 1960 and 1961, Kassem moved against the ICP, removing its members from senior government posts, shutting down its press, and acting against the trade unions and peasant associations. Also in 1961, he passed Public Law 80, which took 99.5 per cent of oil concessions out of the hands of the Iraqi Petroleum Company. Relations with the Kurds had soured and fighting broke out between the army and

Kurdish guerrillas in September. Kassem's ambiguous policies had succeeded in alienating the popular base of the revolution, and he in turn was overthrown by a coup in 1963, which was supported by a wing of the army, and briefly brought to power the Ba'ath party.

The article that follows appeared as an editorial in *Fourth International*, No.6, Spring 1959, the English language publication of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International, led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. It catches the ICP — by far the largest communist party in the Arab world — at the zenith of its influence, and the claim that 'the further evolution of Iraq is now in the hands of the Iraq CP' was no exaggeration. Indeed, in April 1959, CIA director Allen Dulles described the situation in Iraq as 'the most dangerous in the world'. The Bonapartist nature of Kassem's regime — balancing between the army, the bourgeoisie and the poor masses — is accurately portrayed.

The article also contains several characteristic 'Pabloite' weaknesses — the idea that the pressure of the masses could 'push the Iraq CP further than the Kremlin now wishes', and the notion of an Arab 'nation' stretching from the Persian Gulf to the western end of the Mediterranean. **WA**



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The revolution in Iraq

Under the powerful drive of the country's revolutionary masses, Iraq is engaged in gradually getting rid of the after-effects of imperialism. After the country's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact, it is announced that the Royal Air Force will soon leave the big British base of Habbaniya.

Kassem has moreover let it be understood that his government is studying the expropriation of French capital's 23.75 per cent share in the Iraq Petroleum Company. This company is currently producing 35 million tons of oil per year and is the third largest oil company in the Middle East.

This measure, conceived as an aid to the Algerian revolution, should normally lead either to the nationalisation of the company and the expropriation also of the shares held by American, British, and Dutch capital, or to a redistribution of the shares, after a previous expropriation, this time excluding French participation.

In any case, Iraq is little by little leaving the imperialist orbit, which cannot fail to arouse the greatest worries among the imperialists.

At the same time we are witnessing the beginning of a violent 'anti-communist' campaign by Nasser, aimed mainly against Iraq. It was indisputably the Egyptian regime which fomented Colonel Chawal's abortive coup d'état last March.

To understand these developments, it is necessary to get a better grasp of the meaning of events in Iraq since the outbreak of the 14 July 1958 revolution which overturned the pro-imperialist regime of Nuri as Said, 'the Englishman'.

The July revolution was headed by a team of 'Nasserist', viz, 'national', 'anti imperialist' officers, with ideological if not directly social links with the bourgeoisie.

These officers dreamed — in confused terms, naturally — of a regime capable of enabling the industrial bourgeoisie to develop, by shaking off, at least partially, the shackles that imperialism and the native feudalists had been able to impose on the country's progress.

Among them, at that period, there was a good proportion of advocates of immediate union with the UAR, the most eminent

representative of whom was Colonel Aref, since then arrested and sentenced to death.

But the ranks of the revolution – the proletarians and the impoverished petty-bourgeoisie of the cities, and the mass of the landless poor peasants or share-croppers working for a few thousands of big feudal proprietors – were infinitely more to the left than this 'head'.

Under the pressure of these ranks, and faced with the weakness of the Iraqi bourgeoisie, the stubborn resistance of the feudalists, and the plots of the pro-Nasserist elements in the army driving for unification with the UAR, the military regime of Kassem soon developed into a *Bonapartist power*.

The Iraq Communist Party, the strongest of all the CPs in Arab countries, with cadres tempered by long and sanguinary experience in the underground, had received the order from the Kremlin to proclaim its support for the country's bourgeois strata, holding out to them the bright prospect of an autonomous development, owing to Iraq's oil resources, and to 'social peace' guaranteed by the CP.

At the first stage the whole operation was aimed at encouraging the bourgeois strata and their representatives in the government, first of all Kassem himself, to resist the temptation of fusing Iraq with the UAR. The support of the strong Kurdish minority, organised by nuclei of leading elements won over by the Kremlin, operated in the same direction. There can be two explanations for this policy of the Kremlin: either the Kremlin might simply be trying to bring pressure on Nasser, suspected of moving away toward the West, or even to bring him back into the Kremlin's orbit; or else the Kremlin was convinced that it could, without great risks, direct Iraq along the road to a genuine 'Popular Democracy'.

We shall come back to this aspect.

Let us for the moment limit ourselves to noting that the policy followed by the CP, the genuine master of the masses in this country, of unconditional support to Kassem and the 'patriotic' bourgeoisie, has effectively stimulated resistance to Nasserist pressure – all the more so in that the successive plots of the feudalists, in revolt against the agrarian reform (however timid it may be) promulgated by the regime, of pro-imperialist elements, and of pro-Nasser officers, have in fact rendered the Bonapartist government more and more dependent on the support of the masses, over whom the Communist Party is now unquestionably ruling. Imperceptibly Kassem has become the super-Kerensky of the Iraq revolution. The Mosul coup d'état caused the revolution to take a gigantic stride forward, by facilitating the

revolutionary irruption of the masses into the political arena and by disorganising the reactionary forces even further. It is now known that Colonel Chawal's Mosul uprising, which for some hours turned into a massacre of Communist elements, later ran up against strong popular resistance.

The thousands of workers of Mosul and of peasants from the neighbouring countryside, the Communist newspaper *Ittishad el Chaab* reports, took arms and fought against the insurgents. They occupied the principal centres of the city, and penned in, captured, and executed the chiefs of the rebellion.

At Baghdad itself gigantic demonstrations, accompanied by general strike actions, led by the Iraq CP, developed as a sign of sympathy for the victims of the Mosul rebellion and of solidarity with the proletarian fighters.

'The Mosul rebellion,' *L'Humanité* of 12 March 1959 admits, 'was crushed by armed workers' militias.'

These militias in fact exist and are developing in Iraq. Kassem had to reauthorise them. They more and more form one of the essential forces of the country, a 'dual' power, side by side with other organisations of a soviet nature, and facing the Bonapartist government of Kassem, who finds himself obliged to resort to their protection.

In this connection, the most important development in April was the formation of the first Federation of Agricultural Unions, which Kassem was forced to authorise. The resolutions adopted at the constituent congress of this federation advocated, among other things: the execution of 'traitors, both old and new', the formation of peasant militias, and the general arming of the people.

Under these conditions it is becoming clear that the further evolution of Iraq is now in the hands of the Iraq CP and the Kremlin.

The path to total revolutionary power is possible and even necessary. In lack of this alternative the danger that is now lying in wait for the Iraq revolution is the following: either the Kremlin sacrifices it as a bargaining counter in a new compromise with Nasser; or else the latter – profiting by the dislocation of the conservative forces that support Kassem and by a disorientation of the masses in case of a prolonged wait that does not end in the complete victory of the revolution – succeeds in bringing off a new coup d'état, unexpectedly overthrowing Kassem.

It is to be hoped that the vigilance and dynamism of the masses, possibly whetted by a new reactionary attempt, will be able to push the Iraq CP further than the Kremlin now wishes.

In this case the proletarian revolution can be victorious in one of the most important Arab countries of the Middle East, which would not fail to have incalculable repercussions on the development of the revolution throughout this whole region. Nasser is raging against the Iraqi revolution, for he is conscious of its proletarian character and of its dynamism.

The contradiction between the present development of the Iraqi revolution and the historic task of the unification of the Arab nation is only an apparent one. The Iraq CP, instead of defending itself against Nasser by becoming the champion of the 'independence' of Iraq, ought to have worked up a concrete programme for the unification of the Arab nation which could not be in opposition to the imperative needs of the Arab social revolution. When what is in question is a unification between two Arab countries *of the same social system*, the imperative need of unification takes precedence over the *political character* of the regime under which the unification would be carried out. But when it is a question of a unification between an Arab country *engaged in carrying out simultaneously its anti-imperialist and its social revolutions*, and a country *still under a feudal-capitalist regime*, the *imperative need of carrying out its social revolution can postpone the hour of unification into the same national whole*. This is the case at present with Iraq and the UAR, countries between which, however, there must not be the slightest difficulty about immediately establishing relationships, of federative union, for example.

Events are showing that a total, lasting, and progressive Arab national unification, the aspiration of the Arab revolutionary masses, in reality will be brought about only by themselves in the carrying out of their social revolution.

April 1959

WA

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