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# socialist

# alliance

for socialism, internationalism, republicanism and the environment



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# government by amnesia

## from milk-snatcher to turkey twizzler

Socialists are often mocked for a train-spotterish obsession with history, but those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it, sleepwalking through the same mistakes they already gone through countless times.

I was struck by this afresh by the recent rehabilitation of two fallen icons: Jamie Oliver and Margaret Thatcher. A new statue of Margaret Thatcher, to replace the beheaded one has been installed in the Palace of Westminster, in less vulnerable bronze (They wish!) this has prompted commentators to suggest that the reputation of the lady herself is due for turning. Should we not forgive and forget, heal those historic scars?

Jamie Oliver's fall from grace was more of a fickle fashion thing and his re-sanctification as saviour of the nation from the turkey twizzler is less iron-clad: he was invited to guest edit the Big Issue - a recognition of his reintroduction into polite chattering society. The beady-eyed, non-amnesiac could be reminded in the Big Issue that school dinners were once nutritionally balanced and provided as a public good.

This was back in the day, before this current generation of voters were born. In those far off days, before she was Prime Minister, Iron Lady and Not for Turning, Maggie Thatcher was Milk-Snatcher. Her first claim to public attention was as education minister responsible for taking away free school milk. The privatisation of the school meals service, which led a generation on to turkey twizzler hell and the 15-stone nine year old, was a simple continuation.

This generation is the first in hundreds of years to have a life expectancy lower than their parents. It would be grossly oversimplified to lay all of that at Thatcher's door. But political consequences can take a generation to bear fruit. Many of the ills that hit the headlines, from poor childhood nutrition to youth gun crime have their roots in the social deprivation, the destruction of public goods, wrought by the woman who said "there is no such thing as society". Thatcher drove the destruction of public services from a



fanatic commitment to privatisation and the market, which Blair, Brown, etc meekly echo. She provoked and won, in the miners' strike of 1984/5, a confrontation with the organised labour movement, the only force capable of defending a social ideology, from which 20 years on it has still to recover.

### political dementia

Modern life can seem instantaneous and ephemeral. Capitalism is insatiably innovative in pursuit of profit, indifferent to the human cost. Memory is not a bad thing. When we lose it, we are helpless and confused, unable to make sense of the world or look after our own interests. Inability to recall that we've been here before, to learn from our past, is a kind of political dementia. We need a sense of history to understand the world we inhabit today is a consequence of political choices made a generation ago.

Blair lauds Jamie Oliver for drawing attention to the symptoms, while at the same time pushing ahead with the cause, privatisation, which created the situation in the first place. Thatcher never quite managed to crack the NHS. Her new Labour successors hope to complete what she never accomplished.

Should we forgive and forget? No, let's remember, learn, organise.

**gerry byrne, chair socialist alliance**

## SOCIALIST ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

**PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THE MEMBERSHIP FORM BELOW TO**

**THE SA TREASURER, Terry Liddle, PO Box 4123, Rugby CV21 9BJ**

**NAME** .....

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**PHONE**..... **EMAIL** .....

**TRADE UNION**.....

**POLITICAL AFFILIATION** .....

[For comrades in socialist groups]

Circle **WAGED** OR **UNWAGED**

Membership subscription will be £24 waged or £6 unwaged for 2007. This will enable members to be kept informed of any activities, join any e-discussion lists, submit motions and vote at members meetings and conferences. Donations are also very welcome

I wish to join the SA, and I enclose a cheque for £ ..... for SA membership and £..... as a donation

Date..... Signed.....

Please send cheques, made payable to '**Socialist Alliance**', to Terry Liddle, PO Box 4123, Rugby CV21 9BJ

# why we need a socialist alliance



There were moves by a minority of comrades to use the AGM last October to close down the Socialist Alliance once again. This is the background to the arguments put forward at the AGM by SA National Secretary **Pete McLaren** to oppose such a move.

The Socialist Alliance (SA), in its various forms, has existed continuously since 1992. It has worked tirelessly for socialist unity throughout that period. This experience would be largely wasted if the SA was to cease existing.

It is of course true that the SA's strength and influence have fluctuated during those 15 years. The first few years were characterised by a new bottom upwards democracy and non sectarian ways of working as local Socialist Alliances began to develop, initially in Coventry & Warwickshire, Manchester, Merseyside, Kent and Scotland.

A national structure was established in 1996, and three years later all the main political players on the left were on board, either as fully co-operating affiliates like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Socialist Party (SP), the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), or in a looser but equally co-operative way like the Socialist Movement, Red Pepper, various Green Left organisations and the more anarchistic tendencies like Schneus.

Joint campaigning took place on a broad number of issues, ranging from opposing the building of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road (M6 toll motorway), demanding the rationalisation of the rail network under workers' and passengers' control, and initiating campaigns against racism and fascism. Some would argue that the highpoints of this new-found socialist unity were the Euro election campaign of 1999 and the General Election campaign of 2001, when the SA stood 98 candidates up and down the country.

The SA continued to grow in strength until the largest affiliate, the SWP, decided instead to concentrate on building a new coalition that they could control with little opposition - Respect. To clear the way for its new venture, the SWP decided to mothball the SA, and, for two years, it hardly ever met at national level, until, in February 2005, the SWP decided to close

it down altogether. However, those of us still committed to socialist unity kept the SA identity going, initially through the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform, and then the Provisional Socialist Alliance, until the SA itself was re-launched in November 2005, just nine months after the SWP had closed down the original SA.

The enforced inactivity of the SA at national level took its toll. Local SA branches, set up largely by the SWP for the General Election, soon ceased to exist. With no national body of any description, membership fell steadily from the 2,000+ who had joined in 2002. A handful of local SAs did continue to function, but even they found it increasingly difficult to campaign or recruit without any national focus, and in the absence of the main left political organisations, most of which had left when it became clear that the SWP would deny others any influence. An unnecessary split within the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform further weakened what was left of the original SA so that, by the time of its re-launch, there were just 50 national members and a further 75 or so who were members of those few remaining local Socialist Alliances. This includes Coventry and Warwickshire, London, Rugby, Merseyside, Swindon and Southampton

## progress

Despite its present size, the Socialist Alliance has much to offer. The re-launched SA has already made progress in the fifteen months of its existence. It has continued its involvement with the Socialist Green Unity Coalition (SGUC) which co-ordinates the election campaigns of significant numbers of left candidates and parties, including the Socialist Party, the AWL, the Democratic Labour Party in Walsall and the Alliance for Green Socialism (AGS). The SA been instrumental in helping to build the Campaign for a New Workers' Party (CNWP) which the Socialist Party launched last year, having a significant influence on the way this promising socialist unity initiative has developed. The SA is one of just four political organisations to have affiliated to the CNWP, and its wealth of experience in pursuing socialist unity is well respected within the CNWP.

The SA has also continued to provide a home for socialist independents, and, in doing so, has helped to continue the links between socialist groups and socialist individuals. It has also continued to support, develop and co-ordinate the work of local SAs - work through the SGUC facilitates this. There were five SA candidates in the 2006 council elections, more than most left groups outside the SP, the AGS and Respect.

The SA AGM last October set three main tasks. All of them are achievable. The priority, as determined by the NEC, is to establish an SA publication. This should help to raise the profile of the SA, provide a public forum for discussion, and help create dialogue between different organisations. Members also decided that we should develop local SA branches where they did not exist, provide them with a national framework, and provide them with resources including a common electoral title. This would be facilitated by the decision to give every affiliated SA (and affiliated political organisations) representation on the NEC.

The third achievable task was to continue working within socialist unity initiatives, with the long term aim of uniting all such projects under one umbrella. Whilst particularly focussing on the CNWP, this will also include continuing our involvement with the SGUC, whilst also initiating talks with Respect and the Labour Representation Committee. The Socialist Alliance has a proud record of working within socialist unity initiatives and that is its main *raison d'être* - continuation of such work is automatic. The SA has already agreed to re-affiliate to the CNWP, and to work within it for some form of individual membership and the affiliation of all supportive left groups, irrespective of size.



## constructive

The Socialist Alliance can succeed with realistic aims, which is what the AGM has set. Progress will be made if members can unite around the agreed Constitution and policies that have evolved. No one should use specific aspects of that Constitution to promote their own cause to the exclusion of the general ways forward agreed by the members, which, of course, does not preclude encouraging argument for specific principles within those agreed policies. Criticism should be constructive, and never personal.

The newly elected NEC has made a start, particularly with the election of a Local Alliances Officer, firm commitments on the publication, and continued work with both the SGUC and the CNWP, which has had the added bonus of giving the SA some recent media publicity. Membership should gradually start to grow as a result of all this work, and the Socialist Alliance profile should be further raised by standing SA candidates in the May council elections, in partnership with the AGS, the Socialist Party and the AWL.

If all this works, no one will be arguing for the closure of the SA at the next AGM. The moves to do so last year were heavily defeated, but they should act as a warning that the SA must get its act together, work hard towards achieving the tasks that have been set, and avoid unnecessary internal division. Members expect nothing less - and quite rightly so. It is now up to all of us.



**Pete McLaren**  
**Socialist Alliance**  
**National Secretary**

## the new workers party

Socialist unity - it seems, like military intelligence, an oxymoron. The left looks a mess. Squabbling, divisive, unable to agree on anything. Some socialists attempt to 'reclaim' Labour as a party for the working class, others try to build a new alternative. Even among those who believe we need a new vehicle, we are divided as to what sort of a thing that should be.

This apparent chaos is misleading. Socialists do have a core set of beliefs we agree on - summed up in the title of the old Socialist Alliance manifest - people Before Profit. Socialists believe that capitalism, the system of profit, is at base exploitative, serving the interests of the few at the expense of the majority. Capitalism's relentless competition leads to war, famine, poverty, environmental degradation, and millions of premature preventable deaths.

If the running of society were in the hands of the majority, if we had genuine, consistent democracy, we could do away with much human misery, and free humanity to live joyfully, healthily, without the crippling anxiety about making ends meet.

We have many disagreements about how we will get to that desirable state, but if we are committed to democracy in practice we have in our hands a way of resolving those arguments.

The Socialist Alliance is founded on the simple premise that socialists have more in common than what divides us, and that if we work together on those areas of agreement, we can move forward to our mutual benefit.

In this first issue of the Socialist Alliance magazine, we debate the need for a new workers' party. **pete mclaren**, SA national secretary, and Press officer for the Campaign for a New Workers' Party (CNWP), argues that this may be the continuation of what the SA was formed for. **steve freeman** argues that we need to learn from the failures of the Labour Party and not repeat the same mistakes in any new party. We will continue the debate in future issues.

gb

## WHY THE CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW WORKERS' PARTY MAY WELL BE THE CONTINUATION OF WHAT THE SA HAS BEEN AIMING AT

*argues Pete McLaren,  
SA National Secretary and CNWP Press Officer*

The desire for socialist unity has been arguably the major driving force of the Socialist Alliance, old and new. Many of us have worked tirelessly, in our localities and at national level, to try and achieve that unity. There have been some successes. At its high-point, the original Socialist Alliance had over 2,000 members. There were more than 70 local socialist alliances up and down the country, many of them actively campaigning on a range of issues. All the different left groups, large and small, including the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP), affiliated to the SA and worked relatively well together. We stood 98 SA candidates in the 2001 General Election.

Everyone knows the next chapter. The SWP decided to use their numerical majority to turn the SA into their "Electoral front", just as the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) was their "Anti racist front". They took complete control, silenced opposition, drove out increasing numbers of independents and left groups, moth-balled it when they turned their attentions to Respect, finally closing it down last year. What could have developed into the most exciting and serious socialist unity project ever in Britain was all but destroyed by the sectarianism of one partner.

The SA might have been virtually killed off, but the desire for socialist unity has not been. We have kept it alive on a



small scale within the new SA which was re-launched November 2005. On a much larger scale, it has re-emerged within the recently formed Campaign for a New Workers' Party (CNWP).

### launch of the cnwp

The CNWP was launched at a Conference attended by over 400 socialists on March 31st 2006. Within nine months, over 2,500 individuals have become supporters by signing the Declaration to establish a New Workers' Party. This makes it already larger than the original SA at its height - and it is still very much still a campaign, not a party. Significantly, most of the Declaration signatories are active trade unionists - 70% at the last count. In addition, 45 of the signatories are members of their trade union NEC. So the campaign already has firm roots in the trade union movement, something the SA never really had.

The CNWP already has a form of structure. Eight officers were elected at the Launch Conference. They are joined on an Interim Steering Committee by representatives of the trade

union and community groups present at the Launch, and one representative each from affiliated political groups - at present that includes Workers Power, Revolution, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the SA. A more permanent structure is now under consideration, including, at our suggestion, an individual membership structure.

### **initial achievements**

The CNWP has been built by serious hard work. Fringe meetings were organised at all the major trade union conferences in 2006. Local meetings have been held up and down the country to launch the CNWP, resulting in local ad-hoc committees being formed. Nine press releases have been sent out to the national media. The officers and national steering committee have both met twice, and my local ad-hoc committee in Coventry &

each Trade Union. The next CNWP national conference has been agreed for May 13.

### **policy**

The politics of the CNWP, and the organisation it will eventually create, are yet to be determined. The policies used in publicity are those agreed at the Launch conference within the Declaration, together with a few statements agreed at the Steering Committee, based around promoting the 80% we can all agree upon. Full policy debate will follow. The Launch conference agreed that Labour could not be reclaimed. It agreed to resist the neo-liberal capitalist agenda and fight for a socialist programme - including a living minimum wage, opposition to the wars in and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, opposition to environmental degradation, full trade union rights and for fully funded, demo-



Warwickshire has just held its seventh meeting, to complete the planning for a Social with local bands. The CNWP is not for those who limit their political involvement to discussions on elists!

### **the next stage**

Plans have already been made for further developmental work over the next few months. To reach the target of 5,000 Declaration signatories, it has been agreed that we concentrate on campaigning initiatives which will enable the case for a new workers' party to reach a broader layer of workers. These will include speaking at, and intervening in, NHS demonstrations, and contacting local trade union branches and asking for speakers and/or debates on the need for a new workers' party.

We will also take part in all events where there will be the opportunity to put the case for a new workers' party, as we did at the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) Shop Stewards Conference on 28 October and the Respect-organised Fighting Trade Unions Conference on 11 November 2006. Plans have been made to attend the main Trade Union conferences in 2007, working through the Union Broad Lefts with a general resolution on disaffiliation from Labour which can be adapted by

cratically controlled public services. It further agreed and that any new party must be open, inclusive, democratic and representative, and it must appeal to anti war activists, those that campaign on environmental issues, pensions and against racism. It has been generally accepted that any new structure will be federal. Additional policies agreed at Steering Committee meetings include linking the CNWP with opposing the decimation of the NHS; taking an active part in local anti-cuts/privatisation campaigns and raising the need for a new party within them; supporting NHS workers taking strike action; supporting migrant workers and defending asylum seekers; and a series of initiatives for combating the British National Party (BNP). Policy is gradually evolving, but the detailed debates are yet to begin.

### **FOUR MAIN CRITICISMS**

Some on the left have been quick to criticise the CNWP. It is seen as a puppet of the Socialist Party, or an extension of it. Partly arising from this, it is seen as being economistic and left reformist rather than revolutionary, a sort of Red Green Old Labour Party. Others are critical that its development towards a party is too slow, and some individuals have claimed it has been difficult to get involved.

## The role of the SP

Clearly, the CNWP was initiated by the Socialist Party. Five of the eight officers elected at the Launch conference are in the SP, including leading members Hannah Sell, Dave Nellist and Roger Bannister. The Steering Committee does at present have a SP majority. However, the SP do not use their numerical superiority, any more than they did in the earlier days of the original SA. They do tend to lead debates and put the resolutions - but it is up to other affiliates to be more pro-active. Amendments from the CPGB and the SA have been accepted. The SP are aware of their position and have not abused it. At our local ad-hoc committee meetings, the SP have only sent 3 members, the same as the SA - and there are 10 on the committee. I was asked to be on the platform at the September CNWP Rally outside the Labour Party conference "to give it balance" - unfortunately transport difficul-



**cnwp chair dave nellist**

ties meant I declined. In the event, there were 2 SP speakers and 2 who were not. I have not encountered political challenges to any of the nine press releases I have issued so far. Yes, I am aware of the SP's majority, but so are the SP. Furthermore, analysis of the 2,500 Declaration signatories shows that just 25% are SP members.

### Reformist policies?

In terms of policy and what type of organisation the CNWP is likely to become, it is early days. The policies I have listed above, with commitments to fighting profits, cuts and privatisation, racism and war, whilst expanding public services, are all standard socialist positions. There is no question of the CNWP simply representing old Labour policy. There will be policy conferences to determine the detail. The majority view on the extent to which the new organisation is revolutionary was summed up by Dave Nellist at the September Manchester Rally. He argued that although we all wanted a revolutionary organisation, we first of all needed a workers party to represent the working class. "We need to agree around the 80% we can unite around, and not make revolution a pre-condition". I agree with that view.

### A gradual approach

In terms of the more practical criticisms, the development of the

campaign has indeed been gradual - deliberately so. The CNWP is not in favour of simply declaring a new party, as happened with the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and Respect. A gradual bottom upwards approach is preferred, building bases and roots within working class communities, political organisations, and trade unions before deciding that there is enough support to create a new left party, unless there is a sudden move within the trade union rank and file. The timing is a matter of judgement, and is bound to be a central theme at next May's national CNWP conference.

I do understand the frustration this gradual approach causes. The Steering Committee has not met for over three months as I write this in January. However, I am assured that this is simply due to other political/work pressures, not any kind of feet dragging regarding the CNWP project

### Getting involved

Finally, the apparent difficulty some comrades have experienced in becoming involved with the CNWP locally. I have some sympathy with this view. Over 20 local CNWP meetings were advertised on the CNWP web site over the summer, but some areas were not covered. However it is quite simple to contact the CNWP - through the web site (see below) These details have been on the thousands of CNWP leaflets. One of the officers will be able to pass on local CNWP contact details or contacts for local signatories so that a local meeting can be organised. Existing local SAs can facilitate this. There is certainly no intention to make it difficult for local groups to develop - quite the opposite in fact. It may be the case that local groups have only flourished in traditionally strong SP areas - if so, it is up to independent supporters to make the above contacts and help make a local CNWP group work.

### future possibilities

The CNWP has in my view, the potential to unite significant sections of the left, the increasingly radicalised anti war movement, anti cuts/privatisation campaigners, anti racist groups, active trade unionists and all those who want progressive change and a new left party. Officers have held discussions with the leaders of Respect around the Fighting Trade unions Conference, resulting in CNWP Chair Dave Nellist being invited onto the conference platform. This could develop into longer term links - a divided left is a defeated left history tells us.

The Socialist Alliance is already playing a role in all this. It is respected within the CNWP precisely because of its wealth of experience in pursuing socialist unity. There may well come a time, in the not too distant future, when the SA decides to formally become part of the CNWP and not just an affiliate - as a faction or platform or whatever is appropriate.

The CNWP could take off as a mass party of the working class with support throughout the country, an alliance of socialists, environmentalists and other left radicals, just as the Socialist Alliance has aimed to do. In fact, given sufficient time and support from the left, and an absence of sectarianism, the CNWP could become what many of us have been working so solidly for over the last fourteen years. We should unite around the campaign, avoid undue criticism, and do everything in our power to make a new socialist party a reality. The alternative - to look for faults, to be over critical of the gradual approach or the influence of the SP - would only work to put at risk the attempt by the Socialist Party to build a new left party far broader and larger than its own organisation. We should actively support the SP in this role, and, in doing so, help make that new socialist party a reality. Remember, the left organisation which did the most to spearhead the development of Socialist Alliances back in the early 1990's was the Socialist Party: most of us independents supported that move, and should do likewise fifteen years later around the Campaign for a New Workers' Party. **pm**

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# workers resist oil pillage



when blair poodled along in the wake of bush's iraq adventure, we knew it was all about oil. hundreds of billions have been spent on it and iraqis have seen none of it. now the us' iraqi puppets have agreed a law handing over iraq's oil rights to the global oil giants. *naftana reports* iraq's beleaguered workers are fighting back.

## privatisation by stealth

Hassan Juma', head of the Federation of Oil Unions in Iraq, has commented that the Iraq war takes place in two phases: first, the military invasion and occupation, and second, the economic war.

The first phase has brought death and destruction to Iraqis for nearly four years. But right now, the economic war is being fought, which risks leaving Iraqis with nothing, even when the violence eventually comes to an end.

Heavy pressure has been applied by the US and UK governments, as well as the International Monetary Fund, for multinational companies to grab Iraq's vast oil wealth. Iraq has the world's third largest oil reserves, 10% of the total.

As this newsletter goes to press in January 2007, a draft law has been presented to the Iraqi Council of Ministers, which could surrender sovereignty over Iraq's most important resource. Oil accounts for 70% of the Iraqi economy, and 95% of government revenue.

Originally a deadline of the end of 2006 was set for the law, in an agreement between the IMF and Iraqi government in December 2005. Agreeing to this deadline was a condition for the cancellation of some of Iraq's foreign debt.

Over recent months, the US government has been pressuring the Iraqi government to pass this law by that deadline. In the new plan announced by President Bush on 10 January, while increasing troop numbers in Iraq, he ordered the Iraqi government to carry out three urgent legislative actions - top of the list being the passing of the law.

The US and UK governments have been reviewing and commenting on the law since the first draft in July 2006. Oil multinationals also saw it in July, and the IMF has reviewed it several times.

But most Iraqis do not even know the law is coming. There has been nothing in the Iraqi media, and no consultation with civil society groups. Even Iraqi members of parliament have not seen it - months after outside interests. Instead, parliament is expected to rubber-stamp what has already been decided.

This is the kind of "democracy" the occupation is bringing to Iraq..

naftana is a small independent UK-based organisation supporting democratic trade unionism in Iraq, working in solidarity with the GUOE. It strives to publicize the Union's struggle for Iraqi social and economic rights and its stand against the privatisation of the Iraqi oil demanded by the occupying powers.

## iraqi trade unionists unite to reject hydrocarbon law

In December, leaders all five of Iraq's trade union federations - between them representing hundreds of thousands of workers - called for a fundamental rethink of the forthcoming oil law (see above). The law is designed to allow foreign investment in the oil sector.

In a joint statement, the trade unions rejected "the handing of control over oil to foreign companies, whose aim is to make big profits at the expense of the Iraqi people, and to rob the national wealth, according to long-term, unfair contracts, that undermine the sovereignty of the state and the dignity of the Iraqi people". The statement added that this was a "red line" they would not allow to be crossed.

They also criticised the drafting of the law for not including Iraqi civil society and experts, and called for a delay to the law to allow a proper consultation.

## trade union coalition statement on the oil law

**FIRST** : Not to expedite the issuance of the oil law, which would render the oil wealth seized and exploited by the oil Cartel (the multinational oil companies). We are asking to delay this law until it is well prepared by the Iraqis with expertise in the field of oil, and after extensive consideration by the Iraqi trade unionists and the Oil Professional Unions.

**SECOND** : We are asking that the discussions about the oil law be attended by Labor Union Federations and Oil Professional Unions. This practice of democracy would contribute to the protection of the oil wealth for the coming generations and for the whole country.

**THIRD** : We demand involvement of civil society organizations to contribute their opinions about the law, considering that Article (111) of the Iraqi Constitution specifies that oil and gas are the property of the Iraqi people. It is the property of the people in every place and time.

**FOURTH** : We trust that our brothers, the members of the Parliament, shall study the draft oil law with accuracy and diligence, and that this law will not be approved with all the defects and negative points it contains.

**FIFTH** : We strongly reject the privatization of our oil wealth, as well as production sharing agreements, and there is no room for discussing this matter. This is the demand of the Iraqi street, and the privatization of oil is a red line that may not be crossed.

**SIXTH** : We call upon the media and press in the spirit of brotherhood to play a role in conveying the facts to the Iraqi people.

**SEVENTH** : The Iraqi State and its regions should directly invest in oil and gas, as provided for in the Iraqi Constitution, through the support and development of the Ministry of Oil.

**EIGHTH** : Since work is the qualitative activity that sets apart the human experience, and it is the source of all production, wealth, and civilization, and the worker is the biggest asset to the means of production, we demand that this law includes an explicit reference emphasizing the role of all workers in matters of oil wealth and investment, to protect them and build their technical capacity.

**NINTH** : It is possible to benefit from the experiences, technology and expertise of some foreign oil companies through purely Iraqi work contracts that preserve the sovereignty and standing of the State and (its') independence. The State should have the right to terminate these contracts whenever it wants however, under the sole jurisdiction of the Iraqi judiciary. **TENTH** : To rehabilitate the Iraqi National Oil Company. INOC should shoulder the responsibility of Iraqi oil policy.

# not another labour party



**bob crow: 'narrow prism'**

In 2005 the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) annual general meeting called for a conference on working class representation. This took place in January 2006. The Socialist Alliance, Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party and many left organisations attended. Bob Crow, RMT general secretary, addressed the conference. He told the audience that working class representation should not be seen through the narrow prism of the party question. There was more to class representation than simply having a political party to put forward a class point of view.

Platform speakers took up other important themes about the functioning of democracy and constitutional rights. Proportional representation was discussed. It was argued that parliament had such antiquated and bureaucratic procedures that it prevented or made it difficult to secure progressive legislation. Bob Crow himself spoke about a Trade Union Freedom Bill which would establish constitutional legal rights for trade unionists.

The question of class representation has now moved firmly onto the agenda. Last November Respect organised its own rally for trade union activists. Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), urging trade unionists to attend, identifies the 'normal' issues of low pay, pensions and privatisation. But he adds "political representation" to his list. Indeed the third session at the rally was set aside to discuss "options available to trade unionists who want to strengthen the voice of unions in the political process."

## the People's Charter :

- ⌘ universal suffrage for all men over the age of 21
- ⌘ equal-sized electoral districts
- ⌘ voting by secret ballot
- ⌘ an end to property qualifications
- ⌘ pay for members of parliament
- ⌘ annual election of parliament

The model resolution for trade union branches circulated by the conference organisers notes that: "There is a debate about political representation for working people - which began with the disaffiliation of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) from Labour and the affiliation of the RMT to the Scottish Socialist Party." The confer-

ence leaflet calls on workers "to join the discussion about political representation for trade unionists".

So what does political representation mean? Is it simply about the failure of the Labour Party to represent trade unions? If we look back to the 19th century it becomes much clearer that working class representation was first and foremost about democracy and the right to vote. It was only after male suffrage was largely won that the focus shifted onto creating a party for trade unionists independent of the Liberal Party.

Most socialists see the current situation as analogous to the 1890's. Blair has converted Labour into a new Liberal party with trade union leaders hanging onto their top hats and his coat tail. But for others the problem goes deeper than that. We have to go back to the roots of the struggle for working class political representation. Between 1838 and 1848 the first mass working class movement took up the struggle for democracy. What emerged was Chartism. The National Charter Association was the first mass working class party in Britain. It was built on the mobilisation and struggle of the working class around a democratic programme. Of course the fight for political change was not seen an end itself. The idea was that in winning the vote, the working class would take a practical step to

**"the working class has the vote but no access to political power. the house of commons is corrupted and ineffective. real decisions are taken elsewhere."**

winning power through parliament. From this came the momentum to change social conditions. This terrified the ruling class, who saw in greater democracy a threat to their power.

Chartist political struggle was not an alternative to trade union action. Strikes were seen as political weapons. In the 1842 the first general strike began against wages cuts. Half a million workers took action. Soon factories were ready to strike for the Charter. The question of democratic rights could be decided by political action outside parliament.

Strikes for democratic political objectives are something alien to the modern traditions of British Labourism. Trade unions are confined to economic demands. Political questions are channelled into the safe hands of the parliamentary Labour party. This economism is of course incorporated into the present anti-union laws which make all political strike action illegal.

Labour's economism stands in contrast to the democratic political aims of Chartism. Chartism set out to change the political system. Labourism always tried to preserve it. Chartism was a threat to the constitution. Labourism has always been its loyal supporter. Chartism made the democratic programme its priority, whereas Labourism put social reform at the top of its agenda.

Some people have concluded that the question of parliamentary democracy was solved when universal suffrage was achieved. In the 1840's the working class, without the vote, was excluded from parliament. Now however we have gone full circle. The working

**8 - new workers party**

**socialist ⌘ alliance**



class has the vote but no access to political power. The House of Commons is corrupted and ineffective. Real decisions are taken elsewhere. People have lost confidence in the present unrepresentative system. The working class is excluded just as surely as they were in the 1840's.

This sense of political powerlessness is why Bob Crow and some speakers at the RMT conference made references to proportional representation and parliamentary reform. Today we face a crisis of democracy. The government continues to remove civil liberties without check. Whether it is health, welfare, union rights, wages, education or opposition to imperialist wars, the organised working class is totally ignored. Working class influence over political decisions is non-existent. The fact that the anti-union laws are still in place tells us all we need to know.

The Iraq war showed very clearly the weakness of parliamentary democracy. George Galloway made the point that "every MP who voted for the war did so knowing that their constituents were against it. And most did so knowing it was wrong. This is a crisis in bourgeois democracy. The mask has slipped". (*Weekly Worker* December 4 2003).

He went on to explain that the parliamentary system "is completely unresponsive in the face of public opinion on a whole range of issues, not simply on the war". Things happen now on the electoral level, on the civil liberties front, across a whole swathe of issues which do not reflect what people want. Against a massively

to view working class political representation either in terms of reclaiming the Labour Party or creating another Labour Party. This is the perspective of the Labour Representation Committee (who support the John McDonnell campaign for Labour leader), Respect and the Campaign for a Mass Workers Party.

The recognition that parliamentary democracy, as practiced in the Westminster, has failed to provide adequate political representation leads to a different perspective. We need a democratic movement and working class party like the Chartists. Such a party would unite workers around a democratic programme and mobilise mass action outside parliament to push its programme through. We do not need another Labour Party.

Political representation must take up a range of issues including democratic rights, civil liberties, parliamentary reform, proportional representation, and a new written constitution. In this we start from the principle of popular sovereignty (or power to the people) not from any desire to preserve or maintain the present outdated constitutional monarchist system of government.

After the Iraq war there was a brief moment when George Galloway seemed to point to a new kind of party, which like the Chartist party, might take up the fight for democracy. He said that "we have a chance - if we properly grasp what democracy actually means - of being the movement for democracy in this country. And that's an extremely powerful position to be in for a progressive left movement". He concluded that we had "to prioritise the concept of



**chartists demonstration Kennington common 1848**

centralised system of government, concentrated around the prime minister, there is no effective "democratic counterweight from working people and progressive organisations".

Labour MP Clare Short has taken up the same theme. Her experience from inside government led her to conclude the system is dangerously undemocratic. She points to the massive centralisation of power in the hands of the prime minister and a few top bureaucrats. The other side of the coin is a weak and unrepresentative parliamentary system. Government is becoming increasingly authoritarian. Civil liberties are threatened. Short recently announced she would not stand at the next election but campaign for a hung parliament to help bring electoral reform.

Clare Short is taking up issue too little too late. We have at least to agree with Bob Crow's point that working class representation is not simply or even mainly about the bankruptcy of the Labour Party. The malaise goes very much deeper into the heart of the workings of parliament and the constitution. The situation is ripe for more authoritarian government and a breeding ground for fascism unless the democratic movement starts to assert itself.

Unfortunately most of the socialist movement has a narrow perspective. They have failed to recognise that danger that arises from the bankruptcy of the present parliamentary system. They tend

democracy and live by it internally and insist on it externally. We need democratic control of the economy, of parliament, of society itself."

This proved to be empty rhetoric. Galloway never put these words into practice. Respect, the party he founded, has been the negation of that idea. There is nothing democratic, secular or republican about Respect. It modelled itself on the politics of old Labour. The Campaign for a Mass Workers Party, led by the Socialist Party, has followed the same old Labour agenda. Unfortunately the attempt by socialists to warm up Labour's corpse is doomed to failure. The project has already stalled. It doesn't fit the current political realities.

The fight for working class political representation today is fundamentally the fight for democracy. Government must be elected by and made accountable to working people. The more democratic the system, the greater the influence of the working class over the political direction of the country - health service, education, environment, war, and of course wages, hours of work and working conditions etc. This is the road that takes us to democracy, self emancipation and socialism.

**steve freeman**



# endless growth?

"one pill makes you larger, and  
one pill makes you small"  
*white rabbit* - jefferson airplane  
after lewis carroll

## CAPITALISM & GROWTH

Capitalism is based on endless growth, both of the economy as a whole and of the individual capitalist enterprise. For the individual firm, this means an urgent and unscrupulous pursuit of immediate profit and rapid expansion, the aim being to outperform, outgrow and swallow up competitors, before they swallow you up. A capitalist corporation cannot worry about its effects on the environment either in terms of resource depletion or in terms of pollution, including greenhouse gas emission. The one driver is the need for large profits now.

This is well illustrated by the behaviour of capitalist firms in the past and today. The classic example is Exxon, the biggest company in the world. Exxon promotes uncontrolled use of non-renewable resources such as oil and gas and the corresponding pollution. It spends millions of pounds funding pseudo-scientific front organisations to deny the reality of global warming in order to stave off any government interference in its single-minded pursuit of profit. For the capitalist economy as a whole, growth is an overall necessity. Only an ever-growing economy can accommodate the need for growth of its components. Only in an ever-growing economy can

capitalism retain stability as an economic system. Indeed, the classic capitalist cycle of boom and bust shows what happens whenever growth falters.

You do not need to be a Marxist to see this dependence of capitalism on growth. It is so integral to western politics and economics that it is taken for granted. The maxim that "growth is good" does not even need to be stated. Chancellors and Ministers of Finance, in formulating and presenting their budgets, do not discuss whether growth is desirable, just how much they can achieve.

## GROWTH, RESOURCES & POLLUTION

Economic growth, as normally and conventionally understood, is based on measures of economic activity. The measure most used at a national level is Gross Domestic Product. This covers both obvious physical economic activities - steel making, building cars, transporting goods, growing crops, manufacturing computers, and so on - and the "softer" activities - entertainment, advertising, finance, etc. It is defined in terms of what capitalism does and what capitalism needs.

At a macro level, such economic growth inevitably increases use of non-renewable resources and increase pollution including greenhouse gases. That is obvious. This is borne out historically by the relationship between economic growth and both resource use and pollution. Examples graphically illustrate this.

The Soviet Union/Russia grew steadily after the Second World War. Correspondingly its use of oil and other non-renewables grew, as did its output of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. When the Soviet Union broke up and its economy was largely privatised, it went into recession, and its use of oil and its emission of CO2 fell. Since its economic growth has resumed, its use of oil



how long can capitalism continue to deny its role in global warming?

10 - growth

socialist  alliance

and its emissions have also resumed their upward path.

China has had unparalleled economic growth, often in double digit percentages, over the last few years. As this has happened, China's use of oil and gas has increased so much as to quadruple the price of oil on world markets, and its emission of carbon dioxide has risen to a staggering 13% of the world total (The USA emits 24%).

Of course, at a detailed level, different sectors of the economy have different effects. Britain's growing economic dependence on 'taking in each other's washing' and shuffling the world's money around has at least had the effect of limiting our direct increased use of scarce resources and emission of greenhouse gases. Had Thatcher not largely destroyed Britain industrial capacity, we would burn more fossil fuels and pump out more greenhouse gases. Even without our traditional industries, however, Britain's economy has continued to grow and our emission of carbon dioxide has continued to rise.

In any case, our economic growth continues to contribute to global increase in use of non-renewables and to global pollution. All that has happened is that the steel making, car production, etc has moved from Britain to countries with cheaper labour - like China. At a global level that is no help at all. Indeed, it is environmentally counter productive, since production in cheap labour countries is likely to be even more polluting than it would have been in Britain.

### AGS POLICY ON GROWTH

It is clear that the Alliance for Green Socialism (AGS) cannot support endless and unlimited growth on the capitalist model. It is clear that, unless we wish to contradict our stance on the environment - and accept the catastrophic consequences for human civilisation - we must advocate an economic model of limited, zero or negative growth. This should be based on scientific evidence of what is necessary for a sustainable world economy and for the stability of the global climate.

Some ecological groups advocate a drastic contraction of the economy, to as little as a tenth of its current size. That kind of extreme policy cannot be justified. It would imply a return to savagery, perhaps as complete as the likely consequences of unchecked global warming, the cure being worse than the disease.

The AGS should advocate seeking the best achievable and sustainable quality of life for all people. But we must be honest and open about the fact that "achievable and sustainable" is a very strong constraint and is not compatible with the kind of economic growth we have come to regard as normal.

### WHAT IS GROWTH?

All of the foregoing discussion has been in terms of the capitalist concept and measure of growth. This capitalist measure includes many things that we would not regard as contributing to quality of life. UK advertising has a turnover in excess of thirteen billion pounds. Yet far from contributing to our quality of life, it is deliberately designed to make people discontented and to create artificial needs (to fuel the growth that capitalism needs).

The car industry is worth five billion pounds. Expenditure on the infrastructure to support an ever growing number of cars is many times this. Yet is the net effect of this good or bad for us? Our towns and cities are designed around and choked by cars, while our retailing and services increasingly require car use. While cars are very useful, the gross dominance of the car in our society arguably reduces our overall quality of life.

Cuba, whatever its shortcomings, has a small GDP and a low-growth economy by western standards (having suffered a US economic blockade for forty years). Cubans have little access to many of the consumer goods and services we take for granted. Yet Cuba has a lower infant mortality and a better life expectancy than any capitalist state in Latin America. Indeed, Cuba is on a par with both the USA and Britain, despite our economic "prosperity". Surely measures like life expectancy mean more than how much we spend on cars and advertising.

Maybe we need to develop alternative measures to the capitalist ones. Maybe we need measures that look at our quality of life

rather than how much we spend. Maybe we need measures that look at whether our resource use is sustainable and whether our pollution is limited to what our planet can stand.

Perhaps we should concentrate on growth in such measures, rather than seeking growth in the conventional capitalist sense of how fast we circulate our monetary tokens.

md

## stern gets it wrong

The Stern Report was commissioned by the New Labour government, so it is hardly surprising that it proposes a solidly capitalist - and entirely futile - approach to the problem of climate change

The first good thing about the report is that it recognises, without reservation, that climate change is happening and is catastrophic. The second, surprising, good thing is that it accepts the cause of global warming is capitalism. Stern describes the crisis as 'the greatest market failure the world has ever seen'. He goes on to explain why capitalism necessarily ignores the harmful environmental effects of what it does.

Even more surprisingly, the report recognises a whole range of socialist things that are required to beat global warming. Of course, that is not how the press have reported it, nor even how Stern's conclusions read. But if you look at the actual report or even the 30-page 'Executive Summary', it is full of references to state planning and investment, government action and intervention, and international co-operation between governments. It says quite clearly that there is no point in expecting capitalism to solve this problem off its own bat.

The obvious conclusion from this is the one already reached by green socialists - though not by the Green Party. We must stop producing rubbish for profit and start producing what people genuinely need, rather than what they can be persuaded to want. We must plan production, balancing need against the amount of pollution the world can sustain.

Stern, however, comes to a stunningly different conclusion. Instead of government action to solve this grave crisis, government must 'create a market' (his words) which will persuade capitalists to solve it for profit. Carbon pricing, carbon trading, even a carbon 'stock exchange' trading in allowances. Stern wants the whole thrust of government action to be the setting up of an entirely artificial system in which capitalists can make money out of the crisis they created.

The Stern Report represents capitalism's second line of defence to the charge that it is ruining the planet. The first line of defence was denial, exemplified by the hundreds of millions spent by Exxon on bogus science. Capitalism for decades claimed there was no such thing as global warming; that if there is, that it is not caused by greenhouse gases; and that if it is, that greenhouse gases are not the fault of capitalism.

The denial position is now so untenable that capitalism has begun a planned withdrawal to the Stern position: *Yes, climate change exists; yes, it is a huge problem; yes, it was caused by capitalism - but the answer is more capitalism.*

If we fall for this one, the third line of defence, in ten or twenty years time, will be the one prefigured by the US/UK invasion of Iraq for control of its oil: that global warming is indeed a catastrophic problem caused by capitalism; that using capitalism to solve it has indeed inexplicably failed (despite the fortunes made on the Stock Exchange!); but that now we will have to use war abroad and repression at home to defend what rich people have.

mike davies

*This is an edited version of an article which first appeared in the newsletter of the Alliance for Green Socialism.*



# offensive against migrants offends us all

AN INJURY ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL! NO IMMIGRATION CONTROLS!  
NO ONE IS ILLEGAL!

Day after day we are subjected to a relentless stream of garbage from politicians and the media about immigration. Bully boy Home Secretary John Reid has been constantly in the public glare flexing his muscles against migrants and refugees, announcing new initiatives to strengthen what he claims are soft and ineffective immigration controls. The poison pushes the tragic events in Lebanon, the Congo, Darfur and the threats of global warming off the tabloid headlines, the events which displace many of the people Reid and the government want to stomp all over if they try to come here.

Migrants, refugees, their friends and supporters know only too well there is nothing soft about the immigration regime. Over the last ten years there has been a whole wave of immigration and asylum acts and changes in regulations aimed to make migrants destitute, to make it easier to detain and deport migrants, removing their rights of appeal, preventing people from particular parts of the world from entering the UK.

## **Immigration service not fit for purpose?**

Too right! What kind of *service* brutalizes, humiliates, locks up, and renders homeless and poverty stricken its clients? But it is fit for the purposes of exploitative employers who enjoy access to a clandestine workforce, or 'permitted' workers with no rights. Reid's proposals might annoy some of these bosses but in the end it will ensure that those migrants who are here are all the more vulnerable, controlled and disenfranchised.

## **Employer Sanctions:**

The requirement that bosses act as immigration officers and report all 'illegal workers' is being strengthened. This might not suit all bosses but it gives an extra weapon by which employers can discipline their workforce, especially if they start to get unionised.

## **Welcome to Britain?**

A uniformed border control force to greet visitors is the most infamous of these proposals. We will not know what this means until their extra powers are revealed but it is certainly is meant to deter refugees and migrants.

## **'Foreign Criminals':**

This was the vile campaign that launched the latest Home Office 'reforms' in the first place. It played on the totally racist notion that

criminals are more of a threat if they are 'foreigners' and equally racist to suggest that dangerous criminals ought to be shipped off to another country where presumably it does not matter what threat they pose! So we are totally opposed to Reid's racist proposals on deporting criminals.

## **IF THEY COME FOR ME IN THE MORNING THEY WILL BE COMING FOR YOU AT NIGHT!**

As the name suggests, immigration controls are about controlling people. The Reid regime is about increased controls:

Dobbing people in: Campaigning to get us to squeal on migrants and refugees- which will give a license to any racist to ring the Home Office about their neighbours. Sounds like the methods of the Gestapo in Nazi Germany or the NKVD in the USSR.

Papers and more Papers: Papers for coming in and going out, more reporting so that the State knows where everybody is.

Electronic Tagging for migrants and refugees.

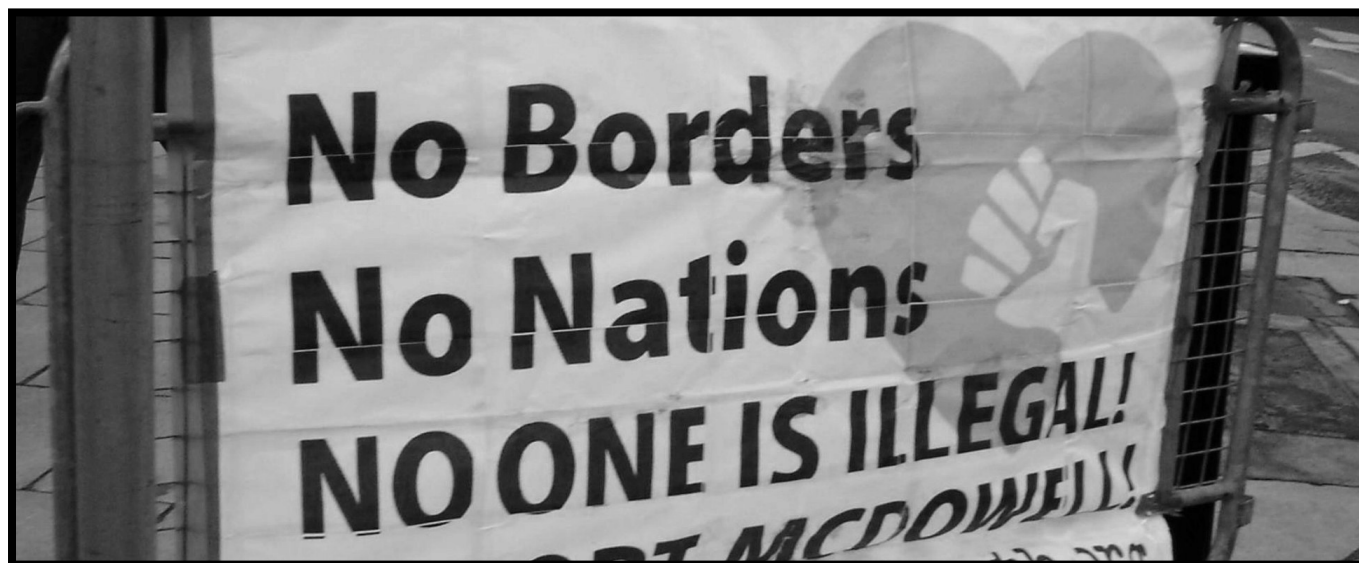
Biometric cards for migrants and refugees.

Every control and every infringement imposed on migrants and refugees sets a precedent for what can be done to the rest of the population- not just Reid's proposals but the existing regime, for example, detention without trial (including children). So readers of the tabloids, who think that strong men are acting to protect them from mythic alien threat, beware. They could be the ones behind the barbed wire in decades to come. This is not hyperbole- the Daily Mail supported Hitler when he came to power and ran the headline 'Hurray for the Blackshirts' in support of the British Union of Fascists.

## **UNDER ATTACK WE FIGHT BACK!**

Migrants and refugees are resisting. They are going on hunger strikes in detention centres. Migrant workers are getting unionised and taking on their employers. Migrants across Europe are linking up and pushing for international action. Workers in the caring professions are beginning to question and refuse to act as enforcers of immigration control and this needs trades union backing. We must support the resistance and fight back together. Reids can be broken but the people united cannot!

**David Landau**





# trade union conference against immigration controls


the well-known slogan  
"workers of the world  
unite"  
means what it says.  
it does not mean:  
"only workers with the  
correct immigration  
status unite".

**Saturday March 31st  
2007  
1.00 - 5.30pm  
light refreshments from  
12 noon,  
Asylum Link,  
St Annes Church,  
Overbury St, Liverpool 7**


Themes will include:

 **organising migrant workers** This isn't just about recruiting migrant workers into the union but assisting them to fight back against their bosses. Speaker from Justice for Cleaners will report on their successes against exploitative agencies in London with the help of the T&GWU and Alan Fraser of GMB (in personal capacity) on the formation of a GMB branch of migrant workers in Wessex.

 **defiance not compliance** Workers in the caring professions are expected to act as immigration officers to their clients; reporting to the home office, cutting off benefits and services. If they refuse they could be victimised or sacked. The unions need to protect their workers and actually organise defiance. Speaker from Bolton UNISON explaining why the branch agree to support social workers in defying Section 9 of 2004 Immigration and Asylum Act and in refusing to take children of the undocumented into care as part of the deportation process.

 **deportation and detention** What can unions do when their members are detained or threatened with deportation

 **fighting for right to work and equal rights at work**

 **what's new?** There is a forest of immigration control legislation already, but new laws are coming in. What are the key developments that effect the workplace.

no one is illegal  
16 wood st, bolton, bl2 1dr  
email : [info@noii.org.uk](mailto:info@noii.org.uk)

## AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!

Immigration controls are an attack on all workers. When groups of workers have unequal status, when workers are precarious or when they are declared illegal; they are vulnerable to superexploitation. Not only do the bosses get superprofits from migrant workers directly through immigration controls, they use this to discipline the entire class. Trades unions must oppose all immigration controls and fight for equal rights regardless of immigration status. Some unions such as NATFHE (now merged with UCU) and the NUJ have adopted this as their policies. Other unions have responded by considering campaigns to 'regularise migrants'.

This conference brings trade unionists together to organise against immigration controls both at the level of policy and practically as it impacts upon the worker place and upon our members.

All this and more at this vitally important conference for all trades unionists.

**No One Is Illegal** is a group of trade unionists long active in anti-deportation campaigns. We have produced with trade unions the pamphlet **Workers Control Not Immigration Controls**. We ask unions to sponsor (give their name to) the conference. Admission/sponsorship free, donations welcome (cheques to No One Is illegal). **Workers Control Not Immigration Controls** can be obtained by donation (or downloaded at [www.noii.org.uk](http://www.noii.org.uk)).

### Initial sponsors

**Trades Councils:** Tameside, Oxford, Bury, Waltham Forest, Oldham, Chorley, Liverpool, Wirral, Haringay, Greater Manchester Association of trades councils. Merseyside TUC.

**Union branches:** Bolton NUT, Bolton UNISON, Manchester Unison Community and Mental Health, TGWU 6/389, GMB London

# radical history of greenwich and deptford

**terry liddle** looks at the radical roots of the labour and popular movements in south east london.

In 1381 peasants in revolt against the Poll Tax marched from Kent on London camping on Blackheath. After the murder of their leader Wat Tyler, they believed the promises of reform made by King Richard II, promises he had no intention of keeping. They dispersed and later were subjected to the vengeance of a ruling class determined to maintain the feudal order.

***in the 1980s thousands would demonstrate on blackheath against thatcher's poll tax***

During the reign of Henry VII, Cornwall revolted against his harsh taxation policies. A Cornish Army marched on London only to be slaughtered on Blackheath.

The Civil War Leveller leader John Lilburne claimed to have been born in Greenwich Palace. When the parliamentary general, the Earl of Essex died, the locals looted his home at Eltham Palace.

Blackheath was the scene of a temperance rally held by Father Theobald Mathew from Cork. Although there were Chartist

temperance groups and later a Socialist Prohibition Fellowship, the temperance movement was mostly Christian. One could be expelled it for being an atheist as was John Finch (1784-1857) a Liverpool disciple of Robert Owen. The Chartist MP Fergus O'Connor held rallies on Blackheath. So outraged at this was a monarchist publican that he renamed his pub The Royal Standard.

**early trade unions**

Some of the earliest trade unions in London were formed among workers in the Deptford dockyards. John Gast, a shipwright from Bristol, formed the Hearts of Oak Benefit Society which after the repeal of the Anti-Combination Laws became the Thames Shipwrights Provident Union. However, in the 1830s workers such as the Tolpuddle Martyrs were still being transported to Australia for trade union activities. Gast tried to unite all workers in the Philanthropic Hercules. When Henry Hunt was released from prison after Peterloo he was greeted in London by Gast. Gast became a member of the Chartist London Workingmens' Association.

In 1834 there was a bricklayers' pay strike and eight marines stationed at Woolwich were tried for mutiny. The Chartists had a group in Woolwich barracks which met in the Barrack Tavern pub. Chartists in Greenwich formed the Greenwich Workingmen's Association. When Bronterre O'Brien came to open a Chartist Hall in Church Fields, Greenwich the event suffered police interference



poll tax protest leader wat tyler murdered by the mayor of london





chartist march in london

but at last come to rest in the Globe Tavern.

A leading Chartist was George Harney who was born in Deptford in 1817. Harney edited many Chartist Publications including *The Red Republican* in which the first English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* was published. In 1847 Samuel Kydd, a shoemaker and speaker for O'Connors Chartist Land Company appeared on the hustings at Greenwich as a Chartist candidate. By 1850 the Chartists were meeting in the Earl Grey pub in Straitsmouth, Greenwich, on Wednesdays. Their secretary was A Cooper, a book seller of Trafalgar Road, Greenwich and their treasurer A Floyd, a baker of Church Street, Deptford. The Greenwich delegate to the Chartist convention of 1851 was GWM Reynolds. The Greenwich Chartists formed a joint organisation with the Irish Confederated Democrats.

With the demise of Chartism many militants went into secularism. The Greenwich and Deptford Secular Society was formed in 1862 by Victor Le Lubez, a French freemason and member of the First International. Its secretary was Robert Forder who emigrated from East Anglia to a job in the foundry of the Woolwich Arsenal. Forder later became proprietor of the *Freethought Publishing Company* in Stonecutter Street, an early publisher of birthcontrol literature. He was arrested during the riots against the enclosure of Woolwich Common. He was tried in Maidstone and acquitted. The GDSS opened its own premises in Union Street, Deptford in 1879. Rowdy Christians were ejected.

When Dan Chatterton, publisher of *Chatterton's Commune: The Atheistic, Communist Scorchers*, died Forder conducted his funeral. Sadly, both men were buried in unmarked paupers' graves.

In 1870 the Greenwich Advanced Liberal Association held a rally against the threatened enclosure of the heath and the Greenwich and Deptford Secular Society held Sunday afternoon meetings there.

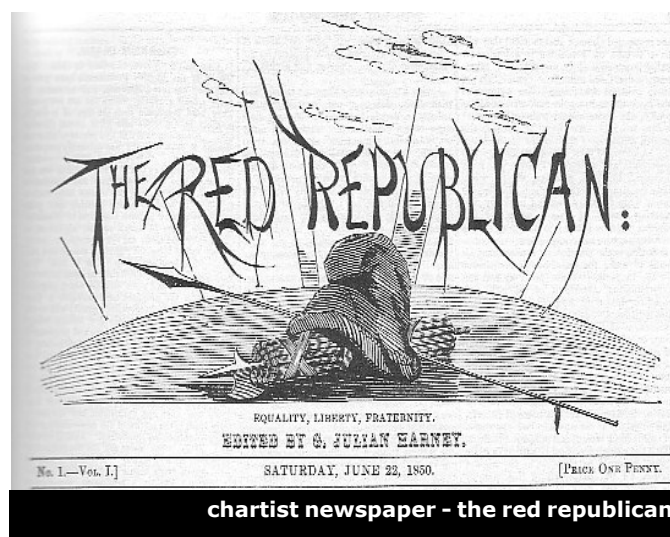
By the 1880s socialism was experiencing a revival and a branch of the Social Democratic Federation was formed in Deptford. In 1888 HH Champion, who had been SDF secretary, announced he would stand as a Labour candidate. In the end he stood down in favour of the Liberals. Robert Banner formed a branch of the ILP in Woolwich and in 1903 Will Crooks was elected Labour MP

In 1887 marchers set out from Deptford and other areas of London to oppose a ban on demonstrations in Trafalgar Square imposed by the Commissioner of Metropolitan, Sir Charles Warren. When marchers from Deptford and Peckham got to Westminster bridge they found a police cordon which baton charged them. They fought back with pokers, lengths of gas pipe

and oyster knives. In the fighting William Turner, a Deptford Radical, was killed.

In February, 1894 the French Anarchist Martial Bourdin blew himself up near the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park. His funeral turned into a riot. In August 1894 the New Cross post office was blown up. A member of the Deptford Anarchist Group Rolla Richards was sentenced to seven years for this.

Margaret and Rachel McMillan were active in Deptford. They were ILP members and wrote for the *Labour Leader* and the *Clarion*. Pioneers of children's education they were influenced by the school set up for Communard refugees by the anarchist Louise Michel. In the 1930s Deptford Green was the local speakers' corner. Kath Duncan spoke there for the Communist Party which she joined after the 1926 General Strike. She led a march of women to the Murdoch Street gasworks to protest against a rise in the price of gas. Sacked from her job as a teacher she was reinstated by popular pressure. she was active against Mosley's blackshirts and in aid for Republican Spain. Duncan was a great influence on a later generation of Communists such as Les Stannard and Alf Stockwell.



chartist newspaper - the red republican

*This guide will be expanded into a pamphlet **Greenwich and Deptford: A Radical History** which will cover the period from the 14th to the 20th centuries.*

# socialist alliance

for socialism, internationalism, republicanism and the environment  
fighting against racism, fascism and special oppression

## nothing to do with iraq

Milan Rai's prompt analysis is a "must read" for anyone interested in Islam in Britain and in the real roots of terrorism.

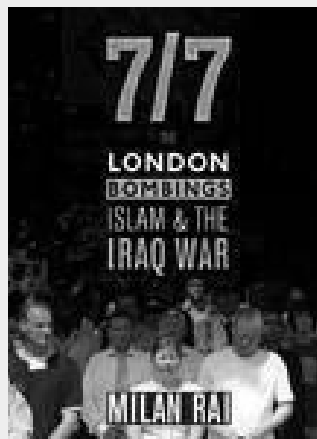
Rai opens with a demonstration of how Blair lied in pretending that the "7/7" bombings had nothing to do with Iraq. While this has long been obvious to many - indeed, to a majority of Britons - Rai provides an admirably clear and documented account of the lies of our government.

The book then gives a thorough, detailed account of the background each of the four bombers and their actions, including the incomprehension of their friends and families at what they had done.

Rai graphically illustrates the biased nature of media reporting of political violence, including the London bombings. Our media never miss the opportunity to describe violence groups whose members are Muslim as "Islamist", carrying the consistent sub-text that Islam is naturally linked to political violence. Yet violence by Christians - even violence by groups like the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda whose explicitly stated motivation is Christian - rarely carries any reference to Christian fundamentalism. Our media choose to reinforce Bush and Blair's false portrayal of Islam as "the enemy".

Rai explores whether Muslim or Christian scripture can be used to justify violence against non believers, scoring them about equal. It is quite possible to trawl through either the Quran or the Bible to find passages (particularly if taken out of context) which seem to support such violence. However, both books also yield an abundance of passages in support of peace and tolerance. Similarly, both religions currently include strands of teaching and practice that are intolerant and violent, and strands which are tolerant and peaceful.

The most illuminating part of the book is its extensive analysis of the different strands of Islam and the typical nature of Islam in Britain. Unless you are already very well informed, this will be an eye-opening education. Rai describes the different forms of Islam worldwide and the typical Sufi Sunni Islam of the majority of British Muslims - theologically relaxed and focussed on the clan. He contrasts this with the fundamentalist Wahhabi Sunni approach that emphasises the global nation of Islam, which more readily supports violent action to defend that global nation. His thesis is that the particular British Muslim background of the four bombers, far from being a natural breeding ground for political/religious violence, was actually an significant obstacle to it.



*7/7 - The  
London  
Bombings,  
Islam and the  
Iraq War*  
Milan Rai  
Pluto Press  
2006

ISBN 0 7453 2563 7

review by **mike davies**

I would disagree in two respects with Rai's choice of language in this discussion. Rai uses "jihad" to mean only violent struggle (admittedly with an explicit caveat about this usage). This is unhelpful in any discussion seeking to embrace the range of possible Islamic responses to oppression. It can lend implicit support to Bush's "Islam is the violent enemy" propaganda. To a Muslim, "jihad" has a range of meanings, from the classic fire and sword to an individual's internal spiritual struggle. Similarly, Rai uses "umma" to refer to the global Muslim nation in the context of Muslims being motivated to defend this Muslim nation. While this usage is correct in itself, it ignores the more normal occurrence of the term "umma" in Islam, which has more to do with community and mutual support, including responsibility for the poor, than it does with violent defence. In Islam, the "umma" is more about socialism than it is about war.

Rai's basic message is a vital political one. Terrorism - such as the London bombings - does not arise from religious motives beyond our understanding, let alone from any hatred of freedom and democracy. It is an attempt to be heard, a protest against what is seen (accurately enough) as Western oppression of Muslims across the world, with Palestine and Iraq the most glaring current examples. While the West pursues a foreign policy that kills, imprisons, tortures and dispossesses Muslims in their thousands and millions, one inevitable consequence will be continuing terrorist attacks against those countries most responsible.

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