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Race is still an issue

JOHN LAURENCIN is in danger of reducing issues of race into a crude class perspective in his letter about how schools fail black children (Letters, 22 October).

He is right to say that the problem does not, at its root, lie with individual teachers and their prejudices. However that should not blind us to the fact that there are teachers who do allow their prejudices to "colour" the way they view and treat black children.

Denial of this would not be a credible position, as any parent of a black child who has come up against a clearly prejudiced teacher knows.

It is also true that class is the backdrop to all this. But all statistics show that, for example, working and middle class African Caribbean and Pakistani pupils as groups do less well than their white counterparts.

This gap can only be explained by an "ethnic penalty". So any measure that raises working class achievement would benefit black pupils—but that wouldn't necessarily be the end of the story.

John's view would be more rounded if he advocated a rank and file revival of the kind of anti-racist education and policies fought for in the 1970s. That action could begin to reverse the crisis now facing another generation of black pupils.

Hassan Mahamdallie
Belvedere, Kent

YOUR ANALYSIS of black children and schools is a breath of fresh air—and a welcome rebuttal to the myths peddled by the likes of Trevor Phillips and other media commentators jumping on the bandwagon of blaming multiculturalism.

Phillips has previously blamed the left and progressive teachers for the failure of black children to achieve in schools. He has also pushed segregated classes as a solution.

It is important for anti-racists and those on the left to continue to challenge these myths in our workplaces and in schools in order to set the record straight and ensure that racist stereotypes in schools in particular are not allowed to take hold.

Julie Bundy
West London

A principled position against nuclear power

SIMON DOWDESWELL writes (Letters, 22 October) that there needs to be a debate within the SWP about nuclear power and its potential to help offset the effects of climate change.

Socialists should of course be prepared to have this debate, which is particularly important given the government's plans to build new power stations.

But it is not wrong for Socialist Worker to take a principled position against nuclear power.

Many organisations have debunked the myth that nuclear power is any solution to climate change. Friends of the Earth produced an excellent report in November 2004 in which they "openly considered" the role of nuclear power in tackling



University staff and students must stand together

Picture: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

Lecturers say no to fees

OUR TRADE unions, the AUT and Natfhe, have launched a pay campaign calling for cash from university top-up fees to be used to increase low wages in academia.

Unfortunately this campaign does not attack top-up fees as such, despite union policy opposing all student fees. We are shooting ourselves in the foot by doing this. The employers and the government will quickly drive a wedge between us and the students who are paying these fees.

It is difficult to understand why our union leaders feel it is necessary to link a pay campaign to fees, because doing so weakens our case.

Many universities have large surpluses, with fees accounting for a very small proportion of their income. At Leeds University, for example, the university reported an £11 million surplus last year. This year it is likely to be even larger.

These surpluses have been achieved through low pay and casualisation of our jobs. Overall the academic system is badly underfunded, with a fall in income per student of over 40 percent over the past ten years.

We need a confident and militant pay campaign, otherwise the money presently in the

system will disappear into the pockets of a few highly paid administrators, and no more will be forthcoming from government. We demand that the government fully funds our pay claim.

Now that the AUT and Natfhe are planning to merge, it is time for ordinary union members to organise and show our union executives how to take on the employers.

We must unite with students to defend education and oppose fees. If necessary, we will do this despite our union leadership.

Dr Rosie Cox Birkbeck College AUT **Dr Marion Hersh** Glasgow University **Terry Wrigley** Edinburgh University **Prof Malcolm Povey** Leeds University AUT **Dr Sue Blackwell** Birmingham University AUT **Dr Karen Evans** Liverpool University AUT **Phil Marfleet** University of East London Natfhe **Mark Campbell** London Metropolitan University Natfhe **Dr Joel Dunn** Kings College AUT **Jon Berry** University of Hertfordshire **Michael Todd** University of Greenwich Natfhe branch secretary **Sean Wallis** UCL AUT joint branch secretary **Sean Vernell** City and Islington College, Camden Road Natfhe branch secretary **Dr John Parrington** University of Oxford AUT **Iain Ferguson** University of Stirling AUT and **eight others** (all personal capacity)

Students politicised by Iraq war

THE HUGE numbers of students recruited to Respect recently shows that our politics are popular and that we have the potential to build large groups that can raise the important political issues on campus.

Students have not been this political for a long time. The anti-war movement has given

people who were involved a feeling that we can and must change the world.

It seems to me that students have drawn the conclusion that politicians ignoring the voices of anti-war protesters means that we need a new political alternative.

Those students that have joined recently are not born

Respect members and so they have lots of questions. There is a real hunger for ideas, debate and answers. We need to show we think these new members are important—that means addressing their questions and proving our politics in practice. **Keith Connelly**
Queen Mary's University Respect

Nelson's defence of Colonel Despard

JONATHAN NEALE gives an excellent account of the imperial context to the Battle of Trafalgar (Socialist Worker, 22 October). But I'm not sure that he is correct to describe Nelson as "right wing".

Horatio Nelson was a key figure in Britain's imperial project to defeat the French—and he was certainly no revolutionary.

However, Nelson did speak out in defence of Colonel Edward Marcus Despard, who was sentenced to death for treason in early 1803.

Nelson and Despard had started their military careers together around 1780 in central America. But Despard

fell out with the military and the government—and became a supporter of revolutionary France and the United Irishmen.

Despard was hanged anyway, but Nelson then went further. He pressed for an official pension for Despard's widow—a black Jamaican woman called Catherine.

This incident suggests that there was a reason why Nelson became something of a popular hero. He was also known to speak up for democratic rights that governments preferred to ignore. **Keith Flett**
North London

INBOX...

Transferred to housing hell

AS A former council tenant for ten years—and now, regrettably, a housing association tenant—I wholeheartedly support all campaigns to resist so called "stock transfer".

My housing association is a total disgrace. Minor repairs aren't done. The building is a fire trap, and the smoke alarms, which used to go off at all times, now don't work.

Tenants are bullied—I cannot sign this letter for fear of victimisation by my association. And discrimination against the disabled is rife.

The cronies who run these associations pretend they are progressive, when in fact they are reactionary privateers. That's why I call upon all socialists to resist stock transfer. **Anonymous**
Sussex



Factory farmed

Factory farms and avian flu

BIRD FLU has long been endemic in wildfowl. It is globalisation and our thoughtless greed that ensures fowl are packed up to 40,000 strong in mammoth sheds.

Their proximity and stress necessitates continuous dosing with antibiotics.

This creates a perfect environment for viruses to mutate into superbugs.

We must now urgently address the slavery that is worldwide factory farming—or more superbugs will emerge and spread themselves far and wide. **Moira Hope**
Hornsey

Rugby league and socialism

I WAS pleased to see you quote the Leeds Rhinos captain Kevin Sinfield talking about his socialist ideals (Socialist Worker, 15 October).

Alongside cricket, rugby league is my favourite sport. My first visit to Headingley was in 1961 to watch Leeds play St Helens.

Those of us from working class backgrounds had an affinity with the players because back then the teams were made up of builders, miners,

drivers, school teachers, printers, butchers and even policemen.

I particularly remember during the 1984-5 miners' strike how generous the supporters of rugby league were when we stood outside the grounds with buckets collecting money.

The Leeds team expressed their support by holding a fund raising cricket match. **John Appleyard**
West Yorkshire

Portugal's swing right

IT WAS good to see that the Left Bloc has made gains in the recent local council elections in Portugal—and to see the ruling Socialist Party getting a real drubbing (Socialist Worker, 22 October).

However the unfortunate reality is that the right wing PSD and PP parties made the most gains. The real swing in the country was to the right. **Duncan Melville**
Lisbon, Portugal

Famines have political roots

IT IS time for world leaders to realise that famines are not a matter of "the rains don't come, the crops don't grow, the people don't eat".

Famines are long term, man made political processes. In the case of Malawi (Socialist Worker, 15 October), we should examine the underlying causes of the famine.

Structural adjustment programmes have created conditions that allow famine to breed. **Derek Meester**
Ottawa, Canada



Dimpleby goes digital

BBC shuts out people's voice

I WATCH the BBC's Question Time every week in hope—only to find it stuffed with the same tired New Labour, Tory and Lib Dem voices.

Often the most insightful points come from ordinary people watching at home—available to digital viewers by pushing the red button.

But the BBC has removed this service from viewers in Wales. People should complain about this through the BBC website. **Reb Smith**
Swansea