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# resistance

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# BREAK NOW FROM BANKRUPT BLAIR!



Stefano Cagnoni www.reportdigital.co.uk

Blair's butchery in Iraq and his bankruptcy at home reinforce the need for a political alternative to the left of New Labour.

The development of Respect is the best opportunity that the left in England has ever had to create such an alternative, and remains so despite the disappointments of its recent conference (see p3, p 6-7).

But Respect must reach out to, recruit and involve a broader audience, particularly amongst active trade unionists who see their job security and conditions under assault every day in the workplace.

These militants also see their public services under attack from the blows of a government deeply committed to a neo-liberal agenda, and have marched in their thousands against the illegal war in Iraq.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union has taken a timely initiative in calling an open conference on working class representation on January 21 in London.

This should provide an opportunity for trade union activists and other socialists to debate out how most effectively to create a political alternative to Blairism.

This conference has been called following a motion at the union's Annual General Meeting in 2005, which clearly expressed the RMT member

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**RESPECT and RMT must show the way for labour movement**

# Home News

## Break now from bankrupt Blair

(From front page)

ships' view that Labour no longer, in any shape or form, represents the aspirations of working people.

A previous motion in 2004 was amended to the union's leadership's liking to allow it to interperate this mandate as meaning support for the Labour Representation Committee – the latest initiative from those committed to the impossible task of "reclaiming" the Labour Party.

Despite this attitude of the leadership to "English" politics their actions in Scotland and Wales has been more positive – affiliating to the Scottish Socialist Party and calling for a vote for the party in the General Election, as it did for Marek's Forward Wales.

In discussing the implementation of this year's AGM



**Blair: exploiting political weakness of union leaders**

motion, the union executive have decided that the conference in January would not set up a new political party, although this would be one of the topics of debate.

But the biggest problem about the conference as it is currently structured is its platform.

The first list of speakers, sent to RMT branches in a circular on December 9 were RMT Secretary Bob Crow, Tony

Benn, left Labour MP John McDonnell (also chair of the RMT Parliamentary group), the Scottish Socialist Party's Colin Fox MSP, Welsh Assembly member John Marek (from Forward Wales) and Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist. As we understand it, Green Party MEP Jean Lambert has subsequently been added.

Socialist Resistance has no problem with any of the speakers participating – but there is obviously a massive omission. There is currently no speaker from Respect. We think it would be a big mistake if this is not rectified before the conference.

Bob Crow told this year's AGM that he was pleased that George Galloway had been elected in Bethnal Green and Bow rather than Oona King. Put your money where your mouth is Bob – and put George on the platform.

## Why we say no to Campus Watch at South Bank Uni

**Maxy Newton (Vice President Communications South Bank University – personal capacity)**

AT THE START of the year the Students Union at South Bank University promised students radical changes. A new intake of officers, a new year and lots of problems to deal with.

As one of those officers, responsible for communication, I realised in September that our work would be cut out for us. The *Guardian* published a front page article claiming that the Islamic Society here were harbouring terrorists.

It was my job to issue a response arguing that they were not terrorists and this was a political attack, not just on them, but on the student body itself. I wrote the *Guardian* a letter which they refused to print, in spite of me ringing them and they agreeing they would. So much for open debate!

We organised a Respect meeting at the beginning of the year with George Galloway and the cousin of Jean Charles De

Menezes.

The University did not like this one bit, and laid on extra security, appointing one security officer to be with George at all times, including when he was sitting in my office waiting for the meeting to start!

Perhaps they thought he was a terrorist too! George was very popular and many students skipped classes to hear him speak.

The audience was almost completely black and muslim which was a real success.

The university also unleashed a plan to 'combat crime' within the university; Campus Watch which is due to be rolled out across London. The aim of the plan is to recruit students into the police force to police other students on other campuses.

I do not see much evidence of crime at South Bank University. The university calls this an issue of 'health and safety'.

It can be argued that this plan fits with the *Guardian's* idea that there are terrorists here! A majority of people believe that police on campus is a direct attack on ethnic

minorities which I believe is true.

Respect has issued a petition against Campus Watch here, and we have already got Jenny Jones, a Green Party member of the GLA to sign it, as well as many students. We don't want our university to turn into a fortress.

We have also produced the first issue of the student paper *Unity* with a circulation of 11,000, which carried a photo on the cover of police arresting a student outside the union building.

The paper is written by students, and the editor is a full time media student.

We think student media like this, a new radio and TV station can all be used to further the demands of students here for justice against attacks by the government.

Over the next few months we will be organising a series of political discussions on issues of war, justice and civil rights and will be mobilising students for the Stop the War demonstration in March, as well as standing for the union elections with more people running this year than last.

## IN BRIEF

### London

As we go to press, the RMT transport workers union members have voted for a 24-hour tube strike on New Year's Eve and another on the January 8. At issue are job cuts which the union claims will lead to lack of safety and increased dangers for passengers.

### Hong Kong

Several thousand protesters took to the streets over two days of demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation talks being held in Hong Kong.

The protesters, which included hundreds of South Korean farmers, got within several hundred metres of the event where large numbers were arrested. As we go to press, Hong Kong is still holding fourteen South Korean protesters to whom they have denied bail.

### New York City

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) went on a 3-day strike, largely over the issue of pensions, causing major disruption throughout the city right before the Christmas holiday. The parent union refused to support the action and the TWU Local 100 has been fined \$1 million with jail time initially threatened for its leaders. Individual workers also must now face fines of two days pay for every day on strike.

An agreement was reached in which the Metropolitan Transit Authority backed down on pensions but the union leadership agreed that members would now pay 1.5% of their wages towards health care premiums for the first time. The members will vote on the agreement in early January.

### Dublin

Between 20,000 – 40,000 took to the streets of Dublin and eight other cities over the attempted "re-flagging" of Irish ferries.

"Re-flagging" of ships allows for owners to hire foreign staff at poverty wages and run unsafe shipping vessels to and from industrialized countries while skirting the labour laws of those countries.

In what has been largely viewed as a defeat, a deal was reached which allows for foreign vessels to be "re-flagged", while only those running between Ireland and England would be exempt.

### Washington, DC

US President George W. Bush admitted to authorizing illegal spying on hundreds of people by the National Security Agency.

Bush, however, flipped the accusation on its head by lambasting the New York Times for "illegally" breaking the story and giving aid to the enemy.

The US House of Representatives voted to approve an immigration bill that includes a proposal for 700 miles of border fencing along California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Days later, the US Senate approved a one month extension of the US Patriot Act after some initial wrangling over the bill.



**Roger Toussaint, president of New York's Transport Workers Union Local 100, calling off the three-day strike by 33,000 members, with union leaders facing mounting fines and possible jail terms**

### Yolo County, California

Republican politicians, parents and students, have filed a lawsuit claiming it unfair that "illegal" local California students receive tuition that out-of-state US citizens supposedly do not.

They are demanding the state refund 60,000 out-of-state college students for tuition fees that they would not have paid if they were "illegal".

What they fail to point out is that in order to qualify, an undocumented student must have spent 3 years in a California high school, graduated and be in the process of obtaining "legal" status whereas an out-of-state student can obtain a \$10,000 drop in tuition after living in California for just one year.

### Mexico City

Coca-Cola was fined £40 million by the Mexican government for "monopolistic practices" after small shop owner Raquel Chavez took Coke to court and won.

The company had threatened to bar her from selling their product alongside other cola drinks in her shop.

### Rome

A violent attack is under way in Italy against the law n194, which allows women some limited rights to abortion.

On January 14, 2006, in squares and streets all over Italy there will be demonstration in support of the 194 and the right of women to freedom and self-determination.

There will also be international solidarity actions of Italian and other women on that day including in Manchester

### Colombo

November's presidential election resulted in victory for hardline Sinhala chauvinist Mahinda Rajapakse, who promised to 'review' the peace process with the Tamil Tiger rebels.

His rival, opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe, was more favoured in the West because of his stress on hard line neoliberalism. Both represented an unsavoury choice.

# Editorial

## Respect: ups and downs of the 2005 conference

*Socialist Resistance* is convinced that Respect is the best opportunity that the British left has ever had to create a new party with mass working class support to the left of Labour.

Unfortunately its second conference has left the organisation in a weakened state. The thrust of the leadership majority's argument was to limit debates on the way forward and advance a much narrower view of how Respect should develop.

An event that should have been devoted to celebrating the successes of the previous year, planning for the council elections and consolidating local and national structures instead became the vehicle for introducing a new internal regime.

The leadership majority used the conference as an opportunity to de-legitimise political discussion and to try to cow anyone who wanted to offer an additional political

perspective.

In a weekend with many low points the nadir was probably Lindsay German speaking to 'support' a *Socialist Resistance* resolution ensuring that a commitment to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights would not be omitted from future manifestos. She concentrated on suggesting that the motion flowed from a "hidden agenda" – while at the same time implying that its movers were on the same side as liberal Islamophobes.

### Debating style

The main problem with a leadership debating style that relies on misrepresenting the other side's positions, virtually denying their right to express their views, insinuating that they have ulterior motives – and using the Conference Arrangements Committee to rig the debate – is that it could be the kiss of death for an organisation

like Respect.

If the conference had contained a significant number of independent trade union militants, peace activists, environmentalists or anti-capitalists such methods would not have been possible.

It is a measure of Respect's need to reach out to these forces that a lot of delegates seemed impressed by such demagoguery.

Delegates who had had the courage of their convictions when voting for resolutions in branches did not feel able to vote the same way when they came under pressure from the top table at conference.

Despite the hectoring that passed for debate, a number of resolutions were approved that will firm up the organisation if they are implemented.

These include the establishment of policy consultation groups and a greater

flow of information between the National Council and the branches.

These are the types of things that the RMT activists who are seeking a new political home outside the Labour Party will expect to have as part of the furniture.

Supporters of *Socialist Resistance* will be working to implement these conference decisions and will continue to work to build Respect at national and local level.

It is clear that many activists felt that the debates were worthwhile, notwithstanding their tone.

They clarified a number of issues which are essential if Respect is to expand.

We think that helping Respect develop into a pluralistic mass party in which the free and comradely exchange of views is standard is a priority for socialists in Britain in 2006.



Cameron: hoping the public have short memories

## Blair helps even Tories to look compassionate

If the election of David Cameron to the leadership of the Conservative Party leadership saw a slight improvement in that party's position at the polls, this says as much about Blair's increasing difficulties as it does about a real revival of Tory party fortunes.

Cameron's promise of "compassionate conservatism" and his high-profile appointment of advisors such as Zac Goldsmith on the environment and Bob Geldof on world poverty will not be enough to heal the deep divisions and repair the declining fortunes of the opposition party.

In the meantime, Blair's government offers the working class and labour movement a New Year present of more of the same.

2005 saw the PM, as usual, tail-ending George Bush and pursuing the barbarous occupation of Iraq, while at home cracking down still further on civil liberties and pushing on with his neo-liberal agenda with its concomitant privatisations, "modernisations" and cuts in public services.

In 2006, we can look forward to further attacks, and take part in building the broadest possible resistance to them.

Blair's plans to gut local education authorities with the vacuous promise of 'parent choice' which is actually a further marketisation

has awakened broad opposition within the Labour Party itself as well as amongst teachers, parents and pupils. Only Tory support is likely to ensure his measures become law.

The National Health Service, once the jewel in Labour's crown, staggers from crisis to crisis as the all the wheels fall off the cart of reform and modernisation.

Meanwhile the campaign to "Keep our NHS public" gathers momentum and begins to develop real roots in a number of local areas.

### Blair's government offers the labour movement a New Year present – more of the same

The attacks on pensions threaten to consign millions to poverty in old age and to tear up hard won gains for public sector trade unionists.

As UNISON begins to ballot local government workers for strike action to defend their pension rights, activists will

be once again convinced that the decision of other public service union leaders to settle for a two-tier pension system undermined the potential of a really united fight-back.

*Socialist Resistance* supporters are determined to be part of whatever fightback takes place in this coming year, be it in defence of public services at home or in continuing to build the anti-war movement and see a massive mobilisation against the occupation of Iraq on March 18.

We are sure all our readers will join with us in that endeavour.

## Spreading democracy?

The war in Iraq has become known as a scam. Few, if any, argue that the reason that the US and British militaries are there has anything to do with the initial excuse – the infamous Weapons of Mass Destruction. This lie has been replaced by another – that of "spreading democracy".

As more comes to light about the US government's role in "outsourcing" the torture of terror suspects, known as "extraordinary rendition", the definition of their "democracy" becomes clearer. In fact, a more accurate description of what the US government has actually done could be "spreading terror, death, fear and war".

An estimated 150 people were "disappeared" from their homes – a practice used largely by US backed dictators in Latin America in the 1980's – flown to CIA "black sites" and routinely

tortured. Some have not been heard from again, while others have been released with no charge.

The controversy continues after senior US diplomat in Britain, Robert Tuttle, claimed that there was "no evidence" that suspects had been taken to Syria to be tortured. Due to prominent coverage of the case of a Canadian citizen of Syrian descent Maher Arar, who was picked up in New York in 2002,

### Blair takes his lead from Washington and has stood firmly behind Condaleeza Rice and the Bush administration as they seek to justify torture and murder.

transferred to Jordan, then Syria, the White House was forced to admit that there has been coverage of the case, but did not comment further. Arar was released without charge after being held and tortured for one

year.

Blair takes his lead from Washington and his cabinet has stood firmly behind Condaleeza Rice and the Bush administration as they seek to justify torture and murder.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that a lawsuit has been filed by 28 Pakistanis who claim that they were hooded, tortured and interrogated for a week by British and Greek security services at a secret location in Athens in the wake of the London bombings of July 2005. Jack Straw has said the reports are "complete nonsense" yet London has barred the news media from printing the names of the implicated agents.

If this is the type of "democracy" that Bush and Blair are seeking to spread throughout the world, then we don't want any part in it. It's time to get rid of the torturers and warmongers!



# NHS

Record spending ... squeeze, and now the freeze

## The wheels come off in new NHS market chaos

**John Lister,**  
Information  
Director, London  
Health Emergency

AS AN UNUSUALLY cold winter sets in, bringing the traditional tide of broken bones, bronchial diseases and medical emergencies, Blairite policies have achieved the seemingly impossible in the NHS – combining record spending levels with record deficits, cuts and closures.

Indeed after big improvements in the performance of many hospital Trusts fuelled by several years of increased spending and expanded numbers of nursing and medical staff, the latest cash squeeze has seen Primary Care Trusts in Suffolk and elsewhere act to slow down treatment and lengthen waiting times in order to save money and defer costs into the next financial year: as a result the 6-month maximum wait for non-urgent operations will soon also be a minimum in many areas.

A rapid-fire and relentless succession of policy initiatives from the Department of Health has left senior managers battered and confused

on all sides as they struggle to meet contradictory targets, reorganise services and deliver more health care than Gordon Brown's budget has paid for.

Even one of the government's most servile former academic advisors, Birmingham University's Professor Chris Ham, has come out in open criticism of the "incoherence" of policies which are seeking to restructure the NHS as a health care market, expand the role of for-profit private hospitals, and drive a new round of privatisation into primary care and community health services.

Ham told a conference of health finance chiefs before Christmas that ministers have got their reforms "out of sync", and put too much emphasis on provision of services and too little on commissioning.

Ham's warning came in the midst of a major reorganisation of the main NHS commissioning bodies, the Primary Care Trusts, which have been urged by NHS chief executive Nigel Crisp to separate out their commissioning from their provision of services.

Pressure from angry local campaigners had just forced government intervention to instruct Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority to delay its plans to hive off the £600m annual purchasing budget for Oxfordshire's health services to a private company, the front runner of which is the giant US corporation United healthcare.

**New hit-squads of accountants will visit the 52 most indebted Trusts and PCTs to drive through even more intensive cuts**

Ham went on to warn that emergency services should be protected from the "excesses" of the new competitive market system that Blair and Health Secretary Hewitt are busily creating in place of the planned public NHS: but ministers are forging ahead regardless with the imposition of a new, half-baked system of "payment by results" which will further destabilise Trusts and PCTs and the services they deliver.

So manic is the obsession

with market mechanisms and private sector business consultants that the US company McKinsey has been invited to draw up plans to split the Department of Health itself into two organisations, one dealing only with service provision and the other with commissioning. Even Nigel Crisp's job could be split into two – although clearly his salary will remain intact as the crazy and wasteful process unfolds.

Out in the real world, ministers have also been warned that the impact of their "modernising" reforms could result in the demise of many District General Hospitals, with a growing share of their waiting list operations hived off to private Treatment Centres, taking the money and staff with them (see *Socialist Resistance* No 30) and pressures on Trusts to save cash through closing local units and "centralising" services across much larger catchment populations.

The drive to cutbacks and closures flows both from central targets to make £250m of "savings" through reorganisation, and from the huge imbalances within the NHS



**Demonstrators fight cuts in Oxfordshire**

arising from inadequate funding of cost pressures, leaving hospital Trusts and PCTs facing combined deficits of at least £1 billion at the end of 2005.

Ministers have seen the answer as simply creating new hit-squads of accountants and business consultants who will visit the 52 most indebted Trusts and PCTs to drive through even more intensive cutbacks, job losses and closures.

Of course many of the economies made in one part of the NHS simply compound the problems elsewhere: when Primary Care Trusts slash back on spending by delaying patients' treatment in hospitals, they simply pass the cash problem on to their local hospitals.

And when Trusts seek to speed up the discharge of patients to the community regardless of the level of

resources to support them, they dump new problems back on to GPs and their local PCTs.

As the chaos worsens, and the pressures on health services increase in a freezing New Year, there are promising signs that campaigners are getting organised and fighting back.

Big demonstrations have marched against the closure of community hospitals, and public meetings to launch local branches of Keep Our NHS Public (see box opposite) have been well attended.

The fightback is vital: Blair is determined to leave a "legacy" of a marketised NHS dependent on a large and parasitic private sector.

We have a few months to stop lasting damage being done.

Let's make 2006 a year of action to Keep Our NHS Public!

## Modernisers drag us back towards the bad old days

**Liz Peretz**

We find ourselves having to fight to save our National Health Service, as the government dismantles it brick by brick and gives it to the private sector.

These are dark days indeed, and days in which we need every argument we can to stop the headlong slide.

We know in the health sector that privatisation increases inequalities in health care; our nation's teeth and sight already show clearly the divide between rich and poor.

This divide will increase as privatisation reduces the available universal services, and the rich pay through private schemes for their own care, depriving the remaining hospitals and community services of specialist staff.

What is not so well rehearsed is the logic which brought these public services into being, including the National

Health Service (NHS) and the rest of the apparatus of the welfare state.

The NHS as an institution didn't arrive without a struggle: and from the outset it was a compromise in the face of strong medical establishment opposition. It was one response from a Labour government with a landslide majority to a war weary electorate demanding better living conditions than had existed in the depression years of the 1920s and 30s.

We know, from memories of those years, the dramatic improvement to people's health which came with the National Health Service.

People remember the immediate impact of free GP visits, free medicine, free prescribed glasses, free dentistry, and free hospital treatment and specialist care.

The health and welfare services in the 1930s and early 1940s had been a

confused mixture of private and public institutions and professions.

There was a Ministry of Health – through which the government tried its best to regulate the whole arena – which had been set up in the aftermath of the First World War, in 1919.

The Ministry worked to improve the health of the nation through sanctions, grants, government circulars, and regular inspections.

Their policy was to keep the maximum volume of service in private and voluntary hands (private midwives, doctors, hospitals, nurses and therapists) only encouraging local authorities to employ their own staff in their own institutions where this seemed to be the only way of providing services locally and then only if the charging could be used to make the services pay for themselves.

This pattern of private and public

provision looked very much like the pattern the government are moving towards again in 2006.

And the crucial point for us to note is that this system *failed*: it failed to improve health, and failed financially: it had to be rescued by the public purse (rather like the railways today), until it finally had to be radically changed.

By the early years of World War 2 the private hospitals were facing bankruptcy, despite relying on insurance schemes; the nursing associations which provided the nation's midwifery were in such a state that there was strong pressure for a public national midwifery service; the local authority medical services had such a labyrinthine system of charging that money was being lost on the administration; and the nation's health record continued divided and poor.

Putting the whole system into public hands made sound financial sense; after decades of trying the keep a 'mixed' economy in health going, the government had to admit defeat.

With this history, with the Liberal Beveridge, right wing Labour PM Attlee, and left wing firebrand Aneurin Bevan all starting to move towards the idea of public ownership, it is not surprising there was an appetite for a National Health Service.

That was the modernisation which brought health care kicking and screaming into the age of scientific medicine.

How ironic that Blair's government, endlessly mouthing the mantra of modernisation is now desperately trying to turn the clock back to the chaotic days of fragmentation, private profit and health inequalities.

# NHS

## Soaring costs and NHS market policies set to scupper PFI

**John Lister, Information Director, London Health Emergency**

A curiously inverted front page headline in the *Financial Times* on December 27 suggests that NHS costs are a threat to the Private Finance Initiative.

In fact the inflated costs of PFI schemes are a threat to NHS Trusts and local services.

The FT highlights the soaring costs of a number of hospital projects, including the Barts and The London scheme in East London, the University Hospitals Birmingham project (long touted at £520m but now nearing the £700m mark), the £1 billion projects planned for Liverpool, £800m in Hertfordshire, and massive schemes in Leicestershire and Plymouth.

The FT points out that ministers seem to have finally realised that there is a huge question mark over the affordability of many of these schemes – especially under the new market-style system

of “payment by results” which the government is roiling out across the NHS in 2006, with unknown results.

The FT understates the cost of some of these projects, notably the Barts and Royal London project, which is now expected to cost not £1.1 billion, as the FT reports, but £1.89 billion (Full Business Case June 2005), requiring annual (index-linked) payments totalling £115m, £67m of which would be rent for the PFI buildings.

These payments over 35-40 years would amount to around £5 billion – or more if inflation once again begins to increase.

### Market-style

We already know that Gordon Brown intends the big increases in NHS funding to end after 2008, and the new market-style system of NHS funding is designed to eliminate any form of security for hospital Trusts, forcing them into competitive cost-cutting.

So it makes sound sense to halt expensive and unaffordable projects now, rather than replicate the sorry financial

fiascos of so many first-wave PFI hospitals – now apparently including the flagship £422m University College Hospital in London – which face large and unbridgeable deficits, with even bigger problems to come.

London Health Emergency has been warning for some time that the runaway costs of these schemes, which helped make them attractive to the private sector, have already exceeded the limits of affordability.

A £512m scheme in Central Manchester has gone ahead, despite warnings that the original £420m scheme could drain off funds from the wider health economy.

The continued constipated silence over the bloated cost of projects like Barts and the London and Birmingham – and many smaller PFI deals which were to have been signed off months or years ago – not only makes a nonsense of the claim that PFI delivers “on time and to budget”, but may indicate that even senior NHS managers and ministers are begin-



ning to see the snags that their blinkered vision has so far kept from view.

The FT figures show hospital schemes worth £5.2 billion have been built or are under construction under PFI, while publicly-funded schemes add up to less than £600m.

### “Approved”

Another £6.2 billion worth of projects are currently under negotiation, while schemes worth £5.9 billion have been “approved in principle” but not yet begun the lengthy PFI process.

In other words if the current plans all go ahead, public funding could account for less than 4 per cent of new hospital investment.

Real prudence from the Chancellor would have meant an inversion of the current pattern, with all mainstream funding for new hospitals coming at lower interest rates from the Treasury, rather than private borrowing that lines the pockets of bankers and shareholders, and leaves future generations to foot the bill.

## Welfare reforms – Claimants braced for the worst

**Susan Moore**

Claimants are likely to be under attack when the government’s proposals on welfare reform are finally published – even if the assault may be less brutal than initially predicted.

The green paper on welfare reform, originally planned for October, is now expected at the end of January. John Hutton, the new work and pensions secretary, promised that the government was not about to embark on “a cuts agenda” where incapacity benefit was concerned.

And rumour has it that the reforms contained within the green paper may indeed be less radical than first planned because New Labour fear risking major conflicts over reform of education, health and welfare benefits at the same time. (65 Labour MPs rebelled against proposed changes to incapacity benefit in 1999.)

Nevertheless claimants are bracing themselves for the worst.

2.7 million people claim incapacity benefit at an annual cost of £12 billion and the numbers have quadrupled over the last 30 years.

This is particularly because the Tories used the benefit and its predecessor, invalidity benefit, as a way of massaging unemployment figures in the 1980s. Tony Blair’s stated aim is to

reduce the numbers claiming by a million.

Incapacity benefit is currently paid at a rate of £57.65 a week for new claimants and usually rises to £68.20 after six months and to £76.45 after a year.

At the lowest rate it is only £1.45 more than Jobseekers Allowance. The green paper is expected to propose only the one rate in future and – surprise surprise – not the highest.

But the core of the proposals will be presented as a carrot and stick with tougher rules for eligibility or hurdles which people will have to jump to remain on the benefit.

They will face medical interviews with government-appointed doctors (working to their own productivity targets to cut numbers) and measures to “help” them back into work.

While of course some people on the benefit welcome support to re-enter the labour market for many, particular those suffering from less visible disabilities and/or those who have been out of work for a long time, this is in fact a second stick.

Trade unions need to be gearing up to analyse the proposals when they emerge.

Whatever the detail, the likely effect will be to increase poverty and humiliation for a section of working class people.

## Keeping our NHS public!

MPs, union leaders, celebrities, professors and hundreds of health professionals have so far lent their backing to a new campaign aimed at building a broad-based challenge to New Labour’s privatisation and marketisation of the NHS.

**Keep Our NHS Public** launched on the weekend before Labour Party conference, unveiling an initial list of supporters for its launch statement which included UNISON leader Dave Prentis, former Health Secretary Frank Dobson, a raft of professors and top academics, leading lights from the BMA and medical profession, and others including Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, actor & writer Stephen Fry, campaigning journalist George Monbiot and novelist Philip Pullman.

The campaign, which also opposes the



current round of cuts, closures and job losses, and lends support to local campaigns that have sprung up across the country, makes the clear link between NHS cash crises and the diversion of billions to create a new, parasitic private sector.

**Keep Our NHS Public** could not have launched without strong support from existing campaigns London Health

Emergency and NHS Support Federation: its purpose is to raise the profile and link a broad range of interest groups in challenging government policies.

It has set up a website where supporters can sign up and make donations online, but also offering up-to-date news and background information for campaigners.

**Keep Our NHS Public** now aims to recruit members and to support and build local groups that will mount an active fight against local cuts, closures and privatisation in major cities across England: it deserves support from all socialists.

[www.keepournhspublic.com](http://www.keepournhspublic.com)

# RESPECT

## Respect prepares for battle on the Preston front

**Preston Respect are preparing to fight a major campaign in next May's local elections, reports Fisher Gate.**

Preston, Lancashire, has seen some of Respect's most successful local election campaigns. In 2004, Respect stood five candidates in the City Council elections, winning 2,423 votes, over 30% of the vote, across a large swathe of the inner city areas and coming second in three of the seats.

This built on the success of Michael Lavalette, who was elected as 'Socialist Alliance Against the War' in 2003, defeating a sitting Labour councillor.

It was a sensational result that helped lead to the formation of Respect.

While Respect narrowly failed to win a seat in 2004, it established Respect as a serious force in the City. In 2004, Respect also won 6% across the whole city in the European Elections – the only area in the North West where Respect beat the Green Party. The combined Respect/Green vote across the whole city was over 10%.

In May 2005, Respect stood in both the General Election and in six seats in the County Council elections.

While Michael Lavalette won an excellent 6.8% in the Preston parliamentary constituency, in the local elections the Respect vote was even higher – 2,795 votes, 10.3% of the vote, and Respect came second in two County divisions.

Respect contested the equivalent of 14 wards, two thirds of the total, on the City Council.

2005 was an eventful year for Preston Respect as it established itself as a serious political force across the city. A Labour councillor defected to Respect, giving it two councillors on the City Council and the ability to propose a variety of initiatives.

Respect threw itself into



Michael Lavalette

**In the local media and on the Council, it is treated as a 'Party'. Publicly it projects itself as the 'Respect Party'.**

solidarity with the victims of the Asian Tsunami and Pakistan earthquake, and was a leading force in the Make Poverty History campaign and mobilisation for the G8 summit.

Respect councillors were able to win Council motions on public transport and environmental issues, and were prominently reported in the local media. We mobilised for anti-war actions and also held

a joint demonstration with trade unions against the closure of a local factory. Respect started to be treated as a serious force within the Council and was able to put pressure on councillors and the ruling Labour Group in particular.

For the 2006 local elections Respect faces a dilemma. There is the serious possibility of winning several seats in the inner city, where the muslim and anti-war population is largest.

This would be a major breakthrough, especially given the 'first past the post' system that keeps smaller parties out of local politics. A strong focus on winning those seats could reap significant rewards in terms of national and local recognition for Respect.

However, thousands of people across the City have been prepared to vote for Respect in the past, despite knowing it has little chance of winning.

By confining its challenge to comparatively few areas, those people outside the inner core who are sick and tired of New Labour and looking for an alternative will not be able to vote for Respect. There is the danger that Respect will be labelled a 'muslim party' rather than achieving broader recognition.

Respect's strong position has also put pressure on Labour councillors in the minority administration. They are in the invidious position of actually implementing a Tory budget after Labour voted against

Respect's alternative budget in February.

Preston was unusual in having a strong left wing in the Labour Party until 2000, when following the death of left wing MP Audrey Wise, her daughter, Val Wise, narrowly lost the battle as left wing candidate for the nomination to a Blairite.

There are still a number of councillors who support left wing causes, most noticeably opposition to the war, solidarity with Palestine and support for trade union struggles.

Respect will not be standing against such councillors, and indeed will be striving to build links with them and with the two 'Labour Independents' on the Council.

Its position on the Council and the wide contesting of local elections, gives Preston Respect a position not shared by most branches of Respect, particularly those outside London. In the media and on the Council, it is treated as a 'Party'. Publicly it projects itself as the 'Respect Party'.

While the debate at the Respect conference about moving forward to a party faltered, in practice Respect is being transformed into a party-type organisation in Preston.

In the same way that winning a seat on Preston City Council showed the capacity for a wider force than the Socialist Alliance, further development of Respect in Preston may have lessons for its overall development and growth.

## Preston report-back

### Fisher Gate

In leading off, Michael Lavalette focused on the positive aspects of the conference; the anti-war debate, environment etc.

When asked about the controversies, he concentrated on the CPGB proposal on open borders and he argued they needed to leave the way open to *Morning Star* supporters to join Respect.

He attacked the proposal for a paper, arguing that Respect had already in practice produced a quarterly paper, and arguing that the last one (on students) was

rubbish and no help in building Respect.

No-one present had been at the debate on the religious hatred bill. I said I was concerned about Respect supporting the Bill. One of the muslim activists asked for more information about the issue. I explained the basis of the bill and stressed that it was part of an overall attack on Civil Liberties and gave as an example the interview with Falconer on Today programme that morning which most people had heard (about the person who read the



## Respect Conference: The debate that will not go away

*Socialist Resistance* is fully committed to building Respect. We believe it is the best thing to have happened on the left in England for a long time.

Respect's conference, however, which took place on 19 and 20 of November, was a deeply worrying event. It unfortunately put a question mark over Respect's long-term development as a broad based alternative to new Labour and its neoliberal agenda.

It questioned Respect's ability to develop as a genuinely pluralist organisation, capable of embracing the bulk of the left in this country.

The conference passed a number of important resolutions in the session on building Respect but the rhetoric from leading members was to the effect that these would be a low priority.

Of course we all want Respect to have an effective, proactive and campaigning leadership, one that can respond to political developments as they take place. But it has to be a leadership based on the collective development of policy by Respect's membership and elected committees as a whole.

One proposal that was opposed by the SWP and defeated was for Respect to move towards a regular newspaper that would communicate with members and give them a means to recruit the new members that are needed for the organisation to grow.

Behind all this of course is the debate as to whether Respect should develop as a party or a loose coalition: the more structures it has, the more it takes on the character of a party. But there is no avoiding this if Respect is to develop as an effective and democratic organisation.

The debate on the issues raised at the conference has continued in many of the branches. Many members were disturbed not only by the apparent opposition to democracy and accountability, but also by the tone of debate and the obvious manoeuvring behind the scenes.

Doubts have been raised that must be answered. That's why these pages and our Editorial explore some of the issues arising out of the conference – and we invite readers to comment and join the debate that will not go away. Our full statement analysing the conference can be found on [www.socialistresistance.net](http://www.socialistresistance.net).

list of war dead).

One SWP member tried to claim it was about who Respect was seen to be lining up with, until I pointed out that Ken Clarke and the BNP had been against the war in Iraq, so we could be seen as lined up with them.

One of the muslim activists said that the majority of the muslim leadership were supporting the bill but he half backed down as he realised that it was obvious they were being bought off by a cynical New Labour play.

He argued it was the devil and

the deep blue sea and whatever position Respect took would be difficult. But the position of *Socialist Resistance* seemed to get some sympathy.

We didn't have time to discuss anything else, though I said the debate on the paper was actually about how much Respect becomes a serious party. Most Respect members in Preston would be more 'pro-party' than the SWP line, but this may be partly a result of local circumstances (see article above).

# RESPECT

## A curate's egg of a conference

By Sean Thompson, (Camden Respect)

AS MY MUM always used to say, I have a sunny and optimistic disposition, so despite some concerns about the agenda and the lack of pre conference discussions I turned up on the first day of Respect's conference with sense of hopeful anticipation.

However, by the end of the second day I left depressed and profoundly concerned about the health and future development of our party.

It wasn't that the conference was uniformly bad; a number of useful resolutions were passed, and there were several worthwhile (if limited) debates.

But overall it was a curate's egg, and like any such dodgy comestible it ended up leaving a bitter taste.

### Positive

The conference had a number of positive features. There were a number of excellent contributions from invited guests, including moving speeches by Haifa Zengana, an exiled Kurdish novelist and Paddy Hill of the Birmingham Six, and valuable contributions from Colin Fox of the SSP and Renato Soeiro of Portugal's Left Bloc.

The number of resolutions on climate change and the discussion on them showed that Respect has at last begun to take environmental issues seriously and the debate on the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill showed that it is possible for Respect members to discuss a 'difficult' issue without too much rancour and in a fairly comradely way.

Unfortunately the conference had more than its fair share of negative features as well.

There were no more delegates than last year – possibly fewer. While there were a few welcome new faces, mainly of students newly recruited in what seems to be a successful autumn campaign on the campuses, most delegates

appeared to have been recycled from the previous year's conference.

Once again the majority of the delegates were SWP members: and once again the conference gave every appearance of being (slightly clumsily) stage managed throughout.

There was no written report from the National Council, and no Treasurer's report. Such omissions could be forgiven if they were mistakes committed by a national leadership demonstrably committed to democratic accountability and to developing Respect as a membership driven broad based party of the left.

However, at the conference Respect's leadership showed itself to be hypersensitive to criticism – real or imagined – and more or less openly contemptuous to any suggestion of extending accountability or actively trying to involve ordinary members more by facilitating better communication and encouraging policy discussions.

The final conference session discussed seven resolutions, all putting forward basically the same message: Respect has to become much more open, more democratic, must involve members more, must have much more (and better) internal communications, and must have more and better agitational material.

### Response

Three of the seven were passed. However the response of the leadership was depressing.

John Rees boomed that if we wanted a National Secretary that sat behind a desk we would have to get another National Secretary (of course we have never had the opportunity to elect the National Secretary, but that is apparently not the point).

George was, as ever, clear and direct about his views. We are a huge success.

We have achieved things

that no other socialist organisation has managed since God knows when, we are "practically a household name", not only in this country but internationally (they talked of little else in Biarritz and St Tropez this summer I hear) and the growing opposition to Blair on health and education in the PLP is down to New Labour backbenchers' fear of Respect.

But none of our manifest achievements have been due to members discussing policy – or indeed it seems anyone discussing anything.

### Talk to ourselves

We don't need a paper, that would simply be an opportunity for us to talk to ourselves rather than the masses.

We don't need any sort of web based forum because we are not going to achieve anything "stuck behind a computer".

We may have no more members than a year ago, but these days people don't join parties, they form networks. So that's all right then.

So it seems that all this nonsense about debate and discussion of ideas being essential to democracy and the lifeblood of a socialist party can be forgotten.

The Galloway/Rees conception of organisation is that we don't need to discuss policies or ideas because that could divide us; we should just concentrate on the main issues that we agree on, and we don't need to worry about what they are because our leaders will tell us.

Where does this leave Respect as a vehicle for the regroupment and revival of the non sectarian left and the base for growing a new type of mass party of the left?

I believe that until we become clearly the most open and democratic organisation on the left we are likely to continue to lose influence within the labour movement and become increasingly politically marginalised.



## South East Essex report back

Norman Traub

Fourteen people, not all Respect members, attended the meeting on December 20.

As it was feared that there would be insufficient time for discussion, it was decided to focus on highlighting the differences at the conference and continue the debate at the next meeting.

I was the first of the two delegates to speak. I said that there had been many good debates and resolutions at conference on Iraq, health, education, pensions and climate change.

Other debates, particularly the one on building Respect threw into question whether we are committed to the project of building a broad based pluralist socialist party to the left of Labour.

Although some of the resolutions on building Respect were passed, they were criticised or only received qualified support from the platform. The SWP and Galloway do not want Respect to develop into a party, but to be a coalition.

*Socialist Resistance*, to which I belong, as well large numbers of independents, believe Respect has to function as a

political party in order to develop its full potential.

An independent asked if Respect were not a party, to whom would elected representatives turn for policy direction. I replied that if public representatives were not bound by the policies of a political party, they would not be accountable.

The other delegate to the conference, an SWP member, stressed the positive features of the conference, the important debates and resolutions on Iraq and social issues. He said Respect was both a party and a coalition.

We had fought elections against neo-liberal policies as a party, but as we come from such widely different political backgrounds such as Labour, the SWP and the anti-war movement, we were a coalition as well.

Another SWP member said that unlike the SWP, which is a party, the Respect membership had a very wide range of views and was therefore a coalition.

A former member of the

Labour Party, who had left it over Iraq but has not joined Respect, said she regarded it as a coalition and this suited her because she did not feel there was any pressure to join, as would be the case if it were a party.

The Communist Party (CP) member said he regarded Respect as a party – and he could not join it, as he would then have to leave the CP.

I argued that Respect had a constitution, which guided its struggles against neo-liberalism.

Was this not the basis for a political party? Historically, Stalinism and Social Democracy had failed and Respect, like the SSP and other radical parties in Europe, was now occupying a position to the left of Social Democracy.

A number of questions that arose were not fully answered and need to be addressed in the future.

What was encouraging was that although the issues discussed were contentious, the debate was conducted in a good spirit.

Although the issues discussed were contentious, the debate was conducted in a good spirit

## Southwark Respect

Jane Kelly

The conference report back was given by Mary Phillips, a long term SWP member.

Hers was a very up-beat report – highlighting parts of the conference which were indeed positive: the international speakers; the debate on social issues (health, education and pensions); the report from Blair's constituency against academies. She concluded: 'It was the best conference I have ever been to!'

I argued that while there had been some good, open debates, there were also problems.

I highlighted the debates on resolutions and amendments put by Southwark: on civil liberties

and the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill and on organising Respect. The former had, as Southwark had hoped, started a debate, now continuing in the letters page of *Socialist Worker*.

I finished by discussing the debate on building Respect, pointing out that Rees' introduction on the role of leadership was hectoring and unpleasant, and that in the debate, perfectly reasonable ideas put about the need to organise effectively, take minutes to ensure transparency, the need for accountability, etc. etc. were lambasted and caricatured.

Two independents then spoke and backed me up. In all it was a positive meeting.

# Home News



## Victories for council housing campaigners

**Maddy Mc Quade (Secretary Cranbrook Estate Residents' Association) describes how they fought and won to defend council housing**

Council tenants in Tower Hamlets have rejected the council's plans to give their homes away to housing associations. Six estates were balloted in late December. Four of them voted to remain with the council and only two voted for transfer.

This is a real step forward for anti-privatisation campaigners. What had been a slow trickle of victories has become a wave.

The only way to defeat the housing give-aways is to get organised as soon as you hear your estate is up for transfer. We began organising in late August. A packed meeting in the community centre heard speakers from Defend Council Housing (DCH) put the case for staying with the council. From then on we had meetings every week or every fortnight. We varied the days and the times so that as wide a range of people could attend as possible.

We used a lot of the DCH publicity materials. We also produced our own newsletters, posters and leaflets. The local UNISON branch helped out with the photocopying. The other thing that

was very useful was our petition. That allowed us to have discussions with people on their doorsteps about the issues. It also gave us a good idea of who our supporters were. A local film workshop, Four Corners, helped us make a video. This had interviews with residents explaining the anti-transfer case. We had it running constantly and provided tea and biscuits for everyone who came in to see it. There is no substitute for talking to people.

One of the turning points was when George Galloway spoke in the community centre. He trounced the leader of the council and won over a lot of residents who had been undecided.

When the vote came we treated it like a general election day. We used the petition to go and "knock up" our supporters. One of our activists, a taxi driver, brought older people in her cab because they were determined to cast their vote against the council's plans. All the work we had done really paid off.

We won with an almost three to one majority. Our estate, along with the others that rejected transfer, will stay in the council's hands. The tenants will still have their homes re-furnished because the council is obliged to under the Decent Homes Standard and the executives of four housing associations didn't get the Christmas present they had been hoping for.

"We only used to face the challenge of non-LGBT Muslims attacking us: now we have LGBT people attacking us for choosing to be Muslims"

Terry Conway from Socialist Resistance spoke to Ubaid, Secretary of Imaan about the issues facing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Muslims in Britain today. The views expressed below are those of the interviewee and not necessarily of Imaan.

**Q: When and why was Imaan created and what is the main work that you do?**

A: Imaan is the new name of the old London based gay Muslim organisation that went by the name of Al-Fatiha UK. In 1999 a group of gay Muslims met in First Out café with the founder of the US-based Al-Fatiha organisation.

Initially Al-Fatiha UK acted as a social support group for gay Muslims who lived openly or in the closet as gay people but also wanted to keep hold of their religion. The group provided the people with a voice where they can talk about their sexuality, Islam, coming out, cultural issues such as arranged marriages, and living double lives.

The group held two successful conferences and had reached out to many LGBT Muslims around the UK and the world. Slowly the number of LGBT Muslims and their partners and friends increased on the Al-Fatiha UK members list.

However 2003 saw Al-Fatiha UK with a new committee who decided to change the name of Al-Fatiha UK to Imaan.

Since 2003 Imaan has taken on more roles than just that of a social support circle. It has been forced in to fighting against the emerging Islamophobia that exists within the gay community. It has also worked to help gay Muslims who are fighting to keep their refugee status in the UK. It has also marched at gay Pride, and fought for gay rights

in Islamic countries. In these terms Imaan has become political.

It has also begun to provide a religious space for those members who wish to express their religion by praying and reciting the Koran.

So now Imaan acts in 3 ways: Religious; Social support; and Political.

**Q: What has been the effect of the growing climate of Islamophobia in Britain on the organisation and its members? How is this manifested in the LGBT communities and what particular issues does this raise for your work?**

A: Islamophobia poses a threat to all Muslims regardless of sexuality.

Imaan has had a few gay organisations talking for gay Muslims and saying very offensive one-sided views. We have also had one organisation be openly Islamophobic, who we criticised, and they have since changed the managing board. Imaan has been fighting such Islamophobic views mainly since the July bombings and will continue to do so.

The LGBT community is very diverse. Imaan cannot and does not want to control people's views on Islam. What Imaan would like people to realise is that what they see on the news in terms of fundamentalist Muslims killing and bombing is not Islam.

Such images need to be seen in its full context of political, cultural and social backgrounds. Education is important and Imaan intends to provide this as well as challenging those that blame Islam itself for the creation of terrorists.

The typical comments gay Muslims hear in the community are Islamophobic talk in chat rooms such as "the sooner Islam is destroyed the better it would be for the world!" in bars and clubs where people question the individual for choosing to have a religion, or fellow gay people calling gay Muslims suicide bombers while they match side by side at the last London Pride.

**Q: What particular challenges do you face as an LGBT Muslim organisation?**

A: We only used to face the challenge of non-LGBT Muslims attacking us and questioning our existence. We now have LGBT people attacking us for choosing to be Muslims.

Another challenge is to be formally recognised by Muslim organisations and gaining their support and cooperation.

**Q: Have you been supported by other Muslim groups or individuals?**

A: We have support from an Imam who does not criticise us and believes we should be allowed to express our religion as well as sexuality.

We have had the support of a progressive Muslim organisation that believes Islam needs to be progressive to work with the modern day world.

**Q: What can our readers, who oppose the war in Iraq and the "war on terror" at home, do to support your organisation? In particular what can our readers who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender do to support you within the LGBT community?**

A: They can first of all reach out and fight the Islamophobic comments.

More LGBT non-Muslim people need to challenge the Islamophobic sayings in society especially within the LGBT community.

Secondly spread the word that a gay Muslim organisation exists and the need to promote and support it.

Join the mailing list, become a member at:

<http://www.imaan.org.uk>

Support can also be given by donations.

Thirdly celebrate and embrace diversity. Include Imaan in your work if it can contribute.

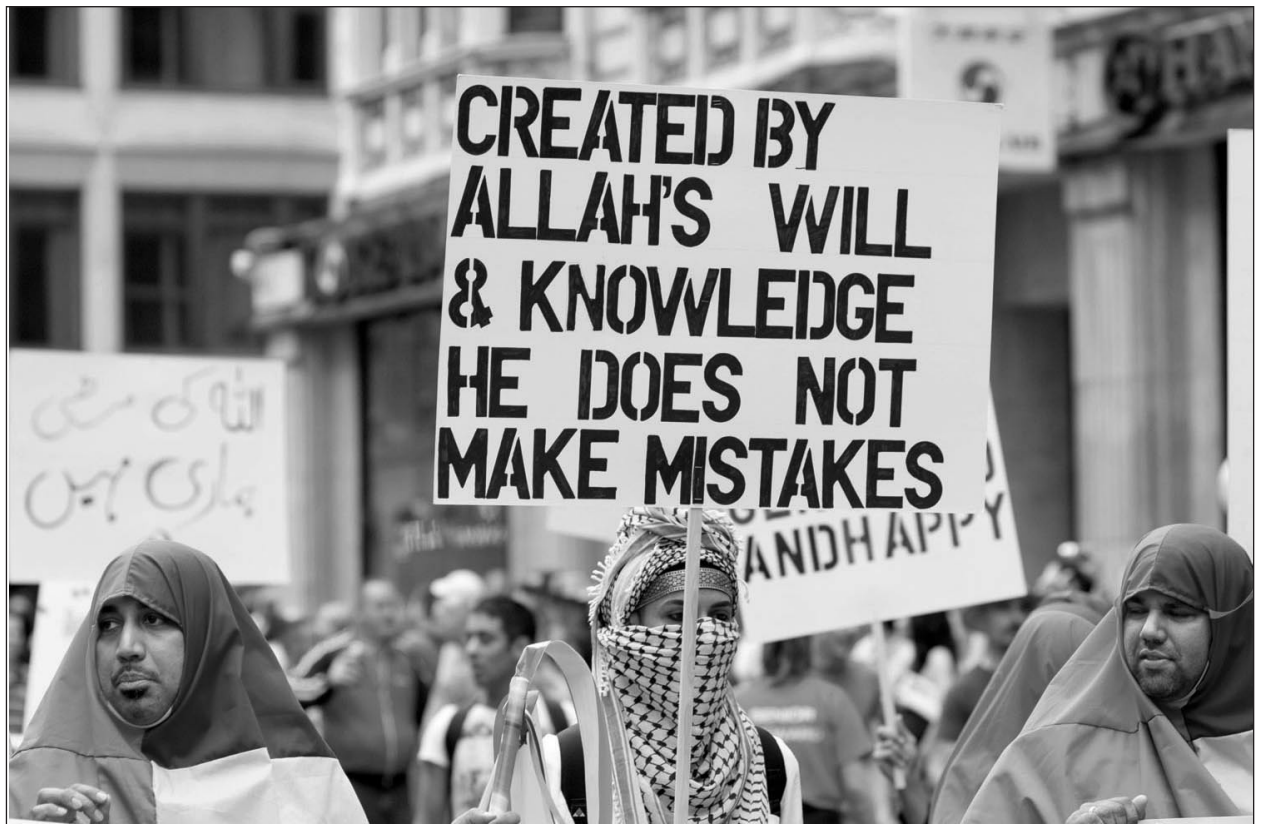
We would like more volunteers. Gay Muslim volunteers would be appreciated, but anyone who would like to contribute we would like to hear from them.



# LGBT rights

## How LGBT rights were won in the labour movement

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The fight for LGBT rights continues in all sections of the labour movement ... and in all communities

**Mark Findlay**

In the mid 20th century the Labour Movement was either hostile to Lesbians and Gays or simply ignored the issue. Transvestitism was completely unknown to it.

However in the late 19th century early pioneers Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter and William Morris associated themselves with utopian socialism and had links with the precursors of the Labour Party.

In Germany, Magnus Hirschfeld established the Institute for Sexual Research. Further back in time, especially in Germany, figures like Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs were amongst the first to argue for lesbian and gay rights.

But Marx and Engels were extremely hostile, and none of these ideas penetrated the German Labour movement of the time.

In the early 20th Century, attitudes shifted slightly and there was some toleration of the underground Lesbian and Gay scene particularly in Germany.

But in the 50s, alongside the cold war and McCarthyism in the USA, there was massive repression and raids on underground gay bars. The Trade Unions and Labour Party did nothing.

In the late 1960s, the rise of radicalism and worker militancy led to the re-founding of first the women's movement and then, from 1969 in the US and 1971 in the UK, the rise of the Gay Liberation movement.

At first, this included both

Lesbian and Gay activism, but soon many lesbians associated themselves with the women's movement rather than the male-dominated gay groups.

More conservative organisations also sprang up like the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) as well as social groups. But the Labour Movement remained largely unaffected and hostile, returned in kind by the early Lesbian and Gay movement.

CHE and many of the social groups avoided any association with politics (especially the left wing variety). Many gays and lesbians wanted to keep as low a profile as possible to avoid "exposure".

divisiveness caused by homophobia in the unions.

This new left was far more supportive of LG rights and began to argue for unions to support their LG members.

In the Labour Party, a new group, Labour Campaign for Gay Rights (soon to add "Lesbian" to its name to be LCLGR) started and lobbied more and more effectively. Debates were held at Labour Party conference, and after several years, Equality became LP policy.

In the unions, at first mainly in the local government union NALGO (now part of Unison), LG groups became active and rapidly began to fight for non-discrimination policies in the

Inevitably the Thatcher government reacted harshly to this with Section 28, which forbade the so-called "promotion" of homosexuality. The section cast a pall over education until it was repealed (way too late) in November 2003. This, however, led to a more radical movement with a harder edge. Groups of Lesbians in particular performed spectacular stunts like abseiling into the House of Lords and invading the BBC news studios.

However, in spite of tabloid hysteria and Thatcherite reaction, gradually Lesbian and Gay rights became ideologically commonplace.

By the mid 1990s, institutions like the NHS were

sex partnerships legal recognition and similar inheritance rights to married couples.

All these rights are very limited. It is still not advisable for same sex couples to hold hands walking down the street in most parts of the country.

Transgender people still suffer enormous discrimination and barriers to expression of their identity even though they now have some legal rights. Gay men are still repressed when they meet outdoors.

Employment rights still stop short of religious organisations (such as the growing number of church schools). Homophobic beatings are

**In the unions, LG groups became active and rapidly began to fight for non-discrimination policies in the workplace. However, a shining beacon was lit by Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners in raising money in gay bars and visits to the South Wales coalfield.**

In practice, the coming-out philosophy of the GLF made little headway among the masses of Lesbian and Gay workers, partly because of the lack of support from the unions.

However, in the late 1970s and early 80s, the ideological battle between the new "Bennite" left and the right in the Labour Movement inevitably began to raise questions about the rights of Lesbian and Gays and the

workplace.

Activists in these worked with LCLGR activists to fight for policy at local government level. Groups soon appeared in the more "traditional" unions, but development of these was hampered by the massive Thatcherite attacks on union rights.

However, a shining beacon was lit by Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners in raising money in gay bars and visits to the South Wales coalfield.

already recognising gay and lesbian partners as next of kin (I have direct experience of this).

Slowly the Blair government introduced anti-discrimination measures in employment (with certain outrageous exceptions for church organisations and charities) and Britain's 19th century sexual offences laws were modernised.

Today the British State is now prepared to allow same-

still commonplace, although the police are now more inclined to take action.

However, there is no doubt that progress has been made, and today a great debt is owed to those who fought to get the Labour Movement to take up the issue in the past.

The war has not been won, and today there is a new struggle to get Respect to pay real attention to the needs of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender people.

# Prisons

No holds barred as

# NEO-LIBERALISM HITS THE PRISONS

## Piers Mostyn

If the quality of a civilisation can be measured by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens, prison statistics are guide to the type of society Tony Blair offers us.

Prison numbers continue to rise. There are now over 77,000 in gaol and official forecasts predict further growth of at least another 10,000, if not double that. Already the number is 50% higher than it was a decade ago (50,000), after rising only 13,000 in the preceding 25 years.

In November, two and a half years after Labour's Lord Chancellor described the numbers as "unsupportable" the newly-resigned head of the prison and probation service, Martin Narey, launched a scathing attack on the penal system.

He described as "simply gross" the fact that 16,000 prisoners are subject to overcrowding - sharing cells which have a toilet and in which they also have to eat their food.

"Crime has been falling for some years", Martin Narey said. "Some crime, burglary for instance, has fallen very significantly indeed. So there is simply no need for us to incarcerate the numbers we do. And in particular there is no need for us to lock away 3,000 children."

## Vulnerable

The vulnerability of young people in the system is a particular scandal - 60% have been in care at some point, 75% have not attended school beyond the age of 13 due to exclusions, 85% show signs of having personality disorders and 25% of males have suffered violence at home.

The system is little more than a dump for those with educational or mental health problems.

About half have lower level



reading skills than an 11-year old. Up to three quarters of men in prison suffer from two or more mental disorders and one in ten has functional psychosis.

There are currently 5,000 in prison that Narey describes as "profoundly mentally ill" - most requiring urgent transfer to NHS facilities.

According to the Howard League for Penal Reform, a shocking 804 prisoners, including 17 children, have committed suicide in the last decade - a substantially higher rate than in the community.

This is clearly preventable given that the proportion is highest in the most overcrowded establishments and almost a third occur within the first week of a prisoner entering custody.

Underlying all these problems lies the cancer of racism. In the decade to 2003 the proportion of ethnic minority inmates increased from 16% to 25% but only 5.7% of the staff come from the same background.

That such a high propor-

## Companies bidding to manage offenders need have no professional qualifications or expertise.

tion of black youth end up in gaol is an indictment of the criminal justice system. But how they are treated once inside is a scandal in itself.

## Murdered

In 2000 Zahid Mubarek was murdered by his Nazi psychopath cellmate in Feltham Young Offenders Institute. The report of the public inquiry into this racist murder is due out in February. It is expected to be

very critical, finding that racism is still rife behind bars.

This is despite the prison service promising big improvements two years ago after a Commission for Racial Equality inquiry condemned it for racial discrimination on 17 separate counts. A further two internal reports found widespread failings - with racist abuse and belligerent behaviour from staff and swastikas daubed on walls.

None of this information is controversial or new. So what has Labour's response been? £2.5 billion has been spent on new prisons since 1997. And each prisoner now costs around £40,000 a year to keep inside. But this hasn't stopped the system lurching from one over-crowding crisis to the next.

The government has been on record for some time as acknowledging that this is unsustainable. But all its solutions point in the other direction. A stream of laws have criminalised young people through ASBOs, increased sentences, reduced defendants' rights and attacked the

right to bail.

According to the Prison Reform Trust over the past five years there has been a big increase in the number of prisoners recalled to custody having been released on licence. In 2003-4 the figure was 8,300.

But the majority of these were not recalled for committing any crime, simply for technical breaches of their licences. A situation completely under government control.

The latest initiative is the privatisation of the probation service. This has been widely condemned - not least because it is being rushed through without consultation or public debate.

Howard League director Frances Crook has stated that "these are dangerous proposals which increase the risk to the public ... and will not reduce crime".

Prison privatisation (which is more advanced than in any other European country) has resulted in lower wages and conditions, higher staff turnover, poorer training and the fragmentation and uncertainty associated with time limited contracts. And it has undermined public accountability and control.

## Private sector

Although only a minority of prisons are private sector, they introduce values by which publicly-run prisons also have to be managed.

The private sector, because it's motive is profit, is bound to want more prisoners rather than less and will look to economies of scale and other cuts. There can be little confidence in its role in cutting inmate numbers and improving conditions.

To privatise probation, regional committees of business people will be set up to "sell off offenders to the lowest bidder", as Crook puts it. Companies bidding to

manage offenders need have no professional qualifications or expertise. Even serious, violent and sex offenders will be managed for commercial gain.

In another massive restructuring exercise, conducted again with little public debate, the prison and probation systems are being bought under one unitary institution. Crook warns:

"The National Offender Management Service will be a hugely bureaucratic new machine that costs the taxpayer a fortune through an increased use of prison and a failure to deal with re-offending. This way leads to more crime and more misery."

Blair came to power promising to be "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime".

But behind the relentless new legislation, privatisation and restructuring lies Labour's commitment to neo-liberal economics. This means only the first half of the slogan applies, because crime is fuelled by government policy.

The prison population in this country is proportionately 50% higher than any other country in Europe, greater even than some of the world's most repressive regimes (Burma, China and Saudi Arabia).

## Prison capital

Only the USA outstrips us in the West. With 2.1 million under lock and key, it has 25 per cent of the world's prisoners despite having only 5 per cent of the population.

It is no coincidence that Britain and the USA are two countries in the neo-liberal vanguard. Stripping back welfare, introducing job "flexibility", longer hours and lower wages not only fuel crime - by atomising individuals, exacerbating social inequality and undermining the social institutions that create social solidarity.

Neo-liberalism also generates a rabid functional need for mechanisms of social discipline.

Only a fundamental transformation of social and economic policies would tackle the causes of crime - pumping sorely needed cash into education, housing, mental health, youth and social services and support for alcohol and drug addicts.

The deprivation, inequality, alienation and racism that is the breeding ground of anti-social behaviour and crime have to be addressed.

# Pensions

## Turner's gang plans another great pensions robbery

**Harry Sloan**

The report from Lord Turner's Pensions Commission at the end of last year called for a series of policies to address the looming crisis in Britain's pension system.

Some of his proposals appear relatively sensible and progressive, but we have to remember two key factors:

- Firstly Turner's proposals centre on driving up the age of official retirement over time to 68 or 69 – deferring still further the point at which workers can access the deferred wages that pensions represent, in many cases beyond the point where workers can enjoy healthy years of retirement.

- And secondly, even though there are calls for employers to be compelled to make contributions to a new National Pension Saving Scheme for each of their employees, the brunt of the contributions will still be extracted from the workers themselves – leaving the main elements of the current failed system intact.

True, Turner has also managed to annoy some of the right people.

He has annoyed Gordon Brown by proposing to reinstate the link between the state pension and average earnings; annoyed the most tight-fisted employers by proposing they should be required to pay towards their employees' pensions; and annoyed sections of the financial establishment by proposing to siphon off a chunk of the potential savings in private pension schemes into a new savings scheme.

But Turner has effectively proposed policies which

life expectancy of the poorest workers, who have lived a lifetime on low wages, often linked with hazardous or stressful jobs, poor diet, smoking and other threats to health, has been much smaller) capitalist enterprises and politicians like Tony Blair are keen to present the issue of pensions as one of "sustainability".

They portray the private sector as some form of benevolent "partner" rather than the organised body of employers that have continued to cream off profits, and which now charges sky-high fees to administer private and occupational pension schemes.

While workers are being expected to pay to get out of

around the world have collapsed, leaving their retired staff and those who had paid years into company schemes stranded, the larger-scale robbery is not just the result of evil-doing by rogue individuals or companies.

British pensioners have been systematically ripped off by governments for decades, most spectacularly in the years since Margaret Thatcher broke the link between pensions and average earnings.

Today's basic state pension of £82 per week would be almost 50 percent higher – £122 per week – if the link had remained intact.

Instead the basic state pension has rapidly eroded as a

**Turner's formula would mean a 25 percent increase by 2050 in the share of national wealth spent on state pensions – but at a time when numbers of pensioners are predicted to rise by 50 percent ... it is a meaner system than the present one**

would avert the worst consequences of the present pensions gap – which otherwise threatens to leave up to three quarters of pensioners reliant on means-tested handouts – without seriously taxing any rich people or big business.

His formula would mean a 25 percent increase by 2050 in the share of national wealth spent on state pensions – but at a time when numbers of pensioners are predicted to rise by 50 percent: in other words it is a meaner system than the present one, and its main initial benefits would be felt by the better-off.

With increased numbers of older people surviving to claim a pension, and a rise in the average life expectancy (although little increase in the

present jam, the problem is not their fault; many workers are still paid too little to stand any chance of saving for a respectable state or private pension.

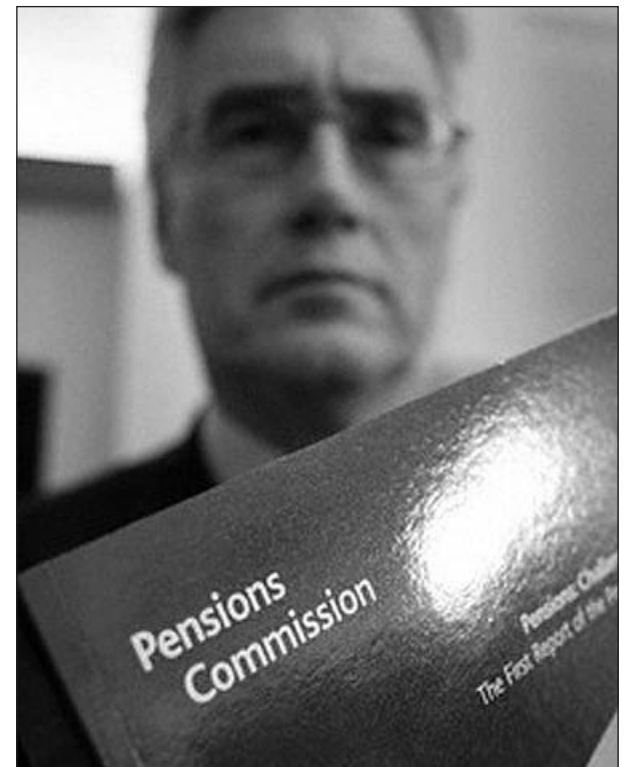
Today's potential crisis has been caused by generations of inadequate contributions from British employers, compounded by the growing privatisation of the pensions system – with the connivance of the TUC and major unions – and the inherent instabilities and corruption within capitalism.

It is the system itself which is at fault. While Robert Maxwell notoriously stole the pension funds of Mirror Group print workers and others, and major companies

percentage of average earnings, while top bosses and high earners – notably including MPs, who can retire after 27 years on two thirds of their salary – have secured extremely generous schemes that will protect them long into retirement.

Gordon Brown's means-tested Pensioner Credit sets a minimum income for a single pensioner of just £109 per week – less than £5,500 per year, or just over 20 percent of average earnings: those who have always been poor are guaranteed to remain desperately poor in old age.

The employers have pocketed much of the money that should have been available to pay pensions. Inland Revenue



figures show that top British companies, relying on continued stock market gains to boost pension funds, took "holidays" from pension contributions equivalent to a staggering £28 billion from 1988 to 2002.

Many more companies cheated their way out of contributing to the state pension by evading taxes.

Meanwhile the drive towards private pensions initiated by the Thatcher government (modelled on the pensions privatisation in General Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile) has resulted in the accumulated savings of

which workers' own resources are used to beat them. Far from protecting British and multinational capital from any increase in costs, and forcing workers to pay an increasing share of the cost of their own retirement, any progressive solution to the pensions crisis would:

- No increase in the retirement age. Pension rights for all men and women at age 60, reducing in line with the expansion of the economy.

- Switch from wasteful, unaccountable pension funds to a Pay As You Go system based on progressive taxation.

- Force multinational and national-level employers to pay a much larger share of the costs, based on a turnover tax and/or a share of their pre-tax profits rather than the numbers of employees. Punitive fines and jail sentences for directors and top bosses who seek to evade contributions, or steal workers' pension savings.

- Scrap the ceiling on National Insurance contributions and increase taxes on high earners to force the rich to pay their full share of progressive taxation.

- Restore the link between state pensions and average earnings.

- Cap the maximum allowable management charges on private pension schemes: nationalise any pension funds which exceed this maximum.

- Elected trade union committees, with access to expert advice, to scrutinise the workings of all occupational pension funds.

The reality is that the private pension funds have

# Pensions

## Pensions; some key facts

■ The stock market boom of the early 1990's saw private pension funds grow massive surpluses. Companies, encouraged by government restrictions on large surpluses, either reduced their contributions or in some cases stopped making any contributions at all. It is estimated that companies collectively saved over £27 billion in 'pensions holidays.'

■ The British Chamber of Commerce, demanded recently that the government raise employee contribution levels to fill the gap left from the 1990s.

■ The end of the stock market boom in at the beginning of the millennium wiped out the surpluses and led to substantially deficits in many schemes.

■ The typical local government worker is a low paid, part time woman. Local government employers estimate that 34 per cent of part time women workers were not even in the pension scheme.

■ A study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and development has described the UK pension system as one of the 'least generous' pensions systems in the world, ranking 26th out of 30 developed countries.

■ A worker on an average salary of £22,000 would collect a state pension equivalent to 48 percent of their after-tax earnings.

■ State pension schemes in most other developed nations – including Austria, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Turkey – provide 75 per cent of an employee's after tax earnings. Luxembourg provides 110 per cent of the working wage. The average across all countries was 69 percent, almost 20 per cent above the figure for British pensioners.



Amicus members campaign against cutbacks in pension rights for private sector workers

## A brief history of the British pension

**Tami Peterson**

Although the first organized pension scheme in Britain was one for Royal Naval Officers in the 1670s, most working people didn't have pensions until the early 20th century.

In 1908, the Liberal MP and Chancellor, David Lloyd George, introduced the Old Age Pensions Act, which was non-contributory and consisted of 10p–25p per week from age 70. This was on a means tested basis.

Before this time, at the birth of the Industrial Revolution, working men in guilds and co-operative societies, which were the precursors to the modern trade unions, had attempted to take care of their older members from money collected in the community.

This could often be a dangerous undertaking due to laws against "combinationism" which were enacted in the early 1800s largely in response to spontaneous protests for food known as the "bread riots".

Life expectancy was so low then that the primary concern was starvation rather than financial provision for one's future.

An initial contributory scheme was set up for manual workers in 1925, but it wasn't

until the National Insurance Act of 1946 (effective in 1948) that contributory state pensions were available for all.

Then the pension age for men was 65 and 60 for women.

In 1959, pensions were based on graduated earnings, followed almost 20 years later by a scheme called SERPS (State Earnings-Related Pensions Scheme) which allowed members of the scheme to be paid 25% of their earnings provided they completed a minimum number of years in the scheme.

This was lowered to 20% in 1988 and the scheme was replaced completely in 2002.

Under SERPS, workers with private pension plans were allowed to opt out of National Insurance pension contributions.

Thatcher's government in 1980 broke the link between the increase in the state pension and the rise in average earnings sharply reducing the relative value of what state pensioners receive.

After various corporate scandals became news in the 1990s, most notoriously in Britain around the publishing tycoon, Robert Maxwell, who had raided the Mirror group's pension fund to finance business deals, new regulations were put in place to allow for compensation.

However, its compensation provisions only cover people within three years of retirement age and has a cap of £12,000.

At the 2005 Labour Party conference, a protest of naked pensioners on Brighton beach highlighted the injustice faced by many in private sector occupational pension schemes.

An estimated 80,000 people are in similar situations and will never be able to afford to retire, having lost all of their pension contributions when their employers went bankrupt.

From the late 1990s onward Britain has seen the introduction of the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG), a support for poorer pensioners, followed by numerous attempts to mix state provision with private savings in the form of "stakeholder pensions", which has become the battle cry of New Labour today.

The Pension Credit, introduced in 2003 and replacing the MIG, subjects half a million pensioners to means testing and effectively penalizes anyone who has saved for retirement.

For example, a single person above the age of 60 who has only £6,000 or more in savings and a weekly income of £110 per week

would be ineligible for the pensions credit. This is a way to keep the poorest pensioners in absolute poverty or force them back to work.

In stark contrast, the pensions total for executives in Britain's 100 largest companies reaches £900 million while around 55% of all pension-related tax subsidies – £11 billion – go to the top 10% money earners in Britain.

As has been made clear from the recent Turner Report, which calls for a retirement age of 68, we are rapidly moving backwards.

We are nearing the age of 70 once again for retirement. How much longer until pension payments are back to their modern monetary equivalents of 10p–25p per week?

It has become acceptable for private businesses to offer no pension protection for their employees.

Other hugely profitable companies like Rentokil are closing their final salary schemes to all workers, while public sector pensions are under attack left and right.

Meanwhile, New Labour repeats its rhetoric that people who live longer must therefore work longer. This rings hollow for industrial workers whose life expectancy is far less than that of office workers. The new pensions proposals fail to take this into account.

Just as the industrial workers of the past risked their lives to form organizations to defend their right not to starve and protect fellow members of the community, so too must the trade unions in Britain today fight tooth and nail to maintain the right of workers to keep their pensions.

**Thatcher's government in 1980 broke the link between the state pension and average earnings, sharply reducing the relative value of what state pensioners receive.**

# Pensions



1920s protest sets the shape of things to come

## Why we must wake up to pension threat

The question of pensions is one that has often turned people off. When pensions are discussed, they often doze off – or day-dream about almost any other topic.

Retirement may seem a long way away to many workers and the size of their next pay packet or the speed of work required of them in the here and now seems much more immediate.

The figures are too complex.

There have been some counterweights to that tendency.

At home it's clear that both government and employers are using a squeeze on pensions to shift the balance of forces against workers. When people hear that Rentokil (which doesn't recognise any trade unions) has closed its final salary pension scheme they know this is yet another example of bosses protecting their profits.

In the public sector many activists have reported that others who have not traditionally been militant are beginning to understand the importance of this attack.

In many European countries over the last decade or so there have been an increasing number of struggles against attacks on pensions.

In mobilising in the workplace, whether in support of the ballot in local government or other action that will be needed to defend our rights, we need to explain what's going on.

Like other parts of the "social wage" such as paid holidays, we have paid for our pensions through our labour. This isn't just true of direct contributions to an employers pension scheme. It's also true of the state pension – paid for out of our taxes rather than being a handout from the generous and faceless state.

But the employers contribution to work pension scheme is also our money. If we work in the private sector then we directly make profit for the bosses – and then claw back a tiny percentage through these contributions. If we work in the public sector then the money that funds the service comes from taxes anyway – paid overwhelmingly by working people rather than by big business.

Pensions are not a distant issue – they are about our right, and the right of all working people to a decent living income, while we are at work – and after we finish working.



## Local government staff forced back to front line

**Terry Conway**  
On December 5 the government launched its latest attack on local government pensions by laying Draft Regulations before parliament that would considerably weaken these workers conditions.

While the scheme is referred to as the local government scheme and covers all local government workers it also affects workers in Further Education, the Fire Service and the police.

The union that organised the majority of these workers, UNISON, reacted angrily: its Local Government Service Group voted unanimously to ballot in January for industrial action.

### The proposed changes include

- Ending the 85 Year rule October 06  
At the moment those whose combined age and length of service is 85 can retire at 60 with no reduction in pension. The change would mean people can still retire at 60 but would face a reduction in benefits of up to 33 per cent
- Protection  
The Draft Regulations are very vague about of protection for existing workers saying that these arrangements will cost no more than what was offered last March. That offer was rejected by 82% of UNISON

members.  
● Calculation of Benefits  
There is a new method of calculating benefits, which allows people to receive a higher lump sum in exchange for a reduced long-term pension if they choose to do so. This change has been accepted by the trade unions.  
The regulations will come back to Parliament for further discussion on February 28 and are due to become law April 1.

### Myths and Reality

The propaganda machine of both government and employers has been working to plant in the mind of the public myths about our pension scheme.

- MYTH 1: All Local Government workers retire at 60.  
REALITY: The average retirement age for Local Government Workers is 64.5 years  
22 per cent of those who retire early do so as a result of ill health.
- MYTH 2: All Local Government Workers get fantastic full pensions.  
REALITY: The average pension is £3600 per year; women have an average pension of £1500 per year. This is 46 to 100 times less than the average pension of a CBI Director.
- MYTH 3: There is not enough money in the schemes

REALITY: Most schemes are in a healthy condition. Some employers have taken pension holidays, resulting in some funds being worse off than others.  
MYTH 4  
The Government has to end the 85-year rule to comply with Age Discrimination Legislation.  
REALITY:  
The Government Draft Age Discrimination Regulations specifically exclude pensions.  
Legal advice confirms the 85 Year Rule can be justified under European law.  
Activists will be working hard to ensure a substantial

turn out and vote for industrial action against these proposals which would see the introduction of not only a two-tier but a multi-tier scheme.  
Unfortunately the recent decision of other unions in the civil service, teaching etc to agree to government assaults on their pension schemes means that workers power to beat back the attacks on their conditions has been weakened.  
Nevertheless workers in this scheme do have the capacity to defeat these reactionary proposals and all trade unionists and socialists have a strong interest in supporting them in doing so.



Local government unions were at the centre of earlier protests

# International

## The outing of Denis Donaldson BRITAIN PURSUES ITS INTEREST

**John McAnulty**

The 15th December outing of Denis Donaldson as a British agent is an earth-shattering blow to the Republican movement.

A key fixer and Gerry Adams' right-hand man, his two decades of action as a British agent call into question the security and credibility of Sinn Fein as a political movement.

Donaldson's unmasking by the British gives us an insight into a murky world, proving once again that truth is stranger than fiction.

Donaldson was arrested as a major figure in the so-called Stormontgate affair. He was accused of spying for Sinn Fein and masses of documents relating to political figures and members of the British forces were seized.

£30 million was spent on relocating and increasing the security of those listed. Yet, following a major enquiry, it was announced 'in the public interest' that no charges would be brought.

The 'in the public interest' formulation often indicated



Adams' right hand man was also a key player for the Brits

that agents are being protected. Donaldson was then outed by the British themselves, as in reality their agent, spying on Sinn Fein.

The outing is a bizarre event, and is again taken as indicating that the sacrifice is justified as a means of protecting more valuable sources.

Dissident republicans have taken the revelations as evidence that republican support for the Good Friday Agreement was actually a British plot, citing the role of British agent Freddie

Scappatici, head of the IRA 'nutting squad' in deciding who survived to take up leadership roles, and also citing Donaldson's role in disrupting the US NORAID organization.

Unfortunately for them, politics remains supreme and Donaldson was working directly for Adams, himself reflecting the failure of the republican programme and the new accommodation with nationalism.

The primacy of politics also applies to outside events.

Sinn Fein claim that Stormontgate, highly publicised arrests around the Northern bank raid and the unmasking of Donaldson are all evidence of 'political policing'.

This is the rebranding of a Sinn Fein theory of 'securocrats' that is dying on the vine because, openly stated, it lacks all credibility. The idea is that a section of the police and the intelligence services are sabotaging the Good Friday agreement against the interests of British imperialism, and that Blair is unable to stop them.

The reality is that Britain pursues its interest, that that interest takes little account of the needs of Sinn Fein and, having signed up to an imperialist settlement, there is nothing the republicans can do as the goalposts shift ever further to the right.

This was true of the Stormontgate affair of October 2002. Whatever the ins and outs of the spooks and Special Branch, the truth is that the police raid on the parliament buildings and the search of the offices of one of the government parties, effec-

tively closing down the political structures meant to stabilise the North, could only have been authorised by Blair.

It was authorised by Blair because that afternoon David Trimble was preparing to stand up and pull the plug on the coalition government, and in the scheme of things the Unionist party was a great deal more important to British interest than Sinn Fein was, so it was politically expedient that the republi-

cans carry the can for the collapse.

The primacy of politics applies today. The republicans have struck their final bargain and disarmed, and can expect British help in finalising that bargain – with personal weapons, 'On the Runs' legislation\* to allow republican facing charges to return, rules that make it easier for the republicans to carry out community policing alongside the RUC/PSNI.

Outside that they are fair game, and can expect a buffeting. There are lots of hidden reasons for the outing of Donaldson, but one cruel fact is that a disarmed republicanism is of less concern to the British and, the more they are kicked, the more the British can hope that the Paisleyites can be persuaded to operate a devolved administration.

They can expect more blows from their new allies as the corrupt deal they signed up to continues to unravel.

\* *The OTR legislation would absolve British agents of crimes and is so corrupt that the republicans have repudiated it.*

**Donaldson was working directly for Adams, himself reflecting the failure of the republican programme and the new accommodation with nationalism**

## Kenyans say no

In November, Kenyans were asked to vote on a constitution that would have given extensive powers to the President. President Mwai Kibaki's draft was rejected by 57 per cent of voters, partly because of its content and partly as a vote of no confidence in the government.

VERONICA FAGAN explains.

The rejected draft constitution resulted from a butchering of a previous draft, the Bomas constitution, which in turn came out of a National Constitutional Conference in 2002-3 – and gave more power to the Prime Minister and decentralised power in the country.

Kibaki had been elected as President of Kenya in December 2002 to replace the corrupt Daniel arap Moi who

had ruled the country for 24 years. But if Kenyans thought that a new President would mean real change in their circumstances, they were sadly mistaken.

Kibaki had served under Kenya's first President Jomo Kenyatta after independence in 1963 and then as Moi's vice-president.

When the ban on political parties was lifted in 1991 he moved into opposition and

founded the Democratic Party, which he still leads, and was twice defeated by Moi as a Presidential candidate.

For the 2002 election he put together a broad based coalition, the National Rainbow Coalition (Narc). Moi was constitutionally barred from standing again and nominated Uhuru Kenyatta, Jomo's son, as his successor.

But the victorious Kibaki, who won 61 per cent of the vote, has proved in fact to be a carbon copy of his predecessor.

Like Moi he has played on tribalism, surrounding himself with members of his Kikuyu ethnic group.

The Kikuyu are the largest ethnic group in the country and make up 22 per cent of the population. Tribal conflicts have plagued the country especially in 1992, where 2000

died in the west of the country and to a lesser extent in 2001.

With over 2 million Kenyans facing starvation, the President is planning to build himself a lavish palace at the people's expense – to the tune of Ksh 1000 million (£800,000). He has been roundly criticised at home and abroad for his failure to act in the current famine in the north of the country.

### Teachers

Moi promised teachers, who live on starvation wages, a rise in 1998, which they were not paid. Kibaki bought their votes by promising that they would be paid after the election – but of course this hasn't happened.

The campaign over the referendum saw the development of the Orange Democratic movement, a

coalition of who campaigned for a "no" vote and the implementation of the Bomas draft. This coalition included some forces from KANU, Moi's party, seven of Kibaki's cabinet ministers and other groups including from the radical left.

During the campaign an Orange rally at Mombassa was banned and eight people were shot in cold blood campaigning against the government.

On November 23, just a few days after the referendum, Kibaki dismissed the whole of his cabinet – thus implementing the worst aspects of the defeated referendum and getting rid of those who had opposed his moves.

Two weeks later he began to put together a new government but many of his nominees initially refused this offer.

However Kibaki was eventually successful in persuading Ford-Kenya party leader Musikari Kombo and National Party of Kenya leader Charity Ngilu to enter the new government, which continues to exclude all those who opposed him in the referendum.

Some leaders of the ODM had called for a snap General Election whatever the result of the referendum.

However since the result there has not been an official call from the ODM and no major rallies have been called against the government either. But whether Kibaki can see out the rest of his term until elections are due in 2007 remains to be seen.

● Some of the information for this article comes from articles at [www.kenyasocialist.org](http://www.kenyasocialist.org)

# Israel

## Israel and the PA

# Election ferment – but what prospects for change?

**Roland Rance**

Forthcoming parliamentary elections in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) have produced political upheaval in both societies. The question is, do these developments represent any real political change?

In Israel, the election of Amir Peretz as leader of the Labour Party has led directly to the decision of Ariel Sharon to quit the Likud in order to establish his own party.

In the PA the Fatah “old guard” attempted to reverse the outcome of primary elections which placed younger activists in leading places on the party list. This has provoked a split in the party and gun battles between the various factions.

Amir Peretz is indeed a sharp contrast to previous Israeli leaders. An immigrant from Morocco, and a resident of the “development town” of Sderot, he is a product of this poorest and most oppressed of Israel’s Jewish communities.

Unlike most Moroccan political activists, Peretz has based his political career in the middle-class Labour Party, rather than the populist Likud, or any of the several orthodox or communitarian parties, and was elected leader of the Histadrut (main union body) in 1995. If elected prime minister he will be the first in that position for several decades not to have been a career military officer, and the first non-Ashkenazi Jew to hold the position.

During his entire political career, Amir Peretz has supported negotiations with the Palestinians in order to resolve the national conflict. Crucially, his purpose in this is to release the state’s resources for social provision for the Moroccan and other deprived communities in Israel.

However Peretz is not a radical, and certainly not an anti-Zionist. One of his first acts as Labour leader, before pulling his party out of the coalition and triggering new elections, was to instruct the housing minister, a Labour



**Few on the left have been tempted to join with Sharon**

member, to approve the building of several hundred new homes for Jews only in the occupied territories. And he has made it clear that he will take a hard line against any Palestinian armed attacks.

Peretz has appointed former chief of the Israeli security service Ami Ayalon as a senior advisor, and is facing strong pressure to “make himself electable” by moving further to the right. Even in Israeli electoral terms, it is far from sure that this would win him support wide support, while it could alienate some of his current supporters.

Certainly his reluctance to challenge the security establishment and his resistance to building an extra-parliamentary movement in support of his goals means that he is unlikely to be able to transform the political map in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Ariel Sharon’s long-expected decision to abandon the Likud (which he founded in 1973) and establish his own party has further altered Israel’s political landscape.

Sharon has been followed by a long list of political has-

bens and would-bes, including former Labour leader Shimon Peres, who was personally affronted at his defeat by Peretz in the Labour leadership election.

Other prominent Sharon recruits include Haim Ramon, Amir Peretz’ predecessor as Histadrut head and a self-proclaimed leftist; and the hardline defence minister, Shaul Mofaz, who quit the Likud after polls showed he had no chance of winning its leadership.

Dismayingly Sharon has also won the support of left activist Haim Hanegbi, one of the founders in the 1960s of Matzpen, the first anti-Zionist organisation in Israel. Hanegbi has consistently supported not merely the establishment of a Palestinian state, but the return of Palestinian refugees and the establishment of a unitary, democratic and secular state in the whole of Palestine.

He says he now supports Sharon because “it is possible that...Grandfather Ariel has grasped how useless is the incessant war”.

Sharon has always been committed to a “strong Israel”, holding on to as much

territory as possible although, unlike the more ideological wing of the Likud, he has not had a rooted religious or nationalist attachment to the occupied territories.

For Sharon (as for his political mentor Yitzhak Rabin ten years ago), withdrawal from Gaza was the price necessary to pay in order to maintain Israeli rule over the bulk of the West Bank.

But this does not mean that he would be willing to make the far-reaching concessions necessary in order to appease even minimalist Palestinian demands.

Thus far, although many on the Israeli left may have deluded themselves with exaggerated expectations from Amir Peretz, few have been tempted to follow Haim Hanegbi and embrace Sharon, a man they have long viewed as their most implacable foe.

Among the Palestinians, too, there have been internal political ructions. Political prisoner Marwan Barghouti, who emerged as the clear winner in the Fatah primaries, has split from Fatah and established his own party, al-Mustaqbal (The Future).

Barghouti has been joined by, among others, Jibril Rajoub and Muhammad Dahlan. All three made their names as leaders of the first Intifada. They have been largely supplanted over recent years by the “old guard” - exiled Palestinian activists, the historic leaders of Fatah, who have been able to return since the 1995 Oslo Agreement.

Many of the older leaders, cronies of Arafat and his successor Muhammad Abbas, have a reputation for corruption. When several of them were nominated to high places in the Fatah electoral list, instead of younger activists who had won internal elections, the anger led to this unprecedented split.

It does not appear, however, that there is any significant ideological difference between these groups. As with Barghouti’s on-again, off-again candidacy for President earlier this year, he seems to

be relying on his creditable record as an honest, consistent activist rather than on any clear political platform.

Many observers expect that the two factions will re-unite, either before or after the election, in an attempt to block a threatened Hamas victory. Hamas has just triumphed in municipal elections, and is expected to do well in the parliamentary election – a prospect that worries Israel and its western backers.

The European Union has threatened to cut off aid to the Palestinian Authority if Hamas wins the election. If Hamas is even allowed to participate the US Senate has passed a resolution threatening to cut off aid.

While opposing the politics of Hamas, we must support their right to offer themselves for election, and the right of Palestinians to vote for them if they so chose.

The election will also be contested by the new Independent Palestine list headed by Dr Mustafa Barghouti of the Palestine National Initiative who came second in the presidential election, with 20% of the vote.

The new list is backed by respected figures such as PLO founder Dr Haider Abdel Shafi, and lawyer and author Raja Shehadeh. The party calls for “unified, popular, non-violent resistance against the Occupation”.

Despite all of the ferment, reflecting the dramatic political background to both elections, none of these new initiatives appears to have the potential to resolve the conflict.

Despite some hopeful signs, both Israelis and Palestinians still lack the political leadership which could unite the struggles of both communities against oppression and occupation, and for social justice and coexistence.

**See also:**

“The End of Zionism?” *Socialist Outlook* no 1, Autumn 2003

*Socialist Resistance* no 22, February 2005

**Stroke could trigger coup**

Ariel Sharon’s recent stroke looks likely to further destabilise an internal Israeli political scene already in ferment. Apart from the assassinated Yitzhak Rabin, only one Israeli prime minister has previously died in office, and there are no accepted procedures for this contingency.

At 77, Sharon is Israel’s oldest prime minister, and he is contesting the forthcoming election as head of a party largely, if not entirely, built around his record and reputation.

Should he die or become incapacitated, his colleagues would fight bitterly for the succession; but none would have Sharon’s stature and prestige, and the party would be very likely to split apart.

In such circumstances, the leaders of the rival parties would also face difficulties in winning support and establishing political legitimacy as Israel’s leader.

In fact, it is likely that Sharon’s death or incapacity would lead to a crisis of political legitimacy, in which the army could pose itself as the only neutral and consensual force.

Israel, like Prussia, has been described as “not a state with an army, but an army with a state”. The army has rarely intervened overtly in politics, preferring to rely on politicians (most of whom have held high military positions) to act suitably, in order to preserve the image of Israel as a western-style parliamentary democracy. But a direct intervention, and even a seizure of power, can no longer be ruled out.

Indeed, an army coup against unpopular political figures, to “ensure national security”, would be likely, in its initial stages at least, to receive widespread public support among the Israeli Jewish population.

For Palestinians, such a development would not make a huge difference. Indeed, by clarifying the nature of Israeli rule, it could even assist in building international support for the Palestinian struggle.

# Stop the War

**Solidarity with prisoners and hostages**

Second statement from International Peace Conference

**This international Peace Conference of 1,400 anti-war activists from Britain, the USA and many other countries demands the release of all illegally detained prisoners in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay.**

**We urge the release of the four Christian peace campaigners, Norman Kember, Tom Fox, James Loney and Harmeet Singh Sooden, and we ask those holding them to return them to their families unharmed.**

## International Peace Conference plans future action

**Fred Leplat (Stop the War Steering Committee)**

The International Peace Conference held on December 10 organised by the Stop the War Coalition was an impressive and successful event. More than 1400 people attended.

The conference was opened with a declaration calling for the release of the Christian peace activists being held as hostages in Iraq.

The conference later heard live from Anas al Tikriti of the Muslim Association of Britain in the Middle East who had been in Iraq trying to secure the release of the hostages.

The Iraqi delegates were Sheikh al Khallisi of the Iraq Foundation Congress, Hanna Ibrahim from the Women's Will organisation and Hassan Jumaa of the Iraqi Oil Workers Union. A represen-



tative of the Al Sadr organisation had been refused a visa by the British government.

Al Khallisi said he had come to Britain to heal the wounds that the war had opened and that the taking of hostages was a blow for peace.

Hassan Jumaa talked about the union's campaign against privatisation and for trade union rights. He said we should support the resistance but not the terror.

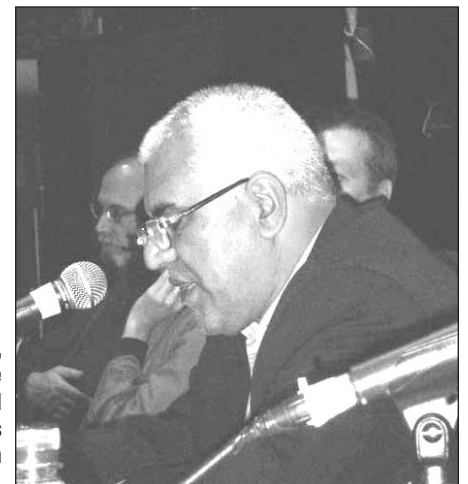
The most moving part of the day was hearing from the relatives of soldiers who had died in Iraq, such as Rose Gentle and Reg Keys from Britain, and Cindy Sheehan from the USA.

The power of their interventions came from their sincerity – they were not “political activists” or public speakers before the tragedies that took over their lives.

Sheehan described how she had been treated by the US and UK press, who were trying to make the victims, that is the soldiers and their relatives, responsible for their deaths. The campaign of these soldiers' relatives is affecting recruitment; now virtually nil in Scotland and in serious difficulty in the USA where there are at least 5,000 soldiers who are AWOL avoiding going to Iraq.

Tariq Ali reminded conference that every movement against colonialism has been described as terrorist and Iraq is no different, and that the purpose of the attack on civil liberties at the moment is to curb dissent.

**Hassan Jumaa, President of the Iraqi Oil Employees Federation**



Walter Wolfgang was treated as a hero. He had been thrown out of Labour Party conference for shouting “nonsense” at Jack Straw in his speech on Iraq, and then subsequently arrested under the new terrorism legislation.

Wolfgang told the Conference that some now admitted that the war was a mistake, but that the US and UK troops should stay to clean the mess. “Now that really is nonsense!” he said.

Billy Hayes of the CWU underlined the importance that “unions in Britain must demonstrate their solidarity with Iraqi workers by supporting Iraqi trade unions.” He argued that

“We cannot offer solidarity in the donation of funds and equipment for Iraqi unions if armed forces acting in our name, and funded by our taxes, are destroying the social basis for trade unionism to develop. Our priority must be to get our troops out. Nothing distorts the development of a country more than foreign occupation.”

The conference unanimously agreed to:

- Organise international demonstrations on March 18-19 2006, the third anniversary of the war and invasion, calling for the immediate withdrawal of troops and an end to the occupation.

- Campaign for a full international public inquiry into the assault on Fallujah last year.

- Give full support to the campaigns of military families in the US, Britain and the other occupying countries.

- Develop an international coordination from this conference to plan further events.

- Campaign against the privatisation of Iraqi oil.

- Oppose any attack on Iran or Syria.

- Other reports, transcript of speeches and photographs of the conference can be viewed at <http://stopwar.org.uk>

## Statement from the International Peace Conference

This international conference, embracing representatives of the Iraqi, British and American and many other peoples, drawn from all parts of society, declares that the crisis caused by the invasion and occupation of Iraq is the central problem in world politics today and demands urgent resolution.

It affirms that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was unlawful, in breach of the Charter of the United Nations and justified by the invading powers with lies designed to manipulate public opinion.

It declares that the occupation of Iraq by US and British military forces has brought misery and suffering to the people of Iraq. The occupation represents the denial of their national rights, impedes social, economic and political development and threatens the wider peace in the Middle East and the world. It has accounted for the loss of tens of thousands of lives of the Iraqi peoples, as well as more than 2,000 soldiers from the occupying armies.

This conference therefore demands an immediate end to the occupation of Iraq, as called for by the majority of the Iraqi, British and American peoples. It demands the withdrawal of the occupying military forces and the return of full sovereignty to the Iraqi people, who should be allowed to determine their own future free of external interference.

We salute the struggle of the Iraqi people for national freedom and the worldwide movement against the war and the occupation. We pledge to step up our campaign against the occupation until it is ended. To this end, we call on the anti-war movement in all countries to:

- \* Organise international demonstrations on March 18-19 2006, the third anniversary of the war and invasion, calling for the immediate withdrawal of troops and an end to the occupation.

- \* Campaign for a full international public inquiry into the assault on Fallujah last year.

- \* Give full support to the campaigns of military families in the US, Britain and the other occupying countries.

- \* Develop an international coordination from this conference to plan further events.

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# USA



## Iraq Occupation Focus: Debates strengthen solidarity of the anti war movement

### Veronica Fagan

The teach-in organised by Iraq Occupation Focus on November 26 saw an impressive array of eyewitnesses bring testimony of the horrific results of US and British occupation of Iraq.

Two hundred people were not only able to listen to these moving and powerful accounts, but in both plenary and workshop sessions, to engage in discussion with the platform speakers and each other about key questions of analysis and tasks for the solidarity movement.

There were differences of opinion both amongst the panel and amongst participants but these were explored in a positive and comradely fashion and thus seen as debates that could strengthen our determination to end the military and corporate occupation of Iraq rather than divide the movement.

I attended the workshop on women in Iraq, a topic which I feel has often been inadequately discussed within the anti-war movement.

My own preoccupation – why there has been little visible feminist organising in solidarity with Iraqi women fighting to end the occupation – was put to one side as I listened to three different Iraqi women exploring their analysis of women's position in Iraq today and throughout recent history.

High points of the day included the contribution from US journalist Rahul Mahajan,

### Build links with Oil union

Hassan Juma'a, President of the Iraqi Oil Employees Federation spoke at a number of trade union meetings during his visit to Britain organised by Iraq Occupation Focus and also at the Peace Conference organised by the Stop the War (STW) coalition.

Following that conference, a special meeting of the STW steering committee was held with those who had addressed the conference from both Iraq and the US.

One of the important outcomes of this meeting was an undertaking from the STW leadership to attempt to bring Juma'a or another representative of the union over to address meetings at various national trade union conferences.

This would be an incredibly important way of strengthening the anti-war movement and building direct solidarity with probably the most important working class organisation in Iraq today.

publisher of Empire Notes blog ([www.empirenotes.org](http://www.empirenotes.org)) who has visited Iraq on a regular basis including during the siege of

Fallujah and the account from the representative of International Peace Angels about her work bringing medical supplies into the besieged city.

Ismael Dawood had come straight from Baghdad – and was only allowed into Britain after a determined intervention from John McDonnell MP – and gave graphic testimony of the brutal human rights abuses

But these and other impressive contributions from Gilbert Achcar, Iraqi novelist Haifa Zangana and from Sami Ramadan were somewhat eclipsed by the power of the speech from the President of the Oil Employees Federation in Iraq, Hassan Juma'a.

Juma'a spoke of the oil workers struggle for workers' rights and the need for the Iraqi people to control the oil wealth of the country themselves.

He made clear that he and the union were completely committed to ending the occupation as a priority but also did not support acts of terrorism against civilians perpetrated by some insurgent groups.

Iraq Occupation Focus deserves to be congratulated for organising a very successful, inspiring and motivating event. An anti-war movement that can put a million people on the streets of London has the capacity to organise a whole plethora of different initiatives. Teach-ins and other participative events are complimentary to not counterposed to rallies and public meetings.

# MURDER MOST FOUL

### David Finkel

We learned in early December, if nothing else, what a filthy little coward California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger really is.

Fresh from the voters' massive defeat on November 8 of his ballot initiatives – which would have gutted public education and teacher rights, further enriched the pharmaceutical industry at consumers' expense, empowered the right wing to rig electoral districts and imposed unconstitutional restrictions on abortion rights for women under age 18 – Schwarzenegger had the opportunity to redeem his own generally worthless life.

The governor could have granted clemency to Stan Tookie Williams, the former LA gang leader who spent the past quarter century on California's Death Row for four brutal 1979 murders.

Williams had long expressed remorse for the carnage he felt responsible for perpetrating as a co-founder of the Crips street gang – but not for those four killings, that he did not commit and in which he was not involved at all.

Williams' conviction and death sentence was a fairly typical travesty of its kind – no physical evidence, incompetent defence council, rigged jury selection – based solely on testimony from jailhouse "informants" claiming that Williams had said he did it.

He was easy to convict because he was a gang leader and commanded no sympathy.

What was unusual about Tookie Williams was his self-conversion in prison, depicted in the movie "Redemption," to a campaigner against violence as an author of children's books.

He became a leading figure speaking out against the self-destructive brutality that pervades American society – the kind of mindless violence that Schwarzenegger became rich and famous by glorifying throughout his cinema career.



Worthless coward: Schwarzenegger

Not only were there then at least two reasons for clemency in this particular case, but the tide has turned against the barbaric death penalty in the USA.

More and more people understand that innocent people ARE falsely convicted and sentenced to die. Indeed, Mumia Abu-Jamal (whose death sentence was overturned last year by a federal judge, although Pennsylvania is seeking to restore it) has won the right in federal court to challenge his original conviction on grounds of prosecutorial and judicial misconduct at the 1982 trial.

In California itself, a legislative vote is pending on a death penalty moratorium in the state.

**Tookie Williams, of course, could not respond to this cowardly, politicised and race-baiting smear, since he was taken that night into the execution chamber and murdered by lethal injection**

But Schwarzenegger not only refused clemency to Tookie Williams. In his written denial, he cited Williams' dedication of a book as "proof" that Tookie's redemption was fraudulent.

The book's dedication to people like Mumia, Geronimo Pratt (imprisoned for over two decades for murder before his innocence was proven), Nelson Mandela, Assata Shakur (a refugee in Cuba from our murderous justice system) and other political prisoners showed that Williams espoused violence!

Tookie Williams, of course, could not respond to this cowardly, politicised and race-baiting smear, since he was taken that night into the execution chamber and murdered by lethal injection – a botched job that took half an hour to complete.

Arnold Schwarzenegger has found his place in history alongside that other obscene object, George W. Bush, who even before he was installed in the White House was already America's number one serial killer, having presided over the death-row assembly line in Texas.

Schwarzenegger murdered a man who was his superior in every respect: Tookie Williams achieved redemption, Schwarzenegger never will.

■ David Finkel is an editor of AGAINST THE CURRENT ([www.solidarity-us.org](http://www.solidarity-us.org)) in Detroit, Michigan.

# Latin America

## Evo Morales wins Bolivian election

**Herve do Alto**

"We ourselves were surprised by the scale of our victory. I am moved, and I thank all the social movements, all those who have fought to recover our natural resources, those who have fought for our rights, those who have fought to change the course of history in Bolivia".

These were the first words of the new Bolivian president, Evo Morales. Someone who in the course of his life has been a llama breeder, a trumpet player and a coca grower, became, on December 18, the first indigenous person to accede to the office of President of the Republic in the whole of Latin America.

The unexpected landslide in favour of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) enabled its leader, Evo Morales, to obtain 51 per cent.

With a result like that, the MAS is sure of being able to govern alone. But that doesn't mean that governing will be an easy thing to do. The Right is not definitively beaten.

The distance between Morales and his presidential rivals is enormous and they could withdraw from political life.

The only good news in the camp of the "neo-liberals" is the surprising "survival" of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), identified as mainly responsible for the massacres that took place during the first "gas war" in October 2003.

With a candidate who was virtually a political unknown, the son of Japanese immigrants Michiaki Nagatani, the MNR won 7 per cent of the vote thanks in particular to a significant mobilization of its historic bastions, such as the department of Beni.

The Right could still have the possibility of "blocking" initiatives of the future Masista government. The MAS only has a relative majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

The majority of regions were won by the Right, meaning that the government's room for manoeuvre could be very limited at this level.

"Now, Evo must respect his promises". That is how a mili-

tant of the MAS put it in on election night.

Pressure is coming from the "base" of the party itself, and the newly elected parliamentarians, like Maria Esther Udaeta, stressed the importance of "maintaining a permanent dialogue with all the social movements", whether or not they are members of the MAS.

Expectations are high, in particular concerning the nationalization of hydrocarbons and the election of a Constituent Assembly in August 2006. Julio Colque, a former mine union activist said, "the goal is to put an end to the neo-liberal model and economic globalization.

"To do that, we have to do away with decree 21060 [a decree promulgated in 1985, which made it possible to privatise state enterprises] which is nothing but a Trojan horse for it."

For Evo Morales himself, speaking from Cochabamba this Sunday, the struggle is not only economic.

"The election of an indigenous person to the head of the Republic will only be of use if it makes it possible to put an end to the colonial state in which we live, and for this new state to be a point of support in the struggle against all forms of racism".

Many questions remain concerning the attitude that the United States will adopt towards the future MAS government.

For the moment, although the United States embassy has up to now maintained a cautious attitude, the declarations of the former functionary of the State Department Otto Reich reveal the hostility that the Bush administration maintains towards Morales, who the United States have often seen as nothing but a "nacre-terrorist" because he wants to de-nationalise coca.

■ Herve Do Alto is the correspondent in Bolivia of Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International)

This is an edited version of an article which first appeared on [www.internationalviewpoint.org](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org)



Victorious: Bolivia's Evo Morales (left) and Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, voting with his grandson

## Hands Off Venezuela conference success – now step up solidarity!

**Andrew Kennedy**

Hands Off Venezuela (HoV) has gone from strength to strength in the last twelve months.

The British wing of this international solidarity campaign held its first conference on December 3 in London. 200 people attended – a remarkable achievement given the climate change demonstration and a rival conference on Latin America were both on the same day.

Speakers included Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn MP, who revealed a knowledge of Latin American politics based on a solidarity commitment that went back decades.

They reminded us that Labour used to have a vibrant and internationalist left wing. The 'star' of the conference, however, was Ruben Linares from the Venezuelan National Union of Workers (UNT), who, in addition to giving detailed and gripping accounts of workers' attempts at self-management and resistance to the 2002 coup, made many people smile when he wondered why God had seen fit to bless Venezuela

with Hugo Chavez.

A more materialist approach was provided by Alan Woods, leader of Socialist Appeal and HoV's founder.

Discussion in the plenaries was organised in a very open way. However, there was a lot of needlessly esoteric Trotskyist phraseology in many speeches which might have put off new people.

HoV would not have been possible without the input of Marxists and they will continue to play a key role, but it needs to present itself as a genuinely inclusive campaign if it is to fulfil its potential.

Socialist Resistance speakers, Jim Jepps from the Socialist Unity Network and others voiced concerns that the slate for the new national steering committee needed a better political and gender balance.

This is especially urgent now that Respect has affiliated (thanks in no small way to SR supporters) and new branches are being formed. One proposal was for places on the steering committee to be left open for new branches

and affiliates.

Jeremy Dear (NUJ general secretary), who was chairing, promised that these concerns would be addressed by the incoming committee.

Readers should build on this success by inviting HoV speakers to their trade union or Respect branch or to their university.

Film showings of documentaries such as 'The Revolution Will Not be Televised' always generate interest, especially amongst young people.

Left-wing trade unions such as the NUJ, NATFHE and the FBU support HoV, while the leaderships of the bigger unions such as Amicus and Unison have tended to support VICUK (which distinguished itself by organising its event on the same day as ours). But many Amicus and Unison branches have affiliated to HoV, which is both more active and more political than VICUK.

■ Contact Hands Off Venezuela at [britain@handsoffvenezuela.org](mailto:britain@handsoffvenezuela.org) or write to 100 Armadale Close London N17 9PL

# Venezuela

On 4 December the parties supporting President Hugo Chavez won all 167 seats in Venezuela's National Assembly, after the main opposition parties withdrew from the election alleging the vote would be rigged. Two weeks later, Chavez' close ally, Evo Morales, won his historic victory in Bolivia (see article on facing page).

As STUART PIPER reports, a new phase is now opening in the Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution – one that is marked by both big opportunities, and difficult challenges.

Everyone in Venezuela knows that the opposition's decision to quit was a cynical manoeuvre. Even their own polls indicated they were heading for a crushing defeat.

At best they might have held on to 30 or so of the 76 seats they held in the outgoing Assembly. It's quite possible they would have slumped to about 10.

This manoeuvre is likely to have limited impact inside Venezuela in the short term. The opposition parties are deeply discredited, even among their traditional supporters.

Abroad, the difficulties could be greater. The US administration, which undoubtedly 'encouraged' the boycott, will use the complete absence of opposition representatives in parliament to try to ridicule the Venezuelan government's democratic credentials.

For this reason it is important for Venezuela's international supporters to repeat as



## After the elections – Defend Venezuela

loudly as possible the obvious arguments against this.

In seven years Chavez and his supporters have won increasingly impressive majorities in two presidential elections, three parliamentary elections, several rounds of state, municipal and parish council elections, plus the crucial recall referendum of 2004. International observers have always found these votes to be 'free and fair'.

In these last elections, the authorities actually gave way on the opposition's only substantial (though still tenuous) complaint – that the system for finger-print identification

people determined to prevent it from being overturned.

The WTO meeting in Hong Kong, two weeks after the elections, was one more example why this defence of Venezuela has become so important for all of us opposing neo-liberalism internationally.

When Brazil and India, at the head of the G20 of developing countries, gave in to pressure from the rich countries, Venezuela and Cuba were the only two delegations that refused to endorse a final ministerial declaration that trade campaigners like

Walden Bello of Focus on the

Off Venezuela, like many on the left inside Venezuela, is right to point out that this reflects a dangerous level of discontent among many Chavez supporters – with the main pro-Chavez parties and their failure to select candidates democratically, with bureaucracy and the failure to implement many revolutionary policies, with corruption and the many public officials who proclaim loyalty to the process while lining their own pockets.

Put another way, you could say this reflects a deepening disaffection with the structures of representative democ-

while simultaneously calling for committees for the defence of the revolution to be set up locally and nationally to push in the same direction.

As marxists we no doubt share these objectives. But there seems to be a link missing.

Moving rapidly in this direction will subject the revolutionary process to absolutely huge pressures, both externally and domestically.

These can only be withstood if such measures are stamped with the kind of legitimacy that only massive and radical, grass-roots

taking.

Calling in the abstract for local committees, councils or soviets will not fill that gap.

However, there are already, in practice, some experiences that may begin to point the way.

The examples of co-management, with many aspects of workers' control, like that in the aluminium industry, or the still incipient attempts to build effective participatory democracy in some communities, through communal and local public planning councils and participatory budgets, are probably the best starting points.

There is no Chinese wall separating these two aspects of the process. But it is important to understand what comes first.

In many ways this is just to restate in contemporary terms the lessons of what revolutionary marxists have usually called permanent revolution – the idea that in 'semi-colonial' countries revolutionary struggles would generally develop on the terrain of a struggle for democracy, but would soon find that they had to begin to tackle questions of socialist transformation as well.

It is not clear that a majority of Chavez supporters are yet convinced of the need to radicalise the content of the revolutionary process in a clearly socialist direction.

The very small vote for explicitly far-left candidates, like those of the PRS (Party of Revolution and Socialism), or the MBP (Movement of the Popular Bases), in spite of the central role members of these organisations play in the most militant expressions of the trade union and peasant movements respectively, suggests that they are not.

But there is plenty of evidence that many of them do want to take greater control of

**It is not clear that a majority of Chavez supporters are yet convinced of the need to radicalise the content of the revolutionary process in a clearly socialist direction.**

of voters could, theoretically, be cross checked with computerized voting records to identify who had voted for who – and that even after this system was abandoned the opposition still withdrew.

There is also the small fact that the revolutionary process has repeatedly been defended in the streets and in the workplaces by millions of working

Global South have called a recipe for de-industrialisation and the wholesale privatization of services in the third world.

However, the elections also sounded a warning. At 25 per cent, turnout was low. Not dramatically so, given the circumstances and historical and regional patterns.

But Alan Woods of Hands

racy and indeed the capitalist state.

Alan Woods says the only answer is to demand that the new National Assembly immediately nationalise the banks, the land and the many closed factories, to deprive the counter revolution of its economic power and social base and take the revolution beyond the point of no return,

democracy can confer.

One of the biggest weaknesses of the Venezuelan process, recognized by many of those involved, is the lack of both effective mass parties and strong, nationally-organised, social movements – the kinds of structures that could begin to provide this kind of democratic control over the direction the process is

the process.

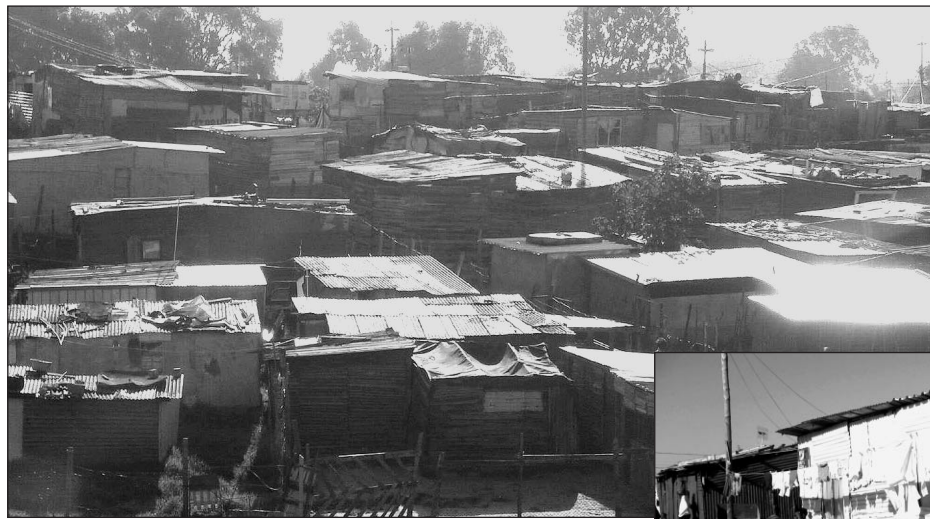
So helping them to develop radical forms of direct democracy, as the embryo of a new kind of state, may be the most important first step towards the kind of deepening of the process that Alan Woods is quite right to insist will be necessary to take the Venezuelan revolution beyond the point of no return.

# South Africa

## SOUTH AFRICA: ANC GOVERNMENT FAILS HOUSING TEST

More than ten years after the end of the legal paraphernalia of apartheid, Terry Conway considers how far the African National Congress (ANC) governments and their supporters at provincial and city level have overcome its legacy in the field of housing.

Housing, like health care and education is one of the clearest ways to assess how a par-



particular society is functioning. Most major cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America have huge shantytowns and big populations of people, including children, living on the streets.

The United States, the richest country in the world, has

large numbers of people, predominantly black, living on the streets and many others living in unsafe and unhealthy substandard accommodation.

In South Africa, the question of housing has played out a very particular tune.



Apartheid laws forbade racially mixed communities and led to the forcible break up of those that did exist.

Between 1913 and 1983, it is estimated that 3.9 million people were forcibly removed from their homes, separated from friends and family and dumped in far-flung places from which travel to school or work was lengthy and expensive.

And in fact segregation in housing – as in other things – predated the apartheid state of 1948.

The first “locations” were established at the turn of the twentieth century and the first clearances of multi-ethnic areas took place in the 1920’s.

On a recent visit to South Africa, my first, it was the question of housing that provided the most graphic illustration of the neo-liberal path being followed by Thabo Mbeki’s ANC government – and its unsurprising but tragic failure to provide homes of a decent standard for the majority black population.

luxury flats are being thrown up and their and in many of the extremely white coastal resorts prices rival those in London.

Housing in the city itself remains very segregated with for example the clearly delineated Muslim quarter of Bo Kaap – though a few older families are beginning to sell out to property developers.

In the meantime thousands of people continue to live in unconverted hostels or in informal settlements without legal electricity supplies or clean water supplies.

Illegal supplies of electricity are extremely dangerous and in a situation where shacks are constructed almost entirely of highly flammable material such as wood, the danger of fire is extremely high.

But it is not just a question of people not being able to get out of these dangerous and denigrating conditions.

In 1996, the percentage of people living in informal settlements in the Cape Metropolitan Area was 16%. Statistics South Africa puts the current growth rate of informal settlements at 14%; this, it is expected, will continue until 2010 and thereafter decline to an annual growth rate of 3%. I witnessed settlements which were being thrown up before my eyes

And it is not just a question of the state at national, provincial or city level not putting in sufficient resources because they are providing other essential public services instead. Far from it.

In the Western Cape the big project at the moment is the construction of the N2 Gateway. This involves massive investment in road improvement and the concomitant beautification of the access route from Cape Town International airport into the city.

The national housing minister Lindiwe Sisulu has explicitly stated that the intention to eradicate squatter housing by 2010 is directly related to the hosting of the soccer world Cup tournament in 2010.

It is difficult to see how this objective could be achieved given the scale of the need for housing and the fact that the townships of Cape Town are precisely situated in this physical space.

But it illustrates the relative priority given to the need to please tourists and to fulfill the basic needs of the people of South Africa.

### The story of District Six

From the passing of the Urban Areas act in 1923 to the elections of 1996, which saw Nelson Mandela, elected president, the state attempted to control where black and coloured people lived. This was an ongoing process over decades with periods of more activity on this front followed by lulls followed by more clearances.

The oldest current township in the Cape Town region is Langa that was created in the 1920s as an alternative to Ndembu, an earlier location which grew up at the turn of the 20th century, but which was cleared under pressure from the middle class white residents of neighbouring Pinelands.

Langa came to prominence in 1960 when large numbers of its residents, along with those of the Johannesburg township of Sharpeville protested against the hated pass laws. On March 20 police opened fire in both places: 69 people died in Sharpeville and 7 in Langa.

The most infamous clearance in the Cape Town area was District Six, which was decimated after being designated a white area. Around 100,000 people were

moved between 1967-82, mainly to the Cape Flats area. Apart from the racism of the apartheid state there was also an economic motivation for this particular attack as District Six was on prime real estate. It had been a really mixed area with a majority “coloured” population but with significant numbers of black, Indian and Jewish people. In fact the area was not really developed during the rest of apartheid rule and most of it still lies unused.

Indeed the story of District Six is another way to measure what the ANC have and have not achieved. The first of the displaced residents were able to move back to the area in February 2004 when 12 houses were built on the site and those over 80 allocated to them. Sadly one woman died the day she was due to move.

This October thirty squatter families who had been attempting to find an existence in the city for quite a while set up their shacks in District Six, to the consternation of those elderly residents who have gone back, not to mention of those still waiting to return home.

Despite this the City Council formalized their settlement and allowed them



District Six was never redeveloped

to stay until alternative accommodation could be found. They were moved on about two weeks later.

The Council’s response was not about their concern for homeless people. It suits them to play divide and rule over different groups of the displaced. Fighting amongst themselves means people are less likely to unite and demand their rights to decent housing in a place of their choosing.

\* The apartheid state categorised racial groups as black (or sometimes Bantu), coloured (by which they meant mixed race), Indian and white. The term coloured is still used by the South African government today.

budget that has on average been less than 2%. This involved a subsidy scheme where the amount was only recently increased to approximately R30,000 per dwelling. Households with an income of below R3500 can receive a government subsidy that is scaled according to income with only the most impoverished being entitled to a full subsidy.

Those who are above the bottom line have to foot the bill for the difference with a bond-type arrangement.

The housing backlog stands at 261,000 units with a delivery capacity of 11,000 units per annum. This therefore means it would take over 23 years more to eliminate homelessness at this rate. 800,000 people remain on the waiting list, some of whom have been waiting for up to 20 years.

In the metropolitan area of Cape Town, of a total population of 3.2 million, 1million black people live in the townships – the locations as were. The largest township Khayelitsha has a population of about 500,000 people.

In the smaller city centre,

# Our history

**The Labour Party is 100 years old this month: John Lister looks back at the events a century ago to see what lessons they offer for us today.**

“The working class at the polls gave the House of Commons a refreshingly new look,” says the official history of the TUC – about the general election of January 1906.

Exactly 100 years ago the first faltering steps were taken towards the establishment of a parliamentary political party that would stand independently of the dominant Conservatives and Liberals, and represent the interests, if not of the working class, then at least of the trade unions and their members.

54 “Labour” MPs were elected, 29 of them supported by the Labour Representation Committee, and others by the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC.

The LRC had been set up in February 1900, largely in response to a series of intensifying legal attacks on the trade unions.

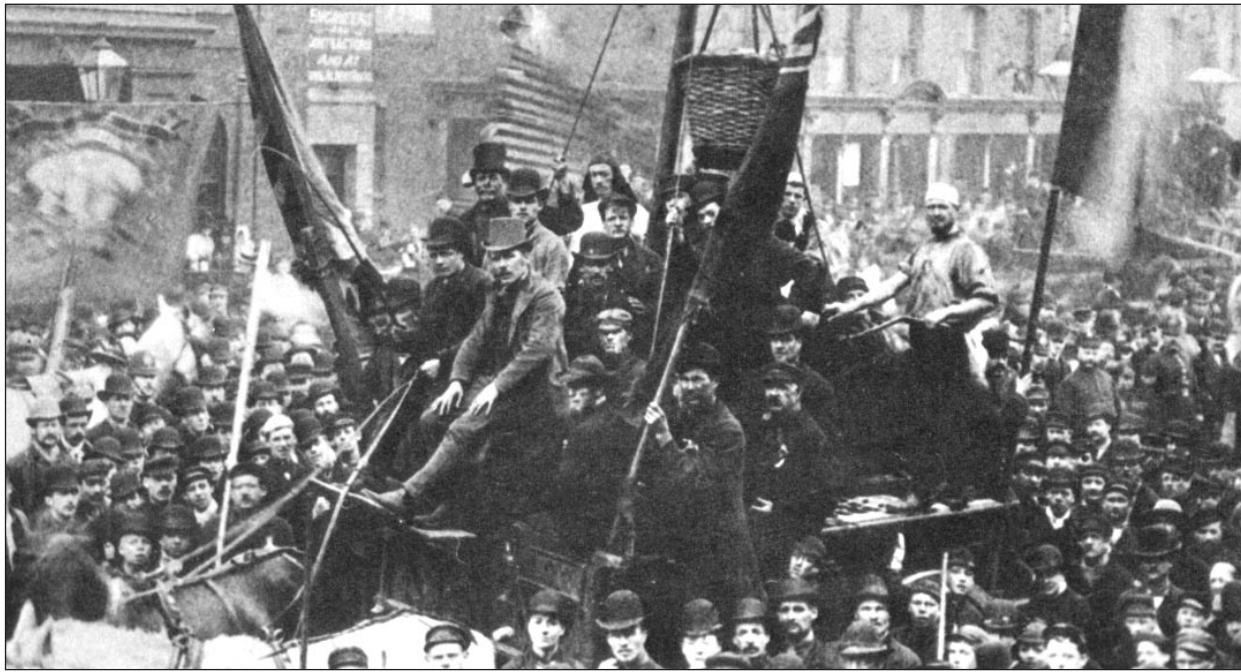
Although it initially only involved a minority of unions, the LRC constituted a significant advance for a trade union movement whose main leaders until the final decade of the 19th century had been Liberal party supporters.

As recently as 1872 gas workers had been jailed for 12 months for “conspiracy” to break contracts after striking to challenge the victimisation of union members. In 1873 16 women married to agricultural workers had been sentenced to prison with hard labour for intimidating scabs.

Trade union leaders began to recognise the urgent need for new laws to guarantee their right to organise. In 1874 the TUC’s Parliamentary Committee tabled test questions on policies to candidates from the main parties, and endorsed ten ‘working class’ candidates. Two trade unionists were also endorsed as candidates by the Liberals, and were elected as the first “Lib-Lab” MPs.

In 1875 new legislation ended the use of the conspiracy laws in trade disputes, limited the penalties for breach of contract, and legalised peaceful picketing: the Parliamentary Committee pronounced these to be ‘perfect’ reforms, satisfying all their demands!

However in the mid 1880s socialists, many of them



London dockers were among the manual workers mobilised in the building of new general unions at the end of the 19th century



**Keir Hardie, the Scottish miners’ leader, called for a new party for the labour movement in the 1890s, and became the first leader of the Labour Party**

## MAKING THE BREAK – FROM THE POLITICS OF THE RULING CLASS

members or adherents of the Social Democratic Federation, began to agitate for a more aggressive, militant approach by the union leaders, especially centred on the fight for a legal 8-hour day.

New unions, influenced and led by socialists, began organising unskilled workers, including gas workers and dockers, in new, militant and successful struggles, and in the early 1890s Keir Hardie from the Scottish miners began to argue for a new party for the labour movement.

From 1893 onwards, despite heated opposition, the TUC Congress agreed resolutions calling for support only to Parliamentary candidates pledged to the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution.

A succession of legal judgments exposed the gaping holes in the 1875 Act. Employers went to court demanding compensation for the impact of union action including the blacklisting of unfair employers: and in 1896-7 came the landmark Lyons v Wilkins ruling which effectively outlawed even peaceful picketing.

In 1897-98 a newly-militant employers’ federation imposed a 6-month lock-out against the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and in 1898 the Employers’ Parliamentary Council was established, to press for even further restrictions on trade union rights.

In August 1900 came a far-reaching legal challenge in the form of the Taff Vale Judgement, which found that the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) was liable to pay £23,000 damages to the rail companies in compensation for losses inflicted by an official strike.

When this ruling was upheld by the House of Lords in 1901 it was clear that it would potentially undermine the unions’ ability to wage successful strike action: but it had also become clear that with the House of Commons dominated by two capitalist parties, there were only limited possibilities to reverse unjust laws. Fresh efforts were put into political organisation in the run-up to the 1906 election.

After negotiations at top level between the Labour

Representation Committee, the TUC’s Parliamentary Committee and the Independent Labour Party, 40 candidates were endorsed by the unions and the LRC; another ten standing under the banner of the LRC were sponsored by the ILP; and 15 candidates, mainly from mining unions were backed by the Parliamentary Committee, in addition to a few other Lib-Labs running independently.

Even though the LRC immediately after the election changed its name to the Labour Party, and established itself with officers and whips in the Commons, this did not reflect any genuine political break from the Liberals by many of the 54 elected, few of whom were socialists.

However the weight of the new working class representation was sufficient to press the newly-elected Liberal government to introduce a new Trades Disputes Act, restoring the trade unions’ immunities from action for damages and peaceful picketing.

While the embryonic Labour Party, lacking any coherent programme or inde-

pendent policy, then largely lost its way, the Liberals attempted to head off any further political differentiation by carrying a number of progressive social measures offering health and unemployment insurance.

100 years on, the trade union movement again stands at a political crossroads: Tony Blair’s “modernisation” of the Labour Party has stripped it of any connection even to the reformist, parliamentary notions of “socialism” that it developed in the early 20th century, while New Labour proudly boasts its commitment to uphold Thatcherite anti-union legislation which leaves unions fewer rights than they secured in 1906.

New Labour’s ‘modernisation’ has cast it in the mould of the Liberal Party a century ago, and Blairism has killed any possibility of ‘reclaiming’ the party for the cause of labour.

Once again a new party is needed ... and once again union leaders and left Labour MPs cling on desperately to the wreckage of the organisation they think they know, for fear of taking the vital steps that are required to form a new mass workers’ party.

# Activist's DIARY

**Tuesday January 17**  
Birmingham Socialist Resistance Forum: Why Labour's education policy is unravelling . Bennett's Bar, 7.30.

**Wednesday January 18**  
London Socialist Resistance Forum. Where are we in the battle for LGBT rights with Mark Findlay and Terry Conway, see [www.socialistresistance.net](http://www.socialistresistance.net) for venue

**Saturday January 21**  
**LONDON** An open meeting to discuss the crisis in working class 12 - 3pm. Friends House, Euston Road. Organised by the RMT Tony Benn MP, John McDonnell MP, Jean Lambert MEP, Colin Fox MSP, John Marek AM and Councillor Dave Nellist. All welcome

**National demonstration**  
Justice for British residents in Guantanamo Bay Support the Hunger Strikers- Shut down all illegal US jails **12 noon** Tothill Street, London (nearest tube St

**2006 bargain**  
Special New Year's sale price of the brilliant Tower Hamlets Respect calendar - End of Year bargain price of £5. Rush your orders (cheques made payable to Respect East London) to: Maggie Falshaw, 23 Adine Road, London E13 8LL

James Park). Called by Save Omar Deghayes campaign; Birmingham Guantanamo Campaign; The Manchester Guantanamo and Belmarsh Campaign . For more details go to [www.save-omar.org.uk](http://www.save-omar.org.uk)

**Saturday January 28**  
**MANCHESTER: Defy Section 9 Working conference**, 11am-5pm, Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street. Organised by National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk). S supported by Liberty, British

Association of Social Workers, Unison branches, NUT branches  
**LONDON** Planning meeting for a rank and file public sector alliance Exmouth Arms, Starcross St, near Euston station, London NW1.  
**LONDON:** Respect Burns night celebration Cittee of Yorke Public House, 22 High Holborn, London WC1 7-11pm,

**Wednesday February 8**  
**LONDON** Defend Council Housing Lobby of Parliament Tenants, trade unionists and councillors will be taking part in a Mass Rally and Lobby of Parliament on Feb 8. Housing professionals and MPs will join a broad platform of speakers and lead a range of workshops  
**Saturday February 18**  
**LONDON.** Unite Against Fascism national conference TUC Conference Centre, Congress House, Great Russell Street London WC1.

## Border crossing

Tickets, a film directed by Ermanno Olmi, Abbas Kiarostami and Ken Loach

**Reviewed by Piers Mostyn**

ANYONE regularly travelling on public transport is familiar with an experience that can bring out the best and worst in all of us.

People from all walks of life interact involuntarily and in close proximity on a continuous basis. Conflict often results, but also warmth and humanity.

In this film three directors have collaborated in weaving together three inter-connected stories rooted in this everyday experience, but based on a long train ride from Central Europe to Rome.

Although each directs a separate story in succession covering the course of the journey, there are themes and characters in common with no break in between.

The first segment, by Italian director Olmi is per-

haps the most traditional – an older man wistfully sentimentalising about a brief encounter.

But there is tension as his reminiscing in the first class dining coach is played against a background of armed soldiers continually harassing the less well off passengers who are glimpsed crammed uncomfortably in the corridors.

Class division and incessant security procedures provide such an uneasy backdrop that he rises from his reverie to assist a young mother whose child is in distress.

Then acclaimed Iranian director Kiarostami directs a scene centring on a caricature of an obnoxiously snobbish woman travelling to a funeral service – continually bullying the young man accompanying her, fellow travellers and the railway staff.

It's a comic portrayal of how friction is inevitable when people approach public spaces by aggressively staking out their individual

claim. A more empathic approach is represented by her harassed young travelling companion.

Best of all is Ken Loach's final segment, scripted by long time collaborator Paul Laverty and one of the sharpest pieces of film making I have seen in a while.

Three Celtic supporters, brilliantly played by actors who also starred in Loach's Sweet Sixteen, are on the way to an international match.

A very dynamic situation quickly develops that allows the viewer no moment of complacency.

One minute they are offering a migrant Albanian boy and his family their sandwiches, the next they suspect him of stealing one of their tickets. The tension is cranked up as they wrestle with contradictory emotions, switching from basic human solidarity to racism and back again in moments with a thrilling, almost revolutionary, finale as the train arrives at the Rome terminal.

Quite how this was filmed is difficult to imagine. It certainly looks as though it all takes place on a real train with real passengers.

These are subtle insights into how humanity strives to and sometimes succeeds in over-coming borders and divisions.

Moving pictures!

If you like what you've read or you want to find out more about Socialist Resistance, get in touch with us by ringing 020 8800 7460, or email [contact@socialistresistance.net](mailto:contact@socialistresistance.net)

## Socialist Resistance

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## Next issue

The next issue of *Socialist Resistance* will be produced on the weekend February 4-5 and distributed the following week.

The deadline for feature articles and for letters (which are welcome on any topic, up to 400 words) will be Monday January 30. Diary items reviews and local news are also welcome.

# Review

## BIRD FLU: GET READY FOR THE PANDEMIC

**Ken Glanfield**

In November 2005 influenza vaccination hit the national headlines as GP surgeries around the UK ran out of vaccine to treat those most at risk – the elderly, infirm and very young.

This coincided with a media frenzy linking the outbreak of avian flu in South East Asia and the associated human deaths with an inevitable human influenza pandemic to rank alongside that of 1918, ‘Spanish flu’, which killed an estimated 40-50 million worldwide.

Influenza is a virus infection that originated in birds and crossed to humans when birds were first domesticated. A virus is a crude ‘dirty bomb’.

Human cells have around 30,000 genes, the E.coli bacterium 4000, and an influenza virus about 10. It comes wrapped in its own protein coat and it’s these proteins that allow it to bind to a host cells surface (protein) receptor from where it can either invade the cell or inject genetic material into it.

Because of this most viruses infect single species to bind proteins must ‘recognise’ one another. Once inside the cell it usurps the cell’s ‘machinery’ to copy itself, its genes and protein coat, replicating, before ‘bursting’ out and infecting new cells.

In this process the host cell is killed. The ‘common’ flu virus is of high virulence, easy transmission person to person, but low ‘pathogenicity’, causing only mild symptoms in fit, healthy people.

The influenza virus is an Orthomyxovirus whose genes contain single stranded RNA. Unlike a human cell, where gene replication of double-stranded DNA is monitored, checked and mistakes corrected, mistakes in copying the genes in this group of viruses go uncorrected, they mutate and very rapidly.



**Anti-viral drugs exist, but are expensive, in short supply, difficult to make, protected by patent and uncertain in outcome.**

Thus, at any time there are many variant strains of the virus in existence.

Mutation may make the virus less or more pathogenic. The flu vaccine in any year is an attenuated, weakened mixture of those viral strains in existence thought most likely to cause infection.

The vaccine enables the immune system to prepare its defences against the expected attack in order to repel it, offering protection to those deemed ‘at risk’. Each year a new vaccine is manufactured to ensure continued protection.

The avian flu A virus is classed into 16 H and 9 N subtypes of which the H5 and H7 subtypes can, when circulating in poultry, rapidly mutate to be highly pathogenic, causing multiple organ failure with mortality, death rate, approaching

100% within 48 hours of onset.

Migratory, wild waterfowl, particularly ducks, have long been considered to be a natural reservoir for all influenza A viruses, carrying them and spreading them to poultry with no apparent harm to themselves.

A strain of the H5 subtype, H5N1 is now endemic and widespread in wildfowl and poultry populations across S.E. Asia and has been found in swans in Croatia, turkeys in Turkey and poultry and swans in Romania.

The H5N1 virus mutates rapidly and has a propensity to acquire genes from viruses infecting other species – reassortment.

Laboratory studies have shown it is highly pathogenic and has the potential to cause serious disease in humans. Birds that survive infection continue to excrete the virus, orally and in faeces, for 10 days facilitating its further spread.

An outbreak in Hong Kong in 1997 caused severe respiratory illness in 18 people, 6 of whom died. Only the culling of the entire poultry population prevented a possible pandemic. It also infects pigs.

Since 2003 the World Health Organisation has confirmed 138 human cases and 71 deaths; lung tissue

destroyed and multiple organ failure.

A Japanese epidemiologist working in China believes there may have been a further 300 unreported cases with unknown numbers of deaths.

The virus has a very high mortality, but as yet there are no confirmed human to human transmissions. The concern is that with people living so close to poultry and being dependent upon it for protein it is only a matter of time before exposure to the virus from blood or faecal matter will lead to a new, novel viral subtype infecting humans.

This will occur when the H5N1 virus swaps genetic material with a human influenza virus – reassortment- making human to human transmission possible and inevitable.

No one can tell how virulent and pathogenic the new virus will be; the proof will be in the infecting. Experiments, in the U.S., on the virus extracted from a victim, buried in permafrost, of the 1918 Spanish flu identified major similarities with H5N1 suggesting high virulence and pathogenicity.

Pandemics are rare, there were three in the last century, of the 3 prerequisites two, the emergence of a novel virus which causes serious infection in humans are in place.

The third, human to human transmission is a matter of time. Models suggest a local cluster of 100 cases with human to human transmission is all that is required to kick start a pandemic.

The outbreak of SARs in 2003 shows how rapidly a viral infection can spread via air trial. Originating in Hong Kong, it spread to 24 countries. Being novel, the human immune system will have no memory and little prepared defence; a vaccine cannot be made until the strain is clearly identified, possibly 3 months.

Anti-viral drugs exist but are expensive, in short supply, difficult to make, protected by patent and uncertain in outcome.

Prevention at source is the preferred option, as in 1997, but is surely no longer a viable solution.

This is why a flu pandemic is inevitable. Whether it will have a high mortality as in 1918 or a low mortality as in ‘57-’58 and ‘68-’69 only time and ‘global action’ will determine.

## Inspiring 1960s memories from a US socialist

*The Party: The Socialist Workers Party 1960-1988 - Volume 1, The Sixties: A Political Memoir*, by Barry Sheppard,

**Reviewed by Tami Peterson**

Barry Sheppard was a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party (US) for 28 years. In this well told and engrossing book, one is transported to the Sixties, not through the eyes of smug historians or lamenting liberals as so often is the case, but through the eyes of a revolutionary who was attempting to build a mass movement and at the same time, a party.

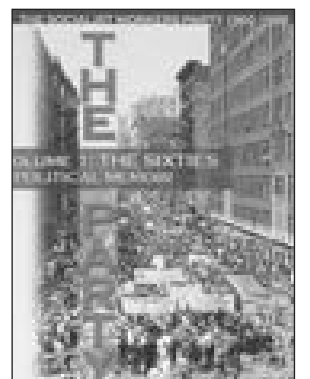
Sheppard’s writing style allows one to envision the numerous demonstrations, situations and people that he meets as a result of his political work, including GIs in Vietnam, French students in ‘68 and many members and leaders of the Fourth International.

It is through these stories one gets a sense of the human face of the left during the Sixties and the important political events that they helped to make and transform.

Despite the decline of the influence and importance of the SWP on the US left today, and arguably for quite some time, Sheppard tells about near ideal forms of organizing from participation in the anti-war and civil rights movements through to the discipline required to print a weekly publication to local branch finances and a strict internal democracy.

He also points to failures and mistakes. In one example he tells of his regret at having had to ask two comrades to leave the organization for being openly gay in the period before the LGBT movement took off and led to a change in policy.

This is not to say that Barry’s book concentrates for any great length on merely organizational aspects, but rather fills in the historical events with personal anecdotes that make this incredibly tumultuous time period live again. In the section of the book covering 1967-68, one is astounded by the world and local events, popping one after the



other.

Sheppard does an excellent job at conveying the electricity of the anticipation among those who were trying to change the world.

When he meets with Malcolm X in the Hotel Theresa in Harlem after his break with the Nation of Islam and weeks before his assassination he writes, ‘Malcolm was dressed immaculately, as always, but I noticed that the collar of his white shirt was frayed.’

Clearly he was having financial troubles since the break with the Nation’. It is the smallest detail that evokes in the reader an amazing image of this unbroke revolutionary.

The book holds useful lessons for anti-war activists in particular. As is made clear from Barry’s description, and in a telling contrast to the present, the SWP (US) participated in and helped to build mass demonstrations, often playing a role on leadership bodies while fighting for the broadest possible participation and supporting democratic voting in large groups at a time when every decision mattered.

It is inspiring, to say the least, to read of 2,000 students at Berkeley in California democratically voting to continue an action at a spontaneous meeting.

These stories serve as a useful reminder on how mass organizing is done correctly and Sheppard’s book should be a welcome addition to every revolutionary’s library.

■ **“The Party: The Socialist Workers Party 1960-1988 - Volume 1, The Sixties: A Political Memoir” by Barry Sheppard can be ordered online from Resistance Books <http://www.resistancebooks.com> or by contacting Socialist Resistance**

# Resistance

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# Iraq: step up fight to get the troops out!



The US and Britain say they want a government of 'national unity' for Iraq. So, if the elections on December 15 have any chance of achieving the aim of the Iraqi people – of whom 82 per cent want immediate withdrawal of occupying forces from Iraq – the majority of Iraqis will look forward to an independent, unified Iraq. Yes?

Well actually, no. Preliminary results of the elections in mid December showed that most voters opted for Sunni and Shia religious parties in the 275-seat parliament.

The western press approached the elections by drawing attention to the different electoral lists; Shia, Sunni, Kurd and apparent internal divisions. But not much attention has been paid to the people and institutions that really run the country.

The CIA runs the intelligence service, and wages an increasingly

bitter struggle to maintain control of the Defence Ministry. According to recent reports, the British government has been trying to stall an investigation into the theft of more than \$1.3bn (£740m) from the Iraqi Ministry of Defence.

The money disappeared during the administration of friend of the west, former Prime Minister Allawi.

In February 2004, Iraq was granted observer status at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In late September 2004, Iraq sent the WTO a formal request for membership.

In November 2005, the World Bank approved a \$100 million installment of a \$500m loan to Iraq, the first such loan in 30 years. According to Jubilee Iraq, 'there would be no need to borrow this money if Iraq were not paying more than \$100m a month in reparations and with a huge odious debt burden

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still un-cancelled from the Saddam era.'

In November 2004, the Paris Club group of 19 creditor nations agreed to forgive, in stages, up to 80 per cent

on \$42 billion worth of loans. The relief is contingent upon Iraq reaching an economic stabilization program with the IMF.

In the past, partitioning countries as part of an imperial carve-up has often been accompanied by violence and civil war – look at Ireland, India/Pakistan, Palestine.

Bush's government argues against a timetable of troop withdrawal because of the threat of civil war: but then the State Department endorses a constitution that appears to encourage the break up of Iraq by way of 'federalism', more likely to lead to civil war. By doing so, the US is encouraging its troops to stay put in Iraq.

Iraqi oil policy will allow 64 per cent of Iraq's oil reserves to foreign companies. The contracts would guarantee massive profits to foreign companies, with rates of return of

between 42 and 162 per cent.

Meanwhile, air raids and bombings by US troops increased in the lead up to the December elections from a monthly average of 35 during the summer to 60 in September and 120 or more in October and November.

George Bush may claim 'victory' in Iraq, yet the truth is that the opposition to occupation is increasing both inside and outside of Iraq.

The International Peace Conference in London in December had delegates from Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India as well as the US, and it is clear that an international peace movement is encircling the Bush administration.

The international demonstrations on March 18 and 19 are likely to be huge mobilisations against the new tyranny of theft, oppression, and partition upheld by the occupation.



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