



weekly
worker



George Galloway: no British troops in Afghanistan, no cuts ... and no abortion

- Support Jafar Panahi
- Tusc woeful organisation
- BNP's eclectic manifesto
- Scottish left divisions

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LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed.

Pilot error

I disagree with Andrew Coates's assertion that there are "few better pilots" through Marx's *Capital* than David Harvey ('Not just a study aid', April 22). I haven't read Harvey's *A companion to Marx's Capital* all the way through; only far enough to determine that the author fails one crucial test - understanding Marx's theory of value.

A major difficulty in reading *Capital* Vol 1 is that it does not follow the order of exposition - from the easily understood to the more difficult - to which most readers are accustomed. The conceptual framework of the book makes it necessary to put the hardest part first. Before he could write about surplus value, Marx had to examine the nature of value: the defining attribute of commodities, which renders them exchangeable in definite proportions despite their incommensurable use-values. Marx argues that the substance of value is simple, undifferentiated human labour. Ever since *Capital* was published, readers have been confounded by this claim, made more baffling by the fact that Marx's argument for it - to be found in the final subsection of chapter 1, entitled 'The fetishism of the commodity and its secret' - is not exactly straightforward.

More straightforwardly (and sketchedly), the argument can be summarised as follows. All human labour is inherently social in character (a premise that Marx does not state in 'Fetishism', but takes for granted). Individual labour must therefore figure, in any mode of production, as a component part of the total labour at society's disposal. Capitalism, however, presents us with a seeming paradox: unlike older societies, it possesses no direct means (eg, communal decision, recognised authority or established custom) for allocating labour. Productive activity is rather carried on by individual commodity producers with an exclusive view to private gain.

How, then, does capitalist society manage to reproduce itself? According to Marx, it can only do so by means of the regular exchange of labour's products between private producers in certain definite proportions. It is through exchange that individual labour times are compared and thus reduced to fractional parts of aggregate social labour. The exchange ratios ensure that each independent commodity producer will receive, upon the sale of his/her commodities, what s/he needs to continue working as before. Moreover, producers will work more if demand exceeds supply, and less if supply exceeds demand, until the necessary proportions are arrived at.

Hence, what is in fact a social relation among producers - the labour they must expend to meet each other's needs - assumes, under capitalism, the form of a proportion among things, which seem to lead a life of their own. As Marx puts it, the social relations between producers are congealed in their products: labour is represented as value, and the labour time necessary for the production of a given commodity as the magnitude of its value. Hence arises what Marx calls the fetishism of the commodity, fetishism being the attribution of human characteristics to inanimate objects.

In his commentary on this section of *Capital*, Harvey, far from demonstrating a grasp of its central concept, gives strong indications of having missed the point altogether. After quoting Marx's famous lines

on commodity fetishism - "To the producers ... the social relations between their private labours ... do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things" - Harvey goes on to dilate about the relations between producers and consumers. He says the lettuce I buy and the breakfast I eat bear no trace of the conditions under which they were produced, and puts forward this correct - but, in this context, irrelevant - observation as the primary example of the way that the fetishism of commodities conceals the social relations that underlie them. Of the principal social relation that commodity fetishism masks - between producers - and the function of the commodity as a reified regulator of their labour, nary a word, even when this relation is spelled out by Marx in the very quotation that Harvey reproduces!

David Harvey is a man of impressive erudition and insight, but this gap in his understanding (if not uncommon, especially among English-speaking readers) is hardly trivial, and places a question mark over his authority as an interpreter of *Capital*. II Rubin's *Essays on Marx's theory of value* is, in my opinion, far more useful as a guide, at least to the foundational first chapter of Marx's *magnum opus*.

Jim Creegan
New York

The ABC of AV

In his letter ('AV, not STV', April 22), comrade Steve Cooke is rightly critical of the alternative vote (AV) electoral system proposed by Gordon Brown as a replacement for the discredited first-past-the-post. However, he nevertheless claims that "AV is probably the best method of electing a single office-holder - eg, a president or a party leader".

Such a claim is pretty meaningless without specifying the criterion according to which AV is supposedly "best". In fact, from a majoritarian viewpoint (majority rule), AV is quite bad. In my article 'Proportional representation and Brown's opportunist ploy' (April 1), to which Steve actually refers in his letter, I mentioned the basic majoritarian postulate due to the great Nicolas de Condorcet: *if there is a candidate, say A, who is preferred by a majority of the voters to each of the other candidates, then A ought to be elected*. Such a candidate is known in the social-choice literature as a 'Condorcet winner'.

As I showed in my article, AV violates this fundamental majoritarian principle. Here again is the toy example with which I illustrated this failure of AV. Suppose there are three candidates, A, B and C, and 17 voters, whose preferences are as follows:

3: A B C
2: A C B
4: B A C
2: B C A
4: C A B
2: C B A

Thus, three voters prefer A to B and B to C; the other rows are to be read similarly. Here A is the Condorcet winner: nine voters prefer A to B, and nine also prefer A to C. But under AV - since none of the candidates has a majority of the top-preference votes - A, who has the least number of these, will be eliminated, and the votes of A's supporters will be transferred: three to B and two to C. So B will now have a majority and be elected - although, as we have just seen, a majority of the voters (nine out of 17) actually prefer A to B.

Perhaps Steve has in mind some other criterion, which he thinks

should trump majority rule. If so, he should state what that criterion is.

By the way, as I mentioned in my article, a Condorcet winner does not always exist. The question as to who ought to be elected in such cases is a thorny one. Interested readers can find a recent survey of this subject by Dan S Felsenthal at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/27685>.

Moshé Machover
email

Chomping

The two central questions for this election are what to do about the banksters and what to do about the failed 'house of thieves'. My campaign is calling for the public ownership of the banks and radical change in the parliamentary system. The slogans of the campaign are "Put people first", "Make the banksters pay" and "For a people's parliament, not a House of Thieves".

In case anybody is wondering about this "people's parliament" this concerns the sovereignty of the people over parliament. It is the inverse of the present "sovereignty of parliament" (or the queen-in-parliament). That means the rule of parliament or, more accurately, the rule of the banksters over the people.

Hence the country is in a mess. It cannot control the banks. It doesn't own and control them and it doesn't control parliament. Without political reforms the banks will remain a law unto themselves. Two policies therefore go hand in hand - a democratic republic and public ownership of the banks.

The three major Tory (or bankster) parties - the Conservative Tories, the Labour Tories and the Liberal Tories - are committed to helping the banksters hold the country to ransom. They are protecting the corrupt parliamentary system by pretending to tinker about with it.

As far as I am aware I am the only candidate in England who is saying we need radical democratic reform and public ownership of the banks as an absolute necessity. They go together like a horse and carriage. In theory you can have one without the other. But in practice it is useless because the carriage won't move on its own.

Sadly the *Weekly Worker* has not highlighted this central policy question, instead promoting all the other leftists who have ducked it, including the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. What happened to that famous question about the right to bear arms? I thought you would be chomping at the bit to ask candidates about that. I had my answer already written out and was waiting to be interviewed! Never mind.

For more details of the campaign please visit the website www.southbankbermondsey.org.uk.

Steve Freeman
Bermondsey and Old Southwark

Libel

Without a correct understanding of the unfolding crisis facing world capitalism, Paul Smith has already decided that the main lines of demarcation are between his version of Marxism and 'Stalinism', Labourism and social democracy (Letters, April 15).

Smith argues that 'Stalinism' attempted to destroy Marxism completely, alienated the working class and the intelligentsia, and even libels the Communist Party of Britain as the same as the BNP - ie, fascist and extremely nationalistic - while referring to me as illustrating the impossibility of unity between Marxists and Stalinists because I support Stalinist regimes.

This requires us to examine what Marxism is. But, before I do that, let me reply to Smith's list of eight accu-

sations aimed at myself. My reply to the third of these can also serve as a reply to Colin McGhie's letter in the same issue.

1. He claims that I maintain that socialism does not entail the abolition of the division of labour. What I actually indicated was that the division of labour existed under socialism, the lowest stage of communism. Unlike the utopians of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, I agree with Lenin that there are two stages in the transition to communism. These two stages are politically demarcated by the existence of the state in the lower, socialist, stage, which testifies that the division of labour still exists. At the higher stage of complete communism, the state has withered away.

2. Smith claims that I defend bureaucratic controls over labour, a slander for which he provides no evidence. For me to defend bureaucratic control over the labour process would be defending Trotsky, who advocated the militarisation of labour.

3. He denies that Lenin was the author of 'socialism in one country'. However, this is not a matter of controversy, but of textual evidence in Lenin's writings, which most Trotskyists refuse to engage with on this issue. On the other hand, Colin McGhie argues that "Stalin skilfully developed the Leninist tactic of constructing socialism in one country as a strategy and used it to secure his position in the bureaucracy", but he provides no evidence that Stalin used Lenin's theory in this way.

4. Smith accuses me of claiming that those who provide evidence that Lenin opposed 'socialism in one country' represent liberal propaganda, but he provides no evidence to refute my argument.

5. He claims that I regard inquiry into Soviet political economy as irrelevant, but I only claim that this would be pointless with individuals who, like Smith, readily distort Lenin's views.

6. I do claim that Stalin's purges were necessary to remove the Soviet fifth column. Obviously, Smith's 'simple Simon' view of the class struggle leads him to believe that the Soviet Union had no internal enemies.

7. Yes, I believe that many fifth column elements sided with Trotsky for their own reasons.

8. I do think that most of the intellectual followers of Trotsky are totalitarian ultra-leftists, constantly expelling those who don't agree with them, while quick to resign over disagreements. This totalitarian mindset leads to fragmentation on the left.

Smith argues that unity is not possible between what he calls 'Stalinism' and Marxism. Marxism is the theory of the class struggle leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the transition to socialism. However, this does not prevent dogma from developing in relation to Marxism, prompting Stalin to remark in 1917 that he sided with

creative Marxism against dogma. However, for Marxism to be creative, it must be concrete, and this led Lenin to write in his *April theses* that Marxism requires a concrete analysis of a concrete situation.

On the basis of Marxism, which they claim to uphold, people can come to different conclusions about the same issues. For instance, Trotsky called for unconditional defence of the former Soviet Union, whereas Smith, claiming to stand on Marxism and be a sympathiser of Trotsky, denounces me for retrospectively being a critical supporter of the Stalinist regime. Trotsky broke with people who refused to defend the Soviet Union unconditionally, but Smith wants to reject those who refuse to unconditionally condemn the former Soviet Union, and this he calls 'Marxism'. The point I am making is that even Trotsky did not regard those who failed to defend the Soviet Union as Marxists.

Smith calls for the development of Marxist theory in a non-revolutionary situation that the proletariat can use to understand the present crisis, free from Stalinist influence. But a correct understanding of the crisis is nowhere to be found in any Trotskyist group, or any of the followers of dogmatic Marxism. As a result of dogmatism, not one of these groups have yet realised that the present contradictions of capitalism are superimposed on, and interrelated with, a more fundamental crisis in society arising from humanity having used up half of the oil formed by nature, and that the economic slowdown of recent years is energy-related. In other words, the world is faced with the peaking and decline of oil production, bringing on an energy crisis with implications for how we struggle for socialism.

If 'Stalinists' were the first to warn the Marxist movement about this, it may have something to do with having taken the side of creative Marxism against dogmatic Marxism.

Tony Clark
email

Liberal helping

Socialists and communists should be pleased about the Liberal Democrat surge in the opinion polls and the likelihood that they will at least share power after the general election.

Marxists generally call them a big business party, but the credit crunch and widespread hatred of bankers and the rich has shifted them to the left. Their manifesto is not perfect but it is far to the left of Labour's.

Additionally, a good performance by the Lib Dems increases the possibility of real proportional representation, which could massively help far left parties, rather than Labour's alternative vote con, which would introduce a big bias towards compromise politics.

Steve Wallis
Manchester



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IRAN

May Day demands

As May Day approaches, Iranian workers are preparing demonstrations in Tehran and other major cities. Over the last few weeks everyone from 'reformist' leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi to president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, from employers to labour groups, agrees that the number of workers' protests and the radicalisation of their slogans marks a new phase in Iran.

Largely unseen by the world media, thousands of strikes, slow-downs and sit-ins by workers challenge the government's drive to privatise the economy. Iran's workers are also aware of their role in the overthrow of the shah and once again they will use May Day to remind the religious state and 'reformist' Islamists alike of their power. A recent statement by a coalition of workers' organisations clarifies this: "We millions are the producers of wealth, the wheels of production. Society moves only because we move it" (*The Epoch Times* March 25).

Since the start of the Iranian new year (March 21) workers have protested against the setting of the official minimum wage at the equivalent of \$303 per month. Six independent workers' organisations have argued that this is a third of the poverty line, which is actually \$900. There is also worker opposition to government at-

tempts to abolish subsidies in line with IMF/World Bank diktat. However, what will distinguish this year's May Day protests will be the political slogans - already seen on posters and leaflets distributed in Tehran and other major cities in Iran.

Many posters feature the slogan, 'Death to the dictator', alongside workers' demands for the right to organise and the right to strike. Statements issued by workers' organisation include demands for the freedom of all political prisoners and an end to the use of military and paramilitary forces against demonstrators and protesters. Teachers are preparing for a week-long strike starting on May 1 to demand an end to interference by the religious state in the school curriculum, as well as better wages and conditions.

Over the last few years workers attempting to celebrate May Day have been arrested and prosecuted - some have been sentenced to prison and lashings. The prominent labour leader, Mansour Ossanlou, remains in prison, along with other worker activists, such as Ebrahim Maddadi, Farzad Kamangar and Ghaleb Hussein. This May Day we should do all we can to defend these activists and join Iranian workers in their call for the release of all political prisoners in Iran.

The charter of workers' minimum

demands, jointly issued by Iran's four main independent trade unions, includes:

- Unconditional recognition of independent workers' organisations, the right to strike, to organise protests, the freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and freedom of political organisation.
- Abolition of the death penalty, and the immediate and unconditional release of jailed workers and other social activists.
- Immediate increase in the minimum wage based on workers' input through their representatives in workers' general assemblies.
- No abolition of subsidies. All unpaid wages should be paid immediately without any excuses.
- Job security for workers and all wage-earners; an end to all temporary and so-called 'blank signature' contracts; removal of all government-run organisations from the workplace; drafting of a new labour law through direct participation of workers' representatives elected by their general assemblies.
- Abolition of all the discriminatory laws against women; the ensuring of full and unconditional equality of women and men in all social, economic, political, cultural and family fields ●

Yasmine Mather

Support Panahi

Despite reports to the contrary, film-maker Jafar Panahi - director of *Offside*, *Crimson gold* and *The circle* and critic of the theocratic regime, has still not officially been charged with any crime since his arrest on March 1. Some of his close friends have told us that in solidarity with all those political prisoners languishing behind bars, he still insists he will stay in prison until they are released and has therefore refused bail.

In February, the Iranian authorities banned Panahi from leaving the country to attend the Berlin Film Festival. Then, in March, the police raided his house and arrested him, along with 16 other people, including his wife and daughter and six democracy activists. Fourteen of those detained have been freed so far.

However, it seems the regime is still not quite sure what to do with him. Soon after Panahi's arrest, Tehran prosecutor Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi said the film-maker had not been detained for political reasons, but was "accused of some crimes and arrested with another person following an order by a judge". On April 14, culture minister Mohammad Hosseini further specified those 'non-political' crimes. He told reporters that "the culture and Islamic guidance ministry asked the judiciary and the security authorities about the arrest of Mr Panahi and they told us that it is a security case. They informed us that this director was making a film against the regime and it was about the events that followed the election."

It seems that Panahi was spotted outside the gates of the infamous Evin prison. Apparently, he was waiting to interview prisoners being released, as well as the families of those still being held in prison, who had been arrested after the protests that erupted following last year's rigged presidential poll.

And last week Nobel peace prize laureate Shirin Ebadi said that he also

remains behind prison bars because "he is against war" and a member of Iran's National Peace Council. You would think that the Iranian theocracy was also less than keen on imperialist threats to drop bombs on the country. But quite the opposite. The warmongers in Washington are helping president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the theocracy to continue to cling to power. He has been able to keep a significant section of the Iranian population behind him because of anti-American posturing.

Of course, we have plenty of criticisms of Ebadi and her alternative to the theocracy is full of dangers. She is under the illusion that the democracy movement could, at least to some degree, be aided by imperialism. For example, she supports "political sanctions" on Iran, but opposes economic ones - as if you could make that kind of distinction, especially with the Revolutionary Guards in control of much of Iran's economy and infrastructure.

The example of neighbouring Iraq shows exactly what kind of 'democracy' imperialism has in mind. Despite the rhetoric, the UN does not care about 'human rights' when it moves to impose yet further sanctions. The US wants to bring Iran to its knees - to make it a more exploitable as part of the capitalist global order. If the communist and socialist trends within the opposition movement were stronger or organised enough to take the lead in the ongoing democracy struggle, imperialism would undoubtedly be quick to drop its (already rather half-hearted) support.

The democracy movement is in an ideologically fluid state and is potentially revolutionary. It is far from being a mere tool in the hands of US-UK imperialism, as some of the wackier groups on the American and British left claim. Large sections of the opposition are against not only their own theocratic regime: they also know what international capital-

ism brings.

At the behest of the International Monetary Fund, Ahmadinejad has imposed many neoliberal 'reforms' on the country. The ensuing privatisations, wage freezes and social spending cuts have led to a deep economic crisis that has worsened dramatically with the global downturn. Many workers are on temporary contracts and have not been paid for months. Others have lost their jobs altogether when their employers went bust. The existing sanctions have only made matters worse. Sanctions weaken the most dynamic and resolute section of the democracy movement, the working class. Working people are forced to concentrate on day-to-day survival rather than organise against the oppressive regime.

Jafar Panahi is acutely aware of this problem and as a consequence has never called for sanctions. Although no Marxist, Panahi is a brave example of the countless people in Iran who are opposed not only to the theocracy, but also to imperialist solutions of all kinds. He deserves the support of all democrats, socialists and genuine anti-imperialists ●

Tina Becker

Solidarity screenings of *Offside*

London (co-sponsored by Labour Representation Committee) Wednesday May 12, 6pm, Soho Theatre, Dean Street, W1. With comedy from Shappi Khorsandi and introductions by John McDonnell MP and Lisa Goldman, artistic director of the Soho Theatre, who met Panahi shortly before he was arrested.
Manchester: Thursday May 20, 6.30pm, Student Union, Manchester University, Oxford Road, M13.
Glasgow: Friday May 21, 7pm, Centre for Contemporary Arts, 350 Sauchiehall Street, G2.
 All profits to Workers Fund Iran.

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sunday May 2, 3.30pm: 'Is this what democracy looks like?' School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Speakers: Moshé Machover (communist and electoral systems expert), Mike Macnair (CPGB).

Oxford: Study group, every Monday evening, studying David Harvey's *Limits to capital*.

Details: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site will feature voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Communist Students

For meetings in your area, contact info@communiststudents.org.uk or check out www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology series, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).

Tuesday May 4, 6.15pm: 'We just want to grow food: biofuels, dalit and adivais communities, India'. Speaker: Jasber Singh. www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Tusc election meetings

Bristol: Tuesday May 4, 7.30pm: Cross Keys pub, Fishponds Road.
Swansea: Tuesday May 4, 7.30pm: Grand Hotel.

Liverpool: Tuesday May 4, 7.30pm: Casa Bar, 29 Hope Street.

Coventry: Tuesday May 4, 7pm: Methodist Central Hall, Warwick Road.

London: Tuesday May 4, 8pm: Telegraph pub, 87 Dennetts Road, SE14.

Wakefield: Wednesday May 5, 7.30: Black Rock pub.

Bristol: Wednesday May 5, 7.30pm: Bedminster Library, Bedminster.

Leicester: Wednesday May 5, 7.30pm: West End Neighbourhood Centre, Andrewes Street (off Hinckley Road).

Manchester: Wednesday May 5, 7pm: Friends Meeting House, Mount Street.

Brighton: Wednesday May 5, 6pm: Phoenix Community Centre, Phoenix Place (near St Peter's Church).

Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: www.tusc.org.uk.

Behud (beyond belief)

Daily until Saturday May 8, 7.30pm: New play by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, a response to the controversial Behzti, sensationally closed after protests in Birmingham. Soho Theatre, 21 Dean Street, London W1. Directed by Lisa Goldman.

International solidarity

Saturday May 1, 12 noon: March and rally. Assemble Clerkenwell Green for march to Trafalgar Square. Speakers include Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone. Organised by London May Day Organising Committee: www.londonmayday.org.

Trial and execution

Saturday May 1, 2.30pm: Seize back the power from New Labour, Parliament Square, London SW1.

Organised by Election Meltdown: election.meltdown@gmail.com

Benefit gig

Saturday May 1, 7.30pm: Performance by The Blueflies, Winding Wheel, Holywell Street, Chesterfield. Tickets £6.

Organised by Chesterfield Stop the War Coalition: 07910 595858.

Outside the law

Tuesday May 11, 5.30pm: Documentary plus Q&A, lecture theatre 3, Herschel Building, Newcastle University. Speakers: Andy Worsington and Omar Deghayes. Organised by Cageprisoners and Tyneside Stop the War Coalition: office@northeaststopwar.org.uk.

After the election

Saturday May 15, 10.30am to 3.30pm: conference, Join the Resistance! ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Admission free (donations welcome). No need to register.

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

Nakba commemoration

Saturday May 15, 12 noon: Demonstration against Israel's violations of international law, opposite 10 Downing Street, London SW1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign, British Muslim Initiative, Stop the War Coalition, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Palestinian Forum in Britain;

www.palestinecampaign.org.

No more custody deaths

Saturday May 15, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Highfields Centre, 96 Melbourne Road, Leicester. Speakers, performances, stalls and workshops. Tickets £5, proceeds to family campaigns.

Organised by 4Wardever with Leicester Civil Rights Movement: <http://remembranceevent2010.eventbrite.com>.

Where next for the unions?

Thursday May 20, 7pm: Meeting, Royal Station Hotel, Neville Street, Newcastle. Speakers include Bob Crow (RMT) Derek Cattell (North East Shop Stewards Network).

Organised by NESSN: merseyadvice@btconnect.com.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

TUSC

Uniting the community

Jenny Sutton, the Tusc candidate in Tottenham, talked to Nick Rogers

Why are you standing as a candidate in the general election?

In February we found out that there were going to be a £2.5 million cuts at our college's budget and David Lammy MP, who is minister for higher education, indicated that there was nothing he could do about it. The local MP can't do anything about it and he's education minister. It was obvious that we needed an MP who could fight. Because of my role as branch secretary of the University and College Union at the College of North East London (Conel) and also chair of London region UCU it seemed to make sense both symbolically and practically to stand against David Lammy and really present an alternative to the programme of cuts that all the main parties are promising.

How did you come to be the candidate for Tusc?

Well, obviously there would have been no point standing as an independent because I'm a socialist and a trade unionist. An independent platform wouldn't have been appropriate.

I'd heard a little bit about the formation of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Although it is clearly by definition an electoral coalition and is going to be flawed and fragile, nevertheless, the basic programme that Tusc was putting forward - anti-privatisation, anti-war - was one I could support. It just felt important that if we are going to start building electoral unity on the left, clearly we are better being part of a coalition than standing as an individual candidate.

This isn't just a single-issue campaign. Although the cuts at Conel were the springboard, it is a broader programme than that I am standing on: defending public services, and campaigning for public money to be spent on public services. The reason why they are cutting public services is that so much money has been spent on bailing out the banks, so much money has been spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that now we are being expected to pay for it.

There are broader questions about the inequalities and contradictions in the system that are coming to the

fore. That is why I wanted to stand on an explicit socialist platform and not just as an independent. I'm not an independent.

What support have you received from the left?

I'm not a member of a left organisation myself. In some ways that has helped, because it's meant that there have been people from different organisations involved in the campaign. On the left, principally, the people who are doing most of the leg work have been the local Socialist Workers Party. They've been brilliant. I've had support from some comrades from your organisation. There have been individuals from other left organisations and a range of non-aligned socialists. At the heart of the campaign have been UCU activists at Conel and the local SWP.

Is it true to say that the Socialist Party in England and Wales have been notable by their absence? Were they involved in the meeting that selected you?

They came along to the second organising meeting and they have given the campaign support. They have their own candidate standing in Walthamstow, Nancy Taaffe, who is a Socialist Party member, so they have been concentrating their efforts on supporting her. I don't think they've had many forces on the ground available to work in Tottenham.

What support have you been getting from the general public?

The response has been extraordinary. We've been out and about on the streets and knocking on doors. What we've found is that, although Tottenham has always been a solid Labour constituency, this time the degree of dissatisfaction we're hearing about is quite overwhelming. There are very few people who are actively defending Labour. Although they start off by saying they are going to vote Labour because they always have done, as soon as you start talking about it, they can be persuaded to vote for an alternative. We've had not one person defending the record of David Lammy actually. He must be one of the most unpopular MPs in the country.

The message we are presenting is really resonating, but my only frustration is that we don't have the machine or the people to get it out more widely. So, although just about anyone we've had ended up having any extended conversation with has said, yes, they are going to support us, nevertheless, we have only been able to speak to at most a couple of thousand people out of a constituency of 60,000.

If Tusc was more widely known and if we'd had longer and had the forces to speak to everybody, I think we could win on the programme. Realistically, we are not going to unseat Labour, but who knows? This election is turning out to be very unpredictable.

One thing I know for sure is that we are putting David Lammy under a lot of pressure. At a hustings last week he focused his attack on me and my campaign - not the Conservative or Lib Dems - so I know we are getting under his skin. What that says to me is that even if he is re-elected he will know that there are people who want to fight for the local college and the local community. He will have to respond to that pressure. So it will have been worth it.

Has race been an issue in this campaign, given that David Lammy is a black man and you are a white woman?

Less than we anticipated. I have to say, when the idea of standing for Tusc was first mooted, I thought, well, we need a black candidate. I did talk to the branch chair at Conel who is a black woman and tried to persuade her to stand.

What is amazing is how few people have said, 'You are a white woman, you shouldn't be standing against David Lammy because he is black'. A lot of people have felt very, very let down. What he has demonstrated is that being black and being from Tottenham is not enough to fight for your local community.

People are looking at me and thinking, 'Here is someone who is genuinely committed to the community.' I've lived here for more than 20 years. I've taught at the college for over 17 years. I've got a history of campaigning against racism. I've supported campaigns against police harassment. I've supported the Winston Silcott defence campaign. I used to take the Silcott family to visit Winston in prison because they didn't have a car. I've worked with the Delroy Lindo defence campaign when he was victim of police harassment. I've worked over the years with lots of asylum-seekers. The whole issue of cuts in English language (Esol) courses is an issue of racism. You are cutting provision for second-language speakers, denying them access to education.

I think people recognise that it's not who you are that counts but what you do and where you stand.

What kind of impact is this campaign going to have on the fight against cuts at Conel?

It's interesting. It's politicised a lot of people. We have linked the fight against job cuts and cuts in courses at Conel with the election campaign. For a lot of people who maybe in the past would have seen it as either purely as an issue of fighting for social provision - a lot of Esol teachers in particular are very committed to their community and will fight hard to defend it - and others who will see it as an industrial struggle for jobs, what this campaign has done is to connect the struggles with the broader political context.

We have said to people, we are in a situation where all three parties are planning a massive programme of cuts in response to the economic crisis. If we want to campaign for community provision for students, if we want to campaign for students with disabilities, for students with low levels of literacy, we have to take on the ideol-

ogy. We've got to take on the Labour Party because they are the party implementing cuts. You can't argue it's not a political struggle to fight for jobs and against cuts. The decision about where public money is spent is very much a political decision.

So, I think it has brought people together; it has engaged people politically. We've had union members who don't have a political background, who wouldn't identify themselves with a political party, group or ideology, and yet they have been some of the most stalwart members of the campaign. It has been brilliant to see them argue with the passion of people who have newly discovered politics.

We are going to be on strike the day before the election. I think people will have a heightened awareness of the role of politics in everyday life. I think it has been very empowering. **Do you think Tusc will continue and how do you see its future?**

I don't know. I haven't been involved in the negotiations at national level. I understand there have been bickerings of one sort or another. To be quite honest, I'm someone who comes from a left background, but, like a lot of people who were in left organisations and got hacked off with the kind of sectarianism that seems to be endemic on the British left, I don't have a lot of time or a lot of patience for these kind of troubles.

What I think is that the left - every socialist, every left activist - has got to see that there is a need for an electoral challenge left of Labour. In order to make that effective, we have to find our points of unity. Too many left organisations define themselves in distinction to others and like to emphasise the differences. I feel very strongly that we have to find the points of unity and we have to work together to create some kind of genuine left coalition. Maybe that's naive, I don't know. I hope that, if Tusc does well, what we'll get out of it is

the willingness to build for a united left of some description.

We're going to have differences. People are going to have different interpretations of what socialism is and different attitudes to the situation in Cuba or Venezuela, or different interpretations of the history of the ex-Soviet Union. But those are secondary. We have to recognise that what is happening at the moment is a massive assault on the working class in our country.

We have to unite to defend the gains that have been made over the years by trade unionists and socialists for social welfare, democratic and civil rights. That's got to be the basic platform. Within that platform, we can have differences. These have to be debated openly. These debates have to be productive and constructive in order to develop a deeper understanding of socialism and Marxism. They should not be pretexts for falling out with each other and for not backing campaigns.

Where the CPGB differs from calls for a 'broad' left coalition or party is that we think Marxists should join together as Marxists. A party should be able to encompass differences on questions of theory and philosophy as long as there is agreement on the broad themes of the programme.

I've always considered myself to be a bit of a half-baked Marxist. I'm not particularly well-read and I'm not particularly ideologically strong. I think what matters is the content rather than the label. I think too many people are put off leftwing politics because they feel that it's almost like a science at which you have to study. I don't want to sound kind of crude and philistine and I'm not being anti-intellectual. I think there is absolutely a need for the development of ideology and theory, but I think that has got to be secondary •

Direct action

Last Saturday was a pleasant, sunny day in Tottenham - just right for campaigning for Tusc you might think. Well not quite.

One young woman commented that she was not voting because politicians had done nothing for her. Another claimed to be putting her trust in god. Later I was told that only 162 new voters have come onto the electoral register in Tottenham over the last 12 months.

There is an obvious anti-politics mood out there, especially amongst the young, and leftwing candidates are seen as being no different from the mainstream parties by most people. In part this must reflect the fact that at each election we enter the fray under a different label, plus we stand on policies that, while for the most part perfectly supportable, associate us with traditional Labourism. We do not attempt to get the message across that we are actually against the system. This does not mean that we will not do well amongst the traditional committed left of Tottenham, which is a relatively large pool, but here too we are paying a price for ingrained sectarianism.

As it happened, the anarchist Haringey Solidarity Group was campaigning with a bit more success on the other side of the street with a

black and red broadsheet calling on people not to vote. Perhaps a free paper with articles challenging people to think was a more attractive option than a free balloon and a glossy postcard. Perhaps they came across more clearly as not being part of the mainstream.

I went across to talk to the anarchists, who explained that they were for direct action and believed that single-issue campaigning, not class struggle, was the way forward. I pointed out that our candidate, Jenny Sutton, was very much involved in direct action and there was no contradiction between the two. She was right to argue that direct action alone was not enough and that the working class needed political organisation capable of uniting broad strands of resistance to the government.

From my own point of view, I explained that the working class needs to be the class of democracy. To impose our will against theirs and pave the way to a transition to socialism we must secure majority support. My anarchist friend seemed impressed, but asked how widespread this belief was amongst the socialist left. More, I said, than are prepared to admit it.

He went back to distributing his paper •

Phil Kent



Help not required?

Peter Manson reports on the welcome he received from Tusc campaigners in south London

Two weeks ago, as a supporter of the Campaign for a New Workers' Party I received an email from Dave Nellist, in his capacity as CNWP national chair, urging me to "get actively involved" in the general election campaign of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (circular, April 13). A couple of days later I received the same message by post.

Of course, it came as no surprise to hear that the CNWP is supporting Tusc, since the rank and file and much of the leadership of both organisations are made up of the same people - ie, comrades from the Socialist Party in England and Wales. But it did come as a surprise to discover just how difficult it is to "get actively involved" in the Tusc campaign.

Take a look at the website and you will see what I mean. You will try in vain to find contact details for any of the 41 campaigns - apart from four, for whom there is a link to a local website (although only one of those is for a candidate who is a SPEW member). As for the rest, the only means of contact on offer is via email or telephone to Tusc's national office in the East End of London. Perhaps because this number frequently gives you a recorded message, some SPEW-led Tusc campaigns are giving the Socialist Party HQ phone number for enquiries.

I was very keen to help the Tusc general election drive and fortunately I already had the private numbers for two of the candidates in my area in south-east London - Onay Kasab (Greenwich and Woolwich) and Ian Page (Lewisham Deptford). I have known both comrades for many years and taken part in local campaigns alongside them, not least during the period of the Socialist Alliance.

First, on Friday April 16 I rang comrade Kasab (known by friends

and comrades as 'Kas'), but his mobile was permanently set to voicemail. I left a message, but he did not get back to me. Greenwich and Bexley Socialist Party is one of the few SPEW branches with its own website, so I emailed the comrades, hoping they would be able to tell me where I could help. No response.

The following morning (Saturday April 17), unable to contact Greenwich and Woolwich Tusc comrades, I tried my luck with comrade Page. He answered straightaway and the conversation went along these lines:

PM: Ian? It's Peter Manson from the CPGB. How are you?

IP: OK.

PM: I'm hoping to get involved in campaigning for you today - leafletting or whatever.

IP: I'm having my breakfast at the moment.

PM: Sorry about that. Can you tell me where I'll be able to help out?

IP: Well, I know they're out campaigning, but I'll be away at a meeting. The best thing is to contact centre.

PM: Isn't there someone local I could speak to?

IP: I know Chris Newby is organising something, but I don't have his number ...

Not very successful then. There was nothing for it but to leave a message on the national Tusc answerphone (for good measure I left the same message on the mobile number for press enquiries). It was not until the Sunday afternoon that I was called by Clive Heemskerck, SPEW's leading representative on the Tusc steering committee and - by coincidence - comrade Page's election agent. Obviously he would be able to point me to where I could join in the work. Wouldn't he?

Although he did not say so in as

many words, comrade Heemskerck was not exactly keen for me to help in Lewisham. He pointed out that comrade Page is not actually standing as Tusc. The party name on his election material and on the ballot paper is 'Socialist Alternative' - SPEW's official electoral description (it is barred from using 'Socialist Party' by decree of the electoral commission, using its powers under the undemocratic provisions of the Registration of Political Parties Act 1998).

While comrade Page's material mentions that he is standing as part of Tusc, it is Socialist Alternative that is vigorously promoted. The reason for this is that comrade Page, alongside Chris Flood, is also standing for re-election as Lewisham councillor for Telegraph Hill ward on May 6, together with Jess Leech, who is attempting to win back from Labour the third seat in the ward for SPEW. Comrades Page and co have been contesting the council seat as Socialist Alternative for a decade and, understandably, want to stick to this now familiar name rather than jeopardise a proportion of their vote by campaigning under a title that will almost certainly be forgotten by the time the next local elections come round.

It is also understandable that SPEW's campaigning, including for the parliamentary seat, is largely restricted to Telegraph Hill. Comrade Heemskerck told me that canvassers in the ward have been told not to get into "long arguments" about who to vote for in the general election. Instead they should stress that, by electing three Socialist Alternative councillors, voters can do "something concrete" to stop the cuts.

In other words, Lewisham Deptford is not really a Tusc campaign at all and it is not just CPGB comrades

who may be considered off message should they turn up to help out. I said I would still be prepared to assist the comrades, but I would also like to help in Greenwich and Woolwich. Comrade Heemskerck promised to call me back with contact details.

Of course, I had by now given up any hope of joining in campaigning over that weekend, but I was hopeful of being able to sort something out for the following one. However, comrade Heemskerck did not get back to me, so, a week after I first tried to get involved, I rang him myself on Friday April 23. Once more the comrade tried to put me off Lewisham, this time telling me that the work over the weekend would involve the boring task of chasing up postal votes.

But he gave me Kas's home number. Unfortunately, this one just rang and rang, no matter when I called, and there was no answerphone. Once more I emailed Greenwich and Bexley SPEW and once more received no reply.

There was only one thing for it. I would have to guess where the SPEW comrades would be. So on Saturday morning at around 11.30 I wandered down to the Powis Street pedestrian precinct in Woolwich and - hey presto - there was their stall. They were certainly campaigning for Kas and Tusc, but they had not bothered to change the presentation much - their stall had more SPEW papers, leaflets and posters than Tusc material. And you would not have thought the three comrades present were electioneering - there were no rosettes, balloons, loudhailers; just the attempted sale of *The Socialist* and the rather desultory handing out of the Tusc leaflet.

But the comrades seemed pleased (as well as surprised, obviously) to see me. One of them said he was

responsible for updating the local SPEW website and checking for email, and apologised for not having done so for a couple of weeks. The presence of someone new actually seemed to give the comrades a boost and they followed my lead in shouting, "Vote against cuts. Vote for a workers' MP on a worker's wage", as we gave out the flyers. They were now being taken up more rapidly and it was soon necessary for one comrade to go off for some more.

The reception we received was mixed. Some people were pleased to hear our message and a couple I spoke to said they would definitely vote for Kas. Other passers-by were less pleased: one elderly woman's main concern was immigration; she said Woolwich had changed beyond recognition and was now more like Africa. A young woman said (without malice), "BNP forever", as she passed. The fact that we were sandwiched between two groups of Christians did not help. One of them was about 30-strong and they were belting out hymns and preaching via an amplifier.

Of course, as this is the only experience of local Tusc work I have succeeded in joining so far, I cannot say much about the overall penetration of the campaign in either Greenwich and Woolwich or Lewisham. But it does seem to me that we are not at present heading for a huge general election vote ●



Selected by a mass meeting

David Henry of the Hazel Must Go campaign is Tusc candidate for Salford and Eccles. Chris Trafford interviewed him

How did the Hazel Must Go campaign become part of Tusc?

Hazel Must Go was born in June 2009 after Hazel Blears survived the meeting to deselect her as Labour candidate following the scandal over her expenses. We had been doing petitions, leaflets and door-knocking long before we decided to stand a candidate.

The campaign involved people from the *Salford Star*, Salford Unison and disenfranchised Labour members, as well as various socialists, Greens and Liberal Democrats. People from community organisations who have had their funding slashed and staff from the civic centre also got involved. It was a random convergence of people who saw an advert in the *Salford Advertiser*. After my 'citizen's arrest' of Blears I was asked to join the new committee against her.

Before the candidate selection we voted to stand under the Tusc banner after hearing Dave Nellist speak at our meeting. A large proportion of people abstained, as they either weren't too bothered or didn't know what Tusc was. Most people there were local and

just wanted to get rid of Hazel Blears. We only had the provisional manifesto at that time. There is no way that anyone can say it was just a socialist or left event. We put out about 10,000 leaflets and many local residents came down to find out what it was all about. It was like a primary.

I was the only Tusc candidate that was selected by a mass meeting. There were three other potential candidates, including Alec McFadden, the head of Merseyside TUC who works at the Unemployed Resource Centre. He hadn't been involved in the Hazel Must Go campaign and didn't come to any committee meetings, but put himself forward as a candidate. At the selection meeting I won with a majority of five to one.

Now we are campaigning for something, as opposed to against something, and also others have joined us. We applied for and got money from local RMT branches, which covered the deposit. We also have raised about £1,000 through fundraising events like the one with comedian Mark Steel.

Some voters think at first we are campaigning for Hazel Blears, as her face is on our leaflets. But that makes

for a good discussion. We may end up splitting the vote and letting in the Liberal Democrats, but that would be Blears' own fault. Norman Owen, the Lib Dem candidate, tried to hijack our campaign at the local hospital, but refused to be photographed next to the trade union banner, saying: "I support the workplace, not the workers".

You used to be in the Green Party. What is your position now?

I haven't made any decision yet. The Green Party is changing all the time, especially with the prospect of Caroline Lucas becoming their first MP. They have been trying to protect their profile and asked me to remove any reference to the Greens from my site. They said I couldn't be considered a member, as I was standing under a different banner. But people thought I was more involved with the Green Party than I was.

The Greens are a socialist party, even if they don't come out and declare it. I don't think you have to say you are a socialist if your policies fit in with socialist ideas. A lot of socialists have joined the Greens, as they are the only group

on the left that offers a way in to serious politics. I consider myself an independent campaigner.

What would you like to see come out of Tusc?

In Salford it will help raise the profile of the voiceless - there isn't really a platform for campaigns to get a proper hearing. It is such a high-profile seat and there is a lot of media and public interest, which is good for Salford and the movement.

I am trying to open doors for people through the contacts we have made. I also want to draw attention to the closures at the Salford Royal Hospital, where Hazel Blears' husband is on the board. She was originally against the cuts, but is now defending them - even the closure of the maternity ward.

Nationally Tusc has been evolving since it started, but was put together at a late stage as a last-minute plan. I think it has come out of the need for a new workers' party. There are people who are on the left of Labour who think the party will lurch left after the election. I think Labour will fall to pieces and suffer defections if they lose.

I wasn't involved in No2EU.

The worse thing was its name, as it came across as another Veritas or UK Independence Party. It wasn't xenophobic, but the name was poor. In the north west we should have tactically voted for the Green Party, not No2EU, to keep the BNP from winning a seat.

I think we need a new workers' party which is strongly anti-capitalist, anti-fascist and socialist, but encompassing everyone from green socialists to anarchists. Groups should be allowed to keep their separate identity, but be part of a united organisation. We could also form pacts with established left groups such as Respect and the Greens and try not split their votes. The situation in Scotland between the Scottish Socialist Party and Solidarity is ridiculous, but the problem is the unrepresentative system - we must push for electoral reform.

What do you think of the CPGB and Workers Power not being allowed to stand candidates under the Tusc umbrella?

I am disappointed that those that wanted to be involved have been denied the opportunity ●

LABOUR

Posing to the left

Nancy Platts is the Labour candidate for Brighton Pavilion, where she is opposed by Green Party leader Caroline Lucas, not to mention Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. While the CPGB will not recommend a vote for the petty bourgeois Greens, we will support any Labour candidate who meets our two conditions: opposition to all cuts in public services and an immediate withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan. Peter Manson spoke to her

Can you tell me about your background? I believe you were once a full-time union worker.

I have been in the past, yes. I left school at 18 and after a couple of other jobs went to work for the London fire brigade for about 11 years. Then I went to work in the trade union movement for TSSA, the transport union, and then on to the voluntary sector, where I campaigned on things like better childcare, maternity leave and tax credits.

How do you view the role of trade unions?

I think it's such a shame that there's still such a fear of working people wanting to have a voice in the workplace and standing up for their rights. You know, as I do, that anyone who works in a unionised organisation is likely to have better terms and conditions than those who don't. With unions there's also likely to be greater transparency, which is much better for trying to achieve equal pay for equal value.

Having worked in the union movement and seen things from the other side, I think it's very sad that the media very rarely talk about the good work that the trade unions do in terms of negotiating on behalf of their members, but also protecting people against things like bullying and harassment in the workplace, and representing individual cases. I didn't tend to a lot of work on the representation side, but because there were very few women working in TSSA, now and again I did represent individuals, particularly where women wanted another woman to do that.

One case that sticks in my mind was that of a woman who was harassed at work for being a lesbian. It got to the point where she was absolutely desperate at the prospect of being hounded out of her job, and was even thinking of taking her own life. The impact on individuals of bullying in the workplace is little realised, so I feel quite strongly and passionately about the need for there always to be someone to turn to - everyone



Nancy Platts: drugs danger

needs someone at their side when things go wrong.

Even talking to friends who query the value of trade unions, I've noticed that when things do go wrong they're very quick to sign up and say, 'Surely my employer can't get away with this. What are my employment rights?' People have less of a collective sense these days in terms of joining, paying into and supporting a union even when they don't need it, but in the full knowledge that it'll be there when they do. I think we need to put a bit of that collective sense back. Young people tend not to know what trade unions are all about.

It's very hard, I know, trying to get into places like call centres and recruit members. I used to stand outside in the rain at seven in the morning, trying to recruit members in the travel trade, where there was a very low level of union membership and organisation. You couldn't physically get in the door to talk to people.

As well as the anti-trade union legislation, the other thing that's

impacted on unions is the higher turnover of staff in companies these days, which makes it much harder to establish a really firm base. And we're still experiencing trade unionists getting picked on. Where I am in Brighton we've got a dispute on at Sussex University and once again we're seeing UCU trade union reps being disproportionately affected and placed in the redundancy pool ahead of other workers. All of that is about the fear of people who are prepared to stand up for their colleagues and put their head above the parapet.

So how important do you view the union link to the Labour Party? Some people say that Labour is now just another capitalist party like the Tories.

I think the union link is essential. Labour is still the party of working people. We're still the only party that's going to get progressive change. Look at what we've achieved over the last 13 years - the massive sums that have gone into public services. Building 149 new hospitals across

the country is no mean feat. And we have reduced crime. I know there's been arguments about statistics, but crime has gone down and that's really important.

Labour has also put in a lot of legislation that's particularly helped women - around balanced equal rights and part-time workers, extending maternity, paternity and adoption leave, better rights for old people and LGBT couples ... All of that are things that the Tories would never, ever have done, so I think we shouldn't kid ourselves with phrases about 'not a fag paper between the two parties'. That's just rubbish. If you look at what the Tories did up to 1997, there's a massive difference between the two political parties.

There's always more we can do and I think we should strengthen the links with the trade unions. Unite, which is supporting me, has been giving massively to the Labour Party over the last two years. All the unions down here are supporting my campaign - even the ones that aren't affiliated to the Labour Party like the RMT and FBU.

You mentioned the effect of the cuts at Sussex University. That is one area where there seems to be next to nothing between the parties. It seems to be just a question of how soon and how large. What is your attitude to cuts in public services?

Nobody wants to see cuts, do they? Listen, there's never anything wrong in looking at an organisation and making sure it's working as efficiently as it can do. Nobody wants to see cuts and I don't think the public sector should be paying the price for the mistakes of the bankers. We're adding one percent onto national insurance as a mechanism to try and close the deficit.

We've got to make sure we're running our public services efficiently and with new technology you've always got to review how things are

working and whether things can be done better. But ultimately the bottom line is that the public sector shouldn't be seen to pay the price for the mistakes the bankers made. In the words of Obama, we want our money back from the banks.

John McDonnell has committed himself to oppose any public service cuts. Would you do the same, Nancy?

I don't want to see any public service cuts and so far I'm opposing any that I come across. It depends what they were and why they were being cut. There would have to be a very good reason before I would support cuts in public services. I certainly don't want to see them.

Many on the left say that one of your opponents, Caroline Lucas, is a leftwing candidate with progressive policies in a number of areas. Why should people vote for Nancy Platts rather than Caroline Lucas?

I think the Greens have adopted a lot of traditional Labour policies. But they've also got some policies that I think are quite dangerous. We've got a huge drug problem in Brighton and I think it's irresponsible to suggest we should legalise all drugs without having an understanding of what the impact of that might be.

At the end of the day, to achieve anything in parliament you need allies and I know if I get elected I'll have people on my side - people I can influence, who I can talk to about new pieces of legislation or policies, and I think she would find herself very isolated. While Labour is the party of working people, the Greens, as much as they would like to have them, haven't got any links with the trade union movement. They're not where we are in terms of history and core values. The danger is, all the Greens are doing is undermining the Labour vote and letting the Tories in through the middle.

I have one further area I'd like to ask you about. You have hinted at your unhappiness with Labour's overseas policies, particularly the war in Afghanistan. What's your position on that?

Well, I'm an anti-war candidate. I'm a pacifist, so I oppose war. I don't see it as a solution to any problems. In the 21st century we should have other ways of sorting out our problems that don't involve killing people. I think the troops should come home from Afghanistan.

So would you call for them to come home immediately and unconditionally?

I'd call for them to come home, simple as that.

The problem with that, though, is that those who sent them there would also say, 'Yes, of course, we want the troops home.' The question is when.

Well, I've given you that answer already. I've said the troops should come home from Afghanistan - it's as simple as that ●

Labour's black sheep

Members of the CPGB were out canvassing for John McDonnell in the Hayes and Harlington constituency on Sunday April 25.

After being assigned an area, we were asked to find out whether the residents were voting for John, but not exactly encouraged to engage in discussion. Time is obviously a factor with the election close, but this approach emphasised the Labour left's quite narrow vision of working class politics.

Our reception on the doorstep was more often positive than not. There were people who knew of McDonnell or had met him personally, and were voting for him because of his political record. We

spoke to few outright Conservatives, and perhaps the majority of people were undecided or were not sure if they would vote at all. But the experience did prove that working class people take their vote seriously: many McDonnell voters were doing so despite their antipathy toward Labour nationally, and even those not voting said they were doing so for *political* reasons rather than laziness or apathy. They argued correctly that no party standing was representing their interests, even partially, and that parliament was undemocratic and corrupt.

Often these people were unaware of their MP's reputation as a persistent rebel and socialist and could be won to voting for

McDonnell. One resident joked that John must be "a bit of a black sheep" in the contemporary Labour Party. Indeed.

The questions of national representation, and genuine democracy at all levels, still remained. And communists should foster no illusions in the failed strategy of Labourism, including the idea of a "real Labour government", as comrade McDonnell puts it in *A people's agenda*, the Labour Representation Committee's pamphlet. But a socialist voice in a parliament determined to impose cuts in public services can help increase the fighting ability of the working class in the struggles to resist them ●

Laurie Smith

RESPECT

Confidence and conscience clauses

Around 120 people attended the 'Women's question time' organised by Tower Hamlets Respect on Wednesday April 21. Ben Lewis was among them



George Galloway: ever poetic

Selling papers outside the meeting, I bumped into Bethnal Green and Bow Respect candidate Abjol Miah, who had just been giving a television interview. I told him about how we had also been trying to interview him for the *Weekly Worker*, but had been fobbed off by his election agent, Socialist Action member George Woods. He told me how busy everyone had been and then proceeded to chat for a good five minutes - almost long enough for the interview we wanted.

Unlike the arch-bureaucrats of SA, however, Miah is quite a skilled politician - approachable and always willing to tell you about his "vision" for Tower Hamlets. He talked about trying to control business rates locally, putting pressure on the Labour Party to force them to return to "old Labour values" and the prospects of the Respect project "mushrooming out" from areas where they have a base.

When we finally made it inside, Yvonne Ridley was opening up from the chair, stating that it was good to see such a number of people from "so many parts of the community" (in reality the crowd was not hugely diverse, being mostly composed of Muslim women, largely of Bangladeshi and Somali origin) and how this embodied Respect's approach and what it represents. She spoke about the significance of holding a meeting for women, given that

51% of the electorate are female, and that women had given birth to and raised the other 49%. She re-emphasised how George Galloway was standing down in order to give way to a local Bangladeshi candidate. She affirmed that both Galloway and Miah held women in very high regard.

Galloway, who had obviously recognised me from the audience, began by saying that it was a great pleasure to address a women's event, but that the few brothers in attendance were also very welcome - even the "scribe for the *Weekly Worker*". I waved to acknowledge such a warm greeting.

Galloway started by reminding us that Respect is the "only party with a woman leader". Indeed, if Salma Yaqoob - described by Galloway as "a hijab-wearing, psychologist mother of three" - wins, which looks increasingly possible, since she now has the backing of the retiring Labour MP in her constituency, after May 6 it will become the first party to have a female Muslim MP. In view of this Galloway slammed *The Guardian* for claiming Respect is male-dominated.

He also went on to excoriate the official Labour view that Iraq is no longer a "toxic" issue, as it had been when New Labour hack Oona King had been ousted from Bethnal Green by Galloway in 2005 (this time George is standing in neighbouring Poplar and Limehouse). Was it no longer "toxic" that one million Iraqis were dead, with mothers nursing de-

formed children in Fallujah due to the bombing? What about the three million people exiled?

Galloway dismissed the competition both he and Miah faced with characteristic fluency. Why should local residents vote Respect? Well, the Tories weren't going to make an issue of Iraq: on the contrary. Additionally, while immigration was not a campaigning point in the East End, out in Barking and Dagenham the Tories were competing with the BNP under a 'No more immigration' banner. The Lib Dems, too, were quickly dismissed as a party that plans to "intensify" the aggression in Afghanistan. Cuts-wise, he declared, votes for Labour or Conservative were votes for "Tweedledum or Tweedledee".

Meanwhile Respect had come of age as a party with "policies on nuclear weapons, housing ... as well as chicken and chip shops." The ever-poetic Galloway waxed particularly lyrical on the subject of cuts. How could Britain not have the money to keep its pensioners warm, while the money was there to "light up" pensioners in Afghanistan? One thing Galloway failed to flag up was how Respect supporters should use their vote outside the constituencies where the party is standing: what about the Labour left or even Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidates?

Fielding questions from the audience handed in on slips of paper, Galloway ran quickly through a number of 'broad' issues, leaving the purely local matters to Miah - apart from advocating an electable, recallable local mayor. In the event of a hung parliament he foresaw greater parliamentary power for parties such as Respect, and committed himself to fighting for council housing and unconditional troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Just before he left for another meeting, Galloway moved on to 'women's issues', unashamedly drawing the audience's attention to the presence of his wife and son and listing the domestic chores he performs on a regular basis: "I am not a model man, but I am better than most." He criticised the ridiculous attacks on women wearing the hijab and underlined his commitment to fight against the oppression of Muslims in the UK and elsewhere.

My own question about the possibility of an attack on the abortion time limit by the Tories or even the Labour right did not interrupt the rhetorical flow. He reminded us that Respect regarded abortion as a "conscience matter" and as such "not political". Galloway was able to bring his "conscience" into the political arena for long enough to "encourage families to have children and not to kill them". Openly against abortion and especially "late" abortion, Galloway fully supports a reduction in the upper time limit to ban terminations where (that old rightwing chestnut) "life can be sustained". Galloway recognised immediately that the question was from me, stating that "I am sure my response will be of great interest to the *Weekly Worker*". Contrary to what Galloway thinks, this is not a case of a "*Weekly Worker* scribe" engaging in some cheap point-scoring: the prospect of attacks on reproductive freedoms is something that the workers' movement as a whole must take extremely seriously.

Miah largely played to his strengths - ie, local issues. He pointed to the connection between poverty and crime in Tower Hamlets: as a former youth worker he criticised the lack of publicly funded provision, and spoke of the need to "politicise" Muslim youth, drawing them away from the kind of Islamic extremist groups that had launched an attack on Respect in Bethnal Green. In a constituency where large numbers live in overcrowded, insecure housing, he vowed to fight for more secure tenancies and improve social housing provision. He emphasised his commitment to individual residents' problems, and claimed his local

constituency work was guided by the Respect values of "peace, justice and equality". Miah dubbed Tower Hamlets the "borough of Tescos" and demanded that local enterprises should benefit more from the 2012 Olympics. In line with Respect's history of demanding a crackdown on 'raunch' culture, he promised a continued battle against the strip clubs springing up across the borough. (One wonders, by the way, whether this is a political or "conscience" matter).

Miah's answer to the same abortion question was more carefully phrased than Galloway's and his opposition to abortion more moderately expressed: "I am for life ... I have my own personal faith." Reminding the audience that Respect must deal with many "different people with different backgrounds", he called for a "healthy debate and discussion on the issue" within Respect. However, he thought we ought not to waste too much time on abortion, as there were "other, bigger issues" to consider.

Speakers following Galloway's impassioned rhetoric and Miah's local knowledge, struggled somewhat, including Socialist Action's Bryony Shanks. She brought up the question of a woman's right to choose ... what she wears, which she described as a "fundamental principle of feminism". This was clearly not the time for comrade Shanks to discuss a woman's right to control her own reproduction - despite the fact that the Abortion Rights campaign is run by SA comrades.

Clearly, this event was intended more as an election rally than a genuine exchange of ideas on the role and rights of women. However, one got the distinct impression that in east London Respect remains a vibrant project with realistic hopes of victory on May 6, and the general emphasis on drawing women into politics was certainly encouraging.

For all its many weaknesses, not least on abortion, Respect candidates are standing on a platform of pro-working class demands and should be critically supported against the establishment parties.

To get involved with the final days of campaigning call or text 07919 843870 ●

Overcoming passivity

With just a week to go until election day, Tusc's campaign for local Unite convenor and Socialist Party in England and Wales member Rob Williams as candidate for Swansea West has been upped a gear.

For the past few weeks, as well as militantly arguing for the defence of working class rights and standards against the raft of cuts guaranteed to be imposed by all the mainstream parties, comrades from Tusc have doggedly fought to raise comrade Williams' profile. The CPGB has continued to play a prominent role in that campaign, involving itself in most of the stall work, leafleting and canvassing.

But important questions now need to be considered. Firstly, what of the future of Tusc? Pushing a set of politics to counter the anti-working class agenda of Labour, Liberal Democrats and Conservatives is commendable as far as it goes,

but how does Tusc hope to advance such politics in the period subsequent to May 6? Indeed, if it has aspirations to become a significant force in leftwing politics, what measures will it take to strengthen the coalition after this date?

This is not an unimportant issue. However, SPEW openly states that the question of left unity is secondary: what matters is organising jointly with trade union left bureaucrats like Bob Crow to encourage a union break from Labour in order to set up a Labour Party mark two. As this possibility is remote, to put it mildly, it is difficult to see how the limited cooperation we have seen in Tusc can be taken forward.

For its part, the Socialist Workers Party, although formally part of Tusc, has not played any significant role in comrade Williams' campaign in Swansea, preferring instead to prioritise its work within Unite Against Fascism and, as a result,

Tusc's name recognition has not been what it might have.

Secondly, there is the question of politics. Canvassing throughout the past couple of weeks has been characterised by a general apathy, indifference and, at times, hostility to politics from people at the door: 'It's not going to make a difference who gets in' and the belief that immigrants are to blame for job losses (particularly high in Wales) were sentiments we have often encountered. Admittedly, there have been positive responses and, speaking from personal experience, the odd one or two inspiring moments when individuals questioned the nature of the political system *per se*. But many people continue to see their relationship to politics and political participation as, at best, a passive one. Which begs the question, how can socialists overcome this? ●

Bob Davies

ELECTION 2010

From an instrument of deception

Mike Macnair reviews the mainstream election campaign and the inadequate response of the left

Watching the general election campaign is watching an electoral fraud in progress. Of course, direct ballot-rigging will be limited - confined to the exploitation of the postal vote rules here and there. We are not about to see the massive stuffing of ballot boxes in the style of the recent 'elections' of Ahmadinejad in Iran or Karzai in Afghanistan, or even the fraudulent use of election qualification rules and ballot errors like the 2000 US presidential election.

But the outcome of the election, whatever it is, will be governed by the systematic fraudulent misrepresentations - *suggestio falsi* (suggestion of falsehood) and *suppressio veri* (suppression of the truth) - of the main parties and the state and capitalist mass media. The vast majority of voters will have no opportunity to make choices not governed by these fraudulent operations. It is as if there were no way to buy medicines - except from three fraudulent 'internet pharmacies', none of whom will in reality deliver what has been paid for.

All capitalist elections have to be largely governed by fraud: who would vote for the Bankers Atlanticist New Labour Party, Bankers Atlanticist Conservative Party or Bankers Atlanticist Liberal Democratic Party, if given their right names? Even before universal suffrage, who would have voted for the Landlords and Bankers Imperialist Whig (Liberal) Party or the Landlords and Bankers Imperialist Tory (Conservative) Party? The capitalist class is a small minority in society, and it can only rule in elections by winning support from the lower orders for parties which it controls through machineries of corruption. But the fraudulent character of *this* election campaign is unusually striking.

Part (but only part) of that fraudulent character is the effective exclusion of the interests of the working class. Historically, since the 1900s these interests have been (very imperfectly) represented by the Labour Party or, more exactly, by its left wing. But the media, by crying 'class war' and 'no return to the 70s', has scared off the Labour leadership from its very tentative attempts earlier in the campaign to raise issues of working class interests, and New Labour, desperately short of activists on the ground, is running an ultra-centralised campaign through commercial mail shots and call-centres. Meanwhile, the far left is characterised by illusions of unity with the right and real internal fragmentation, which preclude *effective* campaigning.

Tweedledum and Tweedledee

The Tories, who remain front-runners, and New Labour have both run fundamentally dishonest campaigns. Recent Tory posters, after early debates, promise 'workfare' schemes (which New Labour has already introduced). They accuse Gordon Brown of increasing social inequality (which Tory tax policy would undoubtedly exacerbate) and of releasing tens of thousands of prisoners early. This last policy the Tories would undoubtedly continue: the al-



Whichever of the main parties you vote for, you have been conned

ternatives are either to reduce the use of imprisonment for property crimes (hardly a likely Tory policy) or massive spending on new jails (also unlikely when huge public spending cuts are in the offing).

New Labour's dishonesty is slightly different in character. "A future fair for all" was immediately spoofed, most effectively as "a future vague for all". The real essence of the campaign, however, is to remind voters of Cameron's and Osborne's early promises of 'slash and burn' cuts in public expenditure, and warn (more or less carefully) targeted groups of voters of Tory cuts affecting their particular interests. Pensioners' benefits has become a *cause célèbre*, as the Tories have accused New Labour of lying.

Both sides promise 'fundamental reforms' in the way politics is done. In both there is one or another sort of catch. Cameron defends 'first past the post' (FPTP); and promotes presidential politics - in the leaders' 'debate', he proposed that the election of a new party leader should trigger a general election and touted directly elected mayors. The effect would be to further reduce the choice available to electors - from *policies* to *administrators*. Brown proposes the unqualified 'alternative vote' (AV) system, which would force politicians onto the centre ground and disenfranchise altogether both left and right, accentuating the problem that 'all politicians are the same'. His 'solution' to the parliamentary expenses scandal is to give yet more power to the lawyers at the expense of politics. Cameron was first off in support of 'open primaries' - ie, allowing the media and the advertisers to select party candidates - but Miliband and others jumped on the bandwagon. The reality is that what is on offer from both sides is to deepen the tendency for the limited democratic elements in the constitution to be eviscerated by control by the state, media and lawyers.

'Cleggstacy'

The three-way leaders' 'debates' have been entirely stage-managed and almost totally bereft of any genuine exchange of ideas. The media coverage has largely turned on presentational trivia. The underlying agenda is presidentialist: we are to vote for *leaders* as potential prime ministers, not to make choices about *policies* or our *representation* by MPs.

The Scottish National Party is entirely right to argue (in its litigation against the BBC) that the effect is anti-democratic and amounts to bias in favour of the three parties represented in the debate, in violation of the BBC's charter. That is not to say that the SNP's narrow Scots-sectionalist agenda is in any way desirable: but its narrowness and that of Plaid Cymru should be exposed to the full view of the electorate. The SNP predictably lost its case, and the UK Independence Party's threat to sue will fail too: no judge will rock the political boat to the extent that ruling against the debates would involve.

But the debate format *has* allowed the Liberal Democrats in the person of Nick Clegg to claim to be offering a 'real alternative'; and their support shot up in the polls after the first debate and has remained in the high 20s since - high enough to make a hung parliament a realistic possibility. In effect, Clegg has - at least temporarily - been able to capitalise on the 'anti-politics' mood which has been around for some time and exacerbated since the expenses scandal broke. 'Cleggstacy', coined by some hack last week, is singularly appropriate: the current Lib Dem-ism is precisely like a drug which provides the *illusion* of 'goodwill to all men'.

The Lib Dems have, of course, fewer MPs than the other parties, and probably proportionately fewer simple careerists than Labour or the Tories. So they have been less hard hit by the expenses scandal. But there is no more reason to believe that the Lib Dems would bring 'real change' than to believe the Tories or New Labour would. The new voting system the Lib Dems propose is the single transferable vote (STV) with larger multi-member constituencies. But, as Moshé Machover has shown in these pages and elsewhere,¹ STV can produce results as unrepresentative as FPTP; and like AV it tends to reinforce the centre and thus deny voters the full range of choices.

Nonetheless, a new voting system would represent a real change. So one acid test of the Lib Dems' claim to stand for change will be whether they will insist on early legislation for proportional representation as a condition of joining a coalition or giving support to a minority government. In fact, it seems most unlikely. As I write, the sovereign debt crisis which has been focussed on Greece

is deepening, spreading and bringing sharp falls in stock markets round the world. Since the 2004 'Orange book' the Lib Dem leadership has moved sharply towards neoliberal orthodoxy, and part of its current selling package is Vince Cable in the debate between the chancellor of the exchequer and his two shadows. Surely, when presented both with sovereign debt crisis and the opportunity to show that they are 'serious and responsible' in order to get a foot in the ministerial door, the Lib Dems will say that serious constitutional change has to wait until the crisis has been sorted out.

We are not without evidence for this judgment from the Lib Dems' prior practice. Anyone who has followed the news of Lib Dem election campaigns in the localities will know that they are characterised by *more* direct dishonesty (false allegations about shares of the vote and about other candidates) and *more* sheer opportunism (saying what they think the voters wish to hear) than either of the other two parties. Moreover, the Lib Dems are in office in a wide range of places in local government, usually in coalition with the Tories. Their conduct in local government has negligible relation to their electoral promises. Moreover, that their election campaign is fraudulent too is shown by the silences they share with the other main parties.

Don't mention the war

The Independent on Sunday (April 18) used this headline to describe what it called a 'conspiracy of silence' on Afghanistan. Its poll found 77% of respondents wanted the withdrawal of troops. But this public opinion found no reflection in the leaders' 'debate' and has no reflection in the policy of the three main parties. The Lib Dems try to exploit the fact that they 'opposed' the invasion of Iraq, by which they mean that they opposed invasion *without a UN mandate*; but when UK forces were sent in they 'rallied behind the troops'. They have never opposed the war in Afghanistan (which has been UN-sanctioned all along) and continue to support it.

Behind this silence is something more fundamental: Britain's place in the world. At the leaders' 'debate' Cameron and Brown joined together

in attacking Clegg over the Lib Dems' unwillingness to support the planned replacement for the Trident nuclear submarine system. Renewal will cost upwards of £20 billion, and the costs (and dubious military value) have led some retired military figures to argue against replacement. Why on earth cling to a system which is expensive, crowds out other military hardware in the defence budget and in any case effectively dependent on the US? (Though Brown *claims* that Trident is not dual-keyed, its predecessor, Polaris, was, and both the subs and the missiles are dependent on US supply and servicing.) On Europe, too, the Lib Dems were targeted as too 'Europhile' by Conservative and New Labour alike.

Beneath these issues lie the Atlanticist commitments of all British parties, the Lib Dems included, and of the British state. 'Don't mention the war' in another sense. In 1940-41 the financial dominance and independent defence capability of the British empire collapsed. After tough negotiations in 1940 the US bailed Britain out, on terms whereby Britain would be *subordinate* to the US, playing a role analogous to Britain's stronger continental satellites in the 18th century. Down to the Suez crisis of 1956 British policymakers hoped to recover an autonomous position; by the mid-1960s they had abandoned this hope.

Thatcher's neoliberal turn and the 'big bang' in the City meant a further surrender of autonomy to the US. The UK had now become an offshore financial centre with a limited material economy attached to it. But its ability to function as an offshore financial centre depended, and still depends, on US support. In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, France and Germany *could* take an autonomous line. The UK could not, or could not without wrecking the City and, as a result, risking radical and wrenching change on a scale comparable to the fates of the eastern European economies after 1989. David Miliband said in October 2009: "For 60 years Europe, with Britain eventually playing its part, has developed a distinctive, successful model of social market economies and liberal politics. Now we are challenged to be a global player. It is, therefore, a choice that no responsible British government can afford to shirk."² This is code for the necessary Atlanticism of any "responsible British government" - and therefore of the three main parties, however much the electorate may be opposed to its results in wars and military waste.

Quiet about the cuts

This week the media finally picked up on the fact that the main parties must, in reality, be planning much more extensive cuts and tax rises than any of them are admitting. The *Financial Times* (April 26) suggested that on the parties' own claims about halving the deficit £37 billion needs to be cut: its major suggestions include a 5% across-the-board cut in public sector pay, freezing all benefits, means-testing child benefit, making 10% cuts in the devolved budgets in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, stopping

all school building projects, halving spending on roads, and scrapping pensioners' winter fuel payments, free TV licences and concessionary fares. Alternatively, the basic rate of income tax could go up to 25% to raise £20 billion, VAT to 20% to raise £12 billion and national insurance by some unspecified amount. On April 27 the Institute for Fiscal Studies got in on the act: it suggested that the Conservatives on their plans need to make around £64 billion of cuts (of which they have specified so far £18 billion), Labour £51 billion (£7 billion specified), and the Lib Dems £47 billion (£7 billion).³

These figures depend, of course, on the parties taking their existing spending and tax commitments at all seriously - which seems, frankly, in the highest degree unlikely. They also depend on two assumptions about the economy. The first is that the contagion of the sovereign debt crisis will not spread so far as to severely increase the yields on gilts (which would mean the UK government had to find more money to pay interest). The second is that neither the sovereign debt crisis, nor the pending cuts themselves, will produce a second leg down in the recession - which would result in a more or less serious fall in tax receipts.

In this context it is not surprising that it has been remarked of the Conservatives' 'big society' slogan and the concrete suggestion of privatising schools through 'parent cooperatives' that there is no money available for it: so that the leader of Tory flagship Kent County Council points out that the only way to pay for it would be to make schools remaining in the public sector worse.

It is characteristic of fraudsters that they play up the good things their product or service will offer - but do not mention the downside risks. Both on the Afghanistan war, 'defence' and Britain's place in the world, and on the scale of the cuts that they are actually contemplating, the main parties are engaged in just such *suppressio veri*.

Machinery of fraud

A large part of the con man's trick is to reduce the information available to the mark. The primary fraudulent misrepresentations are expected to crowd out other information, less attractively presented, which might conflict with them; but also pressure is put on to 'close the deal' before the mark has had an opportunity to rethink.

Electoral fraud works in the same way. The primary fraudulent misrepresentations are broadcast by paid advertising and the state and advertising-funded media, crowding out other messages (indeed, the phenomena of junk mail, billboard advertising and flyposting for clubs and gigs themselves work to drown out all forms of political communication not backed by advertising agencies or the mass media). The role of the advertising-funded mass media is, in fact, central to corruption and sleaze, because the only way (within the rules of the game) that politicians can hope to counter the biases of the mass media and behind them the advertisers, is to buy commercial advertising, which demands donations from the rich, which in turn demands the policy pay-off to the donors.⁴

Meanwhile, elections happen once every five years, and the campaign is short. The message from both the media and the main parties is that the job of elections is to choose a government. So don't waste your vote - or your thinking time - on fringe parties. Close the deal! Political action in local government elections and the internal life of parties, which can provide some degree of political life outside the 'government election season', is as far as possible closed

down: by FPTP, which results in big-party control of councils and 'rotten boroughs'; by the enormous expansion of judicial review (why fight for council policies when the lawyers will tell you what to do anyhow?); and, in the Labour Party, by bureaucratic intervention from the central apparatus, backed up if necessary by the trade union bureaucracy. Only in general elections are the voters to be allowed to make 'real choices'. Close the deal! Close the deal now!

The anarchists produced a true slogan about capitalist elections: 'Whoever you vote for, the government will get in.' It would be even truer to say: 'Whoever of the main parties you vote for, you will have been conned.'

Working class political representation

In the opening of the 1880 *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier* Karl Marx wrote that a political party of the working class "must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal, including universal suffrage, which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation."⁵ A hundred and thirty years later, universal suffrage remains an 'instrument of deception'. And part of that instrument of deception is the Bankers Atlanticist New Labour Party.

Labour was founded as a political party of the working class, though the apple contained from the beginning a worm at its core: the dictatorship of the trade union officials and the autonomy of the MPs. Even so, down to the 1970s the Labour Party did to some extent represent the political interests of the working class. And in doing so it did reduce the extent to which elections could be conducted through pure and simple fraud.

It did so primarily not through its leadership. Ramsay MacDonald or Ernie Bevin, Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson and so on were just as much bureaucrats and careerists as today's politicians and just as prone to lie to the electorate. Rather, on the one hand, the idea of the Labour Party as a party of the independent interests of the working class legitimised political speech about the interests of the working class. And, on the other, the organisation of activists at the base, the imperfectly democratic constitutional structures of Labour conference, constituency Labour parties, and so on, and the labour movement press (the *Daily Herald*, *Tribune* and so on) provided spaces in which it was possible for working class people to debate and discuss what the interests of the class were and put them forward. These spaces were not, unlike the 19th century bourgeois press or today's media, controlled by the media barons and the advertisers.

The existence of the organisations of the labour movement at the base and its press did not guarantee fraud-free elections. But they did mitigate the control of the fraudsters over political communications. They did so by providing alternative channels of political communication accessible to the working class.

Today almost all of this is gone. It is gone because, by the 1970s, the capitalist class judged that the concessions it had made to the working class in the post-war period gave the working class too much power. The capitalist class through the state and the media therefore forced the leadership of the mass workers' organisations to choose between their loyalty to the nation-state and the constitution, on the one hand, and independent organisation of the working class, on the other. Under the 1974-79 Wilson government, and all the more

under Thatcher, the overwhelming majority of the leaders of the labour movement chose loyalty to Britain and to the constitution. The result was not the disappearance of trade unions or labour movement organisations, but rather that these organisations became subordinated to and incorporated within the order of legal-bureaucratic-advertising-media control of political communication.

Almost all that is left is the idea of a Labour Party. Many media types would like to be rid of this, too, and see the Liberal Democrats return to the throne they held in the 19th century as the Liberal Party, the throne held today in the US by the Democrats. In the present state of the polls, it does not look as if they will achieve their aim; and it is far from clear that British capital as such shares it. Trade unions have been dramatically weakened, but they can still from time to time mobilise their members and obstruct employers' plans. Through the Labour Party the trade union bureaucracy is incorporated in the rules of the constitutional game; breaking that link in the hope of remaking it through the Lib Dems would be high-risk.

Labour left

The alternative contenders for recreating working class political representation and undermining the hold of the fraudsters on politics are the left, both within and outside Labour. Both sides of the coin are today extraordinarily weak.

The left inside Labour is paralysed by its attachment to the party as such, which means - in effect - attachment to the careerist fraudsters who constitute the party leadership. To fight exclusively within the party and its (withered) official structures and (ultra-narrow) opportunities for debate means to seek allies to your right, among the Labour 'centre-left': this much is visible even in the Labour Representation Committee's list of recommended Labour candidates. But then the 'centre-left' is seeking allies to its right ... and so what can be said in debate is almost exclusively limited to what is 'acceptable opposition' in the eyes of the New Labour right of the party.

It is perfectly conceivable that if after May 6 Labour is faced with a Lib Dem-Tory coalition, the party will shift to the left in the hope of regaining lost ground or at least providing a vision for opposition. The problem is that to restore Labour as a party of (imperfect) political representation of the working class it would be necessary to liquidate the 'reforms' of the period between Wilson (on reselection of MPs) and Blair; and, in addition, to embark on a campaign to delegitimise the judiciary and delegitimise the media, both in relation to industrial action and in relation to local government, in order to restore the grassroots by gradually breaking the stranglehold of these institutions on local and political action. To do so would not be to seek an insurrectionary general strike; but it would be to break with the path of constitutionalism.

Equally, under present conditions it is extraordinarily difficult to defend the independent interests of the working class at all without fighting to do so on at least a European scale. If the UK is to borrow money on international money markets, which it must do in order to keep going under the existing constitutional order, it must maintain 'credibility' with the capitalist lenders; and in order to pay them it must preserve UK 'competitiveness'. Both mean attacks on working class living standards and working conditions. Merely to print money to avoid cuts would produce a rapid collapse. Economic 'autarky' within Britain would lead to millions starving in short order; the same is

all the more true of an 'independent socialist Scotland'. On a European scale, however, the working class could refuse the demands of the bankers, break free of the limits of the deficit-finance nation-state and take over running the economy as a whole in its own interests.

The Labour left could, potentially, spearhead a political fightback. But to do so it would have to break free of its own Labour-constitutionalism and nationalism.

Splintered left

Outside the Labour Party there are many candidates of different left formations of one sort or another. Most of them are complete no-hopers, aiming at most to do some small-scale propaganda for their own small-scale organisation. So we have the Socialist Equality Party (two candidates), Communist League (also two), Workers Revolutionary Party (seven), Workers Power (one), Alliance for Workers' Liberty (one). The *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain is standing six candidates on the same general approach.

Arthur Scargill's proprietary Socialist Labour Party is standing 24 candidates, and in spite of its almost non-existence on the ground will no doubt get at least as good a vote as other far-left candidates - quite likely better because of the Scargill name. In Scotland the Scottish Socialist Party is standing 10 candidates. Not that many years ago both of these organisations represented serious potential for the reorganisation of the left to challenge New Labour; in both cases that potential has been squandered.

The idea of unity of the left is represented in two different ways, by Respect and by the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition.

Respect does objectively represent a small section of the working class: workers of south Asian - principally Pakistani and Bengali - ethnic origin, in inner east London and inner Birmingham. It has made serious efforts to organise on the ground and has the advantage of consistent use of a name and the prominence of George Galloway MP. Since its split with the Socialist Workers Party it has moved somewhat to the left. However, it remains an organisation which does not set out to represent the working class as a class, but to create a 'rainbow coalition' or people's front. It is also hard to see how, even if Respect does well on May 6, it can break out of its existing ghettos.

Tusc is a lash-up, an attempt to create a sort of fiction of unity under the methods of the isolationism of its principal constituents, the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the SWP - and hence, in Scotland, these two groups' joint front with Tommy Sheridan, Solidarity. Originally it also included the CPB, which pulled out to run its own campaign (although CPB member John Metcalfe is the Tusc candidate in Carlisle); RMT general secretary Bob Crow, theoretically a backer of Tusc, has said he will join the CPB in campaigning on election day. The bureaucratic lash-up of Tusc's creation has meant an extraordinarily late and inefficient entry on the campaign, as can be seen from other reports in this paper. The degree of unity involved can be judged by the fact that *Socialist Worker* reports only the campaigns of SWP-backed candidates, *The Socialist* only those backed by SPEW.

Tusc is politically stronger than Respect, in that its name expresses more clearly the political representation of the working class. It is sharply weaker as an electoral project, and politically, on questions of democracy both in the state and in the movement.

The left inside Labour and the left outside Labour have a common

political weakness. They both cling to the illusion of unity with forces to their right; and in doing so refuse to unite with forces with whom they have common ground. The illusion of unity with the right is most obvious in the Labour left, but it, just like the 'outside left', is internally splintered between different factions (Briefing, Socialist Appeal and so on) which weakens the effectiveness of its work. The splintering is most obvious outside Labour; but the illusion of unity with the right is also present. It expresses itself in the Labourite character of the comrades' electoral platforms and campaigns, which focus on economic issues and ignore or downplay democratic ones - even when, as in this election, questions like proportional representation are at the centre of the campaign.

CPGB comrades have attempted, with varying success, to give personal support to Tusc candidates as well as to Respect in east London and to the Labour left campaign of John McDonnell MP of the Labour Representation Committee in Hayes and Harlington. We have not put the same effort into the campaigns of other more or less supportable far-left groups or individual candidates. The reason is that, however weakly, the LRC, Respect and Tusc pose the question of the unity of the left.

Unity

To overcome the dominance of the fraudsters we need to recover and develop the political representation of the working class. The great illusions of the splintered left are founded on two ideas.

The first is the idea that the political representation of the working class can be recovered within the framework of Labourism - whether inside or outside the Labour Party. The loss of working class political representation through Labour is not an accident, but resulted from choices made by capital, which have reshaped the British constitution in favour of lawyerisation and bureaucratic and media control - which in turn have caused a withering of labour movement organisations. These will not be rebuilt without systematic campaigning on the constitutional issues in order to undermine the legitimacy of the media and the courts. Nor will the idea of socialism in Britain alone be remotely plausible to electors. The effort to reclaim Labour, or build a new Labourite Party, will therefore lead merely to failure or to tailing the Labour right (directly or indirectly).

The second is the illusion that the political representation of the working class can be recovered without overcoming the disunity of the Marxist left and its extraordinarily short attention span. The reality is that regaining political representation means a long, hard grind in the localities, in local elections, local campaigns, and so on, and in rebuilding trade union organisation at the base, workers' education, etc: the work that the precursors of the Labour Party did. It also means building up workers' media - not a party paper, but many local and sectoral papers. This sort of work needs our combined efforts if it is to be at all effective. Without a common party, what we get is ineffective, competing projects and at best bureaucratic lash-ups which have negligible political impact ●

Notes

1. 'Proportional representation and Brown's opportunist ploy' *Weekly Worker* April 1.
2. <http://ukiniraq.fc.gov.uk/en/news/?view=News&id=21094620>.
3. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8646612.stm>. As of writing, the IFS website (www.ifs.org) is down, so that it is not possible to see more detail.
4. 'Sleaze is back' *Weekly Worker* July 20 2006.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.

BNP

Griffin's eclectic manifesto

BNP policies owe as much to the mainstream as they do to its leaders' fascist past, writes **Eddie Ford**

After much delay, widely attributed to the recent attempted 'palace coup' against Nick Griffin, the British National Party finally launched its 94-page election manifesto, *Democracy, freedom, culture, identity*, on April 23. This, of course, happened to be St George's Day and hence Griffin was accompanied throughout the entire press conference by a man, or clown, dressed in an appropriately themed St George's costume - though you could not help but wonder if the patriots of the BNP were aware of the fact that St George is also the patron saint of Portugal, Cyprus, Greece, Georgia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Republic of Macedonia.

At the Stoke-on-Trent launch Griffin was keen to put across the message that for the 2010 general election, which sees the BNP standing a record 339 candidates - more than three times as many as the whole of the left put together - the party's manifesto was not solely about immigration. In fact, he claimed, it was the media and not the BNP which are "obsessed" by the question. So, yes, obviously the BNP wants to 'keep Britain British' - seeing how "Britain is full" and is the "most overcrowded" country in Europe; therefore it is time to "shut the doors". However, Griffin insisted there were other fundamental questions just as important as immigration, if not more so - notably, immediately pulling British troops out of Afghanistan, withdrawing from the European Union, "renationalising" the welfare state, scrapping ID cards and axing "bureaucrats and quangos". Indeed, Griffin points out, economic issues get far more space than immigration in the manifesto - which he proudly described as a "serious piece of political kit".

Now, of course, most of the liberal and socialist left with almost neurotic eagerness will seize upon the BNP's manifesto in order to detect evidence of fascism - even the BNP's congenital 'Nazism'. This is certainly the approach of Jim Wolfreys of *The Guardian*, who writes that in the manifesto there are "features" of a "political current that has existed before" - yes, "it has a name" and "its name is fascism".¹

This profoundly foolish approach is, needless to say, shared by the Socialist Workers Party - hence the latest issue of *Socialist Worker* shrilly warns us about the "Nazi world view" that "lurks" inside the pages of the BNP's manifesto.² Such a method is predicated on the entirely erroneous and prejudiced notion that fascism possesses some sort of coherent, well-rounded ideology or clearly identifiable set of credos - which you can always find if you look hard enough for the ideological 'giveaway' signs.

Yet this is plainly not the case: if only life was so simple. Rather than fighting for various precious programmatic shibboleths, fascism instead wants to capture the streets and physically crush the organised left, using non-state fighting formations or street gangs. This is hardly a description of today's BNP, whose central and overriding political priority is to "claw its way" into parliament and "seize control of councils" - to use the words of the same *Socialist Worker* article. No, far more deserving of fascist status than the BNP is the decidedly non-electoral English Defence League, ever up for a violent ruck with the anti-fascist left - particularly its number one *bête noire*,

Unite Against Fascism (which in turn is led by the SWP). And, contrary to the ludicrous idea persistently and brainlessly promulgated by the left, the EDL is not an outrider for the BNP, but an entirely separate organisation. Indeed, the two organisations are actively *hostile* to each other.

In reality, an examination of the BNP's manifesto reveals a rag-bag of political positions.³ Some of them are in fact remarkably similar to those adopted by sections of the left. Like the promise already mentioned to "end the involvement" of British troops in Afghanistan, and the pledge "not to allow" British troops to become involved in a war against Iran, "reverse the budget cuts on education", "increase spending on front-line" NHS staff, "oppose the privatisation of natural monopolies like Royal Mail", and "repeal all laws aimed at restricting freedom of speech" - including those "relating to race relations and religion" (admittedly this last one is not a demand taken up by the likes of the SWP).

Meanwhile, the BNP's commitment to "defend" British industry could virtually be copied from the social democratic or 'official communist' handbook. For instance, and surely warming the ageing hearts of *Morning Star* readers, the BNP will "nationalise the telecoms infrastructure" and generally "invest" in "rebuilding British industry and skills" through an "active protectionist policy, as many other European nations already do". As for the demand for an "immediate withdrawal" from the EU, a body "dedicated to usurping British sovereignty" and to "destroying our nationhood and national identity" (though the BNP "loves Europe"), this could have come from the No2EU website. Such strident EU-phobia, which communists have always adamantly opposed, has been an extremely undesirable feature of a whole swathe of the left, from the 'Bennite' Labour left, through the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, to the International Socialist Group.

For communists then, what shines through the entire BNP manifesto is not incipient fascism - clearly a leftist dogma. No, what we are confronted with, in addition to the positions outlined above which resemble those held by some on the left, is a far-right version of British nationalism, which is, of course, the ideology of official Britain. What gives the BNP its particular appeal is its ability to ride the 'anti-politics' politics mood, its attacks on international bankers and its targeting of Muslims.

Islamophobia permeates the manifesto and is merely a variation on the racist scapegoating seen in the political/election propaganda churned out by the BNP in the past. So, yes, naturally, the BNP still wants to provide "incentives" for all British citizens with migrant ancestry to "voluntarily" return to "their lands of ethnic origin" and a "halt to all further immigration". Not to mention a "review all citizenship grants awarded" by the Labour government since 1997, "based on that party's admission that they orchestrated mass immigration to change forcibly Britain's demographics and to gerrymander elections". In this way, including through the "repeal of the Race Relations Act and all other far leftist social engineering projects" - such as multiculturalism, the "wrecker of nationhood" - the BNP hopes to prevent the "extinction" of the British people and its "culture, heritage and identity".

However, the previous racist bile directed against those originating from the West Indies or the Indian subcontinent has been replaced by an obsessive anti-Muslim agenda. Indeed, from reading the BNP's manifesto you would have to conclude that Islam and Muslims are squarely to blame for almost all Britain's woes and tribulations. Accordingly we have the section revealingly named, "Counter jihad: confronting the Islamic colonisation of Britain". Here we read that the "historical record shows" that Islam - unlike Christianity presumably - is "by its very nature incompatible with modern, secular, western democracy". Therefore the BNP thinks that there "should be absolutely no further immigration from any Muslim countries", seeing how it "presents one of the most deadly threats yet to the survival of our nation".

In order to further meet this objective, of stopping Britain from being "colonised" by the forces of Islam "within a few decades", the BNP would ban the burqa, ritual slaughter and the building of further mosques in Britain - as well as ordering the "immediate deportation of all radical Islamist preachers" and any other "members of their community who object to these reasonable security measures". We also discover that the BNP is the "only party to identify correctly the twin causes of Islamist terrorism" in Britain - which are, predictably enough, "mass immigration" and, not quite so predictably, a "biased British foreign policy which serves to incite Muslims living in Britain" (that is, the continued presence of British troops in Afghanistan).

Now, this is pure and simple bigotry, but it chimes with the deep-seated sense of insecurity that exists in British society, especially amongst those who are the most atomised, who feel betrayed by self-serving politicians and who are being slowly crushed by the blind workings of the market and fear further impoverishment from the 'slash and burn' cuts that are sure to come in 2011. To these people the idea of further mass migration into Britain appears plain crazy when there is mass unemployment, squeezed health and education budgets and virtually no building of council houses. And Muslims not only often have brown faces and dress differently. Their loyalty to the nation-state can be questioned, what with Iraq, Afghanistan and a whole series of terrorist outrages. Yet the Islamophobia so prominently on show in the BNP's manifesto differs in no fundamental way from the 'respectable' version of it you can find in the *Daily Mail* or *The Sun*. This is the well that the BNP draws upon - the ignorance being manufactured by Associated Newspapers and News International - not from a political and philosophical copying of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or some other such 1920s nonsense.

Apart from Islamophobia, *Democracy, freedom, culture, identity* promotes a striking authoritarianism. Indicative of this mindset, the BNP promises, or threatens, to enact legislation which will "hold journalists" and their media outlets "criminally liable" for "knowingly" writing or publishing "falsehoods" - especially those, one suspects, directed against any newly installed BNP government (this does not sit easily with the pledge to "repeal all laws aimed at

restricting freedom of speech").

Needless to say, the BNP thinks it is "time to get tough on crime", and perhaps here we see the party at its most crudely populist. Playing to the tabloid gallery, the manifesto pledges to "reintroduce" the death penalty for drug dealers, child murderers, multiple murderers, murderers of policemen on duty and terrorists. But there is more. Slightly bizarrely, though with a streak of genuine originality, the BNP will establish a "penal station" for "extremely dangerous/violent repeat criminals" - notably rapists - in South Georgia (the British overseas territory in the south Atlantic).

We also discover that the BNP wants to introduce a "clause 28-style proscription" against the "promotion of racial integration" in schools and the media. There will also be legislation to "ensure" that the "only languages" to be permitted in official government documents/papers will be English, Welsh, Cornish, Manx and Gaelic. Alongside all this, the "British concepts" of civility and courteousness will be taught again in our schools - side by side with an "emphasis" on British history, along with English, Irish, Scots and Welsh culture and their "relation to western civilisation as a whole". In this way, the BNP hopes to encourage patriotism amongst future pupils and students.

It goes without saying that the BNP detests the "trendy egalitarian" teaching methods that the left has "deliberately employed" as a sinister "instrument of social engineering and indoctrination" - wreaking "untold damage" upon the country in the process. An important part of the struggle to restore traditional teaching methods, or so the BNP argues, is to bring back the 'three Rs' to every school in the land, especially at elementary level, and it looks forward to the "return" to the "system of learning by phonetics" - a case of

a stupid populist prejudice straying into the teaching of literacy, as just about anyone working in the field today will tell you.

Another example of such right populism can be found in BNP plans to save £18 billion by abandoning the various schemes and technologies designed to tackle global warming - which is described as "unproved science". We also get some fairly bog-standard petty bourgeois fare about championing small businesses - with the added twist, reminiscent of the open anti-Semitism previously embraced by BNP leaders, of railing against "international profit", combined with "a rootless, amorphous globalist philosophy". Interestingly enough, we also learn that the word 'racist' - which is of a "loose definition" - was "invented" by the "arch" Marxist, Leon Trotsky, in order to "suppress any debate on this important subject".

How should the eclectic mix of left and right populism contained in the BNP's general election manifesto be countered? This can only be done by the systematic and programmatic confrontation with the chauvinistic and backward ideas constantly generated by the mainstream parties, *the establishment* as a whole - and its media - rather than getting obsessed by the supposedly "Nazi" BNP, let alone idiotically chasing the genuinely fascist English Defence League from one town to the next.

Crucially, that means putting forward an *alternative*. Not the warmed over Labourism favoured by most of the left, but the programme of Marxism that espouses extreme democracy, internationalism and working class independence ●

Notes

1. *The Guardian* April 27.
2. *Socialist Worker* May 1.
3. <http://bnp.org.uk/2010/04/democracy-freedom-culture-and-identity-the-bnps-election-manifesto-2010-is-launched>.

Fighting fund

Printing money

Readers are asked to be patient and understanding over the next few weeks. For reasons beyond our control, we will be switching our printers from next week. While we are doing all in our power to ensure a smooth change-over, it may be that, as a result of unforeseen problems of a technical nature, we may encounter delays in production, resulting in late delivery of your *Weekly Worker*. There is no reason why the online version should be held up, however.

But, as always, change costs money. In this case, the new print arrangements are marginally more expensive (although, if we had not switched, our costs would have shot up), but there is also the short-term expense involved whenever new ways of working are adopted.

So it goes without saying that we are relying on our readers and supporters to see us through the change and help us raise the additional money to cover the extra immediate costs. And those readers have done us proud this month. With a day to go, we have exceeded our monthly target of £1,250,

thanks to gifts from JD (whose £50 came in appreciation of the help he received from a CPGB comrade to prepare a publication) and a rather smaller, but still appreciated, £5 from DB, who added it to his resubscription.

Last week also saw a total of £90 come in via standing orders (thank you, GD, DO, JT and SB), but there were no donations received from our internet readers. This despite the fact that, for the second week in a row, our online readership has increased considerably over and above the 15,000 we have come to expect over recent months. We had 18,843 visitors over the last seven days.

Maybe some of these new readers will see their way to helping us out as we begin May's fighting fund. We could certainly do with financial help, as well as understanding, over the next couple of weeks ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

SCOTLAND

Fractured left

While the main battle in Scotland will once more be between Labour and the SNP, rival left nationalists will also be slugging it out. Sarah McDonald reports

The general election campaign north of the border has a slightly different character to that of the rest of the country. While across the UK as a whole the Tories are in the lead with around 34% and the Liberal Democrats and Labour are in the 20s, the Scottish figures look considerably different due to the presence of the Scottish National Party.

The SNP is aiming for 20 Scottish seats that Alex Salmond hopes will get him more bargaining power and a greater share of the budget for Scotland. The SNP leader's dreams are unlikely to be realised. Many who would vote for the party in a Scottish election would see this as a wasted vote in a Westminster poll, and conversely many of those who might have considered voting for the nats to stick it to the Labour Party are unlikely to do so in such a closely run campaign for fear of a Tory victory.

That is not to say the SNP is not a powerful force. According to a Mori poll showing Scottish voting intentions, the nats currently sit at 26% - down from 34% in November last year, but significantly higher than the 18% they won at the last general election in 2005. Perhaps this can be put down to the SNP having increased gravitas since forming a minority government in 2007.

The party is running with the slogan 'More nats, less cuts' and a manifesto that is in many ways positioned to the left of Labour. It is calling for protection of public spending on health and education and scrapping Trident and ID cards to make savings. While the SNP is to the left of the Labour Party at the moment, given that its *raison d'être* is Scottish independence, policies beyond this goal have no mooring in the workers' movement and can shift far to the right according to the needs of capital.

The Lib Dems, unlike the SNP and Plaid Cymru, have reaped the benefit of airtime in the leaders' debates. The nationalists claim the "London parties" (as though everyone outside the M25 is politically disenfranchised) have gone to the courts in a vain attempt to get the BBC to give Salmond an equal platform alongside Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg. Yet in a UK election campaign it seems neither unreasonable nor undemocratic that the nats are not given equal airtime to the three main UK parties.

Just as elsewhere in the country, the Lib Dems are seeing some increase in support, partly on the back of Clegg's performance in the election debates and partly through disillusionment with the Labour government. But the Liberal Democrats' support has been less of a factor in Scotland. They have seen a rise from 12% in February to 20%, yet interestingly are down from 23% in 2005.

In Scotland the Labour Party is currently sitting at 36% in the polls, significantly higher than the national average, though down four percent from 2005. Unlike elsewhere in the UK, the Tories will not be the main beneficiaries of disaffection with Labour and are presently polling around 14% (down by six percent compared to 2005). It is half a century since the Tories won mass support in Scotland, and, just as with the Thatcher government of the 1980s, should we see Cameron in Number 10 come May 7, there will be anger that Scotland will suffer at the hands of a Tory government without a Scottish mandate. This scenario is most likely to add fuel to the fire as far as the national question is concerned, where the legitimate anger of the working class under attack is exploited by those with a separatist agenda.

And speaking of those with a separatist agenda ...

Just as is in the rest of Britain, the left in Scotland is starting from a position of real weakness. The fuck-ups and failures of the last decade have resulted in weak, fractured and less than credible formations. The Scottish Socialist Party, which could once stand a candidate in every seat in Scotland and expect a relatively respectable vote, is now contesting only 10 and - if recent by-elections are anything to go by - is likely to take an embarrassingly low share of the vote even in traditionally left-voting, working class constituencies.

The Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is also fielding 10 candidates. Tusc does at least represent something in terms of the need for socialist unity across Britain. While its platform is better than last year's No2EU venture, politically and organisationally it is a far cry from what is required. The non-SSP left nationalists (Solidarity, including the Socialist Workers Party and Committee for a Workers' International) seem to have had more influence on the Tusc platform than was evident with No2EU, which was based on anti-European British chauvinism. While the Tusc platform north of the border stops short of demanding independence, it calls for a referendum and "the chance to vote on whether Scotland should become an independent country" and "whether there should be a stronger devolved Scottish parliament with fiscal powers".

While an all-Britain coalition is an advance on Tommy Sheridan's insistence when he was an SSP member on the necessity for separate Scottish organisation, Tusc is just that - a mere electoral front rather than a genuine step toward unity. It is regarded as a means of raising Solidarity's profile during an election campaign, while avoiding a humiliatingly low vote for Solidarity itself. But what will happen after the election? At the launch of the Glasgow South campaign, Tusc candidate Brian Smith, Glasgow City Union

branch secretary and CWI member, commented that May 7 is just as important as May 6. Quite true, but nobody seemed to have any concrete plan for what is to happen to Tusc after the polls close.

The SSP's platform is, unsurprisingly, similar to that of Tusc: no to cuts in public spending; troops out of Afghanistan; jobs for youth, etc. But there is now a clear difference in emphasis, though not policy, on the national question. Whereas not making independence a priority fits nicely with the politics of the SWP, which has (at best) fudged the issue, and with the CWI, which seems to have unofficially backtracked on it of late, Scottish independence is central to the SSP's campaign, as it is to the organisation. Its manifesto reads: "We stand for an independent socialist republic where the wealth is fairly distributed ..." Well, yes, good luck with that, comrades. Quite how a small country with a population of around five million (and that is before everyone makes a run for the border) will be able to go it alone, surrounded by hostile imperialist powers is left to our imagination. I dare say, though, that there will not be much wealth to redistribute.

Apart from not wanting to water down its separatism, another reason why the SSP would not contemplate standing under the Tusc umbrella can be summed up in two words: Tommy Sheridan. It will not take part in anything that can be regarded as a move towards reunification until the Sheridan fiasco is put to bed.

Still, with both organisations only fielding 10 candidates, one would have thought they would have been able to at least agree some sort of non-aggression pact. Not so. While in most places a tacit understanding seems to have been achieved - in Dundee the two organisations have split the city, with Tusc fighting the West constituency and the SSP taking the East, and in both Edinburgh and Aberdeen there is no clash - in Glasgow North East both groups are contesting. Tusc is standing Graham Campbell, Solidarity member and community campaigner, against the SSP's national secretary Kevin McVey. It seems no lessons have been learned from last year's by-election in the same constituency, when the SSP and Solidarity split what was a tiny share of the vote.

Meanwhile, Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party is standing in six seats (including Glasgow North East!) and I would not be too surprised to see it poll at least as big a share of the vote in the constituencies it contests as do the SSP and Tusc.

There are many on the left who cite the failure of the SSP, Socialist Alliance, Respect and so on as a reason not to get involved in 'unity projects'. Yet the very opposite is true. We need to take unity much further. Not in Scotland alone, but across Britain, there is a crying need for a party based on Marxism rather than populist, opportunistic politics. There is a need for an organisation that encourages debate and the open resolution of differences, not an ideological sect; an organisation that develops a thinking membership, not personality cults; an organisation capable of digging roots in the working class - in communities, workplaces and educational establishments.

But we must deal with things as they are. That means critical support for Labour anti-cuts, anti-war candidates, as well as for those of Tusc, the SSP and, yes, the SLP. But I will leave readers to judge for themselves who to support in Glasgow North East ●

What we fight for

■ Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose the US-UK occupation of Iraq and stand against all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

■ Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

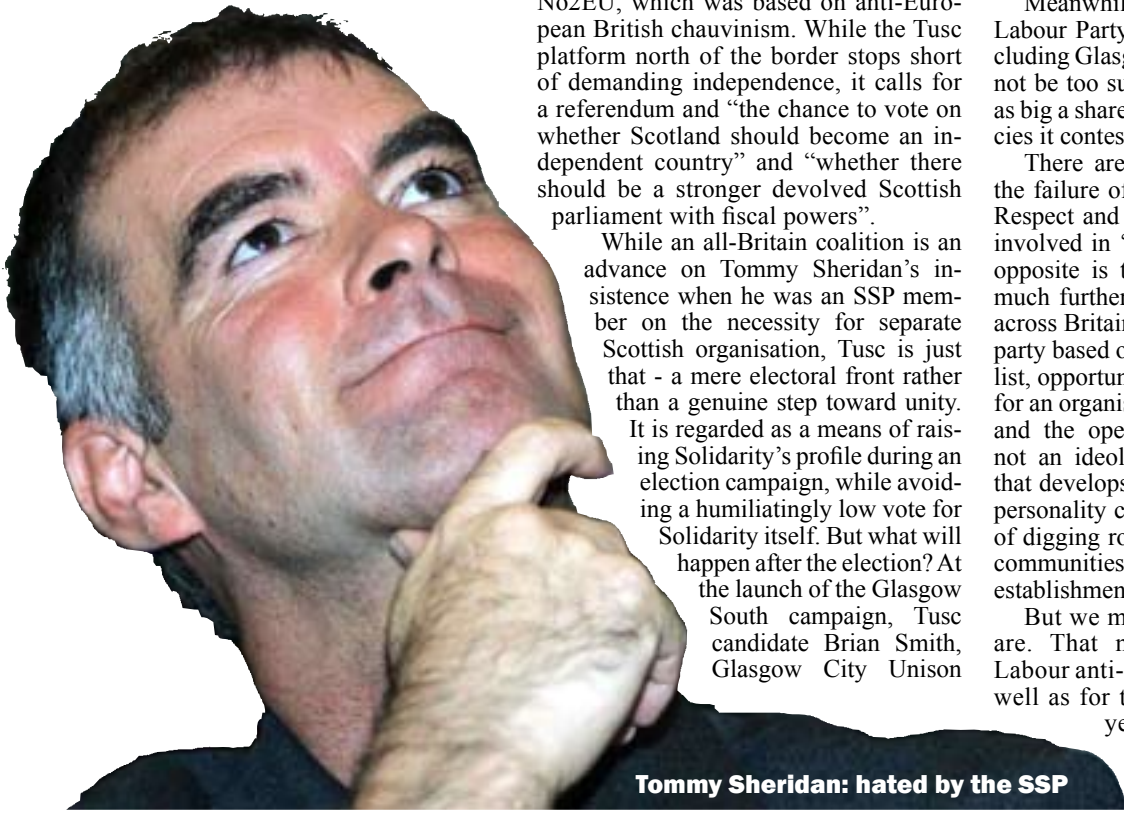
■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

■ All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.



Tommy Sheridan: hated by the SSP

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weekly worker

**Obnoxious
opinions are
best fought
in the open**

The right to be offensive

Creeping censorship must be opposed - even if feelings get hurt, argues James Turley

It seems that freedom of speech is once again being quietly undermined. The recent libel case of Simon Singh, the scientist sued by the snake-oil salesmen of the British Chiropractic Association, had the positive effect of outlining the absurdly punitive restrictions on free expression embodied in libel law - but it remains in place, and talk from government ministers and others has yet to be translated into action over the issue.

Yet, apart from the sledgehammer-subtlety of the libel laws in this country, there is a quieter story - that of the creeping censorship of 'offensive' cultural material and views. A little out of view, the constriction of public expression is reaching Kafkaesque proportions.

On March 30, Dudley council vetoed the performance of a play in a local school, Phillip Ridley's *Moonfleece*. Ridley is not known for his subtlety, having written some by all accounts pretty traumatising scripts over the years, though this one is targeted at younger audiences. Nor is he reticent about confronting critics: those who objected to the content of a previous Ridley show were dismissed as "blinder than a bagful of moles in a cellar"; and *Moonfleece*, centred on an unpleasant far-right milieu, is deliberately touring towns where the British National Party is threatening to make a breakthrough.

In Dudley, the performance was to have taken place three days before a march by the English Defence League. The council had no problem waving through the proto-fascist EDL; no such luck for Ridley and Black Country theatregoers, though - *Moonfleece* was deemed likely to "inflammate racial tensions". Those of us opposed to 'hate speech' legislation have long teased our adversaries with the notion that, surely, banning 'hate speech' is itself being hateful to hatemongers. Now, a local council may have genuinely spiked a play for fear of insulting the BNP.

Across the Atlantic last week, a different sort of controversy erupted over the caustic and enjoyably puerile cartoon series, *South Park*, when a highly self-referential 200th-episode two-parter set up the appearance of the prophet Muhammad alongside other religious leaders. An earlier episode featuring Muhammad was censored following the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* affair; in the event, this one was broadcast, but with Muhammad blacked out, and references to him on the soundtrack bleeped over. The show's distributor, Comedy Central, was apparently, and ludicrously, spooked by an empty threat left on an Islamist website to the effect that Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the show's creators, could "end up like Theo Van Gogh", the murdered Dutch filmmaker.

Asked to comment on the affair on the vapid radio debate show, *Any questions*, Labour minister Jack Straw - a veteran illiberal, of course - argued that going out of your way to offend people was unacceptable, that

it was absolutely necessary to show proper respect to different faiths' "cultural imperatives", and that portraying Muhammad in a mocking or disparaging way was simply out of order. Straw, clearly on a theme, also used the show to tout his continued support for racial and religious hatred laws, and boasted of his government's record in 'controlling' immigration.

Neither Straw nor any of the *Any questions* panel, bar one, had actually seen the episode in question - which is just as well, because it would give any censorious MP a coronary (only Lib Dem stalwart Menzies Campbell could bring himself to defend it, sight-unseen). Like them or loathe them, the notion that you should not go out of your way to offend people is the exact opposite of Parker's and Stone's *modus operandi*. This time round, to celebrate the big 200, they mercilessly spoof almost everyone they ever have before - featuring, among other things, a Buddha addicted to cocaine, and a giant robot dinosaur version of Barbra Streisand. The only notable to come out of the affray well is, needless to say, Muhammad, who says and does basically nothing at all, apart from acting as a McGuffin.

Straw's comments were interesting - though repulsive - inasmuch as they let slip the insidious heart of official anti-racism. The long-term background to this innovation is the policy of encouraging large-scale immigration from the Commonwealth countries, starting in the 1950s; the demographic make-up of Britain, particularly in urban areas, began to change dramatically.

In the context of widespread and officially promoted British chauvinism, which is as old as Britain, racial and other ethnic tensions were easily whipped up; Enoch Powell saw "the river Tiber foaming with much blood", and a rejuvenated British fascism took up the Tory racist's

cause as its main propaganda focus - an astute change from vulgar Jew-hatred and the like, which saw the National Front's ranks swell. In the 1980s, widespread police brutality with a blatant racial bias incited riots in cities around the country.

The state's solution to all this was ingenious - 'support' for ethnic minorities on a community by community basis. Pioneered by Roy Jenkins under Harold Wilson in the late 1960s, it only really crystallised under Thatcher - who, it is important to remember, wiped out the National Front's support by coopting its rhetoric about immigration (as the Tories had done, intermittently, in the past). The Thatcher government's response to the race riots was effectively to hand out cash via local authorities to cultural projects with a recognisably ethnic-minority origin. Overwhelmingly, this amounted to support for religious groups and other petty-patriarchal power structures specific to the locality. The often highly politicised street gangs and Asian Youth Movements were, in the long term, replaced by the expanding power of the church or mosque.

It is was a profoundly anti-democratic rearguard action to head off a nascent political movement (these were the days, after all, of the Provos and the Black Panthers) - indirectly subordinating minorities to the state by claiming to improve their conditions.

The official ideology of all this is multiculturalism. It is a logical outcome, since 'the good guys' with whom Thatcher's government wanted to work tended to be religious; state money went on cultural endeavours. It is in the nature of cultures, however, to clash; the official ideology needed to be one of tolerance and respect for differences. It is only a small step in logic to enshrine this in law - and enshrine it they have, with gusto.

So Straw, in his distasteful way,

has told us what is really at stake in this question. Censorship is necessary to ensure the proper respect for reactionary faith organisations, whose cooperation is to be ensured by bribery. Meanwhile, the underlying problem - the existence of enormous barriers to the free movement of people, which is a cast-iron guarantee of ethnic inequality - is not only taken as a given, but exacerbated by the cynically whipped-up hysteria over immigration. The intervention of the repressive state apparatus is an inevitable outcome, as is the rather paranoid climate in public discourse. Comedy Central, remember, took seriously a death threat by an organisation that the American authorities describe as "all talk".

Every major religion is a standing rebuke to all the others, who are by the same token guiding people down the wrong road to heaven; and community endeavours inevitably end up in competition in crowded inner cities. As conflicts find ways to re-surface, censorship - official and internal - spreads out to smother them ... until you arrive at a council's decision to ban a play on the basis that it depicts far-rightists.

It is unclear exactly what it was about *Moonfleece* that caused such a panic - either the fact that the far-right characters, as is their way, expressed some pretty distasteful and potentially offensive views on stage; or that the far right itself may have been offended by the content. David Edgar, writing in *The Guardian* (April 9), pointed out that each possible interpretation was as ominous as the other. Either literally any play with a political charge is out, attacking as it necessarily will some potentially offended interest group (and how much of Shakespeare would survive the chop?); or "any play in which anyone says anything nasty about anyone" is off limits.

The truth is that you cannot,

by definition, have limits on free speech. It is not something that can be balanced against, in this case, the public's liability to be severely offended. Free speech *means* offence, and it means a level of civic-mindedness on everyone's part about the inevitability of obnoxious opinions and bad taste in a society where objective forces encourage them. It is better to have bigoted opinions out in the open, where they can be shown to be ridiculous, than have them simmering away unspoken and so unchallenged.

This elementary defence of free expression should be the common sense of the left, since we are nothing if not offensive to the sensibilities of some very powerful and ruthless people. The Unison Four, suspended from the union on trumped-up and ludicrous charges of racist abuse, appealed to the courts on the basis that they had been discriminated against for being members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. The judge was unmoved - after all, socialists oppose democracy, so why should they have democratic protection? This highlights two important phenomena - the way official anti-racist dogma hands power to bureaucrats, including in the labour movement; and the way it hands power to unelected, unaccountable judges to decide what is and is not acceptable.

Yet some on the left remain intricately tied up with official anti-racism. The Socialist Workers Party actually *supported* the passing of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act, which outlawed the 'stirring up of hatred' on religious as well as racial grounds; and the SWP staffs Unite Against Fascism, whose hysterical facade masks all the clichés of official multiculturalism - including its censoriousness. The dangers, and the absurdities, of this approach are all too clear; unfortunately, they are rehearsed in almost every issue of *Socialist Worker*. ●

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