

UNIONS: CRUDDAS FOR DEPUTY PM

by Daphne Liddle

UNION leaders who failed to support John McDonnell in his bid for a chance to challenge Gordon Brown for the leadership of the Labour Party have finally stopped shuffling their feet and whispering in corners and declared their support for John Cruddas' bid for the deputy leadership.

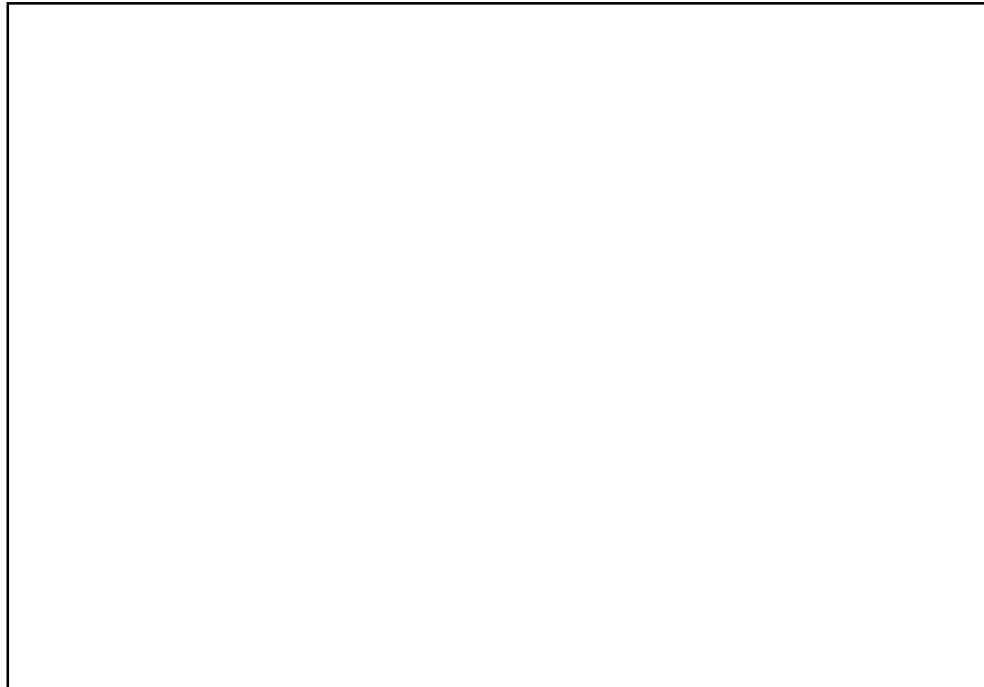
And Cruddas is definitely looking the most promising of the handful of candidates that include Hilary Benn, renegade former union leader Alan Johnson, Hazel Blears and Harriet Harman.

Cruddas has identified three main, linked issues to campaign on: the shortage of affordable housing, large scale migration flows and the increasing economic insecurity of the working class.

He is the long-standing MP for Dagenham in Essex, lives in his constituency and has a good relationship with his local Labour Party and the voters. He has worked tirelessly in local broad anti-fascist campaigns which have succeeded in minimising the British National Party vote in his part of the borough. Cruddas's approach

is to acknowledge that the BNP in the past have made gains by concentrating on the issues that Labour has neglected – especially housing. He said: "The lack of affordable social housing units is the outstanding public policy failure ... For years in our constituency we've been arguing that if we had 6,000 extra council units, we could deal with the pressures in terms of housing and transfers."

Some of his rivals have also just discovered that there is a housing crisis in Britain now and that the working class are suffering because of it. Education Secretary Alan Johnson, who seems to be moving to the left in order to win support, is calling for councils to be enabled to build homes again – a measure that has been ruled out by the Governments of



• Marching against fascism in Dagenham.

Thatcher, Major and Blair.

Hazel Blears wants cheap mortgages and more private home-ownership – which would push house prices up even more – while Benn is calling for a mix of rented and private homes to be built.

But the housing shortage has not come about by chance or neglect. It is a

policy to suit landowners and speculators that pushes up rents, land values and house prices and has led to a boom in new private landlordism. Brown's economic policies have fuelled this process.

Cruddas blames the policy that forces council to pay millions every year from council house rents

into the central government's housing revenue account. He said: "If central government said the council could retain this rent, we could purchase on the private market buy-to-let properties at a rate of 100 a year, and then we could use the rent money to reinvest and borrow against this stock. So it is not a case of waiting for new build, it is a case of being creative now."

He rightly condemned the recent remarks by Margaret Hodge, which called for "native families" to be given priority over migrants in the allocation of council housing. This shameful call is a sop to BNP supporters. It divides the working class according to how long their families have lived in Britain and sets one part of the community against another while the shortage of housing is a deliberate ruling class policy that is hurting "natives" and migrants. Cruddas pointed out that the problem was "purely one of supply".

Cruddas also addresses the issue of migration and accepts that the figures are larger than the Government acknowledges. He blamed both Tory and Labour leaders, saying: Both parties collude in ignoring what is happening ... if the population is growing faster than the state finances public services, then you have got a problem."

He called for an amnesty for illegal migrants "who have become the cornerstone of our flexible labour market" and for the £11,000 that each deportation costs to be invested in

improving services. He has also called for a moratorium on new private NHS contracts, in line with the demands of the public sector unions that are backing him.

Derek Simpson, general secretary of the Amicus section of the newly merged union Unite, has said: "John Cruddas' stated policies mirror our members' desire for better job security, decent pensions, affordable housing and public services provided by the public sector."

"Jon is unlike any other candidate standing for the Deputy Leadership - he alone is calling for a change of direction in order to re-connect with the Labour Party's core supporters."

Unfortunately Simpson then added: "We have the pleasure of being able to announce that our political committee have taken the decision to support Gordon Brown as leader of the Labour Party and Jon Cruddas as Deputy Leader."

London Mayor Ken Livingstone is also backing Cruddas.

Iraq: US searches for its soldiers

by our Arab Affairs Correspondent

IRAQI resistance fighters continued to hit the centre of US control in Baghdad this week with rocket and mortar attacks on the puppet parliament building and other targets inside the heavily fortified "Green Zone". Meanwhile American patrols continue to hunt for the partisans who captured three US soldiers last week during an ambush on 12th May.

But reports are coming in of a major diversion of American armour into the Al Kut airbase, 160 km south-east of Baghdad, firing speculation that this is either a major withdrawal to fortified positions or a redeployment for a possible attack on Iran.

Thousands of American troops have been scouring an area south of Baghdad where the soldiers were captured by members of Al Qaeda in Iraq. The Americans had offered a \$200,000 reward for any information regarding the whereabouts of the missing men and a body was recovered from the Euphrates river on Wednesday.

But the major partisan

action was the temporary liberation of the northern city of Mosul when over 1,000 resistance fighters seized control of the third largest city in Iraq on the night of Wednesday 16th May. American and puppet forces suffered heavy casualties in the fighting before fleeing the city. The partisans then took over the puppet police stations, Mosul's five prisons and freeing all the captives held in them. The Badush bridge was destroyed while other units carried out ambushes on the roads leading to Mosul to delay the arrival of imperialist reinforcements.

After completing all the missions set for the operation – which lasted for several hours – the guerrillas pulled out and returned to their regular positions. The operation, one of the largest and most determined yet, was designed to inflict the greatest possible losses on the occupation forces and their helpers, damaging their ability to remain in the areas and positions that they had occupied.

Meanwhile, former puppet deputy premier, CIA agent and convicted embezzler Ahmad Chalabi narrowly escaped with his life when his

motorcade was ambushed by partisans in Buhriz last Saturday. Chalabi was the darling of the neo-cons, who dubbed him the "George Washington of Iraq" until he lost the support of the Shia religious parties and failed to win a seat in the puppet parliament in the stooge elections in 2005. But he still does their bidding and he was in Baquba to inspect security posts when his convoy came under mortar and small arms fire.

out of steam

Though the imperialists' "surge" offensive has run out of steam in Baghdad, the Americans are trying to crush the resistance in the provincial cities through curfews, collective punishment and economic blockades.

US occupation troops, accompanied by their puppet Iraqi auxiliaries, have launched a huge campaign of mass raids, searches, and arrests in the western Iraqi cities of Anah, Rawah, and Kubaisa on the upper reaches of the Euphrates River. Dozens of US military vehicles backed up by more than 400 US troops and 500 puppet army soldiers

stormed into villages and neighbourhoods in the vast area of western Iraq, searching and rounding up residents.

One-hundred-and-fifty-seven Iraqis, most of them officers in the former Iraqi army, security services, and intelligence have been arrested. The US occupation forces released 23 of the captives for health reasons, but retained the remaining 134.

In the nationalist city of Samara at least 10 civilians have died since it was "shut down" by the Americans on 6th May.

American and puppet troops surround the city and have blocked all the roads with concrete blocks and sand-bags. No vehicles are allowed in or out of the city, some 125 km north of Baghdad. There's no electricity because no fuel is allowed in to power the generators and the people have been struggling to find food, water and medical supplies.

Local doctors' report that at least 10 people, including seven babies, had died because of lack of fuel for generators needed to run incubators and life-saving equipment. At least two elderly patients were among the dead.

FUND

Our May fund total remains disappointing, just £343 this week, bringing the total for the month so far to £940.69, which is £2,059.31 short of a monthly target of £3,000.

We thank a Southall comrade for £55.60, a west London comrade for £10 and a Redbridge supporter for £10. We also thank a south London pensioner for £17.40 and another Southall comrade for £3.

All the rest came from bankers' orders; money that is donated every month, money that we know is coming and can use to plan our finances effectively.

The 30th anniversary of the New Communist Party and New Worker will be with us in July. At the time many cynics thought we would not last more than a few years. Then when the Soviet Union fell, people predicted we would not survive. But we have survived, advanced, developed and our activity levels are rising.

We need more money to keep communism alive. Please send whatever you can to the New Worker Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.

email: party@ncp.clara.net

News Desk 020 7223 4050

THE NEW WORKER

Weekly paper of the New Communist Party

More racist nonsense from Hodge

THOUGH THE LOCAL elections were bad news for Labour we can console ourselves with the fact that the neo-nazis failed to make the breakthrough they had been predicting. The British National Party (BNP) had boasted that it would increase its number of councillors from 49 to 100. It ended up with no net gains at all. This was largely due to the consistent work of the broad anti-racist campaign in the working class estates targeted by the fascists in recent years.

But just when we thought the fascists had their backs against the wall, Margaret Hodge, the worthless Labour MP for Barking, has given them a new lease of life when she blamed immigrants for the housing crisis last Sunday. This isn't the first time that this Blairite junior minister has played the racist card.

On the eve of the London borough elections in May 2006 Hodge claimed that eight out of ten white working class voters in her constituency would be tempted to vote for the BNP because "no one else is listening to them" about concerns over housing, asylum seekers and jobs in Barking and Dagenham. It was a publicity shot in the arm for the fascists who won 12 seats in the borough.

Britain once was proud of its great council estates and its policy of welcoming refugees seeking asylum. Hodge herself is the daughter of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany who settled in London. Now she tells us that immigrants should go to the back of the queue in the allocation of council housing regardless of need.

To his credit, Jon Cruddas, the Labour MP for neighbouring Dagenham has condemned Hodge's comments as "inflammatory". "We're in danger of racialising arguments over housing allocation rather than concentrating on the need for greater social housing provision," he said. Cruddas, unlike Hodge, has thrown his weight behind the local anti-racist movement, and that alone makes him the most credible candidate in the race for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party.

Barking and Dagenham is not the capital of the Fourth Reich and the overwhelmingly working class population are not racists or admirers of Adolf Hitler.

In the 1920s the London County Council built the largest council estate in the world in Dagenham. It was a centre for the motor industry, chemicals and small arms. But, like many other traditional working class towns, it has suffered from decades of neglect under the Tory and New Labour governments. The factories have closed. The giant 300-acre Ford plant, that once employed tens of thousands making cars, has largely gone. What's left just makes diesel engines and gear-boxes.

Barking and Dagenham has a relatively poor, ageing and elderly population and income levels are among the lowest in the capital. Last year Barking and Dagenham saw the largest rise in London for rates of unemployment. Employment rates overall are below the European Union threshold. Many residents are engaged in temporary, low-paid employment outside the borough. All of this makes it fertile ground for the racist lies peddled by the fascists who claim that immigrants and asylum seekers are given favoured treatment for homes and jobs.

There is a housing problem in the borough as most of the stock was sold-off during the "right to buy" frenzy of the Thatcher years, which also saw the imposition of rules that restricted councils' investment in housing, preventing them from subsidising it from local taxes or reinvesting the money from sales into new housing.

The solution is to lift all the restrictions on councils and allow them to build new affordable and secure council homes for rent with life-long secure tenancy; to allow the right of anyone who needs or wants to rent public housing to do so without time limit or means testing.

Say no more

Motivation

"If we can't prove we can make money saving the planet, then we're never going to save it." That was Gary Hirshberg, former hippy and now a successful New Hampshire businessman and politician.

Worst in history

Former United States president Jimmy Carter last week described the presidency of George Bush as the "worst in history" and Tony Blair's support as "abominable and subservient".

Discharged

An elderly woman with severe arthritis and osteoporosis had to spend a night on a hospital car park bench after accident and emergency staff discharged her because there were not enough beds available.

Evelyn Beale was taken by ambulance to the casu-

alty department of the Gloucestershire Royal Hospital. She was wearing light clothing and had no shoes or money with her.

Doctors decided the agonising back and neck pain she was suffering were due to her long-term condition and they could do nothing for her except to administer painkillers.

Beale asked to be allowed to stay in the waiting room until someone could come and collect her but was discharged at 2.30am. She spent six hours freezing on a bench in the car park. After a failed attempt to phone a friend she walked towards the city, where she was found by police with bleeding feet. They took her home. Now she has made a formal complaint.

Banned book

Around 1,700 people have complained to Hong Kong regulators that the Bible is too full of sex and violence, fol-

lowing a sex survey in a student newspaper. The Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority said it received the complaints after the launch of a website giving details of the sexual and violent content of the Bible.

Under stress

The Institute of Education in London last week reported that nurses and psychologists are being brought into hundreds of schools to help children cope with "unprecedented levels" of exam stress.

Psychologists say children face extra stress from schools trying to improve their league table positions. More pupils are reporting symptoms of anxiety such as sleepless nights, eating disorders and panic attacks.

Baby boomer

Ten-month-old Bubba Ludwig of Illinois in the United States has success-

fully obtained a gun licence. His father, Howard, applied on his behalf after his grandfather gave him a shotgun as an heirloom.

Ludwig said he had not expected to succeed, but he filled in the online form, paid \$5 and the licence was his. The licence includes a picture of a toothless Bubba and a squiggle that represents his best attempt at a signature.

Illinois gun laws are said to be among the strictest in the US. But Illinois State Police, who oversee the application process, said that they had followed the law in this case.

Head spy

Headmaster Norman Hoare of St George's Church of England School, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, recently hired a private detective to stake out homes, to check the claims by parents applying to get a place for their children that they really did live where they said.

Unions fight Remploi cuts

THE GMB and Unite general unions last week condemned the management of Remploi – the Government-owned company that provides employment for many workers with disabilities – for visiting MPs to drum up support for its plans to close around 30 of its 83 factories.

GMB discovered that senior members of Remploi management have been visiting MPs to brief them about the closures of Remploi factories in their constituencies and the loss of jobs for disabled people before speaking with the disabled people themselves.

It is expected that the company will name the factories to be closed next week.

Phil Davies, GMB national secretary and senior Remploi negotiator said: "This is a disgrace. The joint trade unions do not even meet Remploi to start the statutory consultation period until the 22nd May 2007 and already we find out from an MP that the company is discussing ending the livelihoods of disabled worker before telling them what their future holds.

"The joint trade unions are asking all Labour MPs to bolt the door against this backdoor tactic and send Remploi managers packing."

Jennie Formby, Unite national secretary said: "This is typical of the Board of Directors which has lied to the trade unions and their workforce all the way through the review process.

"To discuss in the press and with MPs the future of more than 5,000 disabled people's future is deplorable."

Les Woodward, GMB Remploi convenor said: "This leaves the trade unions and our members free to deal with this outrageous company and its hardhearted board of directors.

"We are fed up with the way we are treated and the Government needs to wake up and smell the coffee."

The GMB also warned

that a parliamentary briefing from Minister for the Disabled Anne McQuire, in advance of Tuesday's meeting with Remploi management, demonstrates that the decision has been made to go ahead with the closures.

The Remploi management has lined up six members of a Remploi funded task group to support factory clo-

sure. Remploi workers are asking if these six people from difference disability organisations are representative of the people they have been set up to help or is this just a pay role vote.

In any event the unions would expect those from disability organisations, advocating factory closures, to consult with the workers in

Remploi and their trade union representatives before calling for them to be put out of work.

A clash now seems inevitable. The trade unions are warning that the outcome will be a national strike across all 83 Remploi factories.

Remploi management has also won the backing of some charities for people with disabilities by lobbying in the same way as they have been targeting the MPs.

They claim that disabled workers would be better off as part of the mainstream workforce, working alongside people who do not have disabilities. While this is true, if most of the Remploi workforce could find such jobs they would be already doing them.

The sad truth is that people with disabilities are still very much discriminated against by employers and those thrown out of work by the closures of Remploi factories will not find it easy to find alternative work.

The time to close Remploi factories is when they have run out of workers because they have all found better jobs.

Plans to close 2,500 Post Offices

THE COMMUNICATION Workers' Union last week condemned the Government's decision to enforce the closures of 2,500 Post Offices throughout Britain.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey said: "Unfortunately it seems the Government had already premeditated the future of 2,500 post offices across the UK throughout the sham that was called a consultation period.

"Thousands of submissions were submitted during the consultation period; however it is questionable whether the Government took

notice of these as they are still proceeding with the planned closures.

"This is a devastating blow for millions of people across the UK as Post Offices are a vital and integral part of society. The closures of 2,500 Post Offices will make life even more difficult for vulnerable people.

"Instead of spending taxpayers' money on redundancy packages the Government should have invested in maintaining the Post Office network. The Government has an obligation to provide banking services for those people financially excluded

either by High Street Banks or by location.

"The Post Office is the logical vehicle for this and providing banking services would fulfil both a political commitment and an important and sustainable future for the Post Office network."

In addition to the 2,500 closures Post Office Limited have also announced plans to privatise 85 Crown Post Offices, 70 of which to WH Smiths. This will further impact on the demise of the Post Office network. Post Offices will be replaced by retailers whose primary aim is to make a profit rather than provide a service.

Drivers refuse to cross Tesco picket line

A MANAGEMENT attempt to break the Edinburgh Tesco drivers' strike failed after drivers at one of Britain's best-known haulage firms refused £500 each to breach picket lines.

The last-ditch offer was made to Eddie Stobart staff ahead of a three-day strike day workers at the supermarket's Scottish distribution centre in Livingston on Thursday.

The threatened industrial action, which resulted in empty shelves at nearly 100 stores, is over claims that staff will lose up to £6000 a year following changes to terms and conditions.

£500 on top

Sources within Carlisle-based Eddie Stobart said drivers were told they would be paid £500 on top of their wages to carry out the work for Tesco. The offer meant they would receive more than £2,000 for three 12-hour shifts. They were also to be provided with food and drink and accommodation at a premium hotel during their time in the Lothians.

But when staff found out they would have to cross the picket line at the Caputhall Road plant they said they were not willing to do the work.

One worker at the firm's headquarters said: "I know of at least 11 people who were offered an incentive bonus to go and work for Tesco during the strike. They all agreed but they were not told they would be strike-breaking – nobody informed them of that."

"But when union representatives contacted them, they all agreed to drop out in support of the Livingston drivers."

The drivers would normally be paid between £480 and £550 by Eddie Stobart for each of three 12-hour shifts. But they were being offered a further £500 for the work, as well as the accommodation, food and drink, which is not normally included.

The main dispute with the drivers in Livingston is over new terms and conditions they say they are being forced to accept in order to work at the new £75 million national distribution centre at the Deansway Industrial Estate.

losing

The TGWU section of the union Unite claims changes to the hours that qualify for premium shift rates will lead to some drivers losing £3000-£6000 a year.

Negotiations broke down earlier this month amid claims that Tesco had removed its recognition of the union.

Tony Trench, Edinburgh regional TGWU officer said: "We think that this is an appalling way to do business – throwing large sums of money to get people to strike-break instead of sitting down and negotiating with us in an orderly fashion."

"We are humbly grateful to these guys who have turned down such large sums of money to support their comrades."

New steps towards police state

PUBLIC sector workers including doctors, social workers, council staff and civil servants are to be required to inform on any member of the public they encounter who could, in their view, be likely to commit violent crime, according to Home Office plans leaked last week.

At the same time police are to be given new powers to "shut and seal" all premises, including flats, pubs and clubs, accused of generating yobbish behaviour, according to a speech made by Home Secretary John Reid to the Police Federation annual conference in Blackpool last week.

Violent offender orders will also be imposed on people released from jail, restricting where they can live and who they can associate with.

Specially trained police will also be issued with 50,000-volt taser guns in a 12-month trial. These measures are to be contained in a new Criminal Justice Bill to be introduced within the next few weeks.

Public sector unions have reacted strongly to the idea that their members will be expected to make judgements on the people they encounter in their work and report them to the authorities – and could

face penalties if they fail to do so.

Brian Strutton, GMB national secretary for the public services, commenting on these proposals said: "These proposals are a bolt out of the blue. Trades unions representing council workers know absolutely nothing about these proposals. Why has there been no consultation with employee representatives on these far reaching proposals. Any such propos-

als need to be thought through very deeply.

"GMB's immediate reaction is that these proposals go way beyond the duties of citizens and employees to cooperate with the police. If these proposals were enacted this would create the need for some form of reporting system.

"Council workers making reports would live in fear of recriminations. Reports could put employees at risk. There

is no question that these proposals would give rise to very grave dangers for council workers."

Meanwhile MPs and members of the House of Lords last week warned that the decision to introduce identity cards for foreigners before British citizens will lead to "de-facto racial profiling".

The Joint Committee on Human Rights says black and other ethnic minorities may "disproportionately" be

asked to prove their British immigration status.

Biometric immigration documents are due to be introduced from next year for all non-European Union nationals in Britain.

Ministers say colour or race can never be the reason for an immigration check. In a letter to the committee Home Office Minister Liam Byrne said the main idea of the biometric immigration documents was to allow people to confirm their immigration status easily.

He said it would be unlawful racial discrimination for anyone being asked to prove – to someone such as a police or immigration officer – their immigration status because of their racial appearance. "Therefore race or colour can never be the basis of the officer's 'reasonable suspicion' that someone is not a British citizen," he said.

The committee did not accept this. They responded: "The fact that such a document exists for non-nationals and can be requested to prove entitlement to services makes it highly likely in our view that members of black and minority ethnic communities in the UK will be disproportionately required to prove their immigration status."

The police themselves are not entirely happy about all these new powers being given to them as it all adds up to extra work and responsibility.

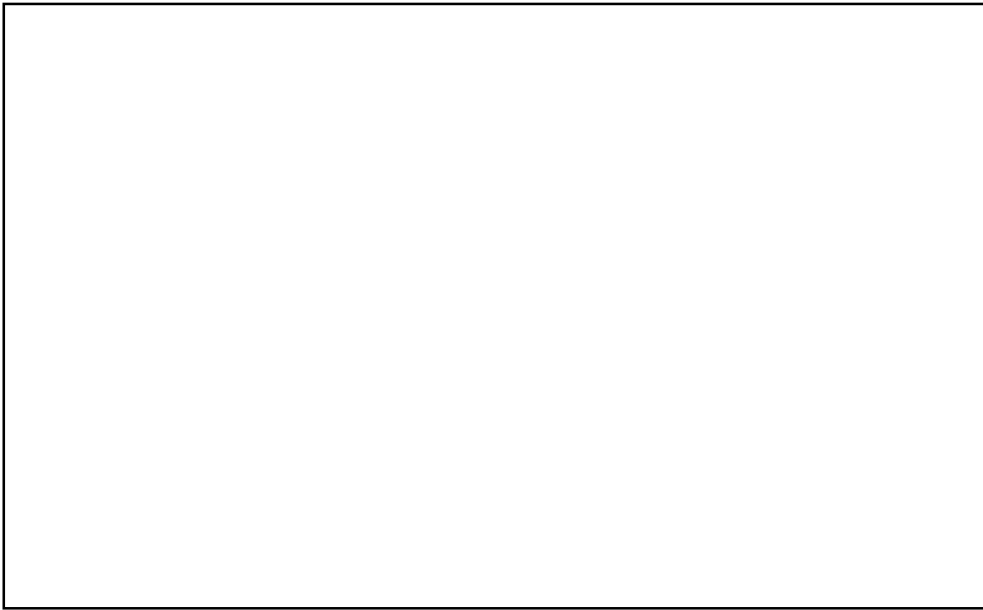
And Hampshire's Deputy Chief Constable Ian Redhead last week warned that Britain risks becoming an "Orwellian society" with CCTV cameras spread to quiet villages with low crime levels.

He said he did not want to live in a country where every street corner was fitted with surveillance devices, now where DNA evidence and fingerprints could be kept for the rest of a teenager's life for an offence, even if they were never in trouble again.

At their conference in Blackpool delegates twice booed John Reid during his speech in protest at a dispute over pay. The federation's chair, Jan Berry, warned that feelings are so high that police might demand the right to strike for the first time in nearly 90 years.

"Home Secretary, the prospect of police picket lines is something I never thought was imaginable, let alone possible," she warned.

Reid had to apologise for the way that pay negotiations were conducted last year.



• Thousands of Californian students protest at the brutal Tasing of a colleague.

Planning laws to be streamlined

RUTH KELLY, the Communities and Local Government Secretary, last Monday unveiled new Government plans to hand sweeping powers to a new unelected quangos to approve planning applications for major projects like airports and nuclear power stations in order to speed up the planning process.

The new body will include planners, environmentalists and "community experts" who will take over power now exercised by elected local authorities and reduce opportunities for local communities to object.

sideline

Critics claim that the new plans will sideline local people who will be allowed only to take part in "open floor" debates organised by the new planning commission.

The plans are part of a new White Paper and proposals include the scrapping of the current "needs test" that was introduced to protect town centres and limit the development of giant supermarkets outside towns.

easier

The plans will also make it easier for householders to make minor changes to their homes, for example by adding a conservatory, solar panels, wind turbines and so on; these things will no longer require planning permission.

Greenpeace director John Sauven warned that the changes were designed to persuade big business to back the expansion of nuclear power.

Groundbreaking victory for agency workers

THOUSANDS of agency workers are entitled to greater employment rights following a tribunal pursued by Unite – the union (TGWU section) that has ruled in favour of a group of Polish workers in the food processing industry, saying they should be considered employees rather than self-employed.

The case, Kalwak and others versus Consistent, will have important implications for thousands of agency workers and the agencies who employ them, some of whom evade paying holiday pay, sick pay or pension rights by classing their workers as self-employed.

The judgement was made after Consistent had appealed against the original Employment Appeals Tribunal decision.

Unite has been pursuing the case against Consistent since the members, who worked at Welsh Country Foods in Winsford in Cheshire, were evicted from their accommodation following dismissal in 2005.

The ruling enables Unite to take the workers' case to the next stage to claim for unfair dismissal and victimisation of trade union activities.

The group of Polish workers had recently become organised into the union, as part of the drive to organise workers

throughout the food processing industry. In a damning indictment of the behaviour of the agency concerned, the tribunal chairman summarised the case: "I noted the frequency with which the first respondents in the documents sought to emphasise the absence of rights – holiday pay, fringe benefits and the right to complain of unfair dismissal.

"These were their real concern. They in practice retained a firm measure of effective control over the claimants' working lives. They told them when and where they had to work, they might deny them days off, they provided them with transport and accommodation (taken away, as it proved, without notice).

"They ensured further economy in the claimants' employment by charging them for domestic services that were not provided. Here were seekers after work who could not adequately speak English, newly arrived here, for whom any purported freedom to work or not work, to work for more than one employer, were unreal.

"They were discouraged from union membership. The first respondents wanted to constrain them so as to retain them as compliant people through whom they could meet the demands of their clients. But they did not want people with expensive and troublesome rights."

Nottingham PCS protest at closures

MORE THAN 30 members of the PCS civil service union in Nottingham last week, along with local MP Alan Simpson confronted Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell outside the Driving Standards Agency HQ to protest about job cuts and office closures.

They warned this will lead to worsening service to the public, particularly in areas like Job Centres and Inland Revenue offices.

Sir Gus, who has presided over the programme of cuts that will see over 1,000 job losses in Nottingham, which will see the closure of the Chalfont Drive site, has recently aggravated PCS members by writing to all individual civil servants calling on them not to support the PCS campaign against the cuts.

Demonstrators handed Sir Gus a letter showing the impact of the cuts for Nottingham both in terms of services to the public and the economic effects of job losses.

PCS has been supported by national and local politicians including the leader of Nottingham City Council Leader, John Collins.

Andrew Lloyd, PCS regional secretary, said, "Everyone bar the Government seems to agree with us that these cuts are bad for PCS members in Nottingham and the Public."

In a recent poll conducted by PCS 79 per cent of the Government's own Labour councillors oppose the cuts.

100 new C of E academy schools

THE CHURCH of England is planning to open 100 new academy schools, which will be state-funded under Tony Blair's education reforms, before he leaves office.

A deal was struck this week with education ministers that put church officials in charge of a multi-million pound academy expansion programme over the next five years.

The tragedy threatening our species

by Fidel Castro

I CANNOT speak as an economist or a scientist. I simply speak as a politician who wishes to unravel the economists' and scientists' arguments one way or another. I also try to sense the motivations of each one of those who make statements on these matters.

Just 22 years ago, here in Havana, we had a great number of meetings with political, union, peasant and student leaders invited to our country as representatives of these sectors. They all agreed that the most important problem at that time was the enormous foreign debt accumulated by the nations of Latin America in 1985. That debt amounted to \$350 billion. The dollar then had a higher purchasing power than it does today.

A copy of the outcome of those meetings was sent to all the world governments, of course with some exceptions, because it might have seemed insulting. At that time, the petrodollars had flooded the market and the large transnational banks were virtually demanding that the countries accept high loans. Needless to say, the people responsible for the economy had taken on those commitments without consulting anybody.

That period coincided with the presence of the most repressive and bloody governments this continent has ever suffered, installed by imperialism. Large sums were spent on weapons, luxuries and consumer goods. The subsequent debt grew to \$800 billion while today's catastrophic dangers were being hatched, the dangers that weigh upon a population that doubled in just two decades and along with it, the number of those condemned to a life of extreme poverty. Today, in the Latin American region, the difference between the most favoured population and the one with the lowest income is the greatest in the world.

Many years before the subjects of today's debates were centre stage, the struggles of the Third World focused on equally agonising problems like the unequal exchange. Year after year it was discovered that the price of the industrialised nations' exports, usually manufactured with our raw materials, would unilaterally grow while our basic exports remained unchanged. The price of coffee and cacao, just to mention two examples, was approximately \$2,000 a ton. A cup of coffee or a chocolate milkshake could be bought in cities like New York for a few cents; today, these cost several dollars, perhaps 30 or 40 times what they cost back then. Today, the purchase of a tractor, a truck or medical equipment require several times the volume of products that was needed to import them back then. Jute, henequen and other Third World produced fibres that were substituted by synthetic ones succumbed to the same fate. In the meantime, tanned hides, rubber and natural

fibres used in many textiles were being replaced by synthetic materials derived from the sophisticated petrochemical industry while sugar prices hit rock bottom, crushed by the large subsidies granted by the industrialised countries to their agricultural sector.

The former colonies or neo-colonies that had been promised a glowing future after World War II had not yet awakened from the Bretton Woods dream. From top to bottom, the system had been designed for exploitation and plundering.

When consciousness was beginning to be roused, the other extremely adverse factors had not yet surfaced, such as the undreamed-of squandering of energy that industrialised countries

had fallen prey to. They were paying less than two dollars a barrel of oil. The source of fuel, with the exception of the United States where it was very abundant, was basically in Third World countries, chiefly in the Middle East but also in Mexico, Venezuela, and later in Africa. But not all of the countries that by virtue of yet another white lie classified as "developing countries" were oil producers, since 82 of them are among the poorest and as a rule they must import oil. A terrible situation awaits them if foodstuffs are to be transformed into biofuels or agrifuels, as the peasant and native movements in our region prefer to call them.

Thirty years ago, the idea of global warming hanging over our species' life like a sword of

Damocles was not even known by the immense majority of the inhabitants of our planet; even today there is great ignorance and confusion about these issues. If we listen to the spokesmen of the transnationals and their media, we are living in the best of all possible worlds: an economy ruled by the market, plus transnational capital, plus sophisticated technology equals a constant growth of productivity, higher GDP, higher living standards and every dream of the human species come true. The state should not interfere with anything; it should not even exist, other than as an instrument of the large financial capital.

But reality is hard-headed. Germany, one of the most highly industrialised countries in the world, loses sleep over its 10 per-

cent unemployment. The toughest and least attractive jobs are taken by immigrants who, desperate in their growing poverty, break into industrialised Europe through any possible chink. Apparently, nobody is taking note of the number of inhabitants on our planet, growing precisely in the undeveloped countries.

More than 700 representatives of social organisations have just been meeting in Havana to discuss various issues raised in this reflection.

Many of them set out their points of view and left indelible impressions on us. There is plenty of material to reflect upon as well as new events happening every day.

Even now, as a consequence of liberating a terrorist monster, two young men, who were fulfilling their legal duty in the Active Military service, anxious to taste consumerism in the United States, hijacked a bus, crashed through one of the doors of the domestic flights terminal at the airport, drove up to a civilian aircraft and got on board with their hostages, demanding to be taken to the United States. A few days earlier, they had killed a soldier, who was standing guard, to steal two automatic weapons. And in the plane they fired four shots that killed a brave officer who, unarmed and held hostage in the bus, had attempted to prevent the plane's hijacking.

The impunity and the material gains that have rewarded any violent action against Cuba during the last half-century encourage such events. It had been many months since we had such an incident. All it needed was setting a notorious terrorist free and once again death comes calling at our door. The perpetrators have not gone on trial yet because, in the course of events, both were wounded; one of them was shot by the other as he fired inside the plane, while they were struggling with the heroic army officer. Now, many people abroad are waiting for the reaction of our Courts and of the Council of State, while our people here are deeply outraged with these events. We really need a large dose of calmness and sangfroid to confront these problems.

The apocalyptic head of the empire declared more than five years ago that the United States armed forces had to be on the ready to make pre-emptive attacks on 60 or more countries in the world; nothing less than one third of the international community. Apparently, he is not satisfied with the death, the torture and the uprooting of millions of people to seize their natural resources and the product of their labours.

Meanwhile, the impressive international meeting that just concluded in Havana reaffirmed my personal conviction: every evil idea must be submitted to devastating criticism, avoiding any concession.

Granma, 7th May 2007.

• Top: presidents three – Chavez, Fidel and Morales. Left: a biofuel plant set in a field of corn.

The real reason Wolfowitz was under fire

by Robert Dobrow

FROM THE bloody ground battles in Iraq to the lush board rooms of the World Bank, US imperialism's "New American Century" is in trouble these days.

Former deputy Pentagon chief and now World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz, prince of the neocons and architect of the Iraq invasion, is knee-deep in scandal. The man who began his tenure two years ago as head of the world's largest so-called public financial institution with calls to battle "global corruption" stands charged with peddling favours to a woman friend at the bank.

Let's not waste any ink on this tenth-rate issue. We'll leave it to the right-wing enablers in the mass media who have turned objective political commentary into scandal-ridden drivel to spin the Wolfowitz story as a titillating tale of sex, lies and payola.

The real story is how the Bush administration has tried to shape the World Bank into a tool of its war agenda, and the limits of its ability to force the rest of the world to bend to its will.

When Wolfowitz was appointed by George W Bush two years ago to head the World Bank, the European business journal *The Economist*, staunchly rightwing and conservative, editorialised that, "His appointment tells the world that Mr Bush wants to capture the World Bank and make it an arm of American foreign policy."

It should be added, however, that *The Economist* has no problem with the World Bank as an arm of European imperialist foreign policy.

Aid as a political weapon

Wolfowitz, next to Bush, has been one of the most visible and hated figures around the world for his role in Iraq, for the lies that justified the invasion, for the torture policies of the occupation, for the arrogance and the ruthless conduct of the war.

And now as head of the World Bank, Wolfowitz has imposed a brazen pro-US agenda there as well. A feature story in the 9th April *New Yorker* magazine by John Cassidy entitled "The Next Crusade" cites numerous instances to support this view.

For instance, in July 2005, the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan ordered the US to remove its troops and aircraft from an Uzbek base it had been using to support the war against Afghanistan. Two months later, Wolfowitz cut off an aid package to the country which was mostly going to rural water and health projects. No cut off of monies was suggested for neighbouring Tajikistan, a brutally repressive but pro-US regime that gets millions in World Bank loans.

Wolfowitz has selectively used the "corruption" charge to deny loans to countries that try to exert a measure of independence from US influence, like Congo-Brazzaville and Chad, poor African nations with rich

natural resources. Both countries were denied development aid in the past year by the World Bank.

With Iraq, however, Wolfowitz has been most active in placing the World Bank at the service of the Pentagon. First Wolfowitz made a series of top-level appointments at the Bank to political cronies of right-wing governments that had been some of the strongest backers of US policy in Iraq, such as El Salvador, Spain and Jordan. "He used his tenure in part to reward those

governments and individuals who were particularly helpful to the US in the Iraq war," says Steven Clemmens of the New America Foundation.

World Bank and Big Oil

Then, last fall, Wolfowitz set up a permanent World Bank office in Baghdad. According to the Bank Information Centre, a liberal non-governmental organisation that monitors the bank's policies: "The institution is

advising the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the development of the oil sector strategy. More broadly, the Bank is advising Iraq on attracting foreign direct investment through quickly developing investor friendly laws and also advising on reforming [privatising—BD] state-owned enterprises. In addition, the Bank is participating in meetings with the IMF, Iraq Minister of Finance, and the International Tax and Investment Centre (ITIC) on Iraq's oil sector. The ITIC is a business lobby group comprised of BP, Chevron, Eni, ExxonMobil, Shell and Total."

"Wolfowitz's apparent determination to use the World Bank to further questionable American military goals in the Middle East is a ... violation of its founding Articles of Agreement, and a reckless waste of donor resources," said Bea Edwards, International Programme Director of the Government Accountability Project, a non-profit-making public interest group and whistleblower protection organisation.

"In fact, the Bank is prohibited from operating in a conflict like this," added Edwards. "In the simplest financial terms, there is

no functioning banking system, the government does not control its territory."

The World Bank and the IMF are leaning on the Iraqi Parliament to establish a Federal Oil and Gas Council, staffed by Big Oil executives. "The new law would grant the council virtually all power to develop policies and plans for undeveloped oil fields and to review and change all exploration and production contracts," Juan Gonzalez reported in the *Daily News* on 21st February. The Iraqi National Oil Company would be defenceless against these foreign companies.

"Since most of Iraq's 73 proven petroleum fields have yet to be developed, the new council would instantly become a world energy powerhouse," Gonzalez wrote. Contracts with international companies will likely be similar to controversial production-sharing agreements, which sign away the lion's share of oil profits to foreign investors.

The World Bank was formed in 1945 with the specific intent of projecting US power in the post-war era. The Bank's president is always from the US, the Bank's headquarters are in Washington, and the US has a permanent veto. It is under fire in many countries around the world for the severe austerity measures that it forces upon developing nations, including demands for privatising industries and looting national resources and native industries for the sake of foreign capital.

But the World Bank in the past has also been a coalition effort by US, European and Japanese capital, with significant bank funds provided by non-US sources.

Today, however, the Bush administration and its big business masters are not interested in coalitions. They demand total control. This is nowhere better revealed than in the infamous document co-authored by Wolfowitz himself seven years ago entitled *Rebuilding American's Defences*. This manifesto of the so-called Project for the New American Century has been called the *Mein Kampf* of the neocon movement. It projects a world of US global domination, calling for massive increases in military spending, for covering the planet with Pentagon bases, for a near-permanent state of military readiness, and for regime change wherever US capitalism's political and economic interests are threatened.

But this reactionary utopia is collapsing on the ground in Iraq, where popular resistance to US aggression continues to grow. And while we would much rather see Wolfowitz brought up on charges of war crimes than on a two-bit misdemeanour for influence peddling, the fact is that his woes at the World Bank are yet another sign that the Bush administration is on the defensive and unable to impose its will on an unwilling world.

Workers' World (US)

• Top: protest at a Wolfowitz visit. Middle: raising the flag. Left: Wolfowitz inspects some of his puppets in Iraq.

Home News

LETTERS

Dear Comrades

In his review of Render Unto Darwin by James H Fetzer, Ray Jones writes, "...concluding that only the sitting on the fence of agnosticism is acceptable." However Jones makes the common mistake of assuming that agnosticism is a dithering between the two more certain positions. In fact the word was coined in 1869 by TH Huxley to signify "... the rigorous application of a single principle"* - that principle being: "Follow your reason as far as it will take you ... Do not pretend that core certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable."*

This principle is the thread running through western culture from Socrates, via the Reformation and Enlightenment to the methodology of modern science. This is hardly sitting on the fence.

* From the essay, Agnosticism by TH Huxley, 1889.

Dave Alton, Tyneside.

Dear Comrades

It always amuses me when I read the bourgeois papers about the activities of the Stasi in the old German Democratic Republic.

Comrades are no doubt aware that our own British state has its own protector: the Special Branch.

These defenders of freedom seized my medical notes from my GP without, it appears giving any reason. He assumed that I had been arrested and must have threatened the life of the monarch at least! In fact all I had done was join the perfectly legal Communist Party of Britain.

Later, after I had refused to spy on the CPB for them, they passed these notes over to BAe - a previous employer.

BAe, when it suited them, proceeded to reveal excerpts from these notes to what I see as members of the general public.

So much for medical confidentiality; so much for the independence of the police!

Comrades please note. Yours sincerely, Roger Newby, Sheffield.

Dear Comrades

When will the persecution of the Palestinian people stop?

They were force marched out of the country once called Palestine, now called Israel, and scattered in refugee camps all over the Middle East where nobody wanted them. Fifty years later many are still refugees, huddled together in what became the West Bank and Gaza.

In 1967 Egypt, Syria and Jordan initiated a war with Israel, which they lost. The Palestinians played no part in starting that war, but the West Bank where they live has been occupied ever since.

Israeli settlers are building more and more illegal settlements on Palestinian land. The Israeli-only roads that cut across Palestinian land and the obscene "security barrier" (Apartheid wall) has now made the concept of a free Palestinian state unviable.

Bush and Blair first insisted that Palestinians should elect a President. President Mahmoud Abbas did everything the Israelis and US asked; and got absolutely nothing in return. Pressure was put on the Palestinians to elect a democratic Western-style government.

They chose their government, but because they voted in Hamas, they are being persecuted daily. The European Union, led by Britain, has stopped all European Aid going into the country.

The Israeli government is denying all export payments due to the Palestinian people from products they have sold abroad. All of this has meant that doctors, teachers, police and professionals' salaries have not been paid since the elections.

Israel and the US, supported by Britain, then called for a unity government. Hamas and Mahmoud Abbas agreed to this condition - and still not one concession from Israel, Britain or the US has been made.

Children are starving; hospitals are full to capacity but without medicines. The only funding coming from the US and Israel is for more arms for one side of the conflict to kill and maim the other side. The end result of all of this is the terrorism which is a threat to us all.

Yours Sincerely,

Councillor Ray Davies Vice chair - CND Cymru.

Racist murder in Leeds jail

PRISON authorities at Leeds jail allowed a violent white prisoner to remain in a cell with an Asian man, whom he later beat and stabbed to death, even though they had been warned that he was a threat to other inmates, a coroner's jury was told last week.

The racist murder of Shahid Aziz by Peter McCann at Leeds prison on 2nd April 2004 has alarming echoes of the murder of Zahid Mubarek in Feltham Young offenders' Institute in 2000 by his white racist cellmate.

The Leeds jury was told that the prison was in such chaos that the assessment of the threat that McCann presented to other prisoners was based on simply asking him if he was violent. He replied that he was not and then was duly classed as safe enough to share a cell with another prisoner.

McCann was moved into a cell with Aziz and within an hour had murdered him.

The coroner's jury unanimously found that the prison officers should have acted immediately on a warning from a probation officer that McCann was dangerous. He has two previous convictions for violence, including attacks on fellow inmates.

The jury also criticised the length of time it took the authorities to inform Aziz's family.

Peace protesters acquitted

TOBY OLDITCH and Philip Pritchard were last Tuesday cleared of all charges of damage at the RAF Fairford air base in Gloucestershire, which they invaded in 2003 to sabotage B-52 bombers in order to prevent war crimes in Iraq.

They both admitted using bolt cutters to get through the perimeter fence but denied conspiracy to cause criminal damage.

"We have been waiting four years for this day," Olditch said afterwards. "It demonstrates that the law really can come down to reasonableness."

Pritchard said: "It is a great relief and a huge vote of confidence for anti-war protesters."

On the Web...

- New Worker National - www.newworker.org
NCP Central - www.geocities.com/ncpcentral
London District NCP - http://londoncommunists.blogspot.com/
Brighton NCP - http://brightoncommunists.blogspot.com/
NCP-PCS - www.geocities.ncppcs/pcs1.html

Diary

SATURDAY 26 May African liberation day. Film, poetry, speakers, stalls. 12 noon to 4.30pm. Room V111, Aernon Square Campus, SOAS, Vernon Square, London WC1, FoA & ALISC.

SUNDAY May 27 Party4peace. Benefit gig. 7pm, The Bedford, Balham, London SW12.

SUNDAY 27 May Nottingham Green Festival. 10am-5pm, Arboretum Park, Waverly St/ Addison St, Nottingham. NCP stall all day.

THURSDAY 31 May John Pilger book launch. Bloomsbury Theatre, 15 Gordon St, London WC1. £4 from 020 7636 1577.

SATURDAY 2 June Friends of Lebanon: liberation day event. 6.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston Rd, London.

TUESDAY 5 June Stop the War fringe meeting at CWU annual conference, 2.00pm, Tregonwell Hall at Bournemouth International Centre, Exeter Road, Bournemouth, BH2 5BH.

WEDNESDAY 6 June Stop the War fringe meeting at GMB annual conference. 12.45pm Brighton Centre, East Sussex BN1 2GR.

SATURDAY 9 June National Demo for Palestine. March from Lincoln's Inn Fields at 1.30pm & rally in Trafalgar Square, London. Enough! Coalition.

MONDAY 11 June Meeting organised by

Coalition to Stop Deportations to Iraq. 6.30pm, Committee Room 4, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1, Contact: sarahp107@hotmail.com

THURSDAY 14 June After Blair, breaking with Bush's endless war. 7.30pm, Yaa Asantewaa Arts & Community Centre, 1 Chippenham Mews, London W9. STWC.

MONDAY 14 June Rageh Omaar presents his latest film "Rageh Inside Iran" London Irish Centre, 52 Camden Square, London NW1 9XB 07989 578840.

FRIDAY 15 June Film: Bloody Sunday - A Derry Diary. Directed by Margo Harkin. 7pm, Hammersmith Irish Cultural Centre, Blacks Road, London W6 9DT. 020 563 8232. £5/£4.

SUNDAY 17 June Brent STWC garden party. Willesden Green. £12/£7.

THURSDAY 21 June Stop the War Unison fringe meeting. 5.30pm, room Beta East 1, East Wing, Brighton Centre, Kings Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 2GR

THURSDAY 21 June Stop the War fringe meeting at Unison Annual. 5.30pm, room Beta East 1, East Wing, Brighton Centre, Kings Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1.

THURSDAY 28 June Troops out of Iraq. Manchester New Worker Supporters Group Friends House, 7.30 pm.

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Armageddon — bring it on!

by Rob Gowland

TWO TELEVISION programmes were shown on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) this week that directly relate to the philosophical battle of ideas in the modern world today.

One, *The Root of All Evil*, is by Professor Richard Dawkins of Oxford University was screened on the ABC's religious programme *Compass* last Sunday.

Near the beginning of it Professor Dawkins states his position, succinctly and unambiguously: "There is no well-demonstrated reason to believe in God, and I think the idea of a divine creator belittles the elegant reality of the universe."

Compass is, at first glance, an odd slot in which to put Dawkins' programme, for he is a scientist who believes "there is a profound contradiction between science and religious belief". The ABC's Religious Broadcasts department may, of course, have included the Professor's outspoken attack on the continued promulgation of obscurantist thinking in a spirit of fair play, of presenting all views including the anti-religious view.

On the other hand, and I think this is more likely, they may have felt that Professor Dawkins' ill-concealed hostility

towards those who promote faith over reason would backfire on him and in fact prompt the undecided to plump for the "reasonableness" of the ever-smiling Christians.

Professor Dawkins admits that, like many people, he used to think that the fight against ignorance and bigotry in the form of religion had been won some years ago.

However, he now realises that such is not the case, that in fact what he refers to as "the process of non-thinking called faith" has not only survived but its practitioners have regrouped and are presently counter-attacking the forces of reason and science.

And it's a battle they intend to win.

The second television programme relating to this subject this week is Andrew Denton's *God On My Side*, which was broadcast on Monday.

To make this programme, Denton in February 2006 went to the United States' 63rd National Religious Broadcasters' Convention in Dallas, Texas. There, more than 6,000 "Christian communicators" gathered at the Gaylord Convention Centre.

They were there to discuss how to win the propaganda war against science and "godlessness" (including against those poor unfortunates who believe in non-Christian religions), although

they did not put it like that. They preferred to say that they were concerned with learning new ways to spread "the word of God" in the 21st century.

They are exceedingly well trained, able to utilise all the latest forms of mass communication, equipped with massive support facilities and budgets, highly motivated and able to motivate (and mobilise) other believers.

To anyone who believes in democratic rights they and their smug opposition to reason are a menacing sight. Appallingly, they look forward complacently, even eagerly, to the end of the world (probably in a nuclear cataclysm).

In language that shows the Cold War is very much alive, they confidently forecast the invasion of Israel by Russia, (with an army of no less than 400 million, I am sure the man said), and the destruction in Israel of Russia, followed by the return of Christ to rule over a world of resurrected past and present Christians (everyone else having been consigned to the everlasting fires of Hell).

Asked (in either programme) for the evidence to support any of this and they happily — in fact, triumphantly — resort to subjective accounts of how they felt better after they had prayed or done something similar. It seems churlish to object that

• Richard Dawkins' hard hitting programme.

such accounts do not constitute proof of anything.

Professor Dawkins goes to Lourdes, where some overwrought peasant girls once convinced themselves they had seen a vision of Christ's

mother, Mary. Dawkins is there to witness the power of faith "where science has failed".

The priest at the shrine proudly tells him of the 60-odd cures of the ill that are "con-

firmed miracles" that have supposedly happened there. Dawkins does some quick maths to show that, compared to the many thousands that visit Lourdes every year, even if the miracles were true the number is actually paltry.

Unlike Professor Dawkins, Denton does not directly confront, still less contradict, the views expressed by the smugly self-satisfied (and relentlessly smiling) born-again Christians he encounters at every turn.

He pursues a policy of giving them enough rope with which to hang themselves, and they smilingly oblige. On the other hand, Dawkins' confrontational style also produces insights: he goes to Israel to meet a young American Jew who went to Gaza and converted to Islam.

Instead of the expected insights into the religious problems of the so-called Holy Land, Dawkins cops a serve from the young man who is revealed as a very scary bigot indeed, an Islamist of the worst stamp.

Dawkins finds all this religious prejudice and bigotry to be, in one sense, ironic: for, as he points out, "We are all atheists when it comes to most of the gods that mankind has ever believed in."

"Some of us just go one god further."
The Guardian,
Australian communist weekly

US trade union visits China

A DELEGATION of leaders from a major US trade union federation arrived in Shanghai last week at the invitation of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

The delegation from Change to Win, which represents more than six million workers, will also visit Beijing and Kunming, capital of southwest China's Yunnan Province on an eight-day friendly visit.

The delegation will meet with workers in factories and other work sites to learn about their conditions.

It will also meet academics, activists, and leaders from labour networks, NGOs, large multinationals and government organisations.

A symposium to discuss collective negotiations organised by trade unions in the two countries will be held during the delegation's visit to Beijing.

"We warmly

welcome our American counterparts and will actively communicate with them to find common ground," said Li Jingfang, an official with the federation.

"The visit will improve and develop relationships between China and US trade union organisations as well as the Sino-US relationship."

Li said it is the first time a US national trade union federation has visited China.

She said the two sides are expected to set up an exchange mechanism after the visit.

Change to Win is one of two major national trade union organisations in the US. The other, AFL-CIO had so far avoided contact with the federation, Li said.

Xu Zhenhuan, vice chairman of the federation, will head a delegation to pay a return visit to the US later in the year, she said.

James Hoffa, a delegate and Chair of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters,

said dialogue between China and US trade unions is of great importance.

"You can never ignore a nation of 1.3 billion people," he said. "We expect to have a frank interchange and talk with our Chinese counterparts on issues

• Left: James Hoffa. Below: These Wal Mart workers are singing a company song before work. But they do really have something to sing about — Wal Mart have been forced to accept unions in China.

such as how we can respectively improve the living standards of our member workers."

Hoffa said Change to Win unions share common employers with millions of Chinese workers throughout the service, transportation and industrial sectors, like the United Parcel Service Inc (UPS).

Change to Win, founded in July 2005, is made up of seven partner unions separate from the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO).

They are: International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Laborers' International Union of North America, Service Employees International Union, UNITE HERE, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, United Farm Workers of America, and United Food and Commercial Workers International Union.

China Daily

Where is Akhmed Zakaev?

by Timothy Bancroft-Hinchey

WHERE IS the Chechen warlord, wanted for organising illegal armed groups, attempted murder, incidents involving murder, terrorism, hostage taking and armed robbery? The perpetrator of this considerable curriculum vitae sits comfortably in Britain, the country which deemed it reasonable to provide him with political asylum.

For nearly six years, precisely since 20th September 2001, the Russian authorities have been trying to secure the extradition of the Chechen criminal Akhmed Zakaev, wanted for practically every crime under the sun. Yet since 7th December 2002, he has resided in London, where he enjoys life as a free citizen under political asylum, despite having been allegedly involved in the slaughter of hundreds of Russian citizens in numerous acts of terrorism practised with the utmost cruelty.

political asylum

Despite the international arrest warrant circulated among Interpol, Zakaev has travelled to Denmark (where he was finally arrested for five weeks in 2002, but was not extradited), he has travelled to Germany (where he was free to travel around like any other tourist), he has travelled to the Netherlands, where he was also not arrested and he has lived in London, where a British judge refused to extradite him (13th November 2003) and where on 29th November, he was granted political asylum.

How, then can Britain be serious in an extradition request for Russian businessman Andrei Lugovoi, when the man wanted for soliciting persons to murder, three counts of murder, two counts of wounding with intent to occasion grievous bodily harm, one count of false imprisonment, six counts of conspiring to commit murder and/or terrorism, wounding and hostage taking, sits comfortably in London, whose authorities ignore and deride the Russian extradition order?

And what did Andrei Lugovoi do, except to be in London around the time when rogue ex-agent Litvinenko was poisoned, and when the same poison was found at numerous locations where Lugovoi had never been?

Perhaps the British authorities would do well to start turning stones among the dregs of Russian society residing in London, the criminals and marginals cowering in their hiding holes provided and sheltered by Britain, and they might be surprised at what they find, not least links between Zakaev and Litvinenko.

Pravda.ru

Fighting rages on in Lebanon

BATTLES ENGULFED a Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon on Monday and the death toll from two days of fighting between the Lebanese army and Al-Qaeda-inspired militants climbed to 71.

Thick black smoke billowed from the Nahr al-Bared camp, home to 40,000 Palestinians, as tanks shelled positions held by Fatah al-Islam fighters hitting back with machinegun and grenade fire.

Fighting subsided in the afternoon amid efforts to allow an aid convoy into the coastal camp in north Lebanon, but clashes resumed before the UN and Red Cross vehicles could move in.

Abu Salim, a spokesman for Fatah al-Islam, blamed the army for the flare-up and threatened to ignite violence elsewhere. "If the situation stays like this we will not be silent and will definitely move the battle outside (the nearby city) of Tripoli," he said by telephone.

He said the group had lost five dead and nine wounded inside the camp since fighting erupted early on Sunday. Palestinian sources in Nahr al-Bared said the bombardment Monday had killed nine civilians and wounded 20.

The conflict is Lebanon's worst internal violence since the 1975-90 civil war. Sunday's battles in Nahr al-Bared and Tripoli killed 27 soldiers, 15 militants and 15 civilians. A military source said the army



• Lebanese soldiers under fire.

suffered no casualties in Monday's fighting.

Fatah al-Islam, a Sunni Muslim group which emerged late last year, has only a few hundred fighters and scant political support in Lebanon. Based in Nahr al-Bared, it is thought to have links with jihadist factions in other Palestinian camps.

The violence showed how fragile security remains in Lebanon, racked by political and sectarian tensions since last year's Israeli-Hezbollah war in the south and by a series of unsolved assassinations before and after Syria's 2005 troop pull-out.

The Cabinet, itself embroiled in a long-running political crisis, was to dis-

cuss the fighting later Monday. Palestine Liberation Organisation representative Abbas Zaki said after talks with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora that the camps housing 400,000 refugees, a legacy of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, should not be "the spark that starts a civil war".

Lebanese government ministers say Fatah al-Islam is a tool used by Syria to stir instability in an effort to derail UN moves to set up an international court to try suspects in the 2005 killing of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moualem reiterated that his country opposed Fatah al-Islam and wanted to arrest its leaders.

"Our forces have been after them, even through Interpol," he said in a lecture at Damascus University. "We reject this organisation. It does not serve the Palestinian cause and it is not after liberating Palestine."

Under a 1969 Arab accord, Lebanon's army may not enter the refugee camps, leaving a security vacuum filled by Palestinian factions. They have not obeyed a 2004 UN Security Council resolution calling for all militias in Lebanon to be disarmed.

Hezbollah, Lebanon's biggest armed group, whose Shia fighters are backed by Iran and Syria, also rejects that demand.

China Daily

Zimbabwe raps Australia

ZIMBABWE has slammed Australian premier John Howard for banning his country's national cricket team from playing the Zimbabwe side, saying that he was using sport as political weapon to effect regime change in the country.

Zimbabwe's Minister of Information and Publicity Sikhanyiso Ndlovu blasted Howard for interfering in sport and using it as a tool to demonise the Zimbabwe government.

The International Cricket Council chief executive Malcolm Speed also described the decision by the Australian government as "unfortunate to Zimbabwe's cricketers and supporters".

The Australian government on Sunday prohibited its cricket team from going to Harare in September to play against Zimbabwe in a three-game one-day series.

Howard announced that the Australian national

side would not travel to Zimbabwe in September as scheduled to avoid "giving a propaganda victory" to President Robert Mugabe.

Howard said it was not fair to leave foreign policy matters with sportspersons, preferring that the government accept responsibility, indicating that his government would enforce the ban, if necessary, by stopping the use of the cricketers' passports to leave the country.

Ndlovu said sport was one of the most important activities which unite nations, but Howard wanted to destroy it. "By putting political pressure on their national cricket team not to come to Zimbabwe, the Australian Prime Minister is flouting United Nations principle on human rights because sporting is a human right which must be respected." Ndlovu said.

"He must learn to accept that Zimbabwe is a sovereign state. It is not a Brit-

ish colony," the Zimbabwean minister said.

Meanwhile, Speed said, "From an ICC perspective, we will work with Zimbabwe Cricket and our

members to try to ensure the game there gets the support it needs in order to continue at this difficult time."

Xinhua news agency

Israel hits Gaza Strip

ISRAEL'S air force fired a missile at a house in Gaza City late Sunday, killing at least eight people, according to residents and hospital officials. According to media reports, Israeli air attacks on targets earlier in the day killed another three Palestinians.

The attack on the house was the deadliest air-strike since Israel began targeting the Gaza Strip last Tuesday. The house reportedly belonged to Hamas MP Khalil al-Haya, who was not at home at the time. He was one of the Hamas representatives in ceasefire talks with Fatah and was attending an Egyptian-sponsored truce meeting just before the strike, residents said.

The missile hit a room used as a meeting place for the extended family, relatives said. Hospital officials said eight people were killed and 13 injured.

All the dead and wounded were relatives and neighbours, according to al-Haya's wife – but the Israeli military claimed that the missile hit "a group of armed militants" outside the house.

At Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, there was confusion as cars brought in the victims, some of them dismembered by the blast. Al-Haya went to the hospital to visit his wounded relatives. "We will go ahead despite the challenges, despite the martyrs, despite the pain that I am suffering and my people are suffering," he told reporters at the hospital.

Fawzi Barhoum, a Hamas official, said those killed were civilian members of the al-Haya family, and the attack was a sign that Israel is targeting "everyone — civilians and leaders". Barhoum said: "This escalation is very serious" — adding that "all options are open" for responding. A Hamas statement called for its military wing to "respond with all means to these crimes".

Three people, including at least one Hamas militant, were killed earlier on Sunday in an air-strike on a car in Gaza City. In another air-strike, Israel said it targeted what it called an Islamic Jihad weapons workshop in northern Gaza, but the shop owner said his stereo and video store was apparently hit by mistake.

Later in the day, an Israeli shell exploded in northern Gaza, wounding three, Palestinian security officials said. Israeli aircraft struck twice in Gaza City early Monday, killing a Hamas militant.

In a statement, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called for international pressure to stop the Israeli attacks. And at the Vatican on Sunday, Pope Benedict XVI called for an end to the violence. He told pilgrims in St Peter's Square: "In the name of God, I beg that an end be put to this tragic violence."

Radio Havana Cuba

