

New Labour, women's rights and the left For free abortion on demand!

For women's liberation through socialist revolution!

A few months ago the front pages of the tabloid press were splashed with ultrasound images of fetuses declared to be smiling, waving and even "walking in the womb". Although the overwhelming majority of the population in Britain is in favour of abortion rights, these pictures have reignited calls for further restrictions on abortion from the powers-that-be who deem themselves the sole arbiters of if and when a woman should have a child. Tony Blair said that the question of the time limits for abortion should be put to a free vote in parliament as a matter of "conscience". Liberal Lord David Steel, the former MP who introduced the 1967 Act legalising abortion, now argues that the time limit should be reduced from 24 to 22 weeks. In an article titled "We need to rethink my abortion law" (*Guardian*, 6 July), Steel argues that advances in medical technology have demonstrated that fetuses are viable at 22 weeks.

At the same time, Steel proposes that women should have easier access to abortion in the first three months of pregnancy. This has the reactionary anti-woman bigots of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children raving that this is a "Trojan horse designed to enshrine a right to abortion for the first time in British law". Indeed, at present there is no such right. On the contrary, abortions must be approved by two doctors, and the woman must "prove" that having a child would cause greater

physical or mental harm than not having one. The arguments by Steel and others for reducing the upper time limit on abortion provide a pseudo-scientific veneer for the ravings of religious fanatics that abortion is "murder".

This was captured in an article in *Scotland on Sunday* by Marina Benjamin (11 July): "Compared to the anti-abortionists who have only the Bible and not the arguably more influential medical profession on side, Lord Steel and his ilk sound eminently reasonable. Set the limit at the age when a baby is able (technological aid notwithstanding) to survive outside the womb, they argue, and bingo! You have a moral law." She goes on to wonder, if medical science discovered a way to keep four-week-old fetuses alive in jam jars, would the government then restrict the upper time limit on abortions to one month.

Before 1967 abortion in this country was illegal except in the most extreme circumstances. Like every other social question in this class-divided society, the right to an abortion was and is fraught with power and privilege. Those with the money and the connections were able to get an abortion while countless women, particularly among the working class and the poor, were horribly mutilated and many died as a result of back-alley abortions. And like every other right secured by the working class and oppressed under capitalism, the right to abortion was not freely granted by a beneficent ruling class: it was the product of social struggles. The mass movement in the US for black civil rights, together with the growing

protests against the Vietnam War, had an impact on youth here as well. Together with laws decriminalising homosexuality, liberalising divorce and abolishing capital punishment, which were introduced in the same period in

Second World War.

By the mid/late-1960s, there was growing disillusionment in the post-war promises of prosperity and increasing combativity among the working class in the face of attacks by Harold



Unison protest by low-paid women health workers against Labour's partial privatisation of Dudley NHS hospital, West Midlands in 2000.

Britain, the 1967 abortion law also reflected economic and social changes issuing from the introduction of the "welfare state" in the aftermath of the

Wilson's Labour government, which included mounting unemployment, wage restraints and attacks on free

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Down with Labour's vendetta against the FBU!

The firefighters' struggle for a living wage has become a test of strength between the unions and this vicious Labour government that is itching to break the powerful Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The employers—local authorities mainly run by Labour—have refused to pay the measly wage increase the FBU leaders agreed to last year. The government stacked a negotiating meeting with councillors in order to vote down a deal that was about to be agreed. Labour's hostility to the FBU was doubtless further encouraged when the union membership voted to disaffiliate from the Labour Party at the FBU conference in June. Now, with the FBU balloting its members for strike action, John Prescott's office has threatened that the government will use the army to break a strike.

If today Labour smells blood, it's because in the previous strike the FBU leadership capitulated rather than wage the kind of class battle that was needed. Taking place on the eve of the Iraq war,

the firefighters strike had the potential to do enormous damage to Blair's mobilisation for the bloody invasion of Iraq. Then as now, Labour threatened to use the army to break picket lines and to seize red fire engines. This should have been met with a commitment from the unions to build mass picket lines at the fire stations. Instead, FBU leader Andy Gilchrist announced: "Firefighters are neither prepared nor looking to hinder the armed forces." As we said at the time: "A leadership that proposes passive acquiescence in the face of such union-busting is not a leadership! This is contrary to the interests of firefighters and all workers looking to the FBU for a lead. A battle conceded before the fight is a battle lost!" ("Victory to the FBU!", Spartacist League leaflet, 19 November 2002).

However the FBU leadership called off the strikes just as they were beginning to bite. Hundreds of thousands of opponents of the Iraq war supported the

FBU, while the strikes also rekindled the kind of solidarity not seen since the miners strike of 20 years ago, from Turkish and Kurdish organisations and others targeted under the so-called "war on terror", to local government workers, many of whom are women and immigrants. Today, an FBU strike against the Blair government could ignite some real class struggle, including from desperately underpaid civil service workers facing massive job losses and dockers who are also being balloted for strike action.

Arguing for disaffiliation from Labour at the FBU conference Tony Maguire, a union member from Northern Ireland, said: "Our party, the party that we nurtured through the Thatcher years and the party trade unions gave millions of pounds to, has stabbed us not in the back, but in the heart". But even before Blair, Old Labour was hardly committed to the defence of the working class. A mass reformist party, when in power it

defended the interests of British imperialism at home and abroad. Labour used troops to break the firefighters strike in 1977; sent the troops to Northern Ireland in 1969 and introduced racist immigration controls.

Today both the Iraqi people suffering brutal occupation and the multiethnic working class in Britain have a common enemy: the British capitalist class and its state—which consists of the army, the police and the prison system. The army that Labour threatens to use against the FBU is regularly used to do the dirty work of this ruling class not only in Iraq but in Northern Ireland, where it is an instrument of oppression against the Catholic minority. What's required is a class-struggle leadership in the unions that will fight for what workers need, not what capitalism can afford. We seek to build a multiethnic revolutionary workers party dedicated to the overthrow of this system of capitalist exploitation and replace it with a planned, socialist economy.

Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Abolish the racist death penalty!

A 24 June Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Beard v. Banks* puts the death sentence back in court in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Jamal was convicted in 1982 on frame-up charges of killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner on 9 December 1981 and sentenced to death. Ruling on Jamal's federal *habeas corpus* challenge to his conviction and death sentence, in December 2001 federal district court judge William Yohn overturned Jamal's sentence. Yohn overturned the death sentence on the grounds that the jury did not consider and unanimously vote on the possible mitigating circumstances

against sentencing him to death. This procedure was explicitly found unconstitutional by the 1988 Supreme Court ruling in *Mills v. Maryland*. At the same time Yohn affirmed the conviction, refusing to even hear the confession of Arnold Beverly that he, not Jamal, shot and killed Faulkner. The prosecution appealed, seeking restoration of Jamal's death sentence. Mumia appealed, seeking to overturn the conviction.

In the *Beard v. Banks* decision in June, written by Clarence Thomas, the Supreme Court grotesquely ruled that the *Mills* holding could not be used to challenge

cases decided before 1988 — ie, it could not be applied retroactively. Although the jury procedure that sent George Banks to death row was identical to that found unlawful in the *Mills* case, Mills would live while Banks (and dozens of others) is to die on the technicality that his case became "final" eight months before the *Mills* decision. This is just the latest in a labyrinth of court rules, legal machinations and sleight-of-hand used to secure the executions of hundreds of death row inmates after evidence of innocence and exposure of gross constitutional violations that put them in the shadow of death in the first place.

In the 1992 *Herrera* case, the Supreme Court announced that the execution of an innocent person is not unconstitutional. Democratic president Clinton's 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, and a 1995 Pennsylvania law adopting draconian time limitations for "discovering" new evidence to challenge a death sentence, have both been used by federal and state courts to bar Beverly's confession and other evidence of Mumia's innocence.

For over two years, Jamal's *habeas corpus* appeal has been on hold as his state appeal wended its way through the Pennsylvania state courts. But within days of the *Beard* decision, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals lifted the stay, ordering Jamal (and other Pennsylvania death row inmates) to file briefs on whether or not the *Beard* decision applies to his case. A legal memorandum submitted to the court by Robert Bryan, Jamal's lead attorney, points out that the *Beard* decision has no relevance to Jamal's case. The brief cites Judge Yohn's ruling: "Although *Mills*, handed down on June 6, 1988, was decided after petitioner was sentenced to death, it nonetheless antedated the finality of petitioner's conviction, which was registered on October 1, 1990, when the United States Supreme Court denied his petition for a writ of certiorari."

This is a clear statement of fact that the *Beard* case should have no effect on Jamal. But the entire history of Jamal's case shows that a fighter for black freedom like Mumia has no rights which the capitalist courts are bound to respect. An outspoken champion of the oppressed, Jamal was a target of the Philadelphia police and of J Edgar Hoover's FBI from the time he was a Black Panther Party spokesman at the age of 15. For over 22 years, Democratic and Republican prosecutors, governors and state and federal legislators have run the truth about this fighter for black freedom through a wringer of lies that would make even Bush and Cheney blush with pride. And for 22 years, court after court has ignored not only overwhelming evidence of Jamal's innocence but also the legal precedents and constitutional strictures demanding his freedom which purportedly guide them.

The district attorney in Jamal's case won a death sentence by assuring the jury the sentence was merely symbolic, that Jamal would never die because he would have "appeal after appeal after appeal". Although three years earlier the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that such language required automatic reversal, in 1989 they affirmed Jamal's death sentence. In 1991, the Supreme Court reversed the death sentence of David Dawson on the



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grounds that the prosecution improperly used his political affiliation as a member of the racist White Aryan Brotherhood to prejudice the jury. When Mumia sought a reversal on the grounds that the prosecution used his past membership in the Black Panther Party in securing the death sentence, the Supreme Court refused to even consider his case.

There is no justice in the capitalist courts!

The capitalist rulers want to see Mumia dead because they see in this eloquent journalist, MOVE supporter and former Panther spokesman, the spectre of black revolution and defiant opposition to their system of racist oppression. They seek to execute Jamal in order to send a chilling message to all those who challenge vicious cop repression in the ghettos, who stand up for labour's rights on the picket lines, who protest imperialist mass murder from the Balkans to Iraq, who demand an end to the anti-immigrant witch hunt and attacks on civil liberties in the name of the never-ending "war on terrorism".

Jamal's case throws a spotlight on the barbaric, racist death penalty, a form of institutionalised state terror directly descended in the US from the system of black chattel slavery. Seeing in his fight for freedom a reflection of their own struggles against oppression and exploitation, trade unionists and fighters for the oppressed in countries spanning the globe have rallied to Jamal's case.

After years of evasion, the NAACP finally adopted a resolution calling for a new trial for Jamal at its annual convention in July. Though support for the resolution was widespread, NAACP leaders did all they could to prevent it from coming to the floor: delegates who planned to present the motion were decertified and barred from the convention; a planned panel discussion on the death penalty at which Mumia's case would be raised was abruptly cancelled. Only when Pam Africa of the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal and others threatened to picket the NAACP convention the same day Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry was to speak there did the NAACP tops relent and let the resolution be voted.

In reporting on the NAACP vote in a recent article (*CounterPunch*, 16 July) liberal journalist Dave Lindorff notes the erosion of public support for Jamal, claiming: "The throngs of people who used to come out to demand a new trial for Abu-Jamal have faded away as his case, over the past several years, was taken over by ideological lawyers and others who managed to

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TROTSKY

The Bolsheviks abolished laws against homosexuality

Tony Blair's recent diatribe against the "liberal 1960s" is part of a reactionary crusade to reinforce "family values". In an international climate of social struggle, 1967 in Britain saw major achievements such as the legalisation of abortion and decriminalisation of homosexuality. The latter however included a misnamed "privacy clause" stating that "no act could take place where a third party is likely to

be present" and the age of consent for gay men was set at 21, until 2001 when it was lowered to 16. The 1917 Russian October Revolution led by the Bolsheviks for the first time laid the basis for real equality for women and eliminated all laws against homosexuality. As laid out by Dr Grigorii Batkis, director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, the early Soviet republic held that the state should stay out of sexual matters as long as there was effective consent. These emancipatory principles were later reversed as the Stalinist bureaucracy sought to entrench itself in part by reinforcing the family and traditional social values.

The present sexual legislation in the Soviet Union is the work of the October Revolution....

After the successful revolution, after the triumph of practice over theory, people first strove for new, firm regulations along economic lines. Along with this were created models governing family life and form of sexual relations responding to the needs and natural demands of the people....

The revolution let nothing remain of the old despotic and infinitely unscientific laws; it did not tread the path of reformist bourgeois legislation which, with juristic subtlety, still hangs on to the concept of property in the sexual sphere, and ultimately demands that the double standard hold sway over sexual life....

Now by taking into account all these aspects of the transition period, Soviet legislation bases itself on the following principle:

"It declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured, and no one's interests are encroached upon" (emphasis in original)....

Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality — Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called 'natural' intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters. Only when there's use of force or duress, as in general when there's an injury or encroachment upon the rights of another person, is there a question of criminal prosecution.

— Grigorii Batkis, *Die Sexualrevolution in Russland* (1925), excerpts translated in John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)* (1974)



LENIN

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For a Socialist United States of Europe!

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EDITOR: Eibhlin McDonald
PRODUCTION MANAGER: James Palmer
CIRCULATION MANAGER: Mick Connor

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Young Spartacus

Becoming a revolutionary: for women's liberation through socialist revolution!

We reprint below a recent application letter to the Spartacus Youth Group, slightly edited for publication. VI Lenin, leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, said that each generation of youth comes to socialism in its own way. In her application, comrade Ariel traces how her fight for social justice against the all-sided misery and oppression of capitalist society took her from politics aimed at pressuring the capitalist rulers to be more "humane" through the mass mobilisations against the Iraq war to a revolutionary perspective.

As she notes, in a political climate conditioned by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the former Soviet Union and the bourgeoisie's triumphal proclamations that Marxism has proven to be a "failed experiment", it is very difficult for youth today to "imagine the overthrow of capitalism". Her application letter underlines that beginning to study the history of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the first and only successful working-class revolution, as well as becoming aware of the lessons of both the heroic struggles of the 1984-85 miners strike and its defeat were critical to being won to the programme of proletarian revolutionary internationalism. This led her to join the SYG, an apprentice school for young revolutionaries to become the future cadre of the Bolshevik party that can lead the struggle for victorious socialist revolution.

I first became interested in politics when I was eleven years old. A small anti-abortion group was protesting outside our local hospital because it was the one place within a 60-mile radius where a single doctor performed abortions. Every day they stood opposite the hospital with placards showing pictures of aborted fetuses. I began asking questions and at eleven years old I came to the conclusion that it is a fundamental right for women to have safe access to abortion. I spent the following ten years involved in a myriad of left-wing campaigns, including, but not limited to, working on referendums to ban discrimination against gays in employment; protesting the use of child labour by Wal-Mart manufacturers; advancing the economic rights of single mothers; fighting for the rights of tenants; protesting the economic sanctions against Iraq and protesting the bombing of Iraq in 1998. I threw myself into these campaigns with the passion of someone who wanted to see a better and more just world. Though I was involved in many different campaigns, they all had one significant similarity: they all were based on the belief that one could pressure the government into acting on the side of the poor and oppressed.

Though I had many strong beliefs, I never thought beyond the bounds of capitalism. I grew up in a rural, backward area and people did not talk about socialism. I was only eight when the Berlin Wall fell and East and West Germany were united under capitalism, and was ten during counterrevolution in the Soviet Union. I always thought that



Above: Afghan women in western-style dress in 1980, as Soviet Red Army intervention opened prospect of social emancipation. Since its withdrawal, women have been forced back into the oppressive burka and are shown below begging in Kabul in 2000.



the best way to advance social justice was to persuade people to vote for social advancements and put constant pressure on the government to advance the rights of the poor and oppressed. I had not yet been exposed to politics with any other method.

My politics began a significant change when I was studying for a Masters degree in "human rights" at the University of Essex. I quickly became involved in the University Peace Campaign, which was organising protests against the upcoming war against Iraq. I threw myself into this campaign with all of my passion and spent Saturdays leafleting in the town centre to build local demonstrations. We collected donations and support petitions for the striking firefighters, and attempted to mobilise campus protests against top-up fees. This was the first time I heard people discussing socialism on any remotely serious basis and started for the first time to understand that the nature of capitalism is to maximise profit for the few by exploiting the labour of the many. I began making the links between capitalism and war, poverty, racism, and women's

oppression; however, I did *not* honestly believe it to be possible to either overthrow capitalism or to rebuild an egalitarian society. This is perhaps why I, as did many others, seemed to believe the Stop the War Coalition and the leaders of sundry left-wing political organisations when they put forward the idea that we could stop the war if we all united together and marched together with a single demand.

I spent the two weeks before the 15 February demonstration in London called by Stop the War handing out leaflets at my university and in the town centre in an attempt to build the demonstration. Every day I skipped my classes to spend several hours outside in the bitter February cold selling tickets for seats on our coaches to London. I felt an amazing sense of self-gratification when we filled nine coaches bound for London. I thought that if we got two million people on the streets that would be enough to pressure the British government to listen to the people and not to go to war. All sense of gratification faded shortly after I arrived in London. In every direction I could see liberal placards

with slogans such as "US—no, UN—yes" and "No war without a second resolution". I was further disappointed and disillusioned when I reached Hyde Park and began listening to the speakers on the stage. I had previously thought that it was a good thing that the Stop the War Coalition was trying to unite everyone who was simply against the war because I was under the impression that once together, more radical politics would be advanced. I was sorely mistaken. The politicians who took the stage advocated the use of the UN, praised the "peace-loving" French bourgeoisie, and resorted to cheap anti-Americanisms, while little was said to denounce the role of British imperialism. I had arrived at the demo feeling optimistic and empowered, and left feeling disillusioned in the dominant left-wing political tendency in Britain and disappointed at the liberal politics put forward at the demo.

Breaking with liberalism

At this time I was becoming more radical and unequivocally opposed to capitalism, despite not seeing any clear means to dispose of capitalism and rebuild a socialist society. I marched again at the Stop the War Coalition's London demo during March and felt even more disempowered. The war had officially begun against Iraq and the numbers of demonstrators dropped significantly. It went from two million on the streets in February before the start of the war to significantly fewer in March after the bombing had begun. I quickly understood *why* there was such a significant drop in numbers when, by the middle of the demo, I decided that I would never again attend a demo called by Stop the War because they peddled the illusion that we could sufficiently pressure the government into not going to war by merely marching through the streets. I do not think I was alone when I thought that two million people on the streets of London would prevent the British government from going to war; they went to war despite this and it left me and probably at least a million others feeling completely and utterly disempowered.

I, too, would have stayed home and not bothered to march again had I not encountered the Spartacist League and the Spartacus Youth Group. I had been reading *Workers Vanguard* for a few months and after the March demonstration against the war, I decided to contact the organisation as its revolutionary politics were beginning to become appealing when I realised the utter bankruptcy of reformism. I began meeting with comrades and thinking more seriously about the Soviet Union. I found it initially difficult, as I was too young during the existence of the Soviet Union to understand the significance of its collapse at the time.

At this time my human rights law teacher went to Afghanistan to do a report on the state of women's rights. She returned with nightmarish tales of her

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The American left and the "Iraqi resistance"

US/Britain out of Iraq now!

We publish below in slightly adapted form an article from Workers Vanguard no 830, 6 August 2004, the paper of our sister group the Spartacist League/US. Many capitalist governments around the world, not least in Europe, are hoping for the election of John Kerry who promises to "mend fences" with America's "allies", meaning he will allow them to join in the brutal occupation and subjugation of Iraq. The article exposes the militant pretensions of groups on the American left whose aim is to utilise anti-war sentiment to boost support for the Democratic Party, which they sometimes disguise behind cheering for the so-called Iraqi "resistance". As can be seen in the case of Workers Power in Britain, who raised the call in May for "victory to the Iraqi resistance", this is not as radical as it sounds. Workers Power has been part of the Stop the War Coalition that didn't even call for defence of Iraq and whose strategy was to pressure Blair's Labour Party to dissociate itself from "Bush's" war, which is a far cry from seeking the military defeat of British imperialism. Not to mention that WP called for "critical support" to Labour in the May local elections! Meanwhile in the US elections, the Socialist Workers Party (Britain) and the American affiliate of the Socialist Party have both endorsed Ralf Nader, a capitalist politician who has made it clear that the purpose of his campaign is to push the Democratic Party in a "progressive" direction.

What does Iraq look like since the balmy-handed handover of sovereignty?



Iraqi women protest last January against decision by Washington's hand-picked Governing Council to replace Hussein-era civil codes protecting women with Islamic *sharia* law.

Exactly like a country under merciless US/British imperialist military occupation with hand-picked satraps returned from exile and crowned by Washington as local "democratic" leaders. The new prime minister, Iyad Allawi, is a thug who did wet work for the American CIA, British MI6 and the Ba'ath Party's intelligence agency. Just days before becoming prime minister, Allawi personally shot dead six handcuffed and blindfolded prisoners in the courtyard of a Baghdad police station (reported by Paul McGeough, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July). The morgue overflows with rotting corpses and as the mercury hits 114 degrees Fahrenheit, "Baghdad is a city that reeks with the stench of the dead" (Robert Fisk, *Independent*, 28 July).

Ordinary citizens are blown to bits by the American military at checkpoints all over Baghdad festooned with signs reading, "Do not enter or you will be shot." Scores more are killed by suicide bombers who make no distinction between Iraqis lining up for jobs or wait-

For class struggle against capitalist rulers at home!



Spartacist contingent at 20 March protest in Los Angeles against US occupation of Iraq.

ing as their documents are checked and the foreign invaders or their police lackeys. The official unemployment figure in Iraq is now 70 per cent. Latest estimates of the number of civilians killed (the imperialist occupiers don't bother to count how many civilians they kill) range from over 11,000 to over 13,000.

control to former Ba'athist officers, Sunni Muslim clerics or their Shi'ite counterparts? In Falluja, women have been forced back into veils, prohibited from wearing make-up or participating in public life under the recently imposed Islamic *sharia* law. A street poster "decree of Allah" threatens, "We will have no pity for those who oppose Allah by their beauty or mode of dress" (*Le Monde*, 30 June). Houses are raided where "sinners" are believed to be drinking alcohol or listening to music other than Koranic chants. School kids with "indecent" haircuts are surrounded by *mujahedin* trucks, hauled off, beaten and shaved bald, dangerously branded as infidels. Ghaith Abdul-Ahad (*Guardian*, 25 June) writes that it's now "Falluja versus Falluja". The mayor handed him two letters. One warns, "Be careful, oh brothers, because the Americans and their traitor allies, the Kurds and the Shias, are planning to come after your leaders." The other is addressed to the UN, demanding that Iraq be run by Sunni army officers. Meanwhile, the US continues to bomb the city with impunity.

As revolutionary Marxists, we have a side in the current situation, against the US, its British allies and Iraqi lackeys. Our starting point is to demand the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of all US and British troops, and their allies. We defend the peoples of Iraq against any US-led attack and repression. Insofar as the forces on the ground in Iraq aim their blows against the imperialist occupiers (including the over 20,000 private mercenaries operating in the country), we call for their military defence against US imperialism. Every blow struck against the imperialist occupiers is a blow struck against the enemy of workers and the oppressed all over the world.

But we do not imbue the forces presently organising guerrilla attacks on US forces with "anti-imperialist" credentials and warn that in the absence of working-class struggle in Iraq and internationally against the occupation, the victory of one or another of the reactionary

clerical forces is more likely to come about through an alliance with US imperialism. We are intransigent opponents of the murderous communal violence against other ethnic, religious and national populations oftentimes carried out by the very same forces fighting the occupation armies. And we condemn the kidnappings and executions of foreign civilian workers in Iraq.

We are external to the situation in Iraq and our task at this point in time is therefore necessarily largely propagandistic, but no less crucial. While making clear that the main enemy is US imperialism, a revolutionary party with roots and influence in Iraq today would mobilise against the reimposition of *sharia*, against communalist sectarian attacks, for organising the vestiges of the workers movement and the legions of the unemployed on a class basis through strikes and workplace occupations against the thieving imperialist occupiers and parasitic clerics.

Equitable resolution of the democratic rights of all the peoples of Iraq, and the Near East more broadly, cannot be achieved under capitalism but only with the overthrow of bourgeois rule in the region and the establishment of a socialist federation of the Near East. This is the Trotskyist programme of permanent revolution. This means combining the struggle against the occupation with a struggle against all manner of bourgeois nationalism and religious fundamentalism, and poses the urgent need to forge Marxist parties to lead the struggles for the working people to come to power throughout the region. International extension of the revolution to the rich centres of imperialism—the United States, Germany, Japan, Britain—is vital, or, as Marx noted, "all the old crap" will return.

Revolutionaries vs reformists in the anti-war movement

We oppose calls to cloak an imperialist occupation in "humanitarian" United Nations garb. We oppose the liberals and ostensible leftists who argue that the way out of the Iraq occupation is "regime change" in Washington in November. The rape of Iraq was prepared by 14 years of crippling United Nations sanctions and thousands of murderous bombing sorties ordered by Democratic president Clinton. John Kerry aims to reclaim the White House for the Democrats this fall by outflanking Bush as a war candidate. A solution to the suffering of the peoples in Iraq depends heavily on *class struggle at home against US and British imperialism*. We fight to instil in the American proletariat the consciousness that the same profit-lusting rulers who smash their unions, drive down wages, destroy health care and education, massacre the workers of Iraq in the interest of capital. This requires a tenacious struggle to swim against the tide of reactionary "national unity" which has been cynically whipped up and manipulated by the Bush gang, the Democrats and the AFL-CIO labour tops since September 11, 2001.

This is the perspective that the Spartacist League/US and Spartacus Youth Clubs fought for in the Iraq anti-war movement against the reformist pressure politics of United for Peace and Justice, Workers World Party (WWP)—which recently underwent a split—and its

ANSWER coalition, the Revolutionary Communist Party and its Not In Our Name coalition, and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and its various campus coalitions.

While occasionally spouting home truths about the nature of the profit-driven capitalist system and its inherent drive to war in the pages of their newspapers, these groups actively limited anti-war protests to the confines of the Democratic Party and built the rallies as platforms for the Democrats. Sure, they featured more left-talking Democrats like Jesse Jackson Sr, Al Sharpton and Barbara Lee rather than John Kerry or Edwards. But these politicians merely cover the left flank of the same party of capitalist class rule. Thus, while we forthrightly raised the call to defend Iraq—ie, that workers and anti-war activists had to take a side against the US—the anti-war coalitions refused to raise such calls, limiting their slogans to pacifist demands like “No to War” or “Stop the War”, pandering to the “peace is patriotic” Democratic Party politicians.

Today, these same reformist groups espouse a seemingly more left-wing posture of cheering resistance to the occupation. A 5 February *Workers World* article headlines, “Mass Resistance Hinders Neocolonial Plans”, while a 22 July article enthuses, “The Iraqi resistance is so large and has so much popular support among nationalist Iraqis angered by the presence of U.S. troops that it cannot be defeated militarily.” Under the headline, “The Right to Resist—Why You Should

You can't raise political consciousness and struggle against war while subordinated to representatives of the capitalist class waging the war! Coalitions based on this kind of class collaboration are an obstacle because they shackle anti-war workers and youth to their class enemy and promote the illusion that the priorities of the American ruling class can be shifted in the interest of working people through peace crawls. The truth is that imperialist war is not merely a policy, but the inexorable product of the drive to conquer new markets for exploitation and export of capital. That's why only a series of socialist revolutions to overthrow capitalist rule can create a world planned economy that will put a stop to imperialist war. This is the only solution, and to achieve it requires a fight for the political independence of the workers movement and the forging of a workers party. Break with the Democrats!

Frankenstein's monster, the anti-war movement and the “resistance”

The imperialist war against and occupation of Iraq are a direct consequence of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92. Although bureaucratically deformed and degenerated by Stalinist misrule, the Soviet Union was still a workers state with a planned economy and collectivised property, if not the beacon of liberation created by the October 1917 socialist revolution. We fought to defend the Soviet Union—just as we do China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba today—against any exter-

armed, financed and trained by US imperialism. We Trotskyists hailed the Red Army intervention in Afghanistan and called to extend the gains of the Russian Revolution to the Afghan peoples. But the Kremlin criminally withdrew the Red Army from Afghanistan in an effort to appease US imperialism. This marked the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union, as religious reaction and nationalism fueled anti-communist rollback across Eastern Europe and to the homeland of the October Revolution.

An informative article by Juan Cole, “The Iraqi Shiites—On the History of America's Would-Be Allies” (*Boston Review*, October-November 2003) notes, “Once the Soviets had fallen the Sunni radicals abandoned their alliance of convenience with Washington and turned against the United States, which they now saw as a bulwark of the secular governments that they were trying to overthrow, in addition to resenting its role in supporting Israeli expansionism. The more radical of these groups coalesced into al Qaeda and decided to hit the ‘far’ enemy rather than only the ‘near’ one.”

This history is essential in evaluating the American left and the Iraq occupation today. Claiming a “third camp” of neither Washington nor Moscow, the ISO sided with their “own” bourgeoisie by serving as the left cover for “democratic” imperialism against the Soviet Union in every conflict of the Cold War. The ISO's *Socialist Worker* (May 1988) cheered: “We welcome the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan. It will give heart to all

In 1958, there was indeed a revolutionary upheaval that overthrew the pro-British monarchy. There was also a mass Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) that united Kurds and Arabs as well as Sunnis, Shi'ites, Jews and Christians. It was a party with good human material but a rotten Stalinist programme of class collaboration. The events of 1958 did not end in victory, but a defeat from which the working class has yet to recover, because the opportunity for socialist revolution was sacrificed by the Kremlin Stalinists and the ICP on the altar of “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism and alliance with a mythical “progressive” bourgeoisie in Iraq. When the Ba'athists took power in the 1960s, they, in cahoots with the CIA, outlawed and shattered the ICP, killing and imprisoning thousands of Communists and trade unionists.

To understand what is happening in Iraq today, including the communalist violence, you have to understand that Iraq is not a nation, but a patchwork of different peoples and ethnicities as a result of the carve up by the British imperialists of the old Turkish Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. There are three main populations within Iraq's borders: a portion of the Kurdish nation (a nation that also spans parts of Iran, Turkey and Syria); an Arab Shi'ite majority; and the historically dominant Arab Sunni minority. In the absence of the working class emerging as an independent political force in a struggle against neocolonial rule, each of these populations can only come to power by oppressing the others and in alliance with US imperialism. What “resistance forces” like Moktada al-Sadr's Shi'ite Mahdi Army are after is to rule Iraq as the local satraps for imperialism if the US forces would just get out.

The struggle of the Kurdish people explodes the myth of a unitary Iraqi nation. Their fight for self-determination is a just struggle, requiring the overthrow of four capitalist states. We call for a Socialist Republic of United Kurdistan! But in Iraq today—and only in Iraq—the Kurdish question has become decisively subordinated to the occupation, in the sense that the Kurdish political parties and their military forces are an integral part of the occupation forces. In fact, many Iraqi Kurds mistakenly look with favour on the American occupation as a guarantor against Arab reconquest. The struggle for Kurdish independence can only go forward through intransigent opposition to the occupation and the Kurdish nationalists who collaborate with US imperialism.

The so-called “national resistance” in Iraq is a myth promoted by US and Western imperialism and cynical leftists. When the American military bombed the Sunni town of Falluja and simultaneously went after Shi'ite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, there were temporary instances of unity against the foreign occupier. But resistance forces led by religious clerics are by definition sectarian. There isn't a unitary “resistance” force in Iraq but rather disparate groupings organising guerrilla attacks on US forces—and often against rival groupings and random civilians. In the present context, an award for the most asinine analysis should go to Nat Weinstein's *Socialist Viewpoint* (a split from Socialist Action) whose front page in April cheered, “Iraq: The People United Can Never Be Defeated”.

Defeat US imperialism through workers revolution!

The flip side of the reformist left's pandering to liberal Democrats is the dim and pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric of Jan Norden's tiny “International Group”. (For an exposé of their three-card-monte organisation, see “IG's Potemkin Village

continued on page 9



Workers Vanguard Photos

Left: Workers World Party's ANSWER coalition at 30 March 2003 protest in LA promotes pro-imperialist lie that American occupation forces are “our troops”. Right: Al Sharpton speaking at 26 October 2002 anti-war rally. ANSWER built platforms for capitalist politicians during anti-war movement, serving to bolster illusions in Democratic Party.

Support the Opposition to the U.S. Occupation of Iraq” (*Socialist Worker*, 2 July), the ISO writes, “If the Iraqi resistance drives the U.S. out of Iraq, it would be a major setback for Bush's agenda and the agenda of U.S. imperialism. This would be a tremendous victory for our side—making it much more difficult for the U.S. to choose a new target in the Middle East or elsewhere in trying to impose its will.” If the US were driven out of Iraq, this would certainly be a victory.

But why is it that groups that refused to side with Iraq in the lead-up to and during the war now cheer on acts of resistance against the occupation? Because every blow against the US in Iraq redounds against Bush in the run-up to the November election and plays to the Democrats' advantage. While the ISO and WWP write articles denouncing the Democrats, and in the case of WWP are running their own candidates for the presidential election, in practice they work for candidates whose purpose is to refurbish the tarnished image of the Democratic Party. Thus a 22 July editorial in *Workers World* endorses the campaign of black Atlanta Democrat Cynthia McKinney, calling her “Unbossed & Unbought”. As for the ISO, they're torn over whether to support capitalist politician Ralph Nader, as they did in 2000, despite the fact that he has made it clear that the purpose of his campaign is to push the Democratic Party in a more “progressive” direction.

nal attack by imperialism, without any a priori conditions, and against internal attempts at capitalist restoration. At the same time, we fight to oust the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracies and to implant the revolutionary internationalist and socialist programme of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks, as we did in the former USSR, East Germany and elsewhere. Without the Soviet Union to stay the hand of US imperialism, the world has become a more dangerous place of unbridled American military intervention and increased rivalries among capitalist powers, which threaten wider conflicts, ultimately including with nuclear weapons.

From the beginning of the Cold War, US policy under Democrats and Republicans was to bolster Islamic fundamentalism and murderous, authoritarian regimes (like Hussein in Iraq and the Shah in Iran) as bulwarks against “godless communism” in the region and to ensure access to petroleum reserves. In 1979, the Soviet Red Army intervened in Afghanistan at the request of the modernising bourgeois-nationalist government which was besieged by Islamic fundamentalists opposed to elementary democratic rights for women and reforms that infringed on the economic and political fiefdoms of the mullahs. These *mujahedin* cut-throats threw acid in the faces of unveiled women and skinned communist schoolteachers alive for the “crime” of teaching women how to read. They were

those inside the USSR and in East Europe who want to break the rule of Stalin's heirs.” With galloping cynicism, groups like the ISO, which howled against “Soviet imperialism” in Afghanistan and supported the counterrevolutionary *jihad*, now oppose the Iraq war they helped bring about in their own small way through their craven anti-communism.

The myth of the “national resistance”

Cheerleaders for Third World nationalism, Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist Party, WWP peddles the myth of an “Iraqi revolution” which they cite as a continuous process since 1958! A 5 February article by Fred Goldstein states: “The invasion to recolonize Iraq is a new development in the history of imperialism. It is an attempt to destroy the independence of a people who have already carried out a great anti-imperialist revolution—the revolution of 1958.” Later in the article, Goldstein informs us, “In Iraq, because of the nature of the Iraqi Revolution and what it achieved for the masses, there was no such counter-revolutionary internal base for the CIA and Pentagon to work with.”

This is an outright lie. Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party were the counter-revolutionary oppressors of Iraq's workers, Kurds, Shi'ites and other peoples, and as such were close allies of US imperialism until Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Abortion...

(Continued from page 1)

school milk for children. This was combined with a radicalisation of youth in opposition to the government's support for the Vietnam War, its anti-immigrant policies—Labour slammed the door in the face of desperate Asians fleeing Kenya—and Labour's maintenance of British nuclear capacity as part of US-dominated NATO which was aimed at the Soviet Union.

In the 1970s young radicals, many of whom had joined self-declared Marxist organisations, fought to defend and extend abortion rights under the slogan "free abortion on demand—a woman's right to choose". Today, a number of these one-time radicals warm New Labour's benches in Parliament. Among those who view themselves as feminists today are the so-called "Blair babes" like Patricia Hewitt and Harriet Harman who, having "made it" themselves, now sanctimoniously preach that working-class, poor and minority women need a "hand up, not a hand out" as Labour cuts benefits for single mothers and rolls back other welfare programmes. At the same time, it is a measure of how far to the right the putative socialist left in this country has gone that the self-proclaimed alternative to Blair's New Labour Party—the Socialist Workers Party's Respect coalition—is headed by George Galloway, a man who openly boasts of his opposition to abortion. In an interview with the *Independent* (5 April), Galloway declared: "I'm strongly against abortion. I believe life begins at conception, and therefore unborn babies have rights. I think abortion is immoral...I believe in God. I have to believe that the collection of cells has a soul."

Scandalously, the SWP never disavowed this god-fearing assault on women's rights. Perhaps in response to an outcry against his statement, Galloway wrote a letter to the *Guardian* (7 June) arguing, "I am not opposed to a woman's right to choose and neither is the Respect coalition: we recognise people's right to express their own views and choices on this matter." Even in the more radical days of the women's movement, the mass of poor and working-class women did not have a right to "choose" because of the class and racial oppression they are subjected to in society. But at least those who fought for "a woman's right to choose" were on the right side, fighting against anti-abortion reaction.

Nowadays, Galloway can claim to be "pro-choice" even while he openly spouts his anti-abortion views. Galloway is saluted as an ally in Parliament by "right-to-life" reactionaries who seek to impose their anti-woman bigotry as the "law of the land". The Muslim Association of Britain also welcomed his anti-abortion stance and called for a vote to him. Indeed obtaining such electoral support was a central aim of the Respect coalition. Thus its founding declaration said nothing explicitly defending women's rights or gay rights, in fear that this would upset the imams whose support they were trying to hustle.

Religion, reaction and "family values"

We reject any notion that fetuses are human beings, all of which ultimately derive from the religious belief that human life is defined by having a "soul". These views are not simply backward ideas designed to provide solace for people in a cruel world with the promise of "eternal happiness" after death. Religion is part of the ideological overlay for the maintenance and

defence of the interests of the rich, propertied few, the purpose of which is to enforce subservience to their rule.

The right to abortion is no more than a democratic right to a simple and safe medical procedure. We fight for it to be legal and free on demand, as part of our struggle for free, quality health care for all. Providing women with the means for deciding when and if they want to have children is basic to the fight for women's equality. And that is precisely what makes it such an explosive issue with the church and the capitalist state. Allowing women sexual freedom, just like legitimising gay marriage and allowing independence to youth in their sexual relations, is a threat to the institution of the family, a bastion of social reaction, which together with organised

is thrust onto the workers themselves.

Since coming to power, "family values" have been at the core of many of the Blair government's attacks on the working class, the poor, youth, women, immigrants and minorities. One of its first acts was to cut back benefits for single mothers, while preaching that it was time to move from welfare to work. Much has been made of the fact that the Labour government instituted a minimum wage, which "rewards" those who work with a miserable £4.50 an hour. In 2002 working-class single mother Patricia Amos was thrown behind bars for 60 days because her kids were playing truant from school. Now children of immigrants, already targeted by the draconian "war on terror", are to be incarcerated if their parents "refuse" to be

campaign that will unleash 20,000 more auxiliary cops on the streets; enforce on-the-spot fines of £80 on youth for shoplifting, under-age drinking and vandalism; and electronically tag some 18,000 "offenders" who are to be tracked by satellite (with a special emphasis on tracking so-called "sex" offenders). In a speech announcing this programme, Blair declared that his government was committed to ending "the 1960s liberal, social consensus on law and order" which "spawned a group of young people who were brought up without parental discipline, without proper role models and without any sense of responsibility to or for others".

Denouncing the "permissiveness" of the 1960s has long been the battle cry of the right, from the fundamentalist Republican neo-cons in the US to the Thatcherite Tories whose purpose is the reactionary rollback of gains that have been achieved. It is now appropriated by Blair's New Labour government to regiment the population. While bemoaning the lack of "good parenting", it is not as if this government can, or has any desire to, go back to the days when working-class women were meant to be confined to the home raising children and the husband was the sole source of income. Nearly 70 per cent of women in Britain are currently employed as the two-income household has become a matter of survival for most working-class families. Rather, Blair's invocation of parental responsibility and attacks on youth in the name of combating "anti-social" behaviour are aimed at strengthening the ideological strictures of the family in an attempt to ensure greater compliance to the increasingly brutal rule of capital.

In the *Observer* (25 July) Yvonne Roberts aptly noted that what Blair really hated about the 1960s was "the questioning of authority". She goes on to point out: "His target is not the spawn of 'a society of different lifestyles', it is a slice of the traditional working class, uprooted and battered by a consumer-mad, service-based economy—a group for which society apparently no longer has any use, except as the politician's scapegoat."

The industrial working class in this country has been decimated over the past two decades. The defeat of the 1984-85 miners strike at the hands of Thatcher's vindictive government was the pivotal point in an onslaught against the working class. It destroyed whole communities and left behind a trail of human wreckage (see article, page 12). The devastation of the industrial unions and loss of millions of manufacturing jobs heralded the creation of the new "flexible economy" of low-paid, unskilled, part-time and temporary jobs many of which are filled by women. In former bastions of the industrial working class like Liverpool, Glasgow and Sheffield women are now a majority of the workforce. While Blair sermonises about good parenting, the greatest growth rate in such employment has been recorded among women with children under the age of five. But by the same token, as workers women have social power that can be mobilised in struggle for their rights.

In the 1980s, women in the coal mining areas wrote a heroic page in the fight for the working class and for women's rights. As we wrote at the time in our article "Women in the coalfields: Class fighters, class leaders!":

"The role of women in the miners strike has awakened this country to working class women as a political powerhouse. Their militant marches and rallies, their courageous up-fronting of scabs and cops on the picket lines, their absolutely essential and efficient organisation of food distribution and daily hot meals for strikers and their families in the face of the Iron



Format Photographers



Socialist Worker

Women's rights are won through struggle. International Women's Day, London 1971, first women's liberation demonstration in Britain (top). London 1979, demonstrators campaign in defence of abortion rights.

religion reinforces authority and conservatism.

The oppression of women, the oldest social inequality in human history, goes back to the beginning of the development of private property, itself the product of the developing capacity of human labour to produce more than was necessary for subsistence. The generation of a social surplus led to the division of society into classes, with those who expropriated the surplus on top and those who produced it on the bottom. The institution of the state is the instrument for the suppression of the exploited by the exploiters. As Engels explained in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, the monogamous patrilineal family arose "to make the man supreme in the family, and to propagate, as the future heirs to his wealth, children indisputably his own". Under capitalism, the institution of the family remains the central source of the oppression of women. It is critical for the bourgeoisie in ensuring that their property is passed from one generation to the next through "legitimate" heirs. The institution of the family is the means by which bourgeois codes of morality and obedience are instilled in the working class, while the burden of raising the next generation of wage slaves and caring for the sick and aged

deported. Last year a law was passed making kissing among under-16s a crime punishable by five years in jail. Meanwhile in Britain, where sex education for youth is woefully inadequate, the teenage pregnancy rate is the highest in Europe.

At the same time, poor, working-class and minority women—particularly youth—have less access to abortion. A column by Polly Toynbee in the *Guardian* (14 July) noted, "the rate of pregnant young girls opting for abortion varies hugely according to social class: nearly 80% of pregnant girls in the highest social classes choose abortion, compared with only 18% among those with low expectations of life". But this is not simply a matter of "choice". Those who have the money can go to private clinics rather than the NHS. Under a system that has come to be called abortion rights "by post code", statistics show that NHS funding for abortions varies widely by region, as do the social attitudes of doctors who in many places refuse to give an abortion to a woman who is more than 11 weeks pregnant. For poor, minority women the stigma of class is compounded by racism which makes access to abortion rights, and indeed to all healthcare services, more difficult.

Most recently "family values" were invoked in the government's inauguration of a new five-year "law and order"

Lady's starvation threats, their cast-iron determination to win—'We shall eat grass rather than give in to her'—have played a critical role in this decisive class battle....

"Capitalism offers the woman worker only further immiseration and dependency. Instead of sending women back into the kitchen the trade unions must fight for equal pay for equal work, special recruitment and training of minorities and women by the unions, free 24-hour child-care facilities and maternity and paternity leave at full pay. Rather than pitting one

reinforcing the family. As Martin Pugh notes in his book *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain* (MacMillan Press, 1992): "Its guiding spirit, after all, was an Edwardian social imperialist, William Beveridge. 'In the next thirty years', he wrote, 'housewives as Mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British Race and of the British Ideal in the world.'"

Introduced as a means to buy "social peace" among a restive proletariat, the

did not get upgraded, the battle fought by these women did win a substantial pay rise. Moreover, their militancy not only gave these women a sense of their own power but also inspired other workers at a time when the Wilson Labour government was trying to impose wage restraints on the unions. Women engineering workers at Lucas went on strike for equal pay the same year. Women bus conductors in London fought against the introduction of one-man buses and for the right of women to become drivers, a battle which had to take on the leadership of the TGWU. The National Joint Action Committee for Women's Equal Rights, based on the unions, was set up in 1968 and the formal legal right to equal pay for women was recognised in 1970.

Moves to restrict the 1967 abortion law, first made by Labour MP James White and later by other male "servants of the Queen" in Parliament, led to the formation of the National Abortion Campaign in 1975 whose central slogan was "free abortion on demand—a woman's right to choose". In the face of a renewed anti-abortion move in Parliament, the Corrie Bill, leftists in the unions put forward motions for the TUC to take up the defence of abortion rights. In October 1979, a few months after the Corrie Bill resoundingly passed its second reading in Parliament (as Labour MPs voted with their "conscience"), a demonstration was called by the TUC in London. Bringing out more than 60,000 people, with wave after wave of union banners, it was the largest pro-abortion demonstration in British history. In its aftermath the Corrie Bill was withdrawn.

Although narrowly restricted in its demands to the defence of the 1967 abortion law, this was a significant action. A break from the chauvinism and sexism promoted by the rulers to keep the working class divided, it presented an opening to further break with the Labourite consensus of "conscience" on the abor-

France. But by the late 1970s, as the bourgeois order moved dramatically to the right, yesterday's leftist radicals moved with it. The mass TUC demonstration for abortion rights took place in 1979, four years after the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution, by which time the IMG was already heralding Khomeini's "Islamic Revolution" in Iran, with its pre-feudal prescriptions that women must be enslaved under the *chador* (veil). A year later, when the opening shots of anti-Soviet Cold War II were fired over the intervention of Soviet troops in Afghanistan—who were fighting against the enslavement of Afghan women to illiteracy, the bride price and the veil at the hands of imperialist-backed Islamic reaction—the IMG refused to take the side of the Red Army. The SWP opposed the Red Army, although it wasn't much of a move for an organisation which was conceived in taking the side of "democratic" imperialism against Stalinist "totalitarianism" in the 1950s Korean War.

We stood with the Red Army in Afghanistan in a war which directly posed the defence of elementary rights for women and of the gains for the world's working class and oppressed which were embodied in the Soviet Union despite its Stalinist degeneration. We declared: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend the social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples!" The 1989 withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan was the prelude to the counterrevolutions that would sweep across the former workers states of Eastern Europe and destroy the Soviet Union in 1991-92. In Eastern Europe one of the first measures after the restoration of capitalism was the reinstatement of anti-abortion laws. In the former Soviet Union, conditions have been thrown back to a level comparable to the time of the tsars. Infant mortality has soared and life expectancy rates have plummeted.

Just as attacks on women's rights are a measure of the increasing depreda-



Ms London
London 1993: Spartacist League placards at demonstration against reactionary anti-abortion forces.

section of the class against another, we fight for jobs for all through worksharing on full pay."

—*Spartacist Britain* no 60, August 1984

Had the miners strike been won it would have done more for the rights of women, gays, blacks and Asians—all of whom were mobilised in active solidarity with the miners—than any efforts to "lobby parliament" which are standard fare among the Labourite left.

Such rights as the working class and oppressed have been accorded were won through hard and often bloody struggle. But under capitalism these rights are always temporary and reversible. Every struggle for democratic rights, if it is to lead to the liberation of the working class and oppressed, must be infused with an understanding of the need to bring down the entire system of capitalist class rule. Our task is to build the revolutionary workers party that is so urgently needed. As Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), such a party must be "the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat."

The fight for abortion rights in Britain

In the aftermath of the Second World War over a million women were driven out of industries to which they were recruited for the "war effort". But by the end of the 1940s the Labour government of Clement Attlee appealed for women workers because of a severe labour shortage, particularly in hospitals and transport. By 1948 over 600,000 more women were employed in industry than a decade earlier. While this obviously served to loosen "Victorian values" of domestic subservience and child-rearing, a central ideological pillar of the "welfare state" was

welfare state did offer real, if highly partial, gains for the working class particularly in health care and other benefits. Yet to maintain the hypocritical morality of family life the husband was to be preserved in his role as the "breadwinner". Married women were neither expected to pay a full contribution nor to get full benefits if they opted to pay. Single working women did receive benefits but again at a lower level as they had no "dependents" to support. Meanwhile, family allowances were introduced to encourage women to continue to play their traditional role as mothers and domestic servants regardless of whether they worked.

The legalisation of abortion in 1967 was a substantial gain for women. It was never extended to Northern Ireland, where abortion rights are rabidly opposed by churchmen on both sides of the sectarian divide. This left women with the "choice" of either having the child or trying to raise the money to travel to Britain to get an abortion (which an estimated two thousand women do each year). While abortion rights here were the product of social struggle, they were also partially prompted by the British rulers' truly vicious class-hatred of the working class. As Lesley Hoggart notes in a paper "Feminist Principles meet Political Reality: the case of the National Abortion Campaign": "There was an explicit agenda, based on a familial ideology, differentiating between potentially 'good' and 'bad' mothers.... In something of a twist to most welfare policies it was women who were potentially 'bad' mothers who were also 'deserving': 'deserving' greater access to abortion, that is." Put otherwise, the upper classes were inspired by concern lest the "lower orders" excessively propagate, while at the same time they were desperate to ensure that they be properly tutored in obedience and subservience through the family.

In the late 1960s, the combined class and sexual oppression of women workers ignited militant struggle for their rights. In 1968, women sewing machinists at Ford Dagenham in London went on strike demanding that they be recognised as skilled workers at the same grade and pay as men. Although they



Socialist Worker
Respect leader George Galloway openly spouts anti-abortion views while claiming to be "pro-choice".

tion question and to win the most advanced layers of the proletariat to the understanding that the fight for women's rights is key to the battle for the emancipation of the working class from capitalist exploitation and oppression.

For women's liberation through socialist revolution!

A central actor in the National Abortion Campaign was the International Marxist Group (IMG). Its then-young militant cadre, like Tariq Ali and others, were overwhelmingly the "children of '68" who were radicalised by the heroic struggle against US imperialism as well as by the impact of the 1968 general strike in

tions of the capitalist order, the rights granted to women following the 1917 Russian Revolution provide a measure of the advances for all of humanity that will come with the overturn of capitalism and the institution of a planned socialist economy based on the needs of the many not the profits of the few. Immediately following the 1917 October Revolution, the Bolsheviks abolished all laws against abortion and homosexuality. They made marriage and divorce simply civil acts, and abolished the concept of illegitimacy. They opened private hospitals to the masses, began to build public kitchens and laundries and to create residential nurseries.

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Heroic women of the miners strike

We print below an edited version of the remarks of Comrade Julia Emery at our 10 April dayschool on the twentieth anniversary of the miners strike.

First of all, I really enjoyed the talks by comrades and by the miners here today, it's been a very valuable experience for me as obviously I wasn't around during the miners strike. I wanted to speak a little bit about the support from the women in the mining areas during the strike. When the strike started the bourgeois press went off to find wives of scabs and printed articles saying the miners must go back to work because children are going to starve. Like most of the coverage of the strike in the bourgeois press, the truth was far different.

Soon the strikers' wives and girlfriends began to organise food kitchens and fundraising. Without that support the strike simply would not have been able to keep going as long as it did. The women organised demonstrations and protests to confront the scabs and police and they raised the profile of the strike. The women were certainly not encouraging men to go back to work. As one woman put it, "we shall eat grass" rather than give in to Thatcher.

Women played an important role towards the end of the strike, when some miners were wavering. They told them: "you are not going to go back and scab on this strike". The women sometimes had to confront fairly backward attitudes. On some occasions they actually had to fight their way onto the picket lines, because some of the miners' leaders said it simply wasn't "their place". But for example when the cops blockaded villages and stopped miners getting through to picket in another area, sometimes women were able to get through and they joined the picket lines to help stop scabs.

We Marxists often say that women are doubly oppressed as workers and as women. The miners strike showed the capitalists' attempts to keep women confined to traditional roles in the home can



Workers Hammer

Courage and determination of women of the coalfields was key to maintaining backbone of strike.

be reversed. An article that appeared in the New York *Village Voice* in November 1984 said: "For these women, the strike has become a social revolution. Women in the pit villages have never worked outside the home. Now they sit at the strike committee tables with the men and fiercely argue a cause which to them has become more than an industrial dispute." Women understood that the union was their sole defence against the capitalist onslaught on their livelihoods and communities. And they wanted to discuss, including with our comrades, a strategy to win the strike.

Our opponents intervened very differently because they, particularly the Revolutionary Communist Party and Workers Power, pandered to the idea of women being supportive but apolitical. They used to intervene to give advice on how best to raise funds and to run soup kitchens. Once, while we were discussing Soviet troops in Afghanistan with a women's support group, Workers Power was talking to them about chip pans. By the end of the strike it was unthinkable for many women to go back to their previous lives

as housewives. And why should they?

Back then we also raised the question, why shouldn't women be allowed down the mines with the men? There's a history to this question in Britain. In the early 1880s, women did work underground in backbreaking conditions. Women and children however earned no independent wage. They were subject to a contract agreed by their husbands or fathers and the mine owners ended up getting the work of a whole family but only paying one wage, that of the male worker. Women and children did dangerous work in damp and cramped conditions. There were so many accidents, deaths, stillbirths, babies born deformed, that it was a real problem in society.

In 1842 an Act was introduced excluding women and children from working underground, which in this context was beneficial. But women continued to work at the surface of the mines. They were known as "pit brow lasses". In the late 1880s and early 1900s there were attempts to exclude women from that kind of work as well,

but in a different context. Capitalist development had introduced more mechanisation to the industry and so these attempts to exclude women were simply a reflection of bourgeois moral codes that women should stay at home. Under capitalism, women are often the first to be thrown out of work and onto the scrap heap. For example, during WWII women were drafted into many sectors of British industry traditionally reserved for men. But when the men came back from the war, many of the women were made unemployed.

We also pointed out that, if legislation is needed to protect workers against dangerous conditions, it should not just apply to women, but to men as well. If work is too backbreaking for a human being, it should be done by a machine. When the labour aristocracy tries to exclude women from working in mines and other sectors of industry, it just reinforces job-trusting unionism and the bourgeois values that women should be kept in the home. During the miners strike we said that when the strike ended, women should be able to work in the mines. One of my favourite lines in *Workers Hammer* is that, if you say there aren't enough jobs for women, get rid of every last filthy scab and give the jobs to the women who've been fighting to win the strike. Many of the issues that affect women, such as the fact that they tend to be in low-paid, non-union, marginal jobs, often with no childcare, can actually be addressed through class struggle. The miners showed that women's struggle and class struggle go hand-in-hand, and that is what we fight for. We fight for an end to discrimination in employment, free abortion on demand, free 24-hour childcare and equal pay for men and women in society. We fight for the programme of class struggle, for the programme of socialist revolution that can establish a society where domestic slavery will be abolished and household duties and childcare will be collectivised. ■

Abortion...

(Continued from page 7)

At the same time they understood that the material conditions necessary to alleviate poverty and inequality required extending the revolution from backward, overwhelmingly peasant Russia to more advanced industrial countries. The failure of revolutions in other countries, particularly Germany, led to the increasing isolation of the first workers republic, which paved the way for the rise of the conservative and repressive Stalinist bureaucracy that reversed many of the liberating advances of the 1917 Revolution and reinforced the backward ideal of the family to inculcate subservience to its authority.

The proletarian revolutionary internationalist programme which animated Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party in the fight for women's liberation was at the core of the "Theses for the Communist Women's Movement" put forward at the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920):

"For women to achieve full social equality with men in truth and fact and not just on passive pages of dead law books, for women as well as men to win the possibility of unrestricted achievement and free development of their full human personality, two primary conditions must be met. First, private property must be uprooted and replaced by social property. Second, the activity of women must be integrated into the social production of a new order free of exploitation and subjugation. Only the realization of these two conditions will prevent women from becoming economically dependent on men as wives and mothers in the family, or, as a result of the class conflict between exploiter and exploited, falling under the economic subjugation and exploitation of the capitalist as proletarian women working a job.... The foundation of communism is the social ownership of the large, economically dominant means of production, distribution, and commerce. In doing away with private ownership in this realm, communism eliminates the cause of the subjugation and exploitation of man by man, the social conflict between rich and poor, exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. In so doing it also eliminates the economic and social conflict between men and women." ■

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Idiocy *Ad Absurdum*”, *WV* no 828, 11 June.) The IG ludicrously denounces *Workers Vanguard* for demanding “U.S. Troops Out of Iraq, Now!” (see the IG’s “Sink U.S. Imperialism in the Quicksands of the Near East!”, *Internationalist*, November 2003). Falsely claiming that our demand for the withdrawal of US troops is addressed to the American rulers and not the workers movement, the IG thunders, “The imperialists must be driven out of Afghanistan and Iraq. The Zionists must be driven out of the West Bank and Gaza” (emphasis in original). What kind of idiots oppose the demand for the immediate withdrawal of imperialist troops? Answer: fraudulent “Marxists” who despair of mobilising the American proletariat against the capitalist ruling class.

Norden’s group equates our slogans — “Down with the colonial occupation of Iraq! All U.S. troops out now!” — with the reformist American Socialist Workers Party’s “Out Now” slogan during the Vietnam War, which was designed to appeal to bourgeois politicians who wanted to cut US imperialism’s losses and get out of Vietnam. Actually, our position is consistent with the Spartacist revolutionary history on which Norden falsely claims to stand. We refer readers to *Spartacist* no 5 (November-December 1965), which reprints the press release “Spartacist Breaks with New York Parade Committee” wherein we state:

“The slogan ‘Stop the War in Vietnam Now’ can mean many things to many people. But given the composition of this Committee, the fact that it is dominated by right-wing pacifists and ‘liberals,’ i.e. pro-capitalist and pro-LBJ, it is clear that the slogan is deliberately ambiguous in order to avoid facing the duty to advance the only demand that has any meaning: *For the Immediate, Unconditional Withdrawal*

of All U.S. Troops from Vietnam!’” (emphasis added)

The IG’s polemics against us boil down to this: they say they’re for the military defeat of the imperialists and lie that we are not. Always prone to impressionism and adventurism, and willing to fight to the last drop of someone else’s blood, Norden & Co. substitute fantasies of revolutionary conflagrations sweeping aside imperialism in the Near East today in the absence of the struggle to build a Leninist-Trotskyist party to bring revolutionary consciousness to the working class, glorifying social forces hostile to the proletariat. During the first Gulf War in 1991, as editor of *Workers Vanguard*, Norden made crazed projections of Hussein’s army inflicting serious damage to the US military. When Norden broke from Trotskyism, one British comrade aptly asked, “Would it have been a capitulation to ‘smoke and mirrors’ imperialist propa-

Mumia...

(Continued from page 2)

convince Abu-Jamal to make his case a political attack on the entire legal system, instead of dealing with the key issues in his trial that offered the best chance to get him a new hearing.”

The “key issues”—racist jury-rigging, suppression of evidence, prosecutorial terrorisation of witnesses, overt racial and pro-prosecutorial bias of the trial judge, denial of Jamal’s constitutional right to self-representation and so much more—precisely point to the whole racist capitalist “justice” system. And every one of these key issues has been turned down by every court—from the Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas to the US Supreme Court.

What has driven Jamal’s supporters from the streets are illusions in the capitalist courts promoted by reformist protest organisers, like Workers World Party and Socialist Action. These illusions have been

ganda to wake the workers of the world to the revolutionary defence of Iraq, to halt, derail, smash by class-struggle means the crushing one-sided slaughter being prepared before our disbelieving eyes?”

In short, occasional phrases to the contrary notwithstanding, the IG has no perspective of fighting to mobilise the proletariat in the US and other imperialist centres to wage class struggle against imperialist war. Indeed, during the Afghanistan war in 2001, the IG explicitly denounced our slogan “For Class Struggle Against Capitalist Rulers at Home!”—a slogan raised in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks and the government’s reactionary “national unity” drive—writing, “The emphasis on ‘at home’ is counterposed to the call to defeat the imperialists abroad” (*Internationalist*, Fall 2001).

Military defeats abroad help sharpen

embodied in the subordination of the call to free Mumia to the demand for a “new trial”, consciously geared to appeal to liberals like Lindorff and the NAACP, to whom the antics of Judge Sabo were an aberration rather than the regular workings of the capitalist courts. Why mobilise in the unions and streets if the courts can be relied on to ultimately do the right thing?

The courts, including the Supreme Court, together with the cops, military and prisons, are part of the capitalist state, an instrumentality for organised violence by one class, the capitalist rulers, against the working class and all those at the bottom of this society. From the time the Partisan Defense Committee took up Jamal’s case in 1987, we have sought to ensure that every legal avenue was pursued to free him while fighting against illusions in the capitalist state. We have publicised Jamal’s case, raised critically needed funds for his legal battles and fought particularly to mobilise the social power of the multiracial labour movement in his

the class contradictions of a particular country. That’s the meaning of the Marxist axiom that “war is the mother of revolution”. But it is fundamentally the working class that has the social power to accomplish this historic task. We do not raise the call for class struggle at home with the pollyannish belief that the Iraq occupation is going to end with the immediate unfolding of socialist revolution in the US. We raise it in order to cut through the reactionary “national unity” mongering and “anti-terror” scare of the ruling class and to bring the working class to the understanding that it alone has the power to defeat the American imperialist system through proletarian socialist revolution. Out of working-class and social struggle and through the intervention of revolutionary Marxists, the workers party essential for this successful outcome will be forged. This is the purpose to which the Spartacist League is dedicated. ■

defence, including through labour-centred united-front protests demanding Mumia’s freedom and the abolition of the racist death penalty. Through these and other means, we have brought his case to trade unions representing millions around the world.

Our fight to free Jamal and abolish the racist death penalty is part of our perspective of winning workers to the understanding that the bourgeois state is not some “neutral” agency that serves society, but exists to defend the class rule and profits of the capitalists against those they exploit. This fight is rooted in the struggle to make the multiracial proletariat conscious of its historic class interests in the fight against the entire capitalist system, particularly the understanding that in this country the struggle for black freedom is central to the struggle for the emancipation of labour itself. *Mobilise labour/black power to fight for Mumia’s freedom! Abolish the racist death penalty!*

Adapted from *Workers Vanguard* no 830, 6 August 2004.

Letter...

(Continued from page 3)

research, which was all conducted while she was forced to remain hidden under a full *burka*. She found that it was routine in legal cases for the family of the perpetrator of a crime to hand over their young daughters as property to the victim of the crime as retribution. Girls were routinely stopped on the street and given virginity tests, which lead to a prison term if not passed. The situation for women in Afghanistan at the moment is that of horrific slavery—there is little difference between life under the woman-hating Taliban and under imperialist occupation. The photos from *Workers Vanguard* of women in Afghanistan in the early 1980s during Soviet intervention were significant for me—there were photos of women in modern clothing with rifles slung over their shoulders before going to fight side-by-side with the Soviet army against the *mujahedin*. There were later photos of women in jeans and T-shirts sitting around a table with men at a university studying. Upon discovering that apart from the Spartacist League, all other organisations on the left took the side of the CIA-backed, women-hating, reactionary *mujahedin*, I was disgusted.

The social gains of the Bolshevik Revolution

The progressive role that the Soviet Union played in Afghanistan and the fact that most other left organisations sided with reactionary women-hating Islamic fundamentalists first won me over to the

distinct politics of the Spartacist League. I began reading more about the Soviet Union and other organisations’ line on the topic. Many organisations claim the Soviet Union was not progressive and had some variant form of capitalism. I began doing research for my degree on the state of women in Russia before the 1917 revolution, after the revolution, and after counterrevolution. The findings were shocking and quickly persuaded me that the Soviet Union was progressive for women. The effects of counterrevolution were so devastating for women that it is clear that there was a qualitative change in the economic system. In the Soviet Union nearly 95 per cent of women who were able to work were either in employment or full-time education. The entire female sex was more educated and skilled than anywhere else in the world. After the restoration of capitalism in the former Soviet Union, the status of women dropped quickly and dramatically. Most women went from being in skilled employment to jobless and the luckier women resorted to begging in the streets. Women have been pushed into such desperate economic situations that some are being trafficked into sexual slavery. Though prostitution in impoverished areas is common, the phenomenon of highly educated and skilled women resorting to prostitution on a large scale is unique to the former Soviet Union. Many women who were doctors, teachers, or engineers during the existence of the Soviet Union are only able to survive as prostitutes.

It is extremely difficult as a young person at this time, when the imperialist

powers and their allies are able to run rampage over defenceless parts of the world, to be able to imagine the overthrow of capitalism in the imperialist centres. I was fortunate enough to attend a recent dayschool put on by the Spartacist League which featured first-hand accounts by ex-miners from the 1984-85 miners strike. The lessons were inspiring, as I learned that though the current political climate and consciousness seems bleak, it has not always been this way and it will not always continue to be this way. Despite their ultimate defeat, the miners left us with important lessons, such as that the best tool for social advancement is class struggle. While two million people marching through the streets of London on a police-approved demo means little to the bourgeoisie, the class struggle of key industrial workers is what inspires fear in the ruling class. It is the working class that holds the power—and when it can be mobilised to fight in its own interests, significant social advances can be made very quickly. The working class is the key to overthrowing capitalism because it is the only class with the interest and the actual social power to bring down the government and possess the skill to start it back up again under workers control.

In 18 months I went from being a reformist who could not see an alternative to capitalism, to becoming a revolutionary committed to the overthrow of capitalism. Though it is difficult, I try not to be too disheartened by the general right-wing shift of even the so-called “socialist” organisations. The SWP has created its new electoral front—RESPECT, which attempts to corral those who were

angry about the war against Iraq into electoral politics. There is no mention of capitalism and no mention of class struggle. This organisation, which purports to be the best left-wing alternative at the moment, has George Galloway as their supreme leader, who is staunchly opposed to abortion. It is no exaggeration to say that I had stronger political principles when I was eleven years old growing up in a rural backward area than the RESPECT Coalition. Though the SWP and other left organisations give lip-service to fighting for socialism, they consistently are unwilling to uphold the basic socialist principle of advancing the status of women. The SWP supported the *mujahedin* in Afghanistan who routinely attacked women who showed their faces from behind the veil and cut off the hands of those who dared to teach women to read and write. They cheered counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, which led to the enslavement and desperate impoverishment of millions of women and an increase in prostitution. They currently put forward as their prime candidate in an electoral front an MP who is so staunchly opposed to abortion that he is praised by extremist anti-abortion organisations. It is the fact that we are in such a reactionary time that has made me realise the immense importance that I join those who are genuinely committed to fighting against this reaction, for the overthrow of capitalism, and forward to communism. I firmly state that I unequivocally agree with the programme and pledge to abide by the discipline.

Comradely,
Ariel R

Miners...

(Continued from page 12)

now as hated by the population and by the trade union movement as Margaret Thatcher was in 1984. You have huge sentiment to fight Blair's privatisation—PPP, Private Finance Initiatives, etc—which is a frontal assault on the public sector unions. These unions have tended to elect more left-wing leaders who are not simply loyalists to New Labour. The so-called “awkward squad” reflect the fact that a new generation of workers feels the need to fight against the Labour government. At the same time these misleaders carry on in the same tradition as the “lefts” in the miners strike. They talk a lot about “solidarity” and about strikes, but take no action, or minimal action, when the time comes.

A case in point is the Fire Brigades Union, whose leadership were regarded as leftist firebrands until the strike a year and a half ago. Very early in the FBU strike, many similarities with the miners strike could be seen: strikers collecting money on street corners; people giving generously, including Asians and immigrants. This strike on the eve of Blair's Iraq war had the potential to seriously disrupt Blair's war plans. But when Blair accused the FBU of “Scargillism” and baited them for lack of patriotism, the FBU leaders said no, we're going to play by the book. Scandalously, when Blair threatened to use the army to break the strike, FBU leader Andy Gilchrist said the union would allow the government to send scabs across the picket lines. With that kind of strategy the miners strike would have never taken place.

The RMT leadership is no better.

kind of serious struggle in the unions has to be undertaken as a political struggle against Labourism and against the left wing in particular, who posture as militants.

One of the most striking features of

first time that the state brutality they faced is the same treatment regularly dished out to British black and Asian minorities. We apply this lesson today when we say that the unions must oppose the so-called “war on terror”



Autumn 2003 FBU strike posed potential for challenge to Labour government on eve of war.

the working class in Britain today is its multiethnic composition: second and third generation black and Asian workers are an integral part of the workforce, and in addition the immigrant component is growing. Every week there is a racist furore against immigrants by the bourgeois press and the Labour government. The public sector unions are among the largest and strongest in the country. Yet their strength is being

which targets Muslims, the left and ultimately the working class.

Today, we Marxists are about the only people who insist that basic democratic demands like *full citizenship rights for all immigrants* must be part of the struggle of the working class against capitalism. However, to those who have not studied the lessons of history, the idea that the trade unions ought to take up defence of minorities or immigrants can sound like pie in the sky. But keeping such lessons of the miners strike alive is the job of a revolutionary party.

For proletarian revolutionary internationalism!

I want to make a point about internationalism. Speaking in London's Conway Hall on the twentieth anniversary of the miners strike, Arthur Scargill spoke powerfully about the level of international solidarity that was achieved in the miners strike. Among others, he mentioned workers in Ireland who raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for the British miners in 1984-85 and said they were repaying a debt they owed to British workers since 1913. He was referring to an important struggle that marked the beginnings of trade unionism and indeed of the working class in Ireland. Around 20,000 workers were locked out in Dublin for months because the employers were determined to break the newly emerging Transport and General Workers Union that was led by Jim Larkin and James Connolly. These socialists transformed and revitalised the union movement in Britain and Ireland by organising unskilled workers. The Dublin lock-out received huge sympathy from workers in Britain, including Liverpool and South Wales. Larkin and Connolly came to Britain and tried their best to get solidarity strikes from unions in Britain because that's what they needed to win in Dublin. The story will sound very familiar: the TUC would authorise collection of money and food, but not solidarity strikes. Eventually Dublin workers were starved back to work; a rotten deal was forced on them. It was enforced by Labour's Arthur Henderson, a despicable man who in 1916 led the cheering in the British Parliament when James Connolly was executed in Dublin for leading the Easter Rising against British rule in Ireland.

Labour Party politics always comes down to taking the side of your own bourgeoisie and loyalty to British imperialism.

The other component of Labourism that would become clear immediately after the Russian Revolution was anti-Sovietism. Social-chauvinism and anti-Sovietism became hallmarks of the politics of Labourism. The Cold War had a major impact on the Labour Party, and this was evident at the time of the miners strike. From around 1981 there had been a cold split in the Labour Party between the pro-NATO/CIA right wing and the left wing led by Tony Benn. The fact that the left refused to split and allowed the right wing to control the party paved the way for New Labour. New Labour emerged out of Kinnock's Labour Party, and Kinnock had contempt for the striking miners. Many of today's New Labour politicians made their political careers either by attacking the miners strike, or by colluding with Robert Maxwell and Neil Kinnock in the frame-up of Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield a few years later.

We sought to exacerbate the split in the Labour Party so that the “lefts” would become the leadership. By making clear the limitations of the politics of the “lefts” we sought to create an opening for the growth of a revolutionary party. But the “lefts” didn't split, not even during the strike, in the heat of a class battle. Even Scargill didn't split until much later. In 1995 he left to form the Socialist Labour Party. This party embodied some of the core elements of Old Labour reformism that had been upheld by reformist “socialists” (including the Communist Party) for decades. Scargill split because the Labour Party had abandoned Clause IV—Labour's nominal commitment to “socialism”, or what they called “common ownership” of the means of production. The clause was adopted in 1918, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, to fool workers into thinking that you could get socialism through parliament, through nationalisation of industry under capitalism. Clause IV was abolished by Tony Blair in 1994 as part of his efforts to remodel the Labour Party along the lines of the American Democratic Party.

Clause IV “socialism” was based on two planks: the large-scale reforms that led to the “welfare state” in the aftermath of the Second World War and nationalised industry of which the coal industry was a prime example. It's been a commonly held belief among the left in Britain for two generations that nationalised industry plus welfare provision represents a step towards socialism. This was a central disagreement we had, for example, with Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. In 1997 and again in 2001 we gave critical support to the SLP in elections because they stood in opposition to Labour. But we always explained the fundamental difference between our politics and the reformist “socialism” that they espoused. I remember one occasion in 1997 when we were campaigning for SLP candidate Ken Capstick and I intervened in an SLP meeting. I explained that we want to build a revolutionary party modelled on the party of Lenin and Trotsky that made the October Revolution in 1917. Scargill retorted: “We don't want to hear about Lenin and Trotsky on a hillside in 1917.” Scargill's conception of “socialism” does not include revolution, it comes through parliament. This is from the man who led the most militant class struggle this country has ever seen.

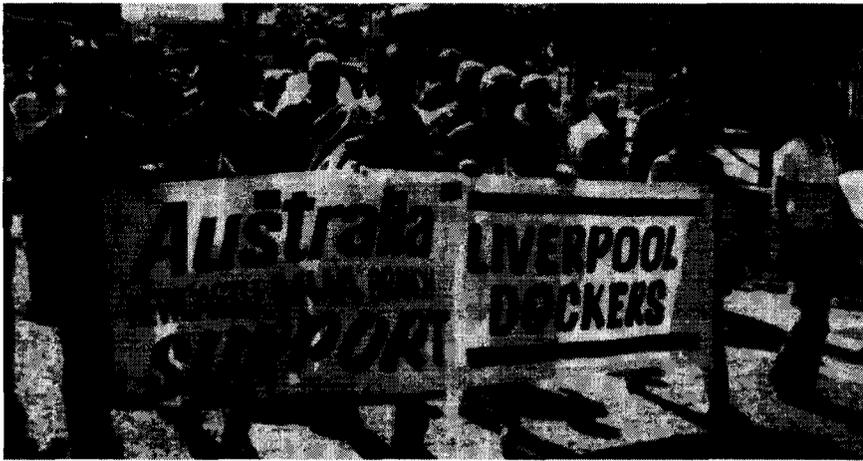
The notion that “socialism” comes through parliament was greatly reinforced by the fact that the Labour government that was elected in 1945 could claim credit for reforms that were very significant for the working class. But this achievement had very little to do with Labour's professed socialism. To understand why the “welfare state” came about, not only in Britain, but

James Larkin (right) exemplifies class-struggle, internationalist traditions of Irish proletariat. For workers revolution throughout the British Isles! Below: Dublin, 31 August 1913: police baton charge strikers in O'Connell Street.



RMT leaders like Bob Crow promised that the Tube would be shut down during an FBU strike, on safety grounds. When RMT members in the Tube refused to drive trains and came under pressure by management to go back to work, Bob Crow and the RMT leadership gave in on the safety issue. There was no question of solidarity strikes. There is a long, long history of that kind of treachery and betrayal within the trade union movement. This is why any

undermined by the “contracting out” that goes with privatisation. We insist that the working class must take up the defence of immigrants and the fight against racism, and that immigrant workers should be organised into unions. That seems very straightforward and is one of the most potent lessons of the miners strike. In the course of their class battle, thousands and thousands of miners learned to oppose racism because they understood for the



Marty Size

Liverpool, Mayday 1997. Australian maritime union supports dockers.

internationally, you have to look at the international picture and what's called the "post-war consensus".

Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, and the neo-liberals today all set their faces against the "post-war consensus". This refers to the outcome of World War Two. British imperialism emerged from World War Two bankrupt, massively in debt, and shocked that the American rulers insisted Britain should repay all her loans to the US. The United States emerged as the dominant imperialist power. However deformed by Stalinist bureaucratic misrule, the Soviet Union was still a workers state and the world's second strongest power. Given that Britain was so indebted to American imperialism, you may wonder why the ruling class ever allowed such extensive reforms as the National Health Service. To get an idea of the answer, I want to read you a quote from Harry Truman addressing the American Congress in 1947. He said: "We'll have to provide a program of interim aid relief until the Marshall Program gets going, or the governments of France and Italy will fall, Austria too, and for all practical purposes Europe will be communist". In other words, it was fear of communism and revolution that persuaded the ruling classes to grant reforms, and not the aspirations or pledges of the Labour government of the time.

The nationalisations of industry also had nothing to do with socialism but were part of an attempt to make British capitalism more competitive in the world market. The nationalisation programme had the support, by and large, of the capitalist class, not simply because the private owners got handsome compensation, although they did, but because it was an attempt to halt the decline of British industry. Nationalisation meant government subsidies for certain industries, paid for out of high income taxes and low wages. One of the main arguments we used to have with miners during the strike was

over protectionism. The idea that the British government should subsidise British coal and British steel to make it competitive against French coal and French steel is integral to Old Labour. It inculcates nationalism and chauvinism and is diametrically opposed to the internationalism that was shown by French and other workers in support of the miners strike. And internationalism is what's necessary to defend the interests of the working class.

The phenomenon known as "globalisation" in part refers to a change in the objective situation of the working class

geoisies no longer fear its influence. The capitalist classes have invested massively in Latin America because they no longer fear social revolutions or the installation of pro-Soviet regimes. For us, this confirms the need for an international perspective and an international party. We now have sections in Mexico and in South Africa. Britain no longer has many coal miners, but South Africa has 300,000. As Karl Marx said, the workers have no country. We seek to build parties where we can, but we don't know and can't know where a revolutionary opportunity will arise.

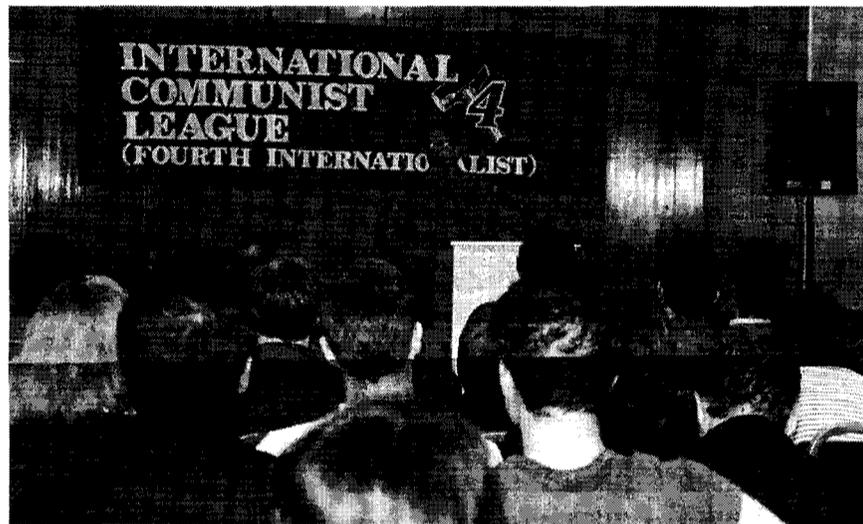
One of the fastest growing economies in the world today is China. The Chinese Revolution triumphed in 1949, very shortly after World War Two. This victory created the Chinese deformed workers state, which exists to this day. China is often branded by ideologues of the "anti-globalisation" movement as the "sweatshop of the world". Indeed it is becoming the factory floor of the world for certain light manufacturing industries. Our organisation is one of the few remaining tendencies that hasn't written off the Chinese deformed workers state as capitalist. In fact what's successful about the Chinese economy is not the result of capitalist investment but the fact that it's a collectivised economy, that the bourgeoisie was driven out in the 1949 revolution. The pro-

tion about differences between the 1980s and today. The generally lower level of political consciousness contributed to counterrevolution in the Soviet Union. The socialist consciousness of the proletariat was undermined by the Stalinist bureaucracy who inculcated nationalism instead. However this process of lowering the political consciousness continues to this day, and is aided in no small measure by self-styled "socialist" organisations who constantly denigrate socialism, even of the reformist variety they have peddled for years. For example, the Socialist Workers Party set up the Respect coalition and opposed every suggestion that it should even make a nominal commitment to socialism. This is a continuation of the role that these organisations played in the past. The Socialist Workers Party—now the dominant tendency on the British left—refused to defend the Soviet Union from the time they came into existence. And in the miners strike, the biggest class battle for decades, their leader Tony Cliff bragged about their members crossing miners picket lines in steel plants. More recently, the SWP led two million people in demonstrations against the war, but they did not use it to promote even their utterly reformist variant of socialism.

The point that you need a revolutionary party has come out very clearly in this dayschool, based on the experience of the miners strike. The ICL is a small organisation. We don't know when we'll be called upon again to play the kind of role that we played in the miners strike. We know that it happens when history dictates, not necessarily when the party is ready for it. As I said, counterrevolution in the Soviet Union really changed the world, but at least our party can say that, like the miners in 1984, we fought. We did everything we could to prevent counterrevolution, first in East Germany in 1989-90 and then in the Soviet Union. Even as a very small organisation we had an impact because of our programme.

What counts is not just what you say, but what you do. We intervened with all our forces, modest as they were, and tried our best to provide revolutionary leadership for the working class to fight against capitalist counterrevolution and for a political revolution. Gorbachev has already been mentioned for playing an ignominious role in the miners strike, making common cause with Margaret Thatcher while the Soviet workers sent money to the British miners. The high point of our intervention in 1989-90 in East Germany was a huge anti-fascist demonstration in defence of the East German workers state at Treptow in East Berlin on 3 January. Gorbachev himself explained many years later the reason he decided to hand over East Germany to West German imperialism, saying "we changed our point of view on the process of unification of Germany under the impact of events that unfolded in the DDR. An especially critical situation came about in January. In essence, a breakdown of structures took place. A threat arose, a threat of disorganisation, of big destabilisation. This began in January and went further almost every day." January 3rd was the date of the Treptow demonstration that we initiated.

We don't know when revolutionary situations will develop, or when we will face other major challenges and opportunities to intervene. To prepare we must learn the lessons, we must not succumb to the myth that such struggles can never happen again and we must transmit these lessons to a new generation. We must make sure they're kept alive and applied in the next situation. That's our responsibility in building a revolutionary party. ■



Workers Hammer

Spartacist League April dayschool in London brings hard-won lessons of the miners strike to a new generation of fighters.

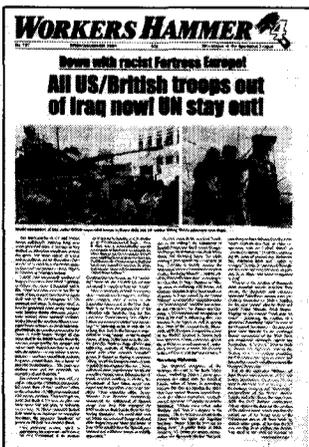
internationally over the last decade or two. There has been a marked decline in the size of the industrial proletariat in countries like Britain and the United States. This is accompanied by the simultaneous growth of an industrial proletariat in neo-colonial countries in South Asia, Mexico, etc. This development too is related to the fact the Soviet Union no longer exists, and the imperialist bour-

lification of capitalist enterprise does strengthen the forces of counterrevolution, but the Chinese proletariat has been resisting and organising, and this simultaneously increases the possibility of a proletarian political revolution, to oust the Beijing Stalinist regime and replace it with the revolutionary internationalist rule of the working class.

There's one last thing I want to men-

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Lessons of the 1984-85 miners strike

Class struggle, “globalisation” and the working class today

We publish below an edited version of a presentation by Eibhlin McDonald of the Spartacist League/Britain at our day school in London on 10 April to mark the twentieth anniversary of the 1984-85 strike. Other presentations were published last issue—see “The great miners strike”, Workers Hammer no 187, Spring/Summer 2004.

where and do anything because they have the mightiest military arsenal in the world. And as for British imperialism, Tony Blair so slavishly supports US imperialism he is described as Bush’s “poodle”. That role has not changed much since the days of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. It’s based on a recognition that British imperialism’s role in the world is

dockers, once a very important component of the British trade union movement, have been removed as a fighting force. But this is still an island and, unlike the coal industry, the government cannot simply shut down the docks. It’s true that containerisation has reduced the number of workers on the docks. But the main problem in Britain is not that there aren’t

Liverpool dockers themselves began to argue that you couldn’t expect workers from other unions to go on strike alongside the Liverpool dockers because of “globalisation”, meaning the work would be relocated elsewhere. Thus the term “globalisation” came to be used to justify a betrayal of workers in struggle. It was used in tandem with the idea that the dockers should wait for a Labour government, which of course had nothing but contempt for striking workers.

You might be interested to know that the struggle of the Liverpool dockers also coincides with the early days of what became known as the “anti-globalisation” or “anti-capitalist” movement in Britain. “Reclaim the Streets” organised protests in support of the Liverpool dockers. A new generation of youth wanted to do something in support of this section of the working class. At the same time the message coming from the trade union leaders was that the trade unions in Britain were too weak to defend themselves against the state, because of the defeat of the miners strike. But that defeat was far from inevitable—it was a result of betrayal by union leaders, including the “lefts”.

The defeat of the miners strike has been used by union bureaucrats to strongly reinforce their argument that you can’t defy the anti-union laws, you must not have solidarity action, etc. With this perspective, the trade union movement never would have been built in the first place. The dockers union began as a militant union. One of the early leaders of the National Union of Dock Labourers was James Larkin, a Liverpool-born Irish socialist who organised thousands of unskilled workers into unions for the first time. The unions were built using methods such as the picket line, solidarity strikes and class struggle. It is not an accident that these same weapons came under attack by Margaret Thatcher’s anti-union laws, nor that they were central issues in the miners strike: whether to conform to the anti-union laws and organise a ballot, which would have meant breaking the strike, or whether to use the picket line as the method of spreading the strike.

The miners strike showed how quickly trade union struggle becomes a political struggle against the government. Socialist consciousness is vitally important in the unions, but it does not drop from the sky. For us it is linked to the struggle to build a revolutionary party. Our model for that is the Bolshevik Party that led the October 1917 Russian Revolution. The fight for revolutionary leadership and for socialist consciousness in the trade unions is integrally linked to the task of building a revolutionary party, a Leninist-Trotskyist party.

The Tony Blair Labour government is

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Stefano Cagnoni (Report)

November 1984: Mass picket of miners and transport workers. TUC/Labour leadership spiked joint class struggle, leaving miners to fight alone against massive state repression.

Our job is to build a revolutionary party that’s based on the lessons of previous struggles, including defeats. Having listened to other speakers describing the level of political consciousness that was achieved in the miners strike, you could be forgiven for thinking that consciousness was always at that level. But that’s not the case, this was achieved in struggle. I don’t need to tell comrades that the political landscape in Britain was changed dramatically by the outcome of the miners strike, or that the international political landscape was also changed by counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1991. When young comrades look at videos of the miners strike they say it was a different world then and it was, politically speaking. The level of political consciousness is indeed one of the most striking differences between then and now.

A lot of myths have arisen about the miners strike. To this day the British ruling class is haunted by “Scargillism”, as they call it. As previous speakers have said, in terms of his political perspective, Scargill wasn’t so different from Tony Benn, or Dennis Skinner. Yet Scargill represents something the rulers still hate and fear, which is the proletariat mobilised in struggle as the miners were in 1984-85.

One major effect of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union is that the United States emerged as the unrivalled world power, which led directly to the war in Iraq. The American rulers have made it quite clear that they feel they can go any-

as a junior partner of American imperialism, reflecting the fact that the City of London is a junior partner of Wall Street. Margaret Thatcher devastated the industrial heartlands of this country and boosted the City of London and finance capital.

One abiding myth about the outcome of the miners strike, that is shared by a spectrum from Tony Blair and New Labour ministers to ideologues of the “anti-globalisation” movement, is the notion that the British working class is finished, at least as an effective fighting force, and that it no longer has the capacity to wage a struggle on the scale of the miners strike. When he assumed office in 1997, Tony Blair put it bluntly: “The class war is over.” This is wishful thinking. There has undoubtedly been a major change in the composition of the British proletariat. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lenin and Trotsky always pointed to a peculiar feature of Britain—the fact the proletariat was the overwhelming majority of the population. That’s not true anymore, because of the decline of British capitalism and de-industrialisation. British imperialism has been in decline from before World War I. Margaret Thatcher accelerated the de-industrialisation process. She got rid of virtually the entire coal industry simply to get rid of the NUM and drastically reduced other heavy industries such as shipbuilding and steel manufacturing.

In addition to the NUM, the unionised

enough dockers, it’s that most are not unionised and they don’t have union conditions on the job, ever since the defeat of the Liverpool dockers. There were two dock strikes during the miners strike, which were the key opportunities for struggle in defence of unionisation in the docks. But those opportunities were betrayed and the National Dock Labour Scheme was abolished in 1989. Liverpool docks, the last remaining stronghold of the union, had the most militant and class-conscious dockers. There is a famous story that miners went to collect money at Liverpool docks in 1984 and the dockers treated the striking miners as a picket line and went home.

The betrayal of the Liverpool dockers

What happened to the Liverpool dockers? In 1995, the company fired the unionised workers and replaced them. The sacked dockers picketed for months and even years, but the leadership of their union, the Transport and General Workers Union, openly disowned their struggle, refusing to shut down the docks in fear of the anti-union laws. There had been international solidarity actions and there was plenty of local sympathy. It was necessary to mobilise other unions, especially around Liverpool. The role of Bill Morris and the Transport and General Workers Union’s national leadership was a gross betrayal. And faced with this treachery, the leaders of the sacked Liv-