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Reject Stop the War exclusions

In moves to sideline any criticism of the Iranian regime within the anti-war movement, Communist Students and Hands Off the People Of Iran (Hopi) have been barred from the Stop the War Coalition. **Benjamin Klein** reports

Andrew Murray, Lindsey German and John Rees, the misleaders of the purportedly 'broad' and 'inclusive' Stop the War Coalition, have drawn a clear line in relation to the threat of war on Iran - if you are critical of the Iranian theocratic regime and look to build active links with the burgeoning Iranian students', workers' or women's movement, then you are not welcome in the movement. According to the twisted logic of these apologists, any criticism of Tehran merely provides ammunition for the plans of Bush and his cronies.

At the STWC annual conference on October 27, these crassly bureaucratic moves to exclude Communist Students and Hopi were confirmed by the majority of the Socialist Workers Party's automaton voting fodder, with proceedings keenly filmed by the Iranian regime's TV cameras. The informed analysis and principled stance of exiled Iranian anti-imperialists like Yasmine Mather of Hopi did not fit the dogmatically apologetic line of Murray and co.

Let us be clear here. Despite the feeble and desperate attempts to pass us off as social imperialists or being soft on imperialism, both Communist Students and Hopi insist that the biggest danger is precisely imperialism - we not only reject war, sanctions and other forms of US-UK bullying, but call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of troops from the Gulf; troops that have killed thousands and brought chaos to Iraq in the name of 'democracy' and 'freedom.' We are for the defeat of imperialism.

However, imperialism cannot be defeated through lies and any anti-war

campaign worth its salt must be based on the truth. The Iranian regime, despite what the pro-Tehran apologists from Campaign Iran claimed at the STWC conference, is not a 'democratic' society where elections are freely contested and over 80% vote for the president; where opportunities for women are so extensive they can become leading racing drivers; and where, although homosexuality is banned, people are free to have a sex change (!). It is a brutally oppressive theocratic dictatorship that regards women as second-class citizens, brutally oppresses minority nationalities and publicly executes gays.

The idea that the Iranian regime is somehow anti-imperialist has no basis in reality. It not only imposes the International Monetary Fund's neoliberal agenda of cuts and privatisation, often forcing workers to wait months on end for unpaid wages; it also applauded the US-UK invasion of Iraq, banning any anti-war protests, and supports the US-puppet occupation government in Afghanistan. True, it may now oppose the occupation of Iraq, but only on the basis that it wants even more influence on today's Iraqi government. Many leading mullahs have already moved their wealth out of the country, leaving nobody in any doubt that they are preparing to flee should the bombs start falling.

The question then raises itself: what forces are consistently anti-imperialist? The name of our campaign, Hands Off the People of Iran, which Communist Students supports so enthusiastically, alludes to the answer. While Stop the War implies our brothers and sisters in Iran should suspend their struggles for freedom and equality, at

least until the war threat is over, we support and champion those same struggles. International solidarity is not merely a nice gesture, but a recognition of the fact that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the imperialist pressure on Iran, are features of the international struggle of *class* forces within the framework of capitalism in decline - imperialism. That international solidarity is extended not to regimes that happen to have fallen foul of imperialism, but to the genuine anti-war forces of working people across the world.

Obviously, in Britain our main task must be to stop any involvement of the British state in intervention against Iran - the main enemy is at home. We do not draw an equals sign between an economically declining yet militarily hegemonic US imperialism and the counterrevolutionary theocratic regime. Yet we recognise that to ally ourselves with the theocratic regime would be not only to undermine the anti-war movement, allowing us to be portrayed as stooges of Tehran, but actually to *scab* on our Iranian brothers and sisters who are crying out for their struggles to be supported.

For the benefit of those unthinking SWP comrades who say that Hopi is a bunch of "white people telling the Iranian people what to do", we had better explain what solidarity, a basic principle for any socialist, actually is. On one level, of course, it does involve offering advice to the Iranian people we come into contact with - although they hardly need convincing, we would advise them to organise independently of the regime that is using the pretext of war to clamp down on them even

more. Not only is there nothing wrong with this. Genuine solidarity *demand*s friendly criticism.

On the other hand, the Iranian comrades we work with also give us advice. For example, in the summer of 2005, when they urged us not to back slogans like 'We are all Hezbollah' - which in Iran means 'We are all strike-breakers and attack women on demonstrations.' They ask us not only to oppose the war, but to provide a voice for the working class struggles, student mobilisations and women's demonstrations in Iran.

The position of the STWC leadership is the opposite of genuine solidarity. By promoting Campaign Iran and excluding Hopi, Murray, Rees and co are demonstrating their contempt for it. That is what they are doing when they cheer and clap Abbas Edalat of Campaign Iran, who claims that there are "no forces in Iran who are fighting against both the threat of an imperialist invasion *and* the regime". Even if there were, though, according to what he said at the STWC conference, we should refrain from supporting their struggles against the regime, since to simultaneously oppose imperialism and the regime would 'confuse' people - a position that is as pathetic as it is patronising. What the average person on the street will probably find more confusing is that those who reject an attack on Iran as a violation of the rights of the Iranian people say

nothing about the repression that those people face on a daily basis.

We will not waver in ensuring that the voice of genuine internationalism is heard in the anti-war movement. Through our daily contacts in Iran and our study of the contradictions in Iranian society we will look to avoid the mistakes that our movement has made in the past. We encourage all our members and supporters to join the STWC as individuals in order to take our arguments to the membership and force the coalition to drop these rotten politics - politics that only discredit the anti-war movement, while alienating many who would otherwise get involved, particularly the large number of Iranian exiles in Britain.

Support Hopi:

- Distribute Hopi materials at the StWC student actions on November 22
- Join our contingent at the STWC day of action in London on November 24
- Publicise Hopi at your university or college
- Ask for a Hopi speaker to address a meeting where you study
- Join the Hopi Facebook group: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5362934167
- Build ad hoc student committees for Hopi's December 8 founding conference in central London
- If you speak Farsi, help translate discussions, interviews and documents from Iran.



Manchester launch:
Wednesday November 21,
5pm, University of Manchester catholic chaplaincy (opposite UMSU Steve Biko Building), Oxford Road.

Sheffield launch: Thursday, November 22, 7pm, Pennines

Room, Sheffield University Student's Union, Glossop Road.

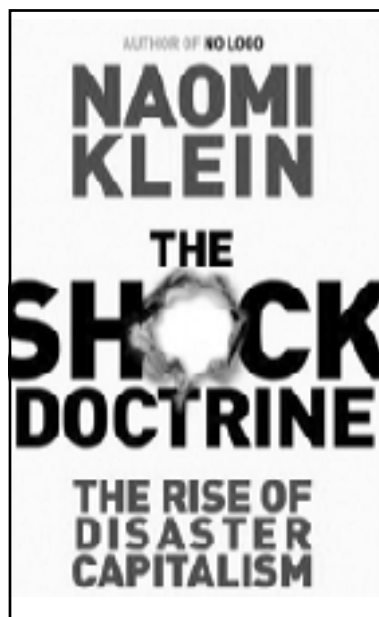
National launch conference:
Saturday December 8, 10am to 5pm, Somerstown Community Centre, 150 Ossulston Street, London NW1. All welcome! Agenda: founding statement, constitution, election of steering committee. Sessions include debates on 'Imperialism and the threat of war', 'The working class movement and progressive change', 'Solidarity movements and fighting on two fronts'.

'Less violent' capitalism

N Klein *The shock doctrine* London 2007, pp576, £25

Naomi Klein largely came to prominence during the early 2000s within the context of an anti-capitalist movement broadly characterised by its militancy, if not its political coherence. Described by the *New York Times* as a "movement bible", Klein's book *No Logo* highlighted the role played by those household brand names involved in the exporting of labour to 'tax-free' havens within areas of the world in which labour-costs were low, and exploitative work practices high.¹ Striking a tone with a new generation of activists, the book went on to sell highly and propelled Klein's message into the homes of many.

Klein's latest book *The shock doctrine* provides a suggested context for the understanding of how, in the words of the book's cover, "free market policies have come to dominate the world". Adopting and expanding upon a recurring theme of Marxist political economy, Klein documents the many facets of a system characterised by continuous conflict and crisis. The role assumed by crisis on a global scale is for Klein the constitutive feature of a new manifestation



of what we may understand as 'disaster capitalism'.

In contrast to the view advanced by Marx and Engels that we may understand forms of crisis on the basis of the overproductive nature of an inherently expansive system,² Klein suggests a process of enduring crisis utilised for the purpose of strengthening and reinforcing the global expansion of capital. Klein notes: "The Marxists were clear: revolution - get rid of the current system, replace with

socialism"; whereas for the advocates of unfettered capitalism "the solution was not so clear".

This process relates to the way in which economic reforms - or 'structural readjustments', in the language of international financial institutions that carry them out - utilise periods of crisis in order to push through unpopular cuts in public services, often with the use of violent suppression of dissent. It is precisely through a process of 'shock therapy' that free-market policies come to dominate the world.

Klein links this process to the role assumed by thinkers such as Fredrick Hayek and Milton Friedman in the furtherance of the political and economic project of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is largely understood as an intellectual movement characteristic of a commitment to the privatisation of previously nationalised companies, limited state expenditure and unfettered private investment. Klein suggests it is the prevalent economic orthodoxy at work within those regions that have provided the clearest examples of 'shock therapy' in action.

Klein cites as an example that of Chile following the military coup of general Augustine Pinochet as one case in which neoliberalism gained a foothold in a region via the export of many of the ideas advanced by Friedman. This includes those who had studied in and around the University of Chicago, at which he had taught. These are the so called 'Chicago

boys'. Following heightened repression during the coup, Klein suggests the 'Chicago boys' were able to gain a foothold as Friedman's close disciples assumed positions of prominence within the government, beginning a process of "construct consent" for many of the otherwise unfavourable policies.³

One solution?

While the violent actions undertaken in the name of global expansion of capital should be quite rightly condemned, wider questions about the inherent nature of capitalism must be raised in order to understand the potential for different ways of organising society.

Klein makes the suggestion in an interview with the Socialist Workers Party's journal *Socialist Review* that a "less violent version" of capitalism is what is needed.⁴

As Marxists we must highlight the inherently violent nature of a system characterised by the antagonistic divisions upon which capitalism has been, and continues to be, dependent. As Karl Marx notes, "Capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt".⁵

We would, of course, join others in condemning the role of financial organisations involved in the stripping of public assets and the ransacking of domestic economies, as well as fighting for reforms during this process. It must be argued that any gains won

during this process are conceded, as Klein suggests, in the face of great opposition and struggle, and as such will be subject to continued and sustained attack.

Klein seems to imitate the approach of social theorists Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in reducing the role of class to one of any range of features of opposition, all providing some measure of the 'shock resistance' needed during this process. A Marxist approach must highlight that it is the working class that is uniquely situated for the purpose of carrying out its 'historic role', namely the disillusion of a society characterised by the class antagonism of capitalism.

It is only on the basis of a global system of socialism that we may see an end to the sustained attacks Klein documents so aptly and a glimpse of a society, in the words of Trotsky, "cleansed of all evil, oppression and violence, and enjoyed to the full."⁶

Nicholas Jones

Notes

1. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F04E2DE1F3CF930A35757C0A9669C8B63>.
2. See S Clarke *Marx's theory of crisis* London 1994.
3. D Harvey *Spaces of capital* Edinburgh 2006.
4. www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=10110.
5. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1990.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1935/trotsky.htm.

Against the mainstream

John Jo Sidwell looks at another radical hip-hop outfit, The Coup, and their struggle for radical politics in the face of adversity

Over the backdrop of laid-back, funk-driven West Coast hip-hop, Boots Riley, The Coup's front man, delivers a biting and polemical attack on the American establishment and the capitalist system it enforces. Boots is joined by DJ Pam the Funkstress, and previously the duo were joined by a second emcee, E-Roc, who left the group amicably in 1998. Despite a barrage of critical acclaim, including having their 1998 release *Steal this album* voted number one hip-hop album of the 90s by online magazine *Dusted*, The Coup have failed to ever receive any real level of popular success.¹

The Coup are arguably the most consistently Marxist group within hip-hop's revolutionary, political wing. The opening line of the 1993 debut album *Kill my landlord* is "Presto, read the *Communist manifesto*..."² Boots has been a communist since the age of 14 and is the son of a Black Panther. He cites his main aim as using his music to contribute to revolution, eventually bringing about "a system where there is no ruling class" and the "people control the means of production". He also stresses the need to focus on fighting for material change.³ Once an organiser within his community, Boots was involved in the formation of the Mau Mau Rhythm Collective, a group that attempted to promote progressive so-

cial change through music. He is also involved with the Axis of Justice, a political lobbying group established by fellow musicians Rage Against the Machine's Tom Morello, and System of a Down's Serj Tankien.⁴

Several explanations have been put forward to explain The Coup's failure to achieve more. Specifically, Boots targets the banning of Coup videos by major public broadcasters, fearing that the lyrics could cause unrest. He highlights the difficulty he faces in making revolutionary music within the confines of a system that will not allow his music to be heard to the degree that it deserves.⁵ It is also true that The Coup appeared on the hip-hop scene at a time when politics was heavily overshadowed by gangsta rap. Had they emerged a few years prior in the heyday of hip-hop activism, their levels of success may have been considerably higher.

Despite failing to make any impact on the charts, The Coup have been surrounded by a considerable amount of controversy. Conservative columnist Michelle Malkin described their music as "a stomach-turning example of anti-Americanism disguised as highbrow intellectual expression", with particular reference to one track - 'Five million ways to kill a CEO', taken from the 2001 release *Party music*.⁶ Greater controversy surfaced over *Party music*. Its stated release date

was September 11 2001, and the cover art consisted of a flaming twin towers with Boots Riley's finger on the detonator. It was claimed this had been designed months prior to the event (according to Boots. The artwork was a symbolic depiction of music bringing about the downfall of capitalism), but nevertheless The Coup were bombarded by scathing attacks.⁷

Condemned simultaneously for both mindless gangsta rap imagery and dangerous political propaganda, The Coup were even claimed by some on the right to be linked to a communist-orchestrated campaign of violence. Distributing label Warner Bros forced the album to be pulled and the cover art changed, a decision Boots originally disputed, wishing to use the controversy of the covert to provide a platform for him to present his alternative political perspective. Boots insisted that the 9/11 attacks must be condemned, stating that the revolutionary change he rapped about would be brought about through a mass popular movement, not random bombing attacks. He also compared the events of 9/11 to other atrocities often instigated or supported by the US government, and spoke of his anger at what he perceived as the higher valuation of American lives over the citizens of other countries. He also warned of the dangerous implications the attacks could have for increased police presence and the intensifying of oppression.⁸

Boots' perspective on the much maligned sub-genre of gangsta rap is also of interest. He criticises the attacks of many so-called 'conscious' rappers, saying that gangsta rappers are simply expressing their view on how best to alleviate their own pov-

erty. Whilst he does not endorse such an approach, he respects them as a product of the urban squalor many gangsta rappers have had to endure in their youth. He is also wary of remaining on independent labels for the sake of credibility, suggesting the need to get the message to a wider audience as of higher significance.⁹

The Coup continue to struggle on against the flow in hip-hop, although their *Pick a bigger weapon* was well received critically, appearing in *Hip-Hop Connection's* 'Top 20 albums of 2006'.¹⁰ Whilst the system may continue to do what it can to keep Boot's message quiet, there can be no doubt he will continue to shout it, and in some circles he's most certainly being heard - readers not yet acquainted

with his work should definitely get hold of his stuff.

Notes

1. S Hunt, 'Steal this double album review': www.dustedmagazine.com/reviews/328.
2. The Coup, 'Dig it' *Kill my landlord* Wild Pitch 1993.
3. The Coup, 'Interview with Boots' *The best coup DVD ever* 2006.
4. Axis of Justice: www.axisofjustice.org/mission.htm.
5. The Coup, 'Interview with Boots' *The best coup DVD ever* 2006.
6. M Malkin, 'Stop giving America a bad rap' *Jewish World Review* 2001.
7. D Davey, 'Boots speaks out about 9/11', 2002: www.davey.com/bootsonthewarpolitics.html.
8. *Ibid*.
9. The Coup, 'Interview with Boots' *The best coup DVD ever* 2006.
10. A Emery, 'Top 20 albums of 2006' *Hip Hop Connection*, No208, 2007.

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Is the NUS worth saving?

It sounds almost farcical: why would the leadership of the National Union of Students try to abolish democracy in its own organisation? CS member **Tina Becker** reports

Let's be honest. Most students don't really know what the NUS is, let alone what it does or how it operates. And who can blame them? Currently, it is not much more than a training ground where people like NUS president Gemma Tumelty learn how to shaft the left and weasel their way up the career ladder. It is where the next generation of Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats is bred.

So why should we be concerned about the attempts by the NUS executive (NEC) to remove the last vestiges of democracy in that organisation? In its *NUS white paper on NUS governance*¹ the NEC proposes, amongst other things:

- The abolition of annual conference (to be replaced with a smaller, rally-type 'congress', which would merely ratify decisions)
- The appointment of delegates by local student unions, which would not even have to pretend to hold elections
- The splitting up of the elected NEC (both the new 'senate' and the 'board' are to be beefed up with more non-elected members)
- The *de facto* abolition of the 'Block of 12' part-time NEC members. In recent years this has been the only way for minority viewpoints to get a foot in the door. Having been fought for by the left, it is probably the most democratic part of NUS structures.²

Communist Students say it is crucial that we fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society, including the NUS. In our view, socialism is synonymous with extreme democracy - ie, the rule of the majority. So the working class (which represents the vast majority) must start to prepare to take on a hegemonic role in this society to prepare the ground for the next one. Socialism cannot be delivered from above, by some enlightened Hugo Chavez or the party leadership - it must be won through the struggles of the majority of the people. In other words, it starts now.

So if we think it is worthwhile fighting for democracy in the NUS, the question must always be viewed from this perspective: how does this aid the fight for socialism?

Kids: don't just say no!

A few left student groups met up on in London on November 4 to launch a joint campaign against the attacks. However, this campaign has a number of serious shortcomings. While every other organisation sent a couple of representatives, the Socialist Workers Party packed this supposed 'organising meeting' with 25 of their members (half a dozen of them only turned up when it was time to vote) and were able to decide the agenda, the political priorities and the composition of the steering committee.

This 14-member body now consists of six members of the SWP, two members of Student Broad Left (the group controlled by the shadowy sect, Socialist Action) and a couple of Young Greens. And while the SWP even stomachs having two members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on board, they used their majority to vote against Communist Students and Socialist Students, the Socialist Party's student organisation, being represented.

Why? Obviously, Communist Students have been punished for their public criticisms of the narrow campaign proposed by the SWP - but chiefly because of our involvement in the Hands Off the People of Iran campaign (see article on page 1). I think the main reason SS were not voted onto the committee was their rather poor input: they had not brought any proposals for the campaign and tried to nominate their 'student organiser' to the committee - who is not actually a student. A pretty stupid mistake.

Politically, the campaign is extremely weak. In order to get Fosis on board (the huge, but politically inconsistent Federation of Student Islamic Societies), the SWP has seen to it that the campaign will only say 'no' to the proposed attacks. Neither Fosis nor the SWP have an interest in building a campaign that could go further. In fact, Student Respect (as the SWP still calls its student front - for not much longer, now that Respect is tits up) actually proposed to run a campaign "based on the core of activists and unions who understand the nature of the attacks - a campaign capable of reaching out to those who hold an intermediate position".

But such a campaign is doomed to failure: The white paper expresses clearly the wishes of the Labourite factions, which have a majority on the executive and most of the local student unions. To overthrow this bureaucracy and their crass plans, we need to win support from below, from the *mass of students*. But the narrow campaign now run by the SWP is unlikely to inspire anybody. In fact, it is designed to be conducted solely at the level of student union bureaucrats - ie, the very people who have launched the attack in the first place.

The formulation was actually changed by a successful CS amendment, but the political direction of the campaign is clear: don't rock the boat too much.

Communist Students, however, say that we must use this as an opportunity to fight for a bold campaign to actually *expand* democracy in the NUS. The current attacks could be a useful springboard for such a *broader* campaign, which would be far more likely to inspire and mobilise students than mere defence of the existing crusty structures.

One reason why students appear apathetic and uninterested in politics is the highly bureaucratized nature of the NUS. How can we expect students to take seriously the notion of challenging and defeating the government when their own organisation is so remote, unaccountable and is clearly little more than a career ladder for wannabe establishment politicians? So let us start with our own union.

We would argue that the students, staff and all university and college workers are the people who should democratically run educational institutions, not the vice-chancellors, state bureaucrats or purveyors of pseudo-market imperatives.

Communist Students fight for:

- Abolition of the direct election of NUS officers at conference. In the current system, they become little Bonapartes who are not really accountable to anybody (the only time they can be removed is at the next

annual conference). Instead, the whole executive should be elected by STV at conference (apart from the representatives elected by the liberation campaigns).

- The NEC should then elect its officers from its own number. They must be accountable to and recallable by the executive - which in turn must be far more accountable to the membership.
- Salaried officials and anybody employed by the NEC should receive no more than an average skilled worker.
- Full transparency on all matters, especially in all dealings with government ministers and commercial concerns. Open the books.

Student fees

One area where accountability is crucial is over the question of student fees. The NUS NEC has scandalously decided not to organise another national demonstration until 2009, concentrating instead on lobbying.

Although the NUS bureaucracy still raises the slogan 'Free education for all' from time to time, it has not exactly put up a fight against student fees. Quite the reverse: the key slogan at its national demonstration on October 29 2006 was 'Keep the cap' - ie, a demand that 'top-up fees' should not be increased. The current, capped, fees of £3,000 per annum are apparently quite all right.

An article in *The Independent*, proud-

ly posted on the NUS website, reports on a recent speech by NUS president Gemma Tumelty, where she warned that students would be "stranded on the margins" if they battled on for free higher education. A "realistic campaign" would have to focus on keeping the cap rather than ditching fees altogether. "Do we really think we can win the argument that those who have benefited most from a university education shouldn't pay more?"³

Clearly, Tumelty's repulsive attitude needs to be challenged head on. Many students can only pay the £3,000 fee by working ridiculously long hours in the worst kind of McJobs. But it looks like we do not have to worry too much: "Applications to university have not dropped as a result of higher tuition fees, according to a new analysis", reads the lead of another 'news item' posted prominently on the NUS website.⁴

In reality, this statistic merely reflects the demands of today's capitalism: a degree is vital to get almost any kind of job. Many young people prefer to accept the inevitability of debts to the tune of £30,000 than the prospect of *permanently* working in the shitty jobs they have to endure in their student days.

Communist Students demand not only the abolition of the student fees - but their replacement with a "living grant". Everyone in study over the age

of 16 should receive a grant set at the level of the minimum wage. And not the slave labour rate the current minimum wage is set at by New Labour.

We say that such a minimum wage must be based on the social category of human need. This is not what the government tells us the system can afford: it is the amount of money students actually need to live full lives in contemporary society - to have time to study, discuss and enjoy themselves to the full in this important formative period. Under present conditions, this means a minimum of £300 per week.

Notes

1. http://stage.office.rnl.ie.co.uk/events/national_events/274911.aspx
2. For a more detailed report on the attacks, see www.comuniststudents.org.uk/reports/rpt_becker_NUS.html
3. *The Independent* October 11.
4. *The Guardian* June 26.

What you can do:

Try to become a delegate to the NUS emergency conference on December 4 in Leicester, where the NUS white paper will be voted on (no amendments are allowed). It also needs to be voted through at the regular NUS conference in 2008, as two consecutive conferences have to give it the go-ahead with a 2/3 majority.

The curious tale of Student Respect

Jim Grant recounts the last few acts of another left tragedy

The in-house student organisation of Respect, natively named Student Respect, turned out to have had a significant role in the terminal crisis within its host body. It's worth reminding ourselves of SR's history.

Student Respect was formed in summer 2005, essentially by the SWP 'turning over' its Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS) infrastructure - wholly or partially, depending on the campus - to the task of building Student Respect. There was very little thought that went into the organisation's formation - it was more that Respect just felt that they should have a student society like the big kids of bourgeois politics.

There was never any real doubt that this was simply a transmission belt to get 'adult' Respect's politics - to the extent that it had any - onto campus; no contortions about the autonomy or otherwise of the new student body were necessary. Indeed, over a full year passed before the powers-that-be even felt the need to call an SR conference. When it came, in December 2006, it was very much a conference like the Conservative Party's: that is to say, basically a rally, in which "over 100 people" (over a hundred!) were talked at by such luminaries as John Rees and Rania Khan, who drew shocked gasps from the crowd by highlighting "the redundancy of the New Labour leader-

ship" (www.respectcoalition.org/index.php?ite=1264). Unsurprisingly, no motions were taken - something that even the (rightly castigated) New Labour student bureaucrats manage.

Getting a hundred people into a room to - sort of - talk politics (unofficial estimates put the actual turnout at 70-80) is, in some circumstances, cause for celebration. Communist Students would certainly be pleased to hit three figures at our conference. The reason the pathologically upbeat report of the Respect student conference caused quite so much amusement at the time was that at the full Respect annual conference the previous October, George Galloway had claimed "over ten thousand students" had signed up at freshers fairs. The attendance at SR conference now seems underwhelming - perhaps *Deal or no deal* was on (or reruns of *Celebrity big brother* maybe?).

And now all the hype has rebounded - the Galloway faction alleged that the SWP was using Student Respect as a wedge to get more delegates at conference than it was entitled to. A big dispute erupted over whether or not the students were full members of Respect. The blackly humorous fact stands thus - *nobody really knows*. At the 2006 conference it was an irrelevance, because Galloway was best of chums with the SWP. After all, the SWP had consistently voted down motions calling for elected representatives to be accountable to the membership and to accept only a worker's wage.

But now, suddenly, the massively

disproportionate dominance of the SWP over Student Respect was a threat. The rest, as they say, is history (the umpteenth time as farce).

There is a moral to every story, and in this case there are several. 1. History has no use for an organisationally stillborn student group. Questions such as its precise function, its independence or otherwise from the parent body, are all-important. You may forget such defining tasks, but they will not forget you. 2. If you are going to have a *separate* student body, there has to be some kind of delegation of responsibility. There has to be a *point*. There was absolutely no reason for Student Respect's existence, because it did not even play-act at making its own policy decisions in any area.

3. The whole story smacks of the rotten, undemocratic nature of today's left. The SWP misleadership now has the sheer audacity to criticise George for his fat earnings and - wait for it - his Bonapartism in Respect. Yet this is the SWP's own method - not honest politics, but the promotion of collective amnesia in its ranks, so that its membership can be moulded to suit the next turn of the leadership.

If we want more than another sorry story such as this one to be sarcastic about, we will have to sweep this damaging bureaucratism aside and start taking our own movement and its organisational forms seriously.

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People and Planet needs Marxism

It is now clear that, if the slump in political activity among youth of the 1990s has recently subsided somewhat, the main beneficiaries of this have been liberal campaigning groups. People and Planet is the pre-eminent example, and its annual Shared Planet festival takes place at Sheffield University on November 16-18. The bulk of the event seems to be centred around debate, which is positive, and on issues in which Marxists should be able and encouraged to intervene - the climate crisis, 'ethical consumerism', the question of national borders and so on.

Who are these people?

The closest thing to a programmatic statement on its website claims P&P to be "the largest student network in Britain campaigning to alleviate world poverty, defend human rights, protect the environment" (<http://peopleandplanet.org/aboutus>).

That's about it. There is a further web page which explains why poverty, human rights violations, environmental degradation and war are, in point of fact, very bad things worthy of steadfast opposition. Agreed so far. What is not offered, explicitly, is any sort of strategy upon which such opposition should be based. This, first and foremost, is why P&P needs Marxism.

Take its first bullet point: global poverty. How does a student network go about fighting this? Thus far, P&P has been focused on NGO campaigns, getting fair-trade products into schools, etc... in other words, the very modest strategic perspectives offered by the left-liberal mainstream within the group.

Such campaigns have had a degree of prominence for a number of decades now (P&P itself, in one form or another, dates back to 1969) - 'fair trade' is the latest fad in a long-running sequence, and one particularly amenable to the venal forces of neo-liberalism that the P&P activists no doubt despise. And, despite the best will in the world on the part of these campaigns' evangelists, global poverty is still with us. Why? The liberal answer is always that this president, that government, such and such a corporation has frustrated the demands being raised. Then, the next campaign is immediately commenced, and *this time* it will work. The cycle begins again, and before we know it

38 years have passed with 1.2 billion still "lack[ing] safe water, enough food and basic healthcare, even though it would only cost just 0.1% of world income to provide these necessities" (<http://peopleandplanet.org/aboutus/why.php>).

Marxists, on the other hand, bite the bullet. We claim that there are very real forces inherent in the capitalist system, necessarily frustrating such philanthropic desires. Under capitalism, 'trade justice' is as oxymoronic as 'Nazi Judeophile', because capital's logic of self-valorisation is constantly driving to exploit workers *more*, regardless of the agreeable wishes of concerned liberals. For us, the answer must lie in organising *conflict* - with the capitalists and the state which serves their interests. We must not *beg* them to do something, but make demands which we can back up with actions that genuinely threaten their power in some way. Ultimately, we must supplant them altogether, and place ourselves - the working class - as the rulers.

The climate crisis

The advantages of a Marxist approach are highlighted most sharply when we look at the developing climate change crisis. Here, we are facing not much less than the total destruction of human society - perhaps the human organism may be able to survive, but the social structures upon which the teeming billions currently rely for what food they can get will disappear if the threatened crisis becomes a reality. It would seem that all of humanity has an interest in averting such an eventuality.

But this has not made a blind bit of difference to the capitalists. They have bravely soldiered on with their task of sending us all to the grave. The 'solutions' that have been offered - emissions trading, individualised action of the 'if we all turn our TVs off standby' type - do not stand up to examination. Capitalism demands the exponential expansion of production, so carbon credits will simply not bite unless there are a theoretically infinite amount available - that is, unless they are rendered entirely superfluous to the environmental question.

As for the 'sum total of individual actions' approach, which is typically favoured to a greater or lesser extent by honest liberals as much as David Cameron, this is not without its diffi-

culties either. Take the typical demand - 'You should take your car out less, and take a train instead'. This is a suggestion which has become more and more common, and indeed emissions from road vehicles are a significant part of the total. However, as it has become more common, the train and bus services we are supposed to use instead have become worse and worse. Ticket prices have gone up, provision has become less frequent and less widespread.

What does this demonstrate? That to a very large extent, climate change is a *social* problem. We cannot reasonably expect the mass of people to catch a train from London to Sheffield instead of driving if the train is twice the cost

of a tank of petrol, and will grind to a halt at the first sign of leaves on the line. It is a fact that the social system defended (or at least not fundamentally opposed) by the advocates of such action on climate change is exactly what renders most of the more significant particular recommendations (no cars, no short-haul flights...) undesirable or infeasible.

Does this mean that we should stop campaigning on climate change issues and stick to directly agitating for socialism? Certainly not. The relationship between the universal aim of total social revolution and the particular aim of this or that campaign is a two-way street. If we are able to force the capitalists into making serious con-

cessions in the name of climate change (or human rights, or alleviation of poverty), this will make our lives easier and theirs more difficult. Marxists must bring their Marxism to bear on the environmentalist movement, and the latter must come to accept that its problems are broader than it may think (bringing it closer, in turn, to Marxism).

Socialism is not guaranteed to solve all our problems, but will at least enable us to 'seal the deal' - on poverty, the environment, and human rights - representing the democratic self-liberation of the working class majority in the interests of humanity as a whole.

James Turley

Two faces of imperialism

As the 'war on terror' rages on in the Middle East, there is another war being against civil liberties in Britain, says Jamie Linney

It is now clear that 9/11 provided an excuse for imperialist expansion that has changed the world forever. The brutal consequences of US and British foreign policy are being lived out daily in Afghanistan and Iraq. For them the 'war on terror' has resulted in over one million deaths. The US has decided to compensate for its economic decline by embarking on military adventures.

As under McCarthyism, the supposed threat of an external enemy is used to suppress internal dissent. While troops are used to take out rogue states and gain advantage for US capital abroad, historically the police have been used to protect the property and profits of capital at home. Anti-terror legislation has massively increased police powers in the UK too - something that should be fought against by all socialists and democrats.

Since the invasion of Iraq 56 people have been killed in Britain as a result of terrorist attacks. This is an average of 14 deaths per year, the same number of annual deaths as people falling from ladders. The argument is not that terrorism is a minor threat which should be ignored, but that the threat has been blown out of all proportion - to justify vastly increased policing powers which are, in any case, plainly incapable of combating that threat. So far the extent of police vigilance in fighting terrorism has been to

shoot and kill an innocent tube user (Jean Charles de Menezes) and shoot another innocent man in the leg in his own home (Mohamed Abdul Kahar). Guess we can all rest easy then.

Yet, apart from highlighting how inept and corrupt the police are, these cases illustrate how the constant threat of 'terror' is being used by the state to excuse greater powers over the population - in this case, the right to shoot and kill anyone *suspected* of terrorism. Thanks to the Terrorism Act of 2006, the police now have the power to detain without charge for up to 28 days and Gordon Brown is to try once more to double this at the very least. The terrorist threat is also being used to justify oppressive laws, from stricter immigration controls to DNA profiling. And as of last month all landline and mobile calls and texts are being logged by the home office. Such measures bring to mind Orwell's *Big Brother*. Ironically, it recently came to light that Orwell himself was under surveillance - by British intelligence. In the present day, MI5 is expanding rapidly, and in 2008 will be nearly twice the size it was in 2001.

Terrorism laws have already been used to stop and search two activists going to protest the DSEI arms fair in London, and to keep the octogenarian peace campaigner Walter Wolfgang out of the Labour conference. Nobody should doubt that these powers will be wielded against the left if it becomes a powerful force again. That they have been passed at all is indicative of the

weak state of the workers' movement. The left should be taking the lead in the fight against these laws, not because they violate some abstract notion of 'human rights', but because, the more power the bourgeois state has, the greater a threat it poses to the concrete progress of the workers' movement.

The possibility of counterrevolutionary violence in any upsurge also increases. Contrarily, the weaker the state and the better armed the organised workers, the less likely violence becomes. The brutal suppression of unarmed attempts at revolutionary change throughout history are testament to this fact. How long will it be before the 'crowd control' measures the US military is testing on Iraqis - such as heat rays and sonic waves - are used against any domestic challenge to the ruling class?

Communist Students will fight against any attack on Iran - and we also believe in solidarity with the Iranian people in their struggle against Ahmadinejad's regime and for democracy. Such solidarity must manifest itself precisely in the fight for democracy here in Britain. Victories in this struggle would give us greater power to stop the imperialist plans of our state and to support the women, trade unionists and democrats of Iran. This fight must be led by the only consistently democratic class - the working class.