

Some history for the bemused

BY MARTIN THOMAS

THE *Weekly Worker* group invited an AWL member to debate Iraq (or was it Iran? their story is not clear) at their recent summer school.

We said yes, and delegated a representative of our majority view on Iraq. No, the WW then said, they wouldn't debate. They would only accept an AWLer who disagrees with our majority view.

The AWL, pretty much uniquely on the left, has a rule that members with minority views not only can but are expected to express those views in public (while not *campaigning against* our organisation, and while explaining the majority view as best they can). But, well, if we're invited to a debate, we want AWL policy represented by someone who agrees with it...

Mark Fischer of the WW, in recent articles (30 August 2007), turns this round into a story of us "banning a member of [our] 'troops out of Iraq' minority from speaking".

AWL believes that the scuttling of the US troops which scaffold the disintegrating polity of Iraq would unleash full-scale civil war between the various sectarian Islamic clerical-fascist militias, intervention by Iran and probably other neighbouring states, a bloody carving-up of Iraq, and the crushing of the Iraqi labour movement. We also stand in intransigent working-class hostility to the US/UK troops. Our conclusion: solidarity with the Iraqi labour movement, against both the US/UK and the sectarian militias.

Some people argue that the Iraqi "resistance", or sections of it, could effect a real if imperfect national liberation of Iraq. Others estimate that the current Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, which is after all elected, after a fashion, could survive US withdrawal and thus embody some national liberation. Yet others may believe that the Iraqi labour movement is strong enough to become, in a workable future, the agent of "troops out".

Real issues, real arguments. The problem with the WW is that it cites our *assessment*, makes no attempt to debate it or offer a different one, but instead just screeches: "If you say such things, that makes you 'pro-occupation', 'troops in'."

To go into the details of Fischer's contortions would be to aid his effort of displacing political debate by scandal-mongering. It may, however, be worth explaining to the bemused observer the general pattern behind such WW operations as using the fate of the peoples of Iraq simply as grist for logic-chopping.

The *Weekly Worker* group was, for the first decade and a half of its existence, a (small) hard-line Stalinist splinter of the disintegrating Communist Party.

Around the mid-1990s, it started to mutate. Over the following years, it adopted, one by one, a series of ideas from non-Stalinist socialism — Hillel Ticktin's ideas on the USSR, Steve Freeman's ideas on the monarchy being the central question in British politics, and then (a version of) our ideas on Israel-Palestine, on Ireland, on "reactionary anti-imperialism", and, finally, on the Labour Party.

Naturally, we tried to talk to them in a friendly way. We were bemused by their blank failure to engage when we challenged their many remaining Stalinist-stock ideas.

In late 2001 WW proposed a merger of their paper with *Solidarity*. Knowing the intractable differences in basic political culture, and the vast difference in practical orientation of the two papers, we said that was hardly realistic.

Jack Conrad, WW's top writer, promptly set about us with a polemic in the tone (as

we put it at the time) "of a high priest scouring an apostate" (28 February 2002).

What was going on? As the polemics flooded the pages of WW, it became clear that they were designed to "fish" (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) for a minority in the AWL (one person, in fact) more inclined to give credence to the idea of a WW/*Solidarity* merger as "the paper of the Socialist Alliance".

To round out the fishing operation, WW discoursed about the evil "economistic wing" of the AWL — which, on the basis of eagerly-reported gossip about "body language" and casual conversation, they claimed to be led by Mark Osborn and Jill Mountford — and the irresolution of the "political wing" in combating that "economistic wing". An internal document of theirs revealed why they had been so blank in discussion: their explicit aim in talking with us had always been, not to examine ideas, but to find ways to "split" us.

All Conrad's show of "high theory" was merely gloss for such manoeuvring. This time, too, the concocted "scandal" about debating Iraq is merely a lever to shit-stir.

The tin lid was put on it when we questioned their reprinting with only trivial demur (11 October 2001) of a screed of theirs from their full-on Stalinist days praising the 1978 Stalinist "revolution" in Afghanistan. The ensuing row, which included a series of seven huge articles denouncing us by Jack Conrad (starting November 2002) but failed to include any substantive reply on the question of Stalinism, confirmed our view that this was a group with which, as Trotsky once said of another similar, one should watch their fingers and not their theses.

And then, of course, after chiding us in 2001-2 as insufficiently unconditional in our hostility to Taliban clerical-fascism, they rallied to the SWP's "adoption" of the Muslim Association of Britain, and joined Respect in 2004.

Will they even take their own ostensible ideas seriously? Given the bizarre charivari of mutually-contradictory borrowed notions those ideas are, it's a hard thing to ask of them. But in any case they don't.

- Assessment of WW we made in September 2002:

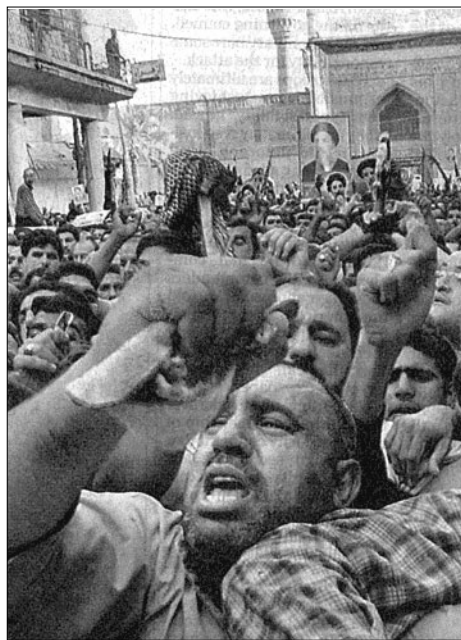
www.workersliberty.org/node/330

- *In Defence of the October Revolution*: a detailed reply to WW's exalting the 1978 Stalinist coup in Afghanistan as the equal of the Russian workers' revolution:

www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/65

- "Never Stalinist?" The short comment about their Stalinist record which prompted the storm in 2002:

www.workersliberty.org/node/354.



Iraq: why no debate?

Galloway vs the SWP

BY SACHA ISMAIL

IN a letter to the Respect Coalition national committee, George Galloway declares that "relations between leading figures in Respect are at an all-time low", that the group's membership "has not grown... in some areas it has gone into a steep decline", and that it could easily face "oblivion" within the next year. What's going on?

Under Galloway's characteristic style, two main issues emerge. Firstly, he wants Respect to be much more purely an electoral machine (!), with less emphasis on all this nonsense about trade unions ("Organising for Fighting Unions") and, even worse, gay liberation (the Respect intervention at Pride). And secondly, he wants greater control over the machine, with fewer SWP members as staff and a new National Organiser position alongside the National Secretary, SWPer John Rees.

Galloway has already announced — whether following an internal discussion or off the top of his head — that at the next election he will stand for Poplar and Canning Town, where Respect got 16.9% in 2005, against Labour's 40%. Meanwhile, he faces an 18-day suspension from Parliament in October.

Perhaps Galloway is thinking about other career moves? To consistent revolutionary socialists, the SWP's politics are pathetic: but to Galloway, they must seem like a left-wing embarrassment and roadblock to his plans for self-promotion.

Let him have his career in business, hack journalism, or whatever. We can only hope that any attempts he makes to break up Respect jolt the committed and good-hearted socialists that remain in the SWP into wondering how on earth they got into an alliance with this sleazebag.

Saddam's gold revisited

BY MARTIN THOMAS

AS mentioned above, George Galloway is facing an 18-day suspension from Parliament, due to start on 8 October, after a report by the House of Commons "committee on standards and privileges".

Newspaper accounts of this report on Galloway's financial links with Saddam Hussein's Iraq gave Galloway a very soft ride.

Read the full report, however, and you will see that it went into the issue of the documents published by the *Daily Telegraph* in 2003, allegedly showing financial links between Galloway and Saddam Hussein's regime.

It found that "Unlike Mr Galloway (who was offered the opportunity to examine the *Telegraph* documents), we have ourselves seen them in their totality and with the files in which they were found. We have little doubt, based on the evidence we have received, including the forensic evidence, that those documents which are relevant to our inquiry are authentic. We note that, in his evidence to us, Mr Galloway did not explicitly rule out this possibility either..."

Galloway has traded on the idea that the success of his libel case against the *Telegraph* shows the documents to be forgeries, but the committee notes that "neither the authenticity nor the veracity of the documents was an issue in Mr Galloway's successful libel action against the *Telegraph*... The *Telegraph*... had at one stage indicated to the court its wish to prove the authenticity of the documents... the judge ruled against the paper on the grounds that the authenticity of the documents was in his view not relevant to the qualified privilege and fair comment defences raised by the paper in the proceedings".

The committee also reports that Galloway "told the Commissioner that he regularly met

the Iraqi Chargé d'Affaires in London to keep him informed of his proposed plans and accepted that these might be described as a working programme... We were struck by the way a coherent and credible story emerges from the key documents, whose authenticity we accept, and conclude that they accurately describe aspects of Mr Galloway's involvement in securing Iraqi funding for the Mariam Appeal. This reinforces our view, in the light of our conclusions on authenticity, that in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to presume that what the documents say is true."

The committee also "take the view that the alleged record of the meeting between Mr Galloway and Saddam Hussein in August 2002 is authentic", i.e. "that some of his activities in support of the Iraqi regime may have been financed through an oil-related mechanism".

Why on earth is none of this even marginally an issue in the conflict between Galloway and the SWP?

Galloway vs MP

GALLOWAY'S announcement that he will be standing against New Labour minister Jim Fitzpatrick in Poplar and Canning Town at the next general election was made in characteristic style. In his Talksport Radio address (yes), Galloway put it like this:

"It's going to be a battle of the Scots in the East End of London. Me standing in the tradition of Keir Hardie, him standing in the tradition of Ramsay MacDonald, the betrayer of everything Labour stands for. It's going to be a very interesting contest."

Keir Hardie, for all his religious and political confusion, was a class-conscious socialist militant. What would he have made of an ex-Labour politician like Galloway, who does not even rise to the level of middle-class liberalism? In any case, Galloway's announcement continues on his website in even more interesting way, denouncing Jim Fitzpatrick's voting record on a series of issues: for ID cards, for foundation hospitals, for top-up fees, for the Iraq war — and for equal gay rights.

So why has Fitzpatrick's support for gay rights been included as one bad thing among man? No doubt this would play well among more conservative Muslims and Christians in Poplar and Canning Town — the people who Galloway no doubt sees as his base.

Yvonne Ridley vs the Iranian workers

"Knowing the truth is the right of all human beings, but the media today is the number one means used by the authorities to keep control," commented Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in July, as the Iranian state launched the "Press TV" satellite channel in order to "break the global media stranglehold of western outlets". Press TV will no doubt be part of the apparatus by which Ahmedinejad's regime controls the media when it launches further crack downs on dissident publications and stations.

So far, so bad. But why should we be particularly bothered?

One of Press TV's presenters is leading Respect member Yvonne Ridley. While Ridley's softness on the Islamic Republic, and the SWP's willingness to put up with and even echo it, are well known, this — becoming a direct mouthpiece for the Iranian state — is a new and appalling development. Again it has not been mentioned in the rows currently engulfing Respect.