



**George Galloway**  
asks how the Left can be  
relevant and effective.



**Salma Yaqoob** asks  
if the government is really  
preventing extremism.



**Yvonne Ridley**  
joins the freedom fleet  
to Gaza.

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# The Respect Paper

SEPTEMBER 2008 80p

# Brown & out?

Working people deserve  
better than New Labour



Photo: Andrew Ward

News headlines ring out with revelations of the bitter divisions inside Gordon Brown's Labour Party as it heads towards its annual conference amid a looming recession, with rock-bottom poll ratings.

Supporters of Tony Blair appear to be the most active plotters seeking to destabilise Brown. Few on the left have offered any real resistance since the left wing MP John McDonnell's valiant attempt to challenge Brown for the leadership perished last year for lack of support among his fellow Labour MPs.

For voters, facing sky-high fuel bills, soaring inflation, chaos on the housing market, increasing unemployment, and a relentless privatisation of public services, the debates over replacing Brown with another New Labour clone are a frustrating, meaningless sideshow.

It's not just Brown: it's New Labour that have become unelectable. It's not a matter of the personalities, but the policies that have already driven away 4 million of the voters who elected Tony Blair in 1997, and two thirds of the Party's membership.

For those of us looking for a real alternative, New Labour is not the solution, but part of the problem: and to challenge New Labour

we need to link up with the widest possible alliance of organisations and individuals – with trade unions, the unemployed, local community campaigns, pensioners, students, young people and migrant workers.

We need to build a real voice for working people.

Who else will fight for the basic popular demands that Labour now rejects? To tax the rich, not the poor; to nationalise the oil and energy companies, to stop the privatisation of our public services, to stop the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to halt the vicious campaign to marginalise and exclude migrant workers?

In Manchester, alongside the Labour conference, but outside of the media spotlight and mainstream headlines, hundreds of activists from dozens of organisations and political currents will be taking part in a Convention of the Left.

Respect welcomes this Convention as a vital step towards the kind of fighting unity we really need to challenge Brown and develop a real, progressive alternative, because working people deserve something better than New Labour.

**INSIDE** Heating or eating? The choice for many in Brown's Britain >> pages 4 & 5

**In vision** send your pictures to news@respectrenewal.org



**Lock up your caribou:** gun-toting Sarah Palin, John McCain's reactionary redneck vice presidential candidate in the US elections, slaughters another quadruped while proclaiming the "right to life".



**Birmingham:** Respect Councillor Salma Yaqoob presenting a petition to Birmingham City Council on behalf of the Friends Institute on Moseley Road, threatened with closure by Lib Dem councillors.



**All together now:** local government unions enjoy a rare moment of united action during two days of strikes demanding an increase in the government's insulting 2.45% pay offer.



**Balls up:** Schools Secretary Ed Balls has spent most of the summer explaining away the disastrous failures of ETS, the American firm brought in to mark schools SATS tests



George Galloway MP

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# A relevant and effective Left

He didn't just say it a few dozen times. It was thousands. "No return to boom and bust." Now, you didn't have to be a catastrophist or a Marxist to spot the hubris in Gordon Brown's mantra. The most cursory glance at history shows that there can be no such thing as capitalism without boom or bust.

Indeed, some of capitalism's most sophisticated ideological defenders have embraced the cycle of growth followed by recession as a self-balancing system of "creative destruction" in which unemployment, business failure and human misery, to a greater or lesser extent, are all necessary for the economy to emerge phoenix-like into a new phase of expansion.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets starkly shows the vulnerabilities of the British economy that have been exacerbated over more than two decades, making it prone to a particularly sharp slowdown.

We can see the gleaming spires of the casino economy, where brokers are paid millions in bonuses just for playing with figures on a computer screen.

Meanwhile, we have 23,000 people on the housing waiting list and a council eager to divest itself of any responsibility to house its residents and to ship tenants off to one private outfit or another instead. Every week, constituents pour into my surgery groaning under a weight of debt. The national average is £23,000 per household, excluding mortgages.

Individuals in Britain now owe more in loans and on credit cards than we produce each year as a nation.

This is the legacy of the Blair-Brown years and the Thatcher and Major years before them. As against all that, the measures announced by Brown this week are insulting in their miserliness.

In my constituency, there are precious few homes that change hands for under £175,000, the threshold of the 12-month exemption on stamp duty.

But surely, if only from the standpoint of his own survival, what's needed is not riddle, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma of tax credits, it's clear and sweeping programme of measures.

An emergency programme of mass council house-building would tackle homelessness and overcrowding now and help to gently deflate the housing market rather than let it crash and burn.

Restoring profit and wealth taxes to what they were under Tory Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, over 20 years ago can provide the wherewithal for the public spending that we will need if slowdown is not to become slump.

And, if corporations say that they cannot operate under conditions which ensure the public interest, from keeping old people warm in winter to saving the environment, then why

should they not be told that they have forfeited the right to do business and their operations taken over.

This all requires a sharp break with the economic and political orthodoxy of the last generation.

It's a point that various people on the left are making. John McDonnell has launched a 10-point policy programme and there's a very similar set of demands going under the name People Before Profit.

All these initiatives deserve support and most people on the left will agree with all of them.

They beg the question, of course, of how we are to get anywhere near to them being implemented. That comes down to politics.

The construction of a serious political force based on real Labour values to the left of new Labour has taken more than its fair share of knocks over the last two years.

But its necessity has grown. Respect, particularly in our heartlands of South Birmingham and East London, is continuing to develop that process, but we are well aware that we are not the finished product.

The bitter economic forecast and the chilling social consequence predicted in last week's leaked Home Office study should concentrate the minds of all on the left.

The millions abandoned by new Labour and the 200,000 who have left the party over the last decade are not interested in the finer lines of division among the left, the narcissism of small difference that has so often been the bane of the progressive movement.

They might be interested if the left fired all its guns at the right and was relevant and effective.



Salma Yaqoob

## Are they really 'Preventing Extremism'?

The recent convictions of three young Muslim men on charges of conspiracy to cause explosions highlight the ongoing and real threat of terrorism.

In video messages explaining their motivations the culprits make a clear and explicit linkage between their intentions and the impact of Western foreign policy in Muslim lands.

Yet despite it coming from their own mouths that it is anger over foreign policy driving their hate, the government continues to deny it as the primary factor.

Instead it blames a 'dangerous Islamist ideology' for creating 'a hatred of the Western way of life' as if such ideology is free-standing and exists in some kind of vacuum.

In this discourse all Islamic political or social activists who are critical of the government, from whatever political hue, get lumped together with the sinister description of 'Islamists'.

The impression is created that all Muslims who are critical of the impact of foreign policy – and certainly any Muslim who recognises the rights of those in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq to resist the

occupation of their countries – give succour to those who preach the language of violent extremism here.

This thinking runs through the government's Preventing Extremism Agenda (PVE). It has dangerous implications.

By denying the legitimacy of democratic opposition to government foreign policy from Muslims, and by promoting and recognising only those Muslims who toe the line, government policy is serving to strengthen the hands of the genuine extremists; those who say that our engagement in the democratic process is pointless or wrong.

The government now increasingly tars all Islamic organisations and individuals that openly oppose Western oppressive policies in the Middle East with the 'extremist' brush. Hence their recent attacks on the mainstream Islam Expo event in London.

This was attended by 50,000 people, and combined a celebration of Islamic cultural life with political debate. But rather than engage with discordant, but much more representative voices, from within the Muslim community, the government very publicly boycotted it.

Instead they are keen to promote on PVE platforms ex-Islamic radicals like Ed Husseini, author of 'The Islamist'. Mr. Husseini is happy to pronounce his support for the invasion of Iraq, denies the existence of Islamophobia, and routinely describes his and government critics as 'Islamofascist'.

As such he is regarded by most Muslims as a government stooge interested only in his self advancement.

The danger of this approach is that it serves to squeeze the democratic space for dissent within the Muslim community. If Muslims organisations are reluctant to provide

the space for sensitive discussions for fear of extremist's accusations, where are these young people to go? Where will their views and concerns get an airing? The answer is obvious. They will be expressed in private and secret, with the genuine extremists keen to be provide listening ears and simplistic solutions.

I regularly speak to young Muslim school students and I always make a point of asking them how they feel being Muslim. Invariably, to the surprise of their teachers, they describe with sadness the long shadow the events post 9/11 have cast over their world. Many are angry because all you need to get angry is to switch on a TV or pick up a newspaper.

Instead of trying to deny or sweep under the carpet the real impact of government policy on the Muslim community, we need to consciously engage with it.

We must create the space within the community where our young people feel free to speak openly about how they feel as young Muslims growing up in a country where their identity is constantly contested. The best antidote to the appeal of extremism is to create a model of critically engaged citizenship.

That will only happen when more young Muslims engage in the political process and are confident and assertive about expressing their concerns, irrespective of whether it offends the government or not.

To that end we need more Muslim role models prepared to speak out, not stooges prepared only to do their master's bidding. It is a waste of PVE funding if it is used simply to finance tokenistic, window-dressing initiatives that simply reinforce government spin and increase cynicism in the democratic process.

I welcome the fact the money is being made available to tackle the threat of violent extremism. But this money needs to be spent wisely. That's why I raised my concerns in the Birmingham City Council at the manner in which the PVE agenda is being implemented in the city.

I complained about the lack of transparency in this whole process, the lack of engagement with elected representatives and the manner in which private consultancy firms are being used to administer public money. These issues need to be aired in public as does a critique of the politics running through the PVE agenda.

We must create the space within the community where our young people feel free to speak openly about how they feel.

## Darling steers deeper into disaster

Alistair Darling is clearly historically challenged. He described the economic circumstances as being the "worst for 60 years", in what appears to be an unguarded moment with a journalist who joined him on his holidays.

Of course times really were hard in 1948. This was only three years after the Second World War, there was widespread rationing still in force, the Marshall Plan had not yet kicked in to bail out the economy with US loans, and we had just come through a very severe winter.

It was only a couple of years later however that we were entering the period that came to be known as the "long boom".

Perhaps that is what Darling is hoping for in time for a General Election in 2010. But it does not seem likely.

What Darling has ignored in his seemingly apocryphal prognosis is the inflation rate which rose towards 30% in 1974 and unemployment which reached 4 million in the mid-1980s.

### HOUSE OF CARDS

However severe the economic crisis may become in the future, inflation and unemployment are currently nowhere near the levels of the 1970s and 1980s and whilst there is a possibility the British economy may be technically in recession, the US and most of the major economies in the rest of the world are not – yet.

Nonetheless, the financial losses amongst major banks have been enormous and none larger than the institutions set up to facilitate mortgage borrowing in the US, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae.

With portfolios worth twice British national annual production (GDP), the neo-liberal Bush administration has taken the "unusual" step of nationalising them. They had no choice. If they had let them be, they might have collapsed and that really would have brought the house of cards down.

Even so, it is estimated that 9% of US homeowners are in arrears on their mortgages or facing repossession. That is phenomenal, but also a human disaster.

In most cases you are talking about relatively poor Americans, many of them black, who were lured into the dream of the security of owning their own home with cut-price mortgages. In Britain the collapse in mortgage lending has been even more dramatic than in the US in percentage terms.

Growth in the world economy over the last ten years was characterised by the extraordinary growth rates in China which has been supplying the West with low cost goods, keeping commodity price inflation down and sustaining growth in the advanced industrialised

economies.

This built up huge surpluses of dollars in Chinese coffers, which were then recycled to the western banking system, supporting the dollar and allowing lower interest rates and the growth of consumer credit.

Bank lending increasingly went into risky (sub-prime) property lending producing a house price spiral in which the banks began to think they could not lose.

### BAD DEBT

This benign balance of forces had to come to an end sooner or later, but none of those who are paid to speculate could bring themselves to call the end.

So the bubble went on growing. Commodity prices began to rise as Chinese expansion ran into raw material capacity constraints, most evident in the oil market.

This produced rising inflation.

At the same time, the housing bubble began to deflate and the banks suddenly found themselves lumbered with billions of dollars of bad debt.

As the more vulnerable and exposed financial institutions began to tumble, the money markets seized up, cut price mortgage deals collapsed and mortgage lending went into free-fall. With stagnation and falling house prices, the beneficial effects of the "wealth effect", the optimism and higher consumer spending associated with the feeling of rising real wealth, is becoming the "poverty effect", with potentially disastrous effects on consumer spending.

### VULNERABLE

Britain, having enjoyed ten years of sustained growth, wrongly attributed to Brown's prudence and deft touch on the tiller, is now in a particularly vulnerable position. The public finances were already in deficit before the economy turned down.

Conventional wisdom has it that this constrains the government's ability to engage in counter-cyclical spending. On top of that the pound has been plummeting against both the Euro and the Dollar, the two most important currencies for an economy a high proportion of which is internationally traded.

A falling currency would be a stimulant to demand for British goods if we still made many, but this is an economy where growth has been in services and the financial sector and industry has been allowed to wither away.

So a weak pound simply means more inflation as the cost of imports rises. Meantime the motor of growth in Britain, the financial sector, is suffering its own severe downturn due to the credit crunch.

A year ago the writing was on the wall for the economy, but Brown had the thinnest window of opportunity to go to the

# Heating or eating

## The choices for many in Brown's Britain

country in the hope of getting back with a slimmer majority. Since then it's been all downhill with Labour now boasting a record deficit against the Tories. And this is before the bad stuff has really begun to feed through to many of the voting public.

Not that there is nothing that can be done. But it would require challenging the conventional wisdom. The establishment is itself now deeply divided.

The body to whom Brown turned over control of interest rates days after New Labour was first elected, the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England, has people who want to raise interest rates against the growing threat of inflation, cut them against the growing threat of recession and sit on the fence because they have no idea what's happening!

What none of them will entertain however is the government pumping investment into the economy by borrowing from the money markets that are now so reluctant to lend to the banks. This investment could be channelled into building and refurbishing council homes, for example, massively boosting the now severely depressed construction industry.

Without radical thinking and radical measures, which Brown seems completely incapable of, very hard economic times lie ahead ... and with them New Labour's annihilation at the next election.

Bob Oxley



## Food prices rocket

Average food prices in British supermarkets have shot up by an average of 8.3% since January according to an August survey for the BBC.

While dairy products and baby food buck the trend by going down in price a massive range of products have increased, from frozen food at 5.8% to Basmati rice at 42%, with chicken, ham and mayonnaise all topping 40%.

Meat and fish average a staggering 23% increase, while fresh fruit and vegetables, which ministers endlessly exhort us to consume in quantities, are up almost 15% this year.

The overall price increase for fresh food is running at almost 12%, almost three times the official inflation rate of 4.4%.

By contrast Gordon Brown has attempted to cap public sector pay increases at just 2% this year: local government staff staged two days of strikes to challenge a 2.5% offer, and unions representing health workers have demanded their 3-year pay deal be reopened, after inflation soared past the assumed levels within weeks of the ballot to endorse the deal.

## Energy profits: 2007-8

£13.9bn  
Shell

£9.3bn  
B.P.

£694m  
Npower

£2.1bn  
Centrica

£957m  
EDF

## Energy price rises this year

49%  
Scottish power

41%  
Eon

43%  
Npower

50%  
British Gas

34%  
EDF

Source: BBC

# The great fuel price rip off

An estimated 5.5 million homes will be in fuel poverty by the end of this year, up from 3.5 million in 2006, according to a coalition of the charities Age Concern, Child Poverty Action Group and National Energy Action.

The number of pensioner households in fuel poverty – spending more than one tenth of their income on fuel bills – has more than doubled since 2004, now affecting 2.5 million older households or one in three pensioners.

### FUEL POVERTY

The massive fuel price rises will have a devastating effect on the poorest, especially the old, the sick and the young. When the £200 Winter Fuel Payment was first introduced it covered a third of the average fuel bill. Even with the increase in this year's budget it still only covers less than a fifth. How are pensioners to survive the winter?

But it's not only older people who are suffering fuel poverty. One in five families with only one source of income, and 17% of working people who live alone, are fuel poor.

Not everyone suffers from the rise in fuel prices, of course. Mark Owen-Lloyd, an executive for energy firm E.ON let the cat out of the bag recently when asked how high

gas and oil prices could be affected by a severe winter. "It will make more money for us", he joked.

But being cold in the winter is no laughing matter. Every year, 25,000 older people die from preventable cold-related illness. According to Age Concern, in the last five years, more than 130,000 people over 65 have died from cold related illnesses during the winter months in Britain.

Last year, a survey for Help the Aged revealed that one in five pensioners (2.5 million people) live in one room of their home to keep warm and save costs in winter. Almost two million older people wear outdoor clothes in their homes including gloves, overcoats and hats.

One million older people go out to public establishments including libraries, coffee shops and shopping centres to find warmth; 1.6 million seek refuge underneath their blankets in bed.

In the winter before last 2.2 million older people turned off their heating to save costs.

If a society is to be judged by the way it looks after the elderly, it doesn't say much for this one.

The response of the New Labour government has been woefully inadequate. Prime Minister Gordon Brown has announced a package

of measures costing £910 million, including half price insulation for all households and a freeze on this year's bills for the half a million poorest consumers.

### FLIMSY AND FAILING

But the package announced by Gordon Brown comes nowhere near providing an answer to the problems.

The government says it aims to insulate every home in Britain by 2020 – by which time more than 250,000 older people will have died from preventable cold-related illness.

"This package will leave millions of the poorest pensioners wondering how they will afford their bills this winter", said Gordon Lishman, of Age Concern. Marvin Kohler of Help the Aged said, "This is a flimsy and failing package which does little to help older people struggling to cope with soaring fuel bills."

New Labour has refused to listen to a call from over 100 Labour backbenchers and many in the trade unions who have been calling for a windfall tax on the fuel companies' profits. Rather than act in the interests of Labour's traditional working-class supporters Gordon Brown and his government bow to the interests of the fuel companies.

Yet the 'big six' fuel companies more than doubled their combined profits from £2.07 billion in 2006 to £4.3 billion in 2007. As a result they were able to increase shareholders dividend payouts by 19%. They paid £1.64 billion in dividends in 2007, £257 million more than in 2006.

That's £1.6 billion to the shareholders but less than a billion for the elderly and the poor.

While 16 million British Gas customers face a 35% price increase, life is rosy for Sam Laidlaw, chief executive of its parent company Centrica, who is set to get a £1 million pay rise this year, taking his salary to £2.8 million. With bonuses he could earn £4.8 million.

But his money and that of all the other fuel directors and shareholders is safe while New Labour is in charge.

Respect supports an immediate windfall tax to alleviate fuel poverty.

It's not an adequate solution. Why leave these big six fuel firms in private hands, having to go cap in hand to them each year? Even if some of the profits were taken in a windfall tax, the companies would ensure they recouped the money through further price hikes.

The only way to ensure that

gas and electricity is available at affordable prices is for the energy companies to be brought back into public ownership. They should be run democratically by and in the interests of those who work for and use the services.

### PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

This is the only way to ensure that prices are capped, that older people and poorer people survive the cold winters, that wages keep pace with inflation and that money is invested in energy saving initiatives such as home insulation and cleaner energy development.

Millions of people have suffered since the Tories privatised British Gas in December 1986 and electricity in December 1990. A few have reaped rich returns.

These companies should be renationalised immediately, without compensation. For twenty years the directors and shareholders have benefited from the Thatcher sell-off. They have been more than amply compensated already.

This winter another 25,000 older people will die because of Gordon Brown and New Labour's refusal to act.

Nick Wrack  
Respect National Secretary

## Talking point



November 2007: Why are unions marching to defend the NHS from a Labour government?

# What a united effort could do about the unions' Labour link

**What concrete initiatives could flow from the Convention of the Left in Manchester to make a difference? John Lister, Respect National Council, in a personal view, suggests a fresh approach to the issue of the age-old link between the trade unions and the Labour Party could yield very positive results.**

It's time to open up a genuine debate in the trade union movement ... and challenge the logic of spending millions in political funds on supporting a party which not only ignores and attacks the unions, but which is on course to lose the next general election, and usher in a new period of Conservative government.

This debate needs to focus around building active support on key issues and positive policies, on which there is already much common ground between most trade union members, a broad political agreement that includes Respect and many other currents and organisations on the Left.

Our aim must be linking up the widest possible coalition to fight for these policies, and fight for the unions to adopt them and to take them seriously: this means using their political funds, both as

a means to support publicity and campaigns for union policies, but also as a means to apply pressure on New Labour.

In each union affiliated to Labour, the left should pool resources, and draw up and publicise a proper "balance sheet", showing how much that union has spent supporting New Labour, and how little they have received, and how much their members have suffered, in return.

### POLICIES

Each union should be urged to discuss widely with their members and with other unions, and adopt a charter of positive policies.

And all unions should be urged to adopt a firm policy of withholding any political funding from parties and candidates which do NOT endorse these policies, but to support any coalition of parties and candidates that do.

The same policies could also be

adopted by unions already outside the Labour Party – notably rail-workers union, the RMT, and Fire Brigades Union.

In some cases unions may require rule changes to open up secretive affiliated political funds to scrutiny from their wider membership, and make them properly accountable to the members who pay the political levy.

Urging unions to give financial and practical support on the basis of policy and programme avoids the problem of trying to force unions with decades of affiliation to "disaffiliate" from the Labour Party in the absence of any clear or credible alternative.

### PROGRESSIVE POLICIES

Indeed it makes it easy to maintain support for progressive Labour MPs like John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn, who would almost certainly support the new policies – and even the Labour Party as a

**Each union should discuss widely with their members and other unions, and adopt a charter of positive policies.**

**This approach would put the pressure on those who wish to maintain their union's affiliation to Labour.**

whole could be supported – if it changed its policies to match the unions' platform. Some unions might opt to pay the bare minimum affiliation to Labour, but use the rest of its political fund to support other parties and candidates that more closely echo the union's own policies.

This approach would put the pressure on those who wish to maintain their union's affiliation to Labour – they would have to fight for real changes in Labour's policies.

A campaign waged in this way by a united coalition of the left would go to the core of Labour's financial foundations, and would also focus the debate in the trade unions onto politics and policies.

Unions such as the GMB have flirted in the past with the idea of withdrawing funding from sponsored MPs who do not endorse GMB policy, although they appear to have selected generally obscure

MPs who receive little or no GMB funding to begin with.

Even UNISON's Labour Link suspended support to Labour – in the run-up to local council elections – in 2006 as it pressed for a solution to its dispute over local government pensions.

These limited gestures give a glimpse of what could be achieved by trade unions with a clear view of the policies they want, and the self-respect to pull the funding from any party that refuses them support.

Let's not wait until Brown's wretched team goes down with all hands to a smug and cynical David Cameron.

If we succeed, who knows? A wider coalition of the left that fights together on these issues in the unions may well prove the basis for a broader left party of the future that fights and wins local and national elections, the way Respect has begun to do in Tower Hamlets and Birmingham.

## TUC Congress 2008

# Prison Officers call for a general strike

If someone had tried to tell me ten years ago that one of the most militant trade unions at the TUC Congress in 2008 would be the Prison Officers Association, I would have thought they were crazy.

Yet that is exactly what happened last week. On key issues such as the public sector pay freeze and the anti-union laws the POA was leading the way.

On the first day Congress debated an important motion from UNISON for coordinated action against the 2% pay freeze and attempts by the government to make low-paid workers pay for the crisis. UNISON deputy general secretary Keith Sonnet rightly insisted that "we will not bear the brunt of the crisis" and that "workers do not cause inflation – they are the casualties of it struggling to make ends meet".

The motion he supported, however, called rather vaguely on the unions to campaign and demonstrate against the freeze without defining what the action should be. The POA amendment went right to the weak spot of the motion, with a proposal to add the rather important word "strike" to the call for days of action. It would then call for joint days of coordinated "strike" action.

POA general secretary Brian Caton put a good case.

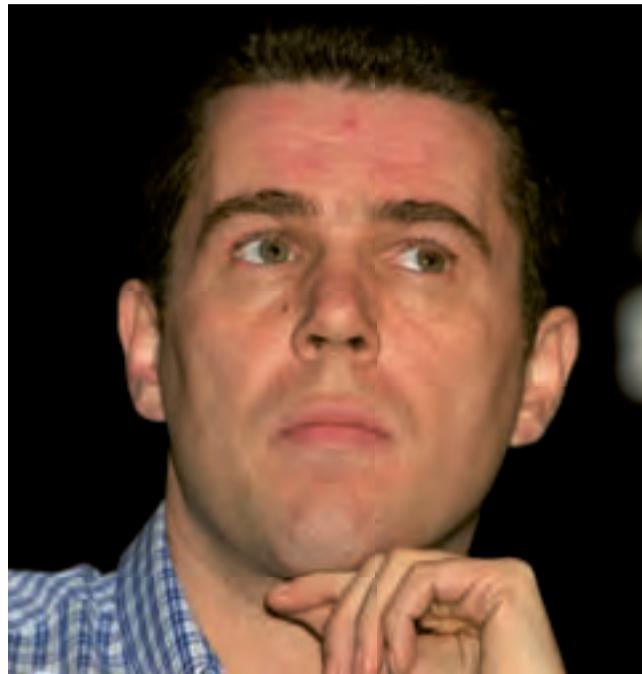
"The blue sails of the Tory Party are on the horizon," he said, and "if we are weak when they get here, we will lose what worker rights we have got left". He went on to urge the delegates to back the amendment and turn the proposed days of action into days of mass strikes.

Mark Serwotka the PCS general secretary backed him up, saying that the attacks on public sector workers' living standards which were being carried out were the clearest sign that the government had lost the plot.

There was then a bizarre twist. After several big unions supported the amendment it appeared to have been passed. It was then declared defeated and the original UNISON motion adopted unamended.

It emerged that the biggest union Unite, which had supported and spoken in favour of the amendment, had failed to vote and had been registered as abstaining.

Remarkably the union later claimed that its voting cre-



Mark Serwotka general secretary of the civil servants union the PCS.

Picture: Andrew Ward

**"The attacks on public sector worker's living standards are the clearest sign that the government has lost the plot."**

**Mark Serwotka**

entials had been "misplaced", and that they had been unable to vote! Pull the other one seemed to be the obvious response; it's got bells on!

The POA was quickly in the front line again, however, with a motion, again moved by Brian Caton, calling for a series of one day general strikes which would go on until the government repeals the anti union laws brought in by the Tories.

It was the first time for many years that the TUC had discussed the possibility of any kind of general strike, let alone a series of them.

Caton explained that the POA had been stripped of the right to strike by a Tory government in 1993, and that Labour had done nothing to reverse this situation. He went on:

"Yes have our rallies. Yes, challenge the legislation in Parliament -- but we need to need to show our strength and we do this by withdrawing our labour."

The motion was strongly opposed from the platform by TUC general secretary Brendan Barber who pointed out that such action would itself be illegal and the TUC could not be involved in it. He was supported in this by Billy Hayes of the CWU, who urged the POA to remit its motion.

Equally strong support, however, came from Bob Crow of the RMT who backed the motion to the hilt pointing out that fears about "illegal action" were against the spirit and history of the trade union movement, which was founded on illegality. Bob Crow insisted that the RMT would stand side by side with any union which was fighting for its rights. The motion, however, was defeated overwhelmingly.

One of the biggest debates at the Congress was in the session on the economy, around the rather obvious call for a windfall tax on the super profits being made by the oil companies: a policy dismissed by New Labour.

Tony Woodley of Unite pointed out that: "the greedy oil companies have made tens of billions and, in the next four years, they will make an extra £15 billion out of the British public. With that money they could gold plate every house in the country, never mind lag the loft".

Alan Thornett

## The union link with Labour

The Labour Party was originally built by the trade unions at the beginning of the last century, when it became clear to even the dimmest and most conservative of the trade union leaders that neither of the then dominant capitalist parties – the Conservatives and the Liberals – would legislate to grant unions the legal freedoms they needed to operate.

But just as the trade union leaders themselves had a very limited agenda for achieving partial gains for their members from the employers, the Labour Party that reflected their policies has never been an anti-capitalist party, but one seeking only to work within the existing political and economic system.

Perhaps because of this shared political limitation, the big unions' link with Labour has lasted ever since. Even though the trade unions today are nowhere near

their peak strength of 10-12 million members, the trade unions have remained a key source of financial and organisational support, currently accounting for around 90% of Labour funding.

### DONATIONS

Since 2005 trade unions have donated almost £30 million to Labour, 20% more than the donations that followed the 2001 election. UNITE alone has donated £11m since the 2005 election. UNISON gave £2.12m last year. The GMB gives £1.4m a year. In the first six months of 2008 unions forked out £5 million to Labour, as it picked fights with public sector workers, got hammered in local elections and watched its chances of reelection disappear in by-election disasters.

Yet rather than listen to the unions, Brown's team has been courting donations from a handful of super-rich fat cats

from private equity and merchant banking companies, who have clearly been influential in shaping government policy.

Labour is happy to listen to policies from big business too. The popular option of a windfall tax on energy companies, proposed by unions and campaigners, is rejected – on the urging of the energy companies. The latest brutal plans to shake up the welfare state have been drawn up by a multi-millionaire banker, David Freud – plans now outrageously endorsed by the unions: city academies give wealthy religious fanatics and others, a hand in shaping education ... again now with unions' tacit endorsement.

Union leaders are squandering millions of members' money to support a government that is systematically kicking them in the teeth, and which refuses even to consider

the policies the unions want to promote.

### PROPPING UP FAILURE

The big unions are therefore not only tied in with the new policy platform, they are the key to bailing New Labour out of its financial crisis ... and funding its next, doomed, election effort. Support for New Labour also means attacking Respect and others on the left who argue for an alternative approach.

Propping up Gordon Brown in this way is a scandalous way to waste union members' hard-earned subscription money: the same amount could much more productively be spent supporting campaigns against the worst New Labour policies – while the threat to withdraw all or most of the union financial support might well secure a change of policy.



Squeezing us dry: Gordon Brown

Picture: Andrew Ward

# Yvonne Ridley joins over 40 international peace activists aboard the Liberty as they



Yvonne Ridley receives her new passport from Palestinian Prime Minister, Ismael Haniyeh

# BREAK THE SEIGE OF GAZA

**T**he last time I tried to get in to Gaza I was strip-searched, interrogated for 10 hours and denied entry on the grounds that I was a terrorist.

This is how Israel treats journalists. My cameraman did not fare much better. "Why do I always get the ugly one!" he wailed as one of his interrogators snapped on a pair of surgical gloves with a sadistic glee and asked him to bend over.

Israel, that great 'democracy' festering like a ripe pustule on the face of the Middle East, did not want to let yet another western news team in to report on the elections which swept Hamas to victory.

Travelling to Palestine is a humiliating affair for anyone, so when nine months ago, I was asked if I would like to sail into Gaza and smash the

blockade I had to say yes.

It sounded really dashing and romantic ... more than 40 international peace activists, representing 17 different countries breaking the siege of Gaza, the world's largest open air prison.

Of course the reality is always different and so it was on this occasion. Film-maker Aki Nawaz and myself boarded one of the two boats leaving Cyprus for Gaza. Apart from showing our solidarity with the Free Gaza Movement ([www.freegaza.org](http://www.freegaza.org)) we were also shooting a documentary which will be shown on Press TV later this year.

We had already spent nearly two weeks on board the Liberty sailing around the Greek islands making our way to Cyprus. Sounds idyllic doesn't it? Well the Liberty and its sister ship The Free Gaza are

more than 25 years old with limited sleeping accommodation and two toilets but no bathroom, shower or running hot water.

By the time we had fought the elements and braved the volatile east Mediterranean waters we looked like shipwreck survivors as we arrived in Larnaca.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

After a couple of days in port, having cleaned and scrubbed up (the passengers not the boats), watched by the media we headed off, with some ceremony and not a little trepidation for our destination 30 hours away.

By this time Aki and I had been away from the UK for more than three weeks and in that time we had witnessed and endured a psychological war between Israel and its

fanatical Zionist supporters, and ourselves. Some passengers had received intimidation and direct threats by phone and e-mail warning them not to set out on the trip.

Fellow journalist and traveller Lauren Booth, who also happens to be Tony Blair's sister-in-law, revealed that her family had received death threats. Another reported that his mother and daughter had been physically threatened. I received some sarcastic emails and there were other forms of intimidation.

Just before we set off from Larnaca, Tzipi Livni, Israel's Foreign Minister, had in a snide off-the-record comment hoped that we could swim. The Commander of the Israeli navy announced he was going to play some war games off the coast of Gaza.

He also said he was throwing

a 35-mile exclusion zone around the area while the military exercises were underway and warned all shipping, including any on humanitarian missions, that they entered the zone at their own peril.

Shaken but undeterred we all agreed to continue. As night fell the sea became volatile and we encountered three metre waves, huge swells and perilous deck conditions which caused a large number of passengers to fall sea sick.

Then, without warning, in the pitch black, all our communications went down. Someone had electronically brought down our satellite system, the radios we used to communicate between boats and even most of our satellite telephones as well as.

There we were, in the dark, in international waters with no way



A Palestinian fishing fleet.

of communicating with the outside world. They say the darkest hour comes before the dawn and this was certainly the case.

We knew there were some naval vessels, around three I think, circling nearby as we crossed from international into Palestinian waters 12 miles from the coast. After some discussion we decided we would continue undaunted, and we did.

Then, unbelievably our radio communication was partly restored and were told that the Israeli navy had quit the area.

In almost quiet disbelief we continued until we saw the Gazan skyline appear on the horizon. It was a magical moment and we cheered in utter disbelief. In this shattering psychological war, Israel had blinked first and we had won.

#### UNFORGETTABLE GREETING

Our feeling of utter disbelief was shared by the good citizens of Gaza who, on hearing that we were coming in, turned out in their tens of thousands to give us a greeting I will never forget.

I can only describe the scenes as being like those in Germany when the first brick was chipped off the Berlin Wall as the Free Gaza and Liberty became the first two ships in more than 40 years to sail into the port of Gaza.

There was much flag-waving and jubilation and quite a few people asked me: "Where's George?" It seems that Respect's George Galloway has a huge fan-base in the Gaza Strip.

Over the next few days we were taken around Gaza and shown the sights ... and I can tell you they were grim.

The infrastructure has been virtually destroyed. Hospitals have broken-down equipment which needs urgent repair. Ninety per cent of local industry has closed because replacements for machines cannot get through the blockade. Nor can vital medicines, food or other supplies.

Fulbright scholars and other students who have won scholarships and places at universities abroad are trapped in Gaza, unable to travel to further their education.

The sick and dying who need urgent medical treatment are also held at the border crossings.

**Without warning, in the pitch black, all our communications went down.**

Israel switches off the water and the power as and when it suits and basically plays God with peoples' lives.

And the Egyptian authorities are no better as they uphold the brutal siege on the Rafah border.

But I reserve most of my criticism for the Palestinian leadership in the West bank. Abu Mazen handles millions of euros and dollars in aid but none of it goes to his people in Gaza. He too is part of the Zionist siege.

Hamas, frustrated and thwarted, finally took over in Gaza last year pushing out the corrupt, money-grubbing politicians from Fatah who supported Abu Mazen. And despite what was said, his house was not ransacked. I saw it with my own eyes ... a beautiful, Hollywood-style mansion, surrounded by poverty.

After a few short days we headed back to Larnaca taking some extra passengers with us. We left behind ten volunteers, including Lauren Booth, who wanted to do more work on the ground.

#### SYMBOLIC VICTORY

The return voyage was just as historic and represented the first time in living memory that Palestinians have been able to freely enter and leave their country.

UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Territories, Richard Falk, has written that: "The landing of two wooden boats carrying 46 human rights activists in Gaza is an important symbolic victory. This non-violent initiative of the Free Gaza Movement focused attention around the world on the stark reality that the 1.5 million residents of Gaza have endured a punitive siege for more than a year.

This siege is a form of collective punishment that constitutes a massive violation of Article 33 of the Fourth

Geneva Convention. The siege, the coastal blockade, and over-flights by Israeli aircraft all bear witness to the fact that despite Israel's claimed 'disengagement' in 2005, these realities on the ground establish that Gaza remains under Israeli occupation, and as a result Israel remains legally responsible for protecting the human rights of its civilian population.

By severely restricting the entry of food, fuel, and medicine the economic and social rights of the people of Gaza have been systematically violated. There is widespread deafness among the people of Gaza that is blamed on the frequent sonic booms produced by over-flying Israeli military aircraft. For this reason the peace boats brought 200 hearing aids to Gaza."

#### PALESTINIAN CITIZEN

There is one success story in Gaza I would like to mention - crime is down eighty per cent since Hamas came to power. I suggested to the Mayor of Gaza that he should travel to London to help out Boris Johnson who is clearly struggling with his pledge to make the streets of London safer.

I have been in many cities across the world and with the exception of a few, I've never felt safer than I did walking around Gaza one of the few places in the Middle East where freedom of speech can be heard loud and proud.

And don't believe the Islamophobic hype spewed out by anti-Hamas media either. I went into the University of Gaza where I saw hundreds of young Muslim women listening, learning and lecturing.

Furthermore, a few of the events I went to involved a lot of music and dancing. That's the other thing about the people of Gaza, they refuse to be victims.

Their resilience and outlook in the face of this brutal siege has been, for me, really humbling. It seems the harder Israel tries to grind them into the ground, the tougher they get.

On my last day Ismael Haniyeh, the Palestinian Prime Minister came to issue all the boat people with Palestinian passports. "You are a Palestinian citizen now," he said as he handed me mine. I turned with joy to the media and shouted: "At last, a Prime Minister I can be proud of".

## US Government forced to come clean

THE Bush Administration has finally admitted that it held a woman known as Prisoner 650 in Bagram, Afghanistan following an international campaign spearheaded by Respect's Yvonne Ridley.

The astonishing admission was made on September 5 in a letter from Richard LeBaron, the US Charge D'Affaires in London, more than two months after Yvonne launched her campaign.

Her dramatic July press conference in Pakistan is also thought to have triggered the sudden appearance of Dr Aafiya Siddiqui who is now in custody in New York following a bizarre shooting incident in Afghanistan in which she was severely injured.

Ten days earlier, at the press conference in Islamabad, Yvonne called on the media help to demand that the US hand over Prisoner 650 immediately.

'I don't know her name or what her mental or physical condition is but I do know her prisoner number and I do know she has been sexually and physically abused by her US jailers. I also believe she is from Pakistan,' Ridley told the assembled media.

#### AIFIYA SIDDQUI

The media speculated that Prisoner 650 was Dr Aafiya Siddiqui who had been missing for five years after she and her three children disappeared from their Karachi home.

Justice movement leader Imran Khan hosted the press conference in Islamabad and pledged to help Yvonne in her quest to find prisoner 650. He began exerting pressure on the Pakistan Government while back in London. Lord Ahmed Nazir also pledged his support.

After he fired off a round of letters a response came from the US Embassy informing him that Prisoner 650 did exist and that she was NOT Dr Aafiya Siddiqui.

Lord Ahmed, a patron of the human rights organisation Cage Prisoners, told a press conference about this latest development.

At the start of this month Imran Khan stated at a press conference in London that 'the US Administration has continually misled us in our attempts to discover the



**Aafiya Siddiqui after her release in July.**

true identity of Prisoner 650 and have even denied her existence previously. We need to know the extent of Pakistan's co-operation in the involvement of Prisoner 650 and Dr Aafiya Siddiqui now that we know the two are separate cases.

#### GREY LADY OF BAGRAM

Afterwards Yvonne said: 'The irony is, had I not gone to Guantanamo Bay to film a documentary none of this would have come out. When I returned to the UK from Cuba I re-interviewed Moaazam Begg about his book Enemy Combatant and he relayed to me this haunting story of the Grey Lady of Bagram and how he could still hear her screams at night.'

I put it to him that maybe the screams were recorded onto a tape and played to him as part of the mental torture programme inflicted by the FBI and CIA but he said she was real and furthermore there were eye-witnesses. I resolved then and there to try and do something.

I knew the story would have more of an impact in Pakistan with the media since our media is largely racist and couldn't give a toss about a Muslim woman being beaten and raped in Bagram. The Pakistan media did a superb job and now we are getting to the truth but there is still a long way to go.

'America has to be completely transparent now and tell the truth about the women they refer to as female enemy combatants. And the Pakistan Government also has to come clean and reveal the truth about its role in prisoner 650 as well as the kidnapping and detention of Dr Aafiya Siddiqui.'

For more information go to Cage Prisoners website [www.cageprisoners.com](http://cageprisoners.com)



# New law no help to trafficked women

Harriet Harman has once again announced her support for outlawing prostitution in Britain. Two weeks ago Harman, who is Labour deputy leader and minister for women, declared that banning paying for sex could help to end the trafficking of women and children, and tackle the exploitation of women.

Just over a year ago Harman first signalled her interest in looking at ways for making paying for sex a crime when she announced that the government would be looking at Swedish laws on prostitution.

No-one should be fooled by Harman's pseudo-feminist rhetoric. There are many measures that her government could take to help the thousands of women drawn into prostitution, but adding yet another new crime to the statute book is not one of them.

In the decade since Sweden criminalized the buying of sex, street prostitution in Sweden fell but prostitution via the internet has risen has fallen. Prostitutes' organisations have pointed out that criminalising the men who buy sex only pushes women into darker, less frequented areas, making them more vulnerable.

It is women who work the streets, the most marginalized of all prostitutes, who suffer the most from such legislation. New Labour has done nothing to relieve the exploitation of those caught up in the sex industry.

On the contrary its policies have made life worse for prostitutes. Labour treats prostitution as anti-social behaviour, issues prostitutes with ASBOs and regularly declares 'zero tolerance' for street prostitution.

All attempts at helping or rehabilitating 'sex workers' are limited and distorted by Labour's instinct to punish rather than help. Breaching the ASBOs can incur a prison sentence of up to five years. Experience of prison and a criminal record makes it ever harder for women to leave the sex trade.

One study of street prostitution suggests that over 60 percent had been raped, over 70 percent assaulted and over 75 percent were homeless. The English Collective of Prostitutes suggests that the police are dismissive of attacks regarding it as just part of the job.

## HYPOCRISY

Yet Labour has cut back on the kind of programs that could help address the needs of these women. Instead, their laws lock desperate and vulnerable women into a cycle of despair.

It is the greatest hypocrisy for Harriet Harman to pose as a friend of trafficked women. Here, too, New Labour has made life more dangerous and damaging for the victims of abuse.

Women and girls forced into the sex indus-

try against their will suffer appalling abuse and inhumane treatment. Many are promised legitimate jobs then 'bonded', which means that they become the property of the creditor until the debt of transportation is paid and they can then be sold on to other owners.

Their passports are taken from them. They live in constant fear of violence and are at the mercy of their traffickers and their clients. Most trafficked women are kidnapped from poor and crisis ridden countries and taken to richer countries.

According to a US government report, most trafficked women come from Moldova, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, China, Thailand and Nigeria. They are most likely to end up in Israel, Germany, Japan, Belgium, Turkey and the US, countries with a 'very high level' of trafficked women. Britain ranks among the countries with a 'high level' of trafficked women.

This lucrative network of abuse and violence is possible precisely because of the twin criminalisations of illegal migration and prostitution which deprive women of any civil rights. This criminalisation means women can be arrested, locked up and fined on the evidence of the condoms that they carry.

Some 75 percent of those working in the sex industry in Britain are migrants, while around one in 20 are trafficked women. All

these women are at risk from not only harassment and abuse, but also imprisonment and deportation, courtesy of New Labour's policies.

Harman's government refuses to sign up to the Council of Europe convention against trafficking in people because it stipulates that trafficked women should be granted residency in the country they have been trafficked to.

Harman bemoans the fate of trafficked women, but will not do the one thing that would make a huge difference to their lives and allow them to stay. As one expert has written, 'The overall picture is that trafficked women are considered above all else as undesirable aliens.'

The fact that they may be victim to sexual violence and exploitation is completely subordinate or even irrelevant to their immigration status. It is almost impossible for migrant women to ask for protection if exploitation, violence and forced prostitution occur.'

Decriminalising prostitution and offering all trafficked women asylum in Britain would actually help prostitutes and the victims of trafficking. Harman wants to put a feminist gloss on yet more authoritarian policies which will make life harder for women already struggling to survive.

Judy Cox

# Time to put union rights on the menu

Thousands and thousands of restaurant workers, most but not all Bangladeshis working in curry houses, crowded into Trafalgar Square last April.

They were protesting against the iniquitous immigration rules that the government has now introduced, licensing those seeking to bring in employees from outside the European Union and making it much more difficult to get permits for Bangladeshis to come here to work.

I do not want to stop Polish and other European workers coming to Britain. They add to the rich diversity of British life. However it is clearly unfair that those with whom Britain has had a long historical connection through empire and then Commonwealth should

be discriminated against because of Britain's EU membership.

Many people from Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, have now lived here for many years. The vast majority of curry restaurants in Britain, which have become such a highlight of the very diverse British cuisine, are owned and staffed by people of Bangladeshi origin.

The distinctive cooking and culture of these restaurants cannot be reproduced if they were no longer run by Bangladeshis, just as it is unthinkable that Turkish restaurants could in the main be run by non-Turks.

Most Bangladeshis have historically supported Labour, so it is a real kick in the teeth that Labour has brought in this legislation,

motivated as always by a fear of a racist backlash, even though many of the targets of that backlash today have become the new immigrants from Eastern Europe.

## PROTECTION

This situation of restaurant workers more generally, in this low wage and long hours business, is crying out for unionisation and trade union protection.

If the restaurant industry became unionised, it would improve the situation of workers who are some of the most oppressed and exploited, ensure their employment was protected from arbitrary decision of the owner and that everyone received the minimum wage at the very least.

Not long after I arrived here in Tower Hamlets I went to a meet-

ing at the Town Hall about learning English. One restaurant owner said his kitchen staff did not need to know English just be able to make out the initials for the different curries. I said that being able to speak the language of where you live is a human right. Without it, how can someone know what their rights are? People are workers, not slaves.

Trade union rights would help families here and beyond in Bangladesh and other countries, where so many suffer from grinding poverty. It would also ensure that employment became regularised and employers and employees paid their fair share of taxation.

But at the same time we also need the government to accept that workers on temporary work permits should be allowed to reapply for an

extension of their permits in Britain rather than have to leave their employment and return home.

Joining a trade union is, for me, a basic human right. I am determined that my restaurant will become the first in Britain to be unionised.

After the holy month of Ramadan is over at the end of September, the workers in my restaurant in Brick Lane intend to meet in order to form a union. They intend to join Unite, the union George Galloway has been a member of for 35 years.

Together in one union they will be stronger, and they will also be stronger for having the voice of the likes of Tony Woodley speaking up for them.

Azmal Hussain, Chair, Tower Hamlets Respect



Communication Workers union (CWU) on the march.

Picture: Andrew Wiard

# Working class people need their own party!

**NICK WRACK**, National Secretary Respect

The five days of discussion and debate at the Convention of the Left will confirm that the left is far more united on answers to the problems we face than is commonly believed. Of course, there will be differences of opinion and emphasis. How could there not be? But a cursory glance at the issues up for discussion reveals that there is far more that unites us than sets us apart.

The issues for the left to tackle hardly need spelling out – the global assault of neo-liberalism, war, the destruction of our environment.

For eleven years New Labour, first under Blair and now under Brown, has implemented policies to the detriment of working-class people – privatisation, deregulation, cuts, anti-trade union legislation and pro-big business legal and tax regimes.

In the face of recession and increasing uncertainty for millions of working-class families both Gordon Brown and his supporters and the arch-Blairites who call for his head have only one answer and that is to make workers pay for the crisis.

The response from the New Labour leadership to the humiliating election defeats in Crewe and

Nantwich, Henley and then Glasgow East has been to move further to the right, arguing for more privatisation and refusing to allow pay rises to keep pace with inflation. The abject failure of Brown to stand up to the fuel bosses and implement a windfall tax on energy profits is a crystal clear indication that he stands exactly where he did when Blair was prime minister – on the side of big business and against working class families.

#### ABANDONED

New Labour long ago abandoned its working-class voters and more and more are reciprocating by abandoning New Labour. At the next general election millions of former Labour voters will be looking for a party to support. A Tory victory looks inevitable.

The central issue of working-class representation remains. Who will those opposed to privatisation and war be able to vote for? Who will get the support of those who want to get rid of the anti-trade union legislation or combat climate change?

Seldom a week goes by without one or more section of the left carrying out fantastic campaigning work on one of the many issues on the Convention's agenda. This is vital, important work. But we need

#### Who will those opposed to privatisation and war be able to vote for?

to ensure that the people involved in these many different issues have the opportunity to vote in elections for someone who agrees with them.

The issues being discussed at the Convention all point to the need for common action by the left to resist attack and to promote policies and argument for change. This must mean not just joint action on single issues but common struggle on a shared political programme to build a new broad party of the working class.

Notwithstanding our differences, we have a shared enemy in the capitalist system and those who defend it. We should seek the maximum unity in between elections and at elections. If the left wants to win elections it has to be involved in the communities and workplaces consistently in between elections.

There have been disappointing setbacks with the splits in the Scottish Socialist Party and Respect. We have to learn the lessons of these experiences and try again. A new party will not emerge over-

night, fully formed and armed with a programme with which everyone agrees. But the situation is urgent and such a party has to be built.

It would be a real step forward if something concrete could emerge out of the Convention as a stepping stone to further collaboration. We should welcome and participate in all initiatives aimed at moving towards the creation of a united party of the working class. Left trade union leaders could play a decisive role in getting this project off the ground.

Respect has demonstrated that the left can win elections, with the successes of George Galloway in Tower Hamlets and Salma Yaqoob and other councillors in Birmingham, Tower Hamlets and Newham. Respect has built up a significant layer of support in these poor, deprived areas with a large working-class Muslim community.

Respect will continue to develop this work, seeking to build support in working-class com-

munities across the country. But Respect is still small and cannot present an alternative everywhere. Respect seeks to work with all other organisations and individuals who want to build a left-wing alternative, with a view to presenting the broadest possible challenge at elections. This could include electoral alliances, non-aggression pacts, joint lists and other such methods of collaboration.

#### MILLIONS WANT CHANGE

The Euro elections next year present a real opportunity for groups, individual and parties on the left to get together to discuss presenting a common list or standing under an umbrella name on a regional or national level. These discussions need to begin straight away.

We all need to reach out to the millions who want change. We need to attract the new generation of activists and involve minority and immigrant communities. There is a massive potential for a party that stands for an alternative to capitalism and its effects.

Separately we are much weaker than we are when combined. The old adage that 'unity is strength' applies as much to the political arena as to the industrial. At this Convention we should commit ourselves to that spirit of solidarity.

Your Respect send your stories and pictures to news@respectrenewal.org

## Manchester



Respect meets its match: On Sunday 13th July Manchester Respect hosted a five-a-side football tournament in Cheetham Hill. The event was a great success with over 60 young people from the area taking part.

At the end of the event a Respect Tournament trophy was awarded to the winning team – the Catalonia Devils, who

won all their eight matches. Many agreed to meet again for regular games, which are now happening on Wednesday evenings and weekends. Many of the youth took away a Respect paper and contact card.

Derek Fraser and Clive Searle  
Manchester Respect

## Solidarity with Somalia

South Manchester Respect held a public meeting in Moss Side on the crisis in Somalia. The speaker was Malik Sheikh, the Somali Manager of the "Cohesion Legal Centre" in Moss Side and a Human Rights Activist who is campaigning for his people who are struggling here in the UK and for the millions of Somalis clinging to survive at home.

The meeting was attended by

several men from the Somali community in Moss Side and their concerns were discussed: mainly how to unite the Somalis in Manchester and inspire the 9,000 strong community to come together protest at the UK government's support of the Ethiopian occupation. They also want to organize support for failed asylum seekers from Somalia and raise awareness of the humanitarian disaster in their home country.

The meeting acknowledged that the Respect Party was the only political party that had put Somalia on their agenda and that George Gal-

loway's speech in Parliament in June which criticized the British Government's blind loyalty to Bush's policy was much appreciated.

To develop the Somali protest group further it was agreed that the next stage would be to invite all the leaders of the various Somali community groups in Manchester to a meeting to discuss how they can work together. This meeting will be initiated by Malik Sheikh with the full support of Respect.

Lucinda Lavelle  
South Manchester Respect

## London

## Respect at the Pongu Tamil

Every year thousands of members of London's Tamil community come together for a day of music and politics at the Pongu Tamil festival.

The word "pongu" translates as 'revival' or 'uprising'. The organisers say that the word Tamil denotes not the language but the people who speak Tamil. Pongu Tamil symbolises the quest towards self-rule as an alternative to armed struggle.

The Pongu began in Jaffna University as a student protest and has become an international festival of Tamil solidarity and resistance to the Sri Lankan government's murderous campaign to deny the area self-determination. In Melbourne, Sydney, New Zealand, Italy, Canada and many other countries similar gathering of Tamil families and com-

munities were taking place.

My message to the crowd was simple. The first part was that any peace deal which involves the imperialists in London or Washington will not bring peace with justice. It will deliver only an arrangement which suits whoever is in power in those cities and the oppressive Sri Lankan government and he used the example of the colonial Stor-



mont regime in my native Belfast.

My second point was that the real friends of the Tamil struggle for self-determination and peace will be found in the progressive socialist organisations and in the workers' movement. I urged listeners who have jobs to join a trade union I reminded them that there they will be able to make workers from all over Britain aware of the struggle of the Tamil people.

Referring to the rocketing cost of living, wage freezes and poor housing many working people face I urged festival-goers to get involved in political organisations in Britain. Respect I told them is the party that is fighting for social justice and against war and that in Respect they would find many friends who will also support them in their struggle for self determination for the Tamil people.

Liam Mac Uaid

## Birmingham

### Friends defended

Supporters of one of Birmingham's most historic buildings are fighting to keep it open after the Liberal Democrat-run Hall Green constituency threatened to close it. The Friends Institute on Moseley Road, Balsall Heath, built in 1898, and given to the City by the Cadbury family, is home to some 40 community groups and businesses.

The Liberal Democrats wanted to close the building rather than pay a minimal amount of money to repair its boiler.

Lib Dem Councillor Martin Mullaney told the Birmingham Post: "I would advise those who want to keep the Institute open not to pursue the line of trying to make Hall Green constituency pay."

We are determined to fight to keep this historic and beautiful building and indispensable community resource open.

Friends of the 'Friends' organised a lively protest outside the last Council meeting, and Councillor Salma Yaqoob presented a petition on their behalf.

Now supporters are meeting regularly to plan their campaign, and to come up with proposals to keep the Friends Institute open. Campaigners have already scored a victory by preventing the council from implementing their plans to immediately close the building.

Coun Salma Yaqoob said: "I am determined to do everything within my power to ensure that all those concerned about preserving

Birmingham's heritage, as well as the valuable work carried out by the community groups in the Friend's Institute are included in meaningful consultation and constructive plans to keep this precious building open – both in the short term and in a sustainable long term."

## Tower Hamlets

### Labour climb down on housing

New Labour has finally announced that it is abandoning its stock transfer policy. Cllr. Marc Francis, Lead Member for Housing, announced that the council was abandoning its plan to ballot residents on Chick-sand East and Chicksand West estates in Banglatown and Spital-fields ward.

This follows a very active campaign led by Respect members against stock transfer including the distribution of a personal letter from George Galloway opposing the transfer.

In the face of its repeated failure to win a majority of residents to transfer on a significant number of estates over the last three years since Respect came on the scene, New Labour has now transferred its housing department to an Arms Length Management Organisation, denying council residents in Tower Hamlets a ballot on this transfer which they would have certainly lost.

Councillor Fozol Miah

## Bristol



Respect members on a stall at the Islamic fair in Eastville park.

**Cllr. Abjol Miah**

# A fairer way of funding

Poverty in this country is set to increase. It now seems certain that unemployment is going to rise. The poor will also be hit hardest by rising inflation as essential food and services that consume a larger proportion of their income.

Tony Woodley, the leader of Unite, is quite right to argue for a windfall tax on the utility companies which have raked in huge profits and continue to raise dividends to their share owners. It's a disgrace that Brown has not only dismissed the idea but intends to do the minimum to alleviate the fuel poverty into which so many have been plunged.

Despite the fact that local government has had so much power stripped from it by successive Tory and New Labour governments, it still has a very important role in trying to alleviate poverty and, potentially I believe, in counteracting the recession.

Here in Tower Hamlets a three year budget has recently been set. In response to questions I put to the officials involved in budget setting and targeting, they claimed that they had tried to anticipate economic developments and were confident things will be OK. Such optimism must border on the complacent if not the foolhardy.

We in the Respect Group are arguing that the council needs to be planning now both for a significant economic downturn

which will see a fall not just in revenues but also a rise in costs. I certainly want to see local government workers properly compensated for the rise in inflation but fair and just increases in wages will raise costs for the council at a time when demand for essential services will also be rising.

As things take a turn for the worse and the financial position of the council deteriorates, there will be two temptations for the New Labour majority on the council: - to raise council tax and to cut services.

## CROSSHEAD

Cutting services is completely unacceptable, especially in this, one of the most deprived boroughs in the country.

We need more spending on services, especially with the downturn, not less. But the council tax is a completely regressive tax, unrelated to the ability to pay and capped for property over a certain value.

We have to have an alternative strategy. The return of the business rate to local government, taken away by Margaret Thatcher in her crusade against the "loony left" municipal socialists in the 1980s, would be a start.

Tower Hamlets has in its midst the second "City of London" at Canary Wharf. It's a national scandal that such opulence

**Cutting services is completely unacceptable, especially in one of the most deprived boroughs in the country**

should sit side by side with such deprivation. Tower Hamlets should directly benefit from the likes of Canary Wharf and also the encroachment of the real City of London into Tower Hamlets in the west of the borough.

Even if the business rate were to be returned, the Treasury may produce corresponding reductions in grant aid to Tower Hamlets, so money will still have to be raised through local taxation. With the council tax so regressive, we have to look hard at alternatives. I am intrigued by the decision of the Scottish parliament to replace the council tax with a local income tax. There are pros and cons with this and the alternative sales tax originally proposed

by the Scottish Socialist Party. But that the council tax has got to go I am in no doubt.

We also need a liberalisation of the rules on local council borrowing. In particular, we need councils once again to be allowed to borrow as well as receiving government grant to build council housing and to provide mortgages.

The government's entire strategy on housing for those who are on low incomes has been to transfer council housing to the private sector in the form of registered social landlords (RSLs) and then subsidise the RSLs and allow them to borrow to build.

However the financial plans of these bodies invariably include significant building for high value private sale. With the housing market in meltdown, so are those plans.

It is all very simple really. The banks because of the sub-prime collapse and the credit crunch are not lending for mortgages.

The construction industry is facing a severe downturn because of the fall in housing starts. And yet there is massive overcrowding and sub-standard housing, none more so than here in Tower Hamlets. The state, and in this instance local government, can, should and indeed must be allowed to step into the breach.

## Councillors' Roundup

Respect councillors have been making the most of a real opportunity to build up their local base of support in Tower Hamlets where the Labour Party has suffered a very serious collapse in support.

**Councillor Abjol Miah** has helped re-establish the Shadwell Youth Forum, organising a community festival, space for football and membership of the Local Area partnership.

He has attended the Brick Lane Youth Development Association (BLYDA) and Cannon Street Road youth festivals and has been involved in fund-raising for an orphanage in Mali promoted by the famous footballer Frederic Kanoute and for orphans in Bangladesh (IQRA).

He has been liaising with council officers relating to various issues of council business – and all this despite the fact he had had a major operation on his ankle and his mobility had been severely impaired.

**Councillors Harun and Mamun** from Shadwell ward organised two very successful events, a barbecue attracting 500 people and an Iftar gathering at Shadwell Mosque attracting 250. They have been making home visits and dealing with case work, most of which

relates to housing and parking matters.

**Councillor Abdul Munim** has been very heavily involved in the campaign over the withdrawal of the S2 bus service and its replacement by the much less satisfactory 488, and has also campaigned against the granting of a licence to a strip club in Bromley-by-Bow.

**Councillor Dulal** had been centrally involved in the Robin Hood Gardens campaign, which included an open air meeting on the estate organised addressed by George Galloway and is now planning to get residents to lobby the full council meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> October.

He has also been involved in helping the Shahjalal Community Centre to get properly established and development plans sorted out, and organised a barbecue which raised £500 for the community centre. He helped procure £150,000 for development at Poplar Recreation Park and has been fighting to secure Cheadle Hall, on Loxley Estate, for the community.

He persuaded council officers to do site visits on Roche House Estate for improvement works and also to three playgrounds to secure investment and improvements.



## Barbecue for Poplar Shahjalal Mosque.

It was a wonderful, sunny Sunday afternoon with a cool breeze. Around four o'clock we gathered on the Will Crooks Estate. As my friends and Councillor Dulal arrived a crowd gathered on the Green. Situated in Limehouse Ward, the Will Crooks Estate is a council estate full of working class people and Respect voters. There are four buildings and in the middle a little play area and a green area.

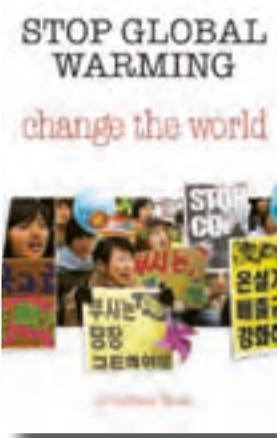
The cars arrived with the charcoal for the barbecue and we set up the gear for the barbecue on the green. The fire was set and slowly the food was barbecued. Around three hundred people joined in; it was really atmospheric and everyone thoroughly enjoyed it.

It was a fundraiser event which I, Councillor Dulal and few others organised the barbecue for the Poplar Shahjalal Mosque to which all the proceeds from this event went. The mosque has

recently got planning permission to convert it into three storey building from which services such as youth activities will be rendered from. There was no obligation for anyone to donate and all were invited to eat as much as they liked. The food and the equipment for the barbecue and expenses were paid for by some of the younger lads from the locality. I had the task of collecting money from people who made generous donations for this good cause. A great team effort raised £530 pounds for the mosque. Special thanks to the young people who paid for all the expenses for the barbecue, to Cllr Dulal and everyone that helped organised the event and donated money.

Abdul Kahir Chowdhury  
Committee member Poplar Shahjalal Mosque  
(Tower Hamlets Respect)

## Review



## Inspiring action on climate change

*Stop Global Warming: Change the World*  
Jonathan Neale  
Bookmarks Publications,  
London, £11.99  
Reviewed by Roy Wilkes

Two years ago George Monbiot published *Heat*, a ground-breaking book which armed a generation of activists with the technical and scientific knowledge to fight climate change. Jonathan Neale's new book starts in a similar vein, by explaining the science of climate change and by showing that the technology already exists to prevent it (or at least to prevent catastrophic abrupt climate change. Climate change as such is already with us, and hitting the world's poor first and hardest.)

But whereas Monbiot concluded that the battle against climate change is 'a campaign against ourselves', Neale takes the opposite tack.

Ordinary people should not be prevailed upon to make sacrifices, an approach which tries to tackle the problem 'at the wrong end of the pipe.' Instead we must build a global mass movement to force through the changes that are needed, particularly in energy production, transport, housing and industry.

And whereas Monbiot tried to develop a utopian scheme of tradable individual carbon rations, Neale explains why such market mechanisms (and others such as green taxation and carbon trading) are incapable of solving the problem.

To fight climate change effectively will necessitate rational planning and extensive government intervention. However, the rich and powerful will fight tooth and nail to prevent this happening, since they will perceive any retreat from neo-liberalism, which has brought pain, hardship and fear to so many people, as a threat to their wealth and power.

Neale suggests demands that are eminently achievable and realistic, yet sufficiently inspiring to motivate people to act.

These include 5 million solar roofs in 5 years; a 20 fold increase in wind power in 5 years (Germany already has ten times the wind power of Britain); 10 million fully insulated homes in 10 years; car free cities; free public transport; public ownership of the railways; an end to airport expansion; union environment reps in every workplace; and policies to guarantee alternative work (with no loss of pay) for all those currently employed in unsustainable industries.

If every union fights hard for these demands, we would not only have a real chance of preventing climate chaos, we would also ensure a better quality of life for all.

Among the most illuminating chapters are those dealing with the history of climate politics. The scientists and environmental NGOs performed an invaluable service to the world by warning us about global warming.

Now everyone knows. But their political strategy, which is based entirely on trying to persuade the rich and powerful to act, was fatally flawed. What is needed now is for the social movements, and in particular the unions, to pick up the baton and run with it.

Neale imagines four possible outcomes to this crisis. The first is that abrupt climate change will overwhelm us. This is all too possible. The second, and least likely outcome, is that the ruling class will see sense and do what needs to be done.

### MASS MOVEMENT

The third possible outcome is that a huge mass movement will force the rulers to act, and that the rulers will make a compromise. And the fourth is global social revolution. We don't yet know which outcome will prevail.

I would take issue with Neale's analysis of the former Soviet Union, which in my opinion leads him to grossly underestimate the global impact of its collapse. And some economists might argue that Neale underestimates the extent to which the rate of profit has been restored under neo-liberalism.

These are issues for ongoing debate within the movement, as are the precise details of the demands we should be raising. But overall this is a wonderful book, a positive and optimistic addition to the armoury of socialists and climate activists alike.

It is written with genuine warmth and humour, and filled with boundless faith in the humanity and decency of ordinary people.

Everyone should read this book and read it soon. Order a copy now from your local bookshop as a way of encouraging them to put it on their shelves. And when you have read it, pass it on to your friends, family and workmates, and get them involved in the movement. We have a planet to save, and in the process of saving it, we have a world to win.



# Letters

**Email:** news@respectrenewal.org

**Post:** Respect, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

## Child M from Iran

'Child M' is an 8 year old Iranian child who's been living in Manchester since June 2007. He came to Britain on holiday with his family but while they were here the Iranian authorities searched and boarded up their home in Iran. They were warned by friends not to return to Iran because an arrest warrant had been issued for Child M's mother and older sister. Because of this they claimed asylum in Britain. They believe they will face the death penalty in Iran for distributing copies of *The Satanic Verses*.

Their asylum claim was turned down due to lack of evidence. In July Child M and his family were detained by Immigration Officers and were due to be deported to Iran. New evidence was obtained and their immediate deportation was halted.

Child M and his family were then locked-up at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre where they were held until 4th September. They spent a total of 51 days in conditions which are prison-like. The detention of

children is "an inhuman process" (Children's Commissioner, September 08), and can "significantly impair a child's mental and physical health," (BID Report into the Detention of Children, March 2008).

The Home Office's own rules say that a child should not be kept in detention if another alternative exists. Whilst they were in detention, Child M's home in Manchester sat empty.

There can be no justification for locking up an 8 year old child.

To prevent further damage to Child M and his family, the UK government should review their position and grant this family asylum.

For more information on the campaign, please contact: Child M Must Stay Campaign, c/o Gorton Mount Primary School, Mount Road, Gorton, Manchester, M18 7GR.

Emma Shaw

## Help clear Karen Reissmann



Karen Reissmann demands a chance to clear her name. On Friday 29th August the Trust which sacked UNISON steward and NEC member Karen Reissmann a year ago made an offer to her to settle her claim for unfair dismissal. The offer made no admission of liability for her sacking, and did not include reinstatement.

Karen immediately announced her determination to fight on: "I am not accepting this offer. It's not simply about the money," she said.

"The principles are too important – that we continue to stand up and defend the right of NHS trade union reps to comment on government policy and its impact on services.

"I want to prove to a court that I was unfairly dismissed. That would protect me, and would also be a reminder to all other NHS Trusts that they cannot sack trade unionists for speaking out."

The fight for her reinstatement has been an official dispute: UNISON have said from the beginning that

"UNISON will vigorously defend our members right to speak out without fear of persecution and we will ensure that Karen will be supported throughout this process and that her interests will be positively defended." However this commitment appears to have ended with the employer's offer of a face-saving deal.

Disgracefully at this crucial stage, without any discussion with Karen or her branch, Karen was informed that as she was not accepting the current offer UNISON legal support would be withdrawn from that point onwards.

The mental health trust had already put in an application for an adjournment of the case until at least November as one of the key witnesses was unable to attend. The chief executive at the centre of her victimisation had already left the Trust.

Contact the Campaign to Defend Karen Reissmann, on 07931 152 001 or 0161 620 9497.

## Zimbabwe anger

Bristol Zimbabwe Association (BZA) is a community organisation representing many the 1000 Zimbabweans living in the city.

On August 30th they staged a demonstration in support of Zimbabweans who have fled their country in fear of their lives, and are now either being treated like criminals, locked up in Detention Centres in this country, or are failed asylum seekers, unable to work and unable to return home for fear of further persecution.

BZA are calling on the British government to release those Zimbabweans languishing in Detention Centres and allow those who have failed their asylum to work, in order to support themselves while they are forced to stay here due to the danger of returning to their home country.

Jo Benefield, Bristol Respect contact [www.bristolzimbabweassociation.org.uk](http://www.bristolzimbabweassociation.org.uk)

# Respect

## Equality

## Socialism

## Peace

## Environment

## Community

## Trade Unionism

An end to the war and occupation in Iraq. We will not join any further imperialist wars.

An end to all privatisation and the return to public ownership of the railways and other public services.

An education system that is not dependent on the ability to pay, that is comprehensive and gives an equal chance in life to every child no matter how wealthy or poor their parents, from nursery to university.

Publicly owned and funded, democratically controlled NHS, free to all users.

Pensions linked to average earnings.

Raising the minimum wage to the EU Decency threshold of £7.40 an hour.

Tax the rich to fund welfare and to close the growing gap between the poor and the wealthy few.

The repeal of the Tory anti-union laws.

Opposition to all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, beliefs (religious or secular), sexual orientation, disabilities or national origin.

The right to selfdetermination of every individual in relation to their religious (or secular) beliefs, and sexual choices.

The defence of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Opposition to the European Union's 'Fortress Europe' policies.

We will strongly oppose the anti-European xenophobic right wing in any Euro referendum. We oppose the 'stability pact' the EU imposes on those who join the euro. This pact would outlaw government deficit spending and reinforce the drive to deregulate the economy. We will therefore vote 'No' in any referendum on this issue.

Support for the people of Palestine and opposition to the apartheid system that oppresses them.

An end to the destruction of the environment by states and corporations for whom profit is more important.

# Crisis: Respect offers a fighting response

Respect MP George Galloway, Birmingham Respect councillor Salma Yaqoob, and award-winning film director Ken Loach will join invited guests among the platform speakers at the Respect National Conference on Saturday 25 October.

There will also be reports from other Respect councillors in Tower Hamlets, Birmingham and Newham.

The main theme of the conference will be on the current economic crisis and its effect on working-class communities and how we can develop policies and actions to defend those communities.

The conference, in the Bishopsgate Centre in East London, will be an excellent opportunity for all Respect members to hear of the work being done by their elected representatives, and by other local branches, and to decide on policies and plans for the next year.

## Respect conference

**Saturday October 25th 2008**

**11am–6pm**  
**Registration opens 10am**

**Bishopsgate Centre, East London**

Central to the discussions will be preparation for the general election campaigns, likely to be in 2010, especially in Birmingham and east London.

A year has passed since Respect split and conference will also be an opportunity to take stock and move forward. The Respect Renewal conference last November was a very good event and we aim for this year's conference to be even better.

Respect members from all over the country will be able to exchange ideas and experiences, and the conference will be open to all the members of Respect Renewal as well as visitors.

Only members of Respect Renewal who are fully paid up on 25 October will be allowed to vote.

Membership until the end of 2008 is now available for £5.

Nick Wrack

## How the conference will work

The conference fee will be £10 per person.

Resolutions must be submitted by 11 October 2008; they can be on any subject.

Respect branches can submit up to three resolutions. Any six members can submit a resolution. Anyone wanting to submit a resolution and seek support from five others can ask for it to be posted on the Respect website.

Amendments to resolutions must be submitted by 22 October 2008.

A Standing Orders Committee will organise conference business and prioritise resolutions.

The conference will elect a new National Council but the size and

method of election will be discussed determined by conference itself. The outgoing National Council has decided not to take a position on this, and to leave the final decision to conference.

Nominations for the new National Council must be received by 10 October 2008. People can nominate themselves. Anyone nominated for the NC must be a paid-up member.

If you would like further information about our conference please contact us at conference@respectrenewal.org or write to: Respect Renewal, c/o PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU and clearly mark envelope 'Conference'.

\* Any organisation that wants to book a stall at the conference should contact the Respect office.

## Are you ready for **RESPECT**?

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please pay NatWest, Temple Branch, PO Box 10720, 217 Strand, London WC2R 1AL sort code 60-80-08, for the credit of the Respect Renewal conference account no. 60601051 the sum of the value indicated above.

Signed .....

Date .....

Return to: Respect PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

# The RespectPaper

Peace | Justice | Equality

SEPTEMBER 2008 80p

## Respect welcomes the Convention of the Left

Over the last few months supporters of Manchester Respect have been working alongside others to organise the Convention of the Left. This will take place in September in Manchester at the same time as the Labour Party Conference. In fact, our Convention will meet just metres from the 'ring of steel' that will surround the New Labour event.

We hope our Convention will stand in start contrast to the New Labour death agony being stage-managed across the road. The Convention is being supported by over 40 organisations from across the spectrum of the Left.

For Manchester Respect the Convention expresses exactly what Respect's politics are all about: bringing together all those who reject the neo-liberal consensus. Our starting point has been to find the points of broad agreement. For only then can we have a constructive and friendly discussion about disagreements, whether over analysis, strategy or tactics?

The Convention will kick off on Saturday 20th September and will be followed by four days of themed debates around the issues of Politics, Planet, People and Peace.

The closing event of the Convention on Wednesday 25th September will be a 'Question Time for the Left' where a panel consisting of Colin Fox (SSP), George Galloway (Respect), Lindsey German (SWP), Robert Griffiths (CPB), John McDonnell (LRC), Mark Serwotka (PCS), Hilary Wainwright (Red Pepper) and



Derek Wall (Green Left) will be quizzed about the issues raised during the week. With panellists restricted to short answers, there will be plenty of time for answers from the floor as well as the top table.

For Respect the Convention is not an end in itself but, hopefully, the start of a positive process seeking to define a new left consensus as the old 'New' Labour falls apart. We will hold a re-call event on November 29th to flesh out the possibilities raised by the Convention. My own wish is to see the development of joint policies or charters – which some, if not all, of the many organisations taking part in the Convention can agree to campaign around. Issues such as free school meals or free public transport – in an era of rising food and fuel prices – could not only become a unifying demand but would make a real, positive difference to people's lives.

We are witnessing the dying days of the New Labour project – but the stark reality is that the Left has mostly failed to benefit from this decline. Instead we have a resurgent Tory party offering themselves as the solution to Brown's failures. If the Left is not to find itself forever marginalised in the political debate we must find new ways of working together, while debating our disagreements constructively.

For more information visit our website at [www.conventionoftheleft.org](http://www.conventionoftheleft.org)

By Clive Searle

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