

Journal of the Alliance for Green Socialism

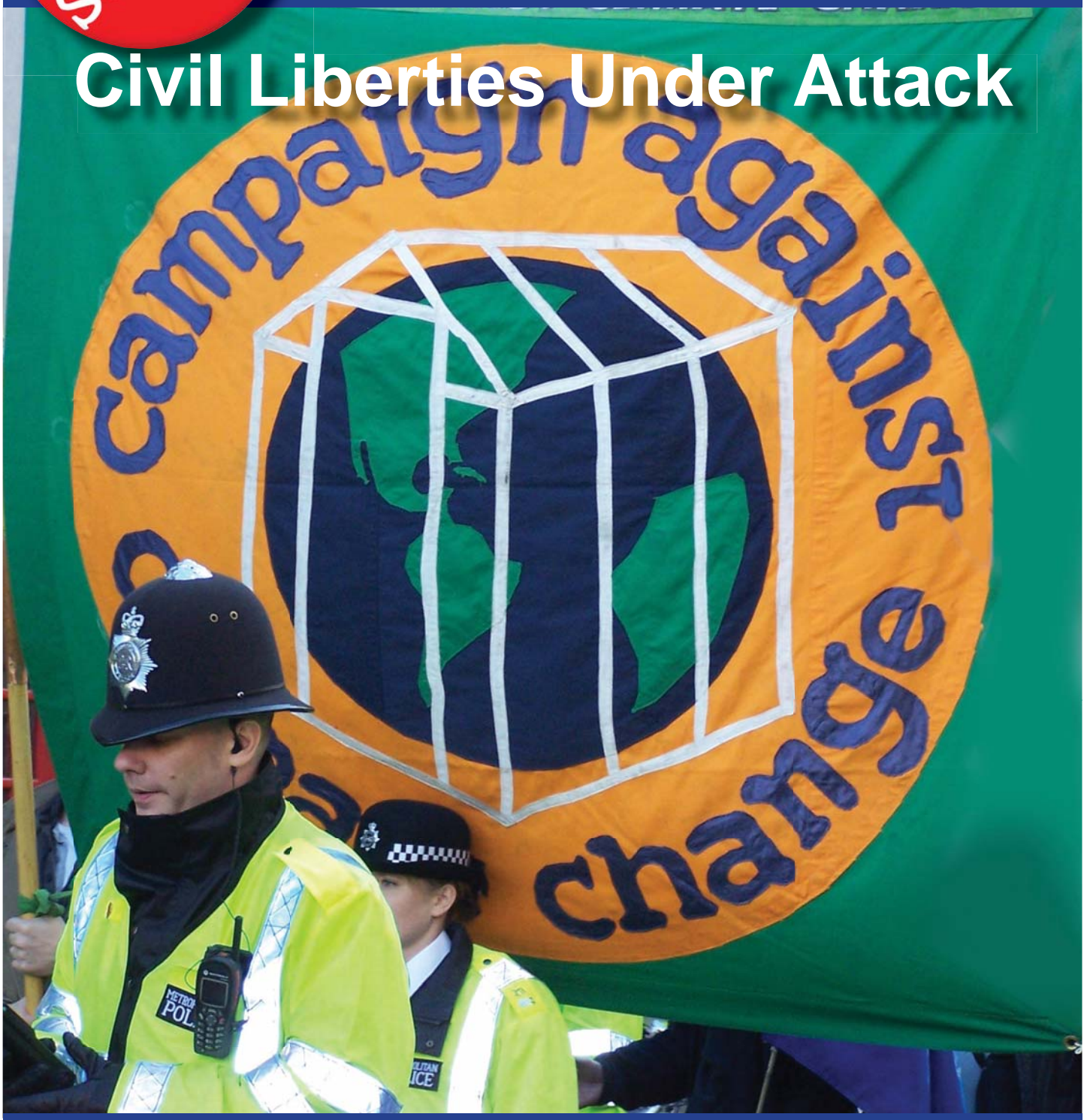


# Green Socialist

Issue No. 39 Spring 2007

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## Civil Liberties Under Attack



**Garth Frankland** on Civil Liberties

**Mike Davies** on Immigration Control

**Abdul Quddus** on Bangladesh

**Eddie Adams** London Column

**Stop the Doomsday Clock** and much, much more



# Editorial: Stop the Doomsday Clock

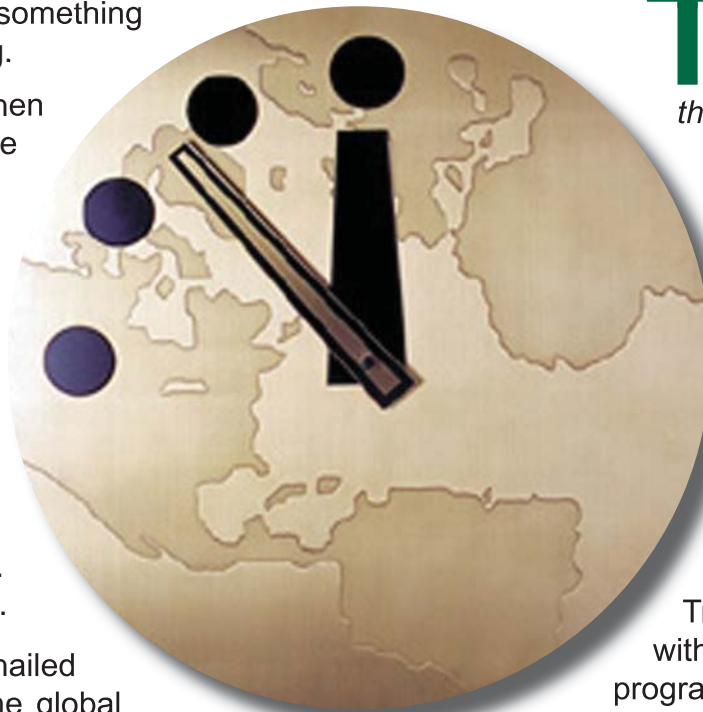
**I**n the last 12 months report after report has shown that the environmental crisis facing our planet is real. These include in the UK the huge Stern report commissioned by New Labour's Chancellor Gordon Brown. This supported and drew upon the previous scientific research on the rise of human-made carbon dioxide production, the melting of the ice caps etc. Its central theses were that in order for capitalism to cut its future costs it should do something today about global warming.

The famous scientist Stephen Hawking has joined in the calls for something to be done immediately. Scientists are stressing that it is impossible to tell when the tipping point will occur i.e. the point where global warming could spiral out of control. Therefore they too call for urgent action. Something has to be done today. Tomorrow might be too late.

Some four years ago Blair hailed the Kyoto agreement as the global breakthrough that was needed. He even boasted that Britain would beat its targets. However New Labour's strategy was based on letting the growth in gas-fired power stations take the brunt of the cuts. The economy continued to expand and the targets are not going to be met. Further, Blair is unwilling to put real pressure on the US and China to join Kyoto.

New Labour's only other plan is carbon trading. This in reality is like switching the deck chairs around on the *Titanic* and can by its very nature not bring down the total amount of carbon dioxide being emitted. The City of London however likes this idea very much. It can see ways of making billions of pounds profit out of such schemes.

In a sense the City of London is at the heart of New Labour. One old Labour backbench MP told me that there was nothing this government has done to curb the power of finance capital. In fact it has done everything to help it from its deregulation of the City of London to conducting massive areas of government spending through the Private Finance Initiative.



**T**here is however not only the environmental crisis. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has moved its famous clock two minutes forward to 5 minutes to midnight. This indicates that organization's growing worries over the spread of nuclear weapons and the failure of the disarmament process. Blair and Brown are pushing ahead with Trident nuclear weapons with a multi billion pound programme.

They have put no effort into any nuclear disarmament talks. This, combined with an overall increase in military expenditure, is designed to increase Britain's ability to fight wars across the globe. These can only be in the interests of the City of London.

The *Alliance for Green Socialism* recognizes the depth of the environmental crisis facing humanity. We know that any solutions that serve the interests of big business and finance capital will not solve the problems facing us.

We are for socialist solutions and for solutions that can empower us all to deal with the crisis. Such solutions would include proper regulation of finance capital.

## The future of Green Socialist

**T**his the first issue of *Green Socialist* with colour. This has been possible because of generous donations and the taking out of standing orders from a wide range of comrades. We would still like a little more money to help with the promotion and distribution of the magazine. But please use the magazine to expand its circulation.

The following measure will help spread our message.

- Show the magazine to a friend or colleague. Try to get them to subscribe or join the *Alliance for Green Socialism*. Perhaps they might agree to buy a copy off you regularly.
- Check out your local alternative bookshop and see if they will take some to sell.
- Post your old copy to an old comrade and see if they will subscribe.
- Take some copies to sell at green and labour movement events.

Together we can get our socialist green vision across to many more people.

Thanks for all your help and support.

**Garth Frankland** *Editor Green Socialist*  
**Steve Radford** *Deputy Editor*

Could we remind all our readers that our articles are seen by the *Alliance for Green Socialism* as part of the debate to establish a real political alternative. Therefore unless stated they are not the official policy of the *AGS*. In fact the *AGS* members hold a wide variety of views and try to discuss them in a friendly way. You are welcome to try us out by coming to our meetings. These are advertised on our website or you can write to us at our mailbox and we will send you details.

**Join us in the debate.**

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## The next issue

**W**e were hoping to include more articles in this issue around the question of civil liberties.

Unfortunately they have missed our print deadline; however we intend to continue the theme along with some more contributions on immigration control in the next issue.

We welcome letters and also suggestions for articles, especially if you are prepared to write them. The magazine is for all the members and supporters of the *Alliance for Green Socialism*. It is **your** journal.

*Green Socialist* is published by the *Alliance for Green Socialism*

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# Civil Liberties

**I**n the last days of Tony Blair's regime he has become obsessive about developing all-embracing systems for controlling society. Those nasty but amusing characteristics of early New Labour in attempting to manipulate and control the media and public's perception of them have been transferred into civil society.

Blair wants to preserve his political legacy. Over last few months there have been numerous speeches and articles arguing that Labour has to remain New Labour. In fact Blair goes further echoing his earlier comments that he hadn't gone far enough calling for a New New Labour approach!

New Labour famously claims to be developing policies for the many and not the few. However in practice they have become a party financed by and supporting the rich. Their entire thrust was to support finance capital. There is nothing for industry and nothing for workers.

The New New Labour approach is to protect the interests of the City of London above all else. So far the Labour Government has been able to push through its reforms and its military policy with limited degrees of protest. This is because of their control freakery and their buying off of trade union leaders combined with a relative economic boom. This seems to be mainly driven by rising house prices. The switching of workers into lower paid unskilled jobs and the keeping down of wages by carefully controlled immigration has met almost no protests. But underneath the failure of the trade unions to defend wages has been growth of the reactionary British National Party.

This lack of social unrest is unlikely to continue and Blair is laying the foundations for the police state in order to ensure the survival of finance capital. These preparations go alongside the policy of pouring tax payers money into the military, the replacement for the Trident missile system and the development of new nuclear bombs. Their slogan really is New Labour, New Bombs. These protect the interests of the City of London around the globe and at home they need

the measures the Blairites are putting forward to protect their base.

Over the last nine years New Labour has carried out twin strategies. The expansion of education and the hospitals has been carried out by mortgaging future generations through gigantic Public Finance Initiative schemes. These have resulted in record profits for the private consultants and the City of London.

The other prong of the strategy is social repression as outlined below:

- They have expanded our prison population to be the largest proportional to our population in Europe.
- They have allowed private companies to run sections of our prison service for a profit.
- They have pushed judges to go for longer and longer sentences until the system begins to bust at the seams.
- With ASBOs they have deliberately set out to criminalise working class youth. They were introduced just after New Labour cut funding for youth provision.
- They have allowed DNA samples and fingerprint data from innocent people to be placed on national police records.
- They have allowed the American government access to our private banks accounts without warrants.
- They have allowed British citizens to be deported to the US without the evidence being assessed in British courts. There is no reciprocal arrangement for US citizens.
- They have deliberately jailed and harassed refugees, many of whom have been fleeing from war zones created by the government's interventions.
- They pushed and supported the introduction of school uniforms as part of the regimentation of young people

# Under Attack

- They trebled the size of the security services and directed them towards spying on political dissidents
- They passed special legislation to prevent people protesting near parliament
- They have kept Tory legislation which prevented workers acting in solidarity with colleagues under attack
- They are trying to go back on the Freedom of Information Act by making it too expensive for ordinary citizens to obtain information.
- The Legislative and Regulatory Reform bill which originally allowed the government to make laws by decree was still passed with only minor safeguards.

However Blair feels none of this is sufficient.

He wants all citizens to be checked, spied on and controlled in a society very similar to George Orwell's 1984. And his justifications for his drive echoes Comrade Big Brother's all embracing control of people lives. There is a sense that Channel Four's *Big Brother* is really a show about our future. After all, the problems with the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan are really being caused by people who protest over them. This approach echoes Bertolt Brecht's remarks about the East German's Government's suppression of workers in the 1953 uprising: "That the government should dissolve the people and elect another".

**T**he core of Blair's plans is a huge computer system. Every citizen will be on it. It will contain their biometric measurements, their health records, their employment history, and their holidays abroad. The Big Brother justification being that it would help protect people's identity. With thousands being able to access your records it would achieve the exact opposite. Even the so called biometric data can be altered. After all, the notorious US bank robber John Dillinger had new fingerprints grafted in the 1930s. Originally

this database was to be built it up from scratch with a considerable amount of quality control. In order to avoid opposition and to save money Blair is proposing to stitch the database from existing records. This means you could be stitched up with a criminal record from some one who has a similar name.

This super database will contain no safeguards for the people on it. You won't be able to check you records or have them changed. The only people who will be protected, according to some newspaper reports, will be the rich and famous. The whole process will ride roughshod over the principles of the Data Protection Act.

This super database will be backed by a new raft of oppressive measures which will include:

- Locking up the mentally ill even if they have not committed any crimes
- More expansion of the security services
- The use of the military to protect privately owned buildings
- More restrictions on Jury trials
- Restrictions on what material you can hold on your computer (These proposals came after a consultation on BDSM computer images in which the majority of those submitting evidence opposed any legislation. The law will allow the police to go on fishing expeditions looking for data on anyone's computer)
- Super ASBOs to restrict people who have been identified by the authorities (not the courts) as big criminals.

New Labour has a coherent strategy. They are "working for a clampdown". Our response has to go beyond just opposing individual pieces of legislation towards arguing for a bill of rights. We have to work for a law that will protect our privacy and defend our democratic rights. Otherwise in the not too distant future we will wake up and find out we are living in a police state.

**Garth Frankland**

# Whither Bangladesh?

**B**angladesh, after 35 years of independence, is in political turmoil again. National elections have been cancelled and a state of emergency was declared on 11 January this year. The country is being run by an interim caretaker government with the backing of the army. The question is will Bangladesh be able to defend its fledgling democracy?

Bangladesh emerged as an independent country out of the clutches of Pakistani military dictatorship in December 1971. The people of Bangladesh had to make a great sacrifice for their independence. When the British left the Indian sub-continent in 1947 at the end of nearly 200 years rule, it was partitioned into two countries – Pakistan and India – on the basis of religious lines. The former consisted of two Muslim majority areas each separated from the others by an Indian territory of one thousand miles.

For the people of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, it was a second colonial period. In spite of having 56% of total population, the economic and political power rested with the ruling class of West Pakistan. The first major political protest started in the form of the 'language movement' in 1952 when Urdu was imposed as the state language of Pakistan in spite of the fact that the language of overwhelming majority of the population in former East Pakistan was Bengali. On 21st February of that year, a number of Dhaka University students were killed by the police while they were demanding Bengali as one of the state languages.

This movement turned into a wider political movement for autonomy and ultimately for complete independence led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of a secular nationalist party Awami League. In 1970 in the first national election of Pakistan, Sheikh Mujib's Awami League captured the majority of the seats in the National

Assembly. However, the Pakistani rulers refused to hand over power. This led to a country-wide non-co-operation movement. On 25th March of 1971, the military junta unleashed the army on the people of East Pakistan and the genocide began. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested and taken to West Pakistan jail. Independence was declared on the 26th of March. Armed resistance grew up in

the name of Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters) drawing cadres from Awami League and most left-of-centre parties.

After 9 months of bloody struggle the Pakistani Army was defeated by the joint command of Mukti Bahini and the Indian Army on the 16th of December 1971. Three million Bangladeshis lost their lives. Ten millions crossed the border to take shelter in neighbouring India. Thousands of women were raped. Millions of houses and properties were destroyed.

In order to cripple the country economically and cultural, the Pakistani Army systematically killed the top intellectuals and professionals. During this whole episode, pro-Islamic parties including Jamaat-e-Islami actively co-operated with the Pakistani Army.

In 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was released from Pakistani jail. A new constitution was framed for the newly independent country. In spite of being a Muslim country, Bangladesh opted for secular parliamentary democracy.

However, the first challenge to Bangladesh's democratic path came when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, was assassinated in a right-wing military coup in August 1975. The constitution was suspended and martial law was promulgated. Ziaur Rahman became the Chief Martial Law Administrator and later declared himself the President He founded a new political party called the Bangladeshi Nationalist Party. After Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981 the country



experienced a decade of military rule till 1991. Since then two major political parties have ruled the country – the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Khaleda Zia, the widow of former President General Ziaur Rahman.

However, the political system was prone to corruption. Successive elections relied heavily on patronage and cronyism. The situation deteriorated particularly after the election of 2001 in which the BNP-led four-party alliance including Jamaat-e-Islami came to power. Corruption was rampant, political opponents were harassed and intellectuals were arrested, tortured and sometimes killed by the cadres of pro-Islamic militia groups. The religious minorities became targets. The alliance politicised all the ruling apparatus including judiciary, civil administration and election commission by appointing their own party cadres in important positions. Religious fundamentalists got the upper hand.

**I**n May 2005 religious militants attacked different institutions all over the country and killed a number of people. The Awami League formed a broad alliance of 14 parties including most of the left and secular political parties to oppose the four-party alliance led by the BNP. The situation took another turn when the term of the four-party alliance expired in October 2006. Under the constitution of Bangladesh, after the expiry of the term of office, the ruling party hands over power to a neutral caretaker government headed by Chief Advisor to conduct an election within 90 days.

On that basis the current President who had been elected as a BNP nominee formed a caretaker government. However, instead of appointing a neutral person as the Chief Advisor he himself assumed the responsibility. The fourteen-party alliance led by Awami League started a countrywide movement with the demand for reconstitution of the caretaker government, rectifying the voter list which included at least 10 million fake voters, reconstitution of the election commission and de-politicisation of administration. The movement led to violent clashes with the police and rival parties. Dozens of people were killed, hundreds of people were arrested and normal life was crippled. President declared state of emergency, resigned from his position of Chief Advisor and formed a new caretaker government. For the time being people have welcomed the state of emergency. However, they are cautious as well and eagerly waiting for the new date of election and resumption of normal political activities.

The people of Bangladesh face many other challenges including environmental and economic issues. Bangladesh is probably the most densely populated country in the world with a population of 145 million living in area of 54,000 square miles. The pressure on land is very high as the most of the people still live and work in rural areas. It is the world's largest deltaic plain formed by three major river systems – the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna flowing from the north from Himalayas to the South to the Bay of Bengal. There is hardly any part of the country more than 40ft above sea level. The deforestation at the foot of Himalayas and the gradual erosion of Sundarban, the largest mangrove forest in the mouth of Bengal, have made it much more prone to flooding, cyclones and salinity problems particularly in coastal areas. In some parts access to clean water has been affected due to the presence of arsenic in underground water.

As regards the economic situation, the socialist principle adopted in the First Five Year Plan was abandoned in favour of export-led private enterprise model. In spite of having an annual growth rate of 5% and above, almost 50% of 145 million people live below the poverty line i.e. \$1 per capita per day. There has been an unprecedented concentration of the country's wealth in a few hands. It has been estimated that 1% of population own 40% of national wealth.

**O**n a positive note, the rate of population growth has gone down significantly to below 2% annually. In the field of education, girls' participation has increased to be on a par with the boys and literacy has risen to 53%. These are mainly due to the initiatives taken by a number of progressive NGOs. Another success story is the Grameen Bank, a micro-credit initiative that has been able to involve hundreds and thousands of women in economic and social activities. Its founder Prof. Yunus has recently been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Finally, the people of Bangladesh are resilient. In spite of political upheavals and natural disasters, they have been able to sustain themselves by producing enough food through the use of modern technology and hard work. In the past, they fought for their freedom and democracy. This time, they will also make sure that they get back their democratic rights through a free and fair election.

**Abdul Quddus**

# Socialists and Migration

by Mike Davies

**This article is the part of a debate on migration initiated by the AGS National Committee. The Editor welcomes further contributions on this subject.**

**I** agree with much of the article on migration by Tony Greenstein in the last *Green Socialist*. Certainly British immigration policy has always been racist. It started by targeting Jews and moved on to targeting blacks and Asians. Modern British treatment of asylum seekers is a disgrace. We treat refugees appallingly while they are here, either locking them up or forcing them into destitution – and send refugees back to face torture.

The socialist answer to “them” coming here and “taking our jobs” should not be stopping “them” coming here but organising, both here and wherever “they” come from, to fight for decent wages and conditions. Any idea that the answer could be an anti-foreigner coalition with the right ignores the fundamentally opposed interests of worker and employer.

However, the “No borders” position – that any control on the movement and settlement of people anywhere is necessarily racist and anti-socialist – is both simplistic and wrong.

## Examples

**T**ake a few examples from the many available: The Galapagos Islands of Charles Darwin fame are a unique and natural environment of great scientific and historical importance. They are already suffering damage from human presence, despite the existing controls. Is it really a socialist position to say they should have no controls on entry and settlement?

The reserved aboriginal areas of Australia provide a refuge for cultures and peoples. These protected areas are under continual threat from white Australians. Would socialists really strip away the protection that even capitalist governments have given aboriginal Australians, and allow unrestricted access?

Palestine, up to a hundred years ago, was peopled almost entirely by Arab Palestinians. Over the last hundred years, Zionists have organised settlement on a vast scale by Zionist Jews, with the aim of taking over the country. The result? Death for tens of thousands of Palestinians and displacement and

poverty for millions. Do socialists really believe that Zionists should have been allowed unrestricted migration into Palestine?

It makes no difference to the argument whether the examples are of areas within countries or countries themselves. What these examples show clearly is that there may be a whole range of justifications for controlling migration and settlement.

## Fallacy

**T**he article – and the “No Borders” manifesto – use a classically fallacious argument to claim that any controls are necessarily racist. A modern illustration of the flaw in the reasoning is easy:

- Elephants are grey;
- My car is grey;
- Therefore my car is an elephant.

“No Borders” similarly fallacious argument is that:

- British immigration controls over the last hundred years have been racist
- Immigration controls are suggested;
- Therefore these immigration controls must be racist.

This is not a valid conclusion. Controls on migration can be racist or not, capitalist or not. It depends on their intention and nature. There could be any number of non-racist immigration policies. Stopping migration into the UK when the population reached 100,000,000 would not be racist. Letting people migrate into Fiji only if born on a Tuesday would not be racist. And so on.

Interestingly, Canada’s current immigration policies appear to be non-racist. Canada claims to allow people in if they benefit the Canadian economy, regardless of race. That may be capitalist, it may be unfeeling, we may disagree with it, and so on. But it’s not racist.

I do not argue for adopting any of the foregoing examples of non-racist policies. But their existence fatally undermines the fundamentalist thesis that any controls must be racist.

## Socialist Planning

**I**t would be rather odd for a socialist to declare that any planning of the movement of any people, under any circumstances, was anathema. Why

# or My Car Is an Elephant

on earth should it be? We aim to plan most major aspects of our society – industry, natural resource extraction, pollution, etc – so why on earth exclude the migration of populations from planning?

To quote one more example at home, is the Green Belt policy anti-socialist or racist? It stops people moving to live where they wish. But the AGS will surely support the Green Belt in the face of New Labour's intention to do away with it. The "No Borders" thesis supported in the article – that any controls on where people settle are racist and wrong – is simply unsustainable for a socialist. The slogan of "anyone can go and settle anywhere, regardless" is as simplistic as the racist slogan of "keep out the foreigners".

For socialists, migration is much like other social questions such as education, health, policing etc. We want maximum freedom for individuals to do what they choose, but we also want the best outcome for society and the environment. On all of these questions, socialists must seek a balance between the interests of the individual and those of society.

## A Socialist World

**I**n a socialist world that had moved beyond both capitalism and the nation state, the issue of the movement of large numbers of people might go away. The removal of capitalist exploitation, together with education, would lessen or remove migratory pressures. If it did remain a problem, it would be much easier to address it rationally in such a socialist world. If it were the case that, say, millions wanted to move to Barbados to enjoy the Caribbean sea, sensible regulation of this would be far easier to achieve than in a capitalist world.

To take a more likely example, if we fail to stop global warming and Bangladesh disappears under the waves, some 100,000,000 people will have to relocate. As individuals they would be likely simply to move into neighbouring parts of India, already overcrowded and under-resourced. A socialist approach to this would be more sensible planning for them to move to areas with more space and better infrastructure – maybe Canada, the USA, Australia or Britain.

## The Current World

**I**n today's non-socialist world the issue is certainly highly problematic. Capitalism and imperialism, in their framework of nation states,

create huge migratory pressures, sometimes deliberately, both historically and today. Indeed, capitalism tries to have it all ways: it creates migratory pressures; restricts migration to keep labour under control; uses incoming labour to undermine local labour; and ruthlessly exploits the vulnerability of those incoming migrants it has chosen to make illegal!

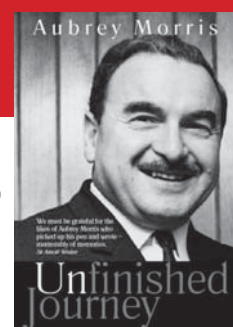
Of course, the question of what policies on migration should be promoted by socialists in this exploitative, capitalist, nation-state world raises the same difficulties as occur for many policy issues. There is a difference between the approach we would take in a socialist society and world, and what can feasibly be implemented at present. Socialists now should clearly advocate policies which remove the injustice, racism and inhumanity of the kind of controls and practices we have in Britain and in many other countries. And we should seek policies which help move us along the road towards a socialist society.

## Real Debate

**R**efusal to discuss the matter by pretending that no socialist could entertain controls on migration and settlement avoids the issue. It prevents much-needed discussion of a difficult question. Deciding whether any controls are needed and, if they are, formulating appropriate policies is not easy. But any such debate must start from socialist basics, not from simplistic slogans based on fallacies ■

### *Unfinished Journey*

Aubrey Morris



This is an extraordinary account of the life of man who fought the fascists on Cable Street, was a London cab driver, pioneered package holidays and held on to his socialist beliefs.

There will be a review of this wonderful book in the next issue of *Green Socialist*.

Available from Michael Maynard 24 Kenilworth Road, London W5 3UH. Please send a cheque or postal order for £12.99. This covers both the book and postage.

## REVIEW: *The Red above the Green* by Laurie Green with a foreword by Bruce Kent

£14.50 from Laurie Green, 39, Hotham Road, Putney, London, SW15 1QL

**S**adly, many veteran socialists, who have given a lifetime and more to the struggle, die without recording their memoirs. Those who wish to write about their lives and their activities have to undertake painstaking research. An exception to this is Laurie Green, a member of *AGS* now in his eighties. He was born in Fulham in 1924, and remains a supporter of the football team. He has just published his autobiography and a wonderful read it is too.

Unlike many of his generation, Laurie's roots were not in the Jewish community. Although the Yiddish phrase a laugh, a song and a tear springs to mind on reading it, Laurie's family were Catholics, his father combing the Catholic faith with socialist politics. Others as varied as James Connolly and Dorothy Day were of this ilk. Laurie spent some of his youth in hospitals and nursing homes suffering from rheumatic fever. At his father's urging he read Jack London and the biographies of other American socialists such as Bill Haywood and Eugene Debs.

Laurie went to a Catholic grammar school the aim of which was to remove bright pupils from their roots. There he was beaten by the head teacher. But Laurie not only remained true to his origins but fought long and hard for the emancipation of his class. On the outbreak of war, Laurie was evacuated to Windsor where he discovered the delights of smoking, beer, the company of women and jazz.

Laurie's writing on the related musics of jazz and blues are better than much of what is written by professional journalists in the music press. He writes of the brilliant clarinet player Sidney Bechet and the blues singer Bessie Smith, both of them victims of racism. The message of the blues, he says, has helped black people to survive. No mean poet himself, he includes a poem about Ma Rainey by the black poet Sterling Brown. The music, he writes, will beat all the racists and the bigots.

Having collected funds for the Spanish Republicans, fighting for their lives against Franco's fascism, and attended Communist meetings in Windsor at 18 Laurie joined the army. He served in India, Burma and Malaya where he made contact with local Communists then engaged in a struggle for independence against the British Empire. Demobbed in 1947 he at once joined the Communist Party.

From 1948-1951 Laurie trained to be a teacher. In 1951 he gained his BA which was followed by a MA with distinction in education. By 1960 he had become a Deputy Head and by 1965 a Headteacher. In 1968 he wrote *Parents and Teachers; Partners or Rivals* which sold 12,000 copies. He was a vastly different teacher from the Catholic sadist who had flogged him. A NUT activist, when the police came to his school seeking information on the pupils' parents then involved in the St Pancras rent strike Laurie told them where to go.

In 1950 Laurie married Jean Thurman, a fellow Communist. Sadly he was to lose her to cancer in 1998. His deep love for his partner shines in the pages of his book.

It is said that old Communists don't give up until their last breath. Retired from teaching in 1983, Laurie has fought on as a member of CND and from 1983 to 2000 as Secretary, then Chair of Putney and Roehampton Organisation of Pensioners. He is still fighting.

Having given decades of his life to the Communist Party, Laurie asks "What went wrong in the USSR... Why and how did socialism fail? Why are they capitalist now?"

He writes: "I think communists should state clearly and unambiguously, 'we were wrong'. For years we defended the indefensible. We may not have known the crimes and injustices committed by other communists; those in power, but we should have listened to those who told us of abuses. We didn't. We condemned them as 'provocateurs' and 'agents of capitalism' ...Many were decent honest people and we often ignored or belittled them. In so doing, we lost much of our support. We should have publicly voiced our worries and disquiet. We didn't. And we have to accept the responsibility with a deep sense of shame." In a year which marks the 50th anniversary of the revolt of the Hungarian workers' councils against the stranglehold of a bureaucratic state these remain brave words. They should be listened to!

Laurie is part of a fighting generation which is now nearing its end. Born in the bitter struggles of the 1930s against fascism and hunger, its hopes for a better postwar world have not been fulfilled. Pensioners go cold and hungry. Fascists stalk the streets and win votes from the working people New Labour betrayed. What can we who remain do? Laurie writes: "I've worked all my life since the age of 14 to end injustice and bring about a sane and peaceful socialist society in which war, unemployment and discrimination will be abolished. This kind of society is possible and one day it will come about." Honour Laurie and the millions like him! Fight on to make it so!

Terry Liddle

# The Jungle Book

## John Severs on an Upton Sinclair Anniversary

**A** major influence on my becoming a committed socialist in my early teens was reading *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's epic 1906 novel, that exposed the appalling conditions and treatment of newly arrived immigrants in the Chicago stock-yards and meat packing factories. Although fifty years have passed, I can still recall the story of Jurgis, the trusting young Lithuanian, whose motto in the face of adversity was "I will work harder" who is finally broken by the treatment he receives and, after experiencing terrible poverty, ends by becoming a campaigning socialist. The fact that the book was over 40 years old when I read it was irrelevant, it still seemed fresh – the principles still held good. It still provoked anger. Now 100 years old, the book and Upton Sinclair himself, still have much to offer.

It had an explosive impact, not only in the USA but world wide, being translated into 18 languages and selling hundreds of thousands of copies. After reading *The Jungle*, President Theodore Roosevelt met Sinclair and said that, although he disapproved of the socialism, the book had made him realise that "...radical action must be taken to do away with the efforts of arrogant and selfish greed on the part of the capitalist (sic)" Plus ça change...

It was a new kind of political novel with characters expressing views and opinions about both conditions and polemics. Sinclair spent 5 weeks working in the factories and talking to all kinds of workers at all levels. It was said that the politics came from 'within' rather than 'without' and that the new breed of writer (he and Jack London) wrote with "a consciously exaggerated savagery".

It led to the passing of The Pure Food and Drugs and the Meat Packing Acts in 1906 and inspired others to expose bad practice in a range of industries to the annoyance of Roosevelt who coined the term 'Muckrakers' to describe them.

Oddly, Sinclair thought the book a failure in that, although the hygiene was vastly improved, it didn't lead to a change in the system.

*"I aimed at the public's heart and, by accident, I hit it in the stomach"*

He never ceased to campaign, writing over 90 books, mainly novels, including the classic *Oil and Dragon's Teeth*, an account of the rise of Hitler that won him the

Pulitzer Prize. As I read more of his books I realised that they were somewhat prudish and lacked humour, but the belief was always there.

**H**aving stood as a socialist party candidate for governor of California in 1926 and getting a handful of votes, he decided that the public might vote for socialist measures, but not for anything described as socialist. Another approach was needed. He joined the Democrats and, to his surprise, easily won the nomination for candidate for the 1934 election. He stood under the EPIC banner – End Poverty in California. There were over 1¼ million unemployed out of a population of around 9 million and over 2,000 groups sprang up in support of his campaign. He wrote in his address

*"The cause of the trouble is that a small class has the wealth while the rest have the debts"*

His advocacy of unemployment benefit and payments to non-working women, nationalisation of spare land and industries etc. meant that the democrat hierarchy didn't support him – president Franklin Roosevelt wouldn't endorse him – and brought about the rabid enmity of newspaper owners and Hollywood. They brought all their resources to bear, even making false propaganda films, showing, for example, an army of tramps camped on the Californian border waiting to come in if the welfare measures were passed and a Russian immigrant, frothing at the mouth and saying that what Sinclair advocated "vorked vell in Russia, vy can't it vork here?"

Not surprisingly, given that his opponents had so much wealth and controlled the media, he lost but only by around 200,000 votes. Much of what he advocated later became Democratic Party policy.

He was imprisoned, arrested and accused of sedition for reading extracts from the Constitution in public. He campaigned fearlessly for freedom of expression throughout his life.

Upton Sinclair died in 1968 but his memory lives on. His description of socialism still rings true today,

*"...a language of brotherhood, a comradeship of mutual service and mutual escape, of liberty, justice and humanity."*



# Scottish Socialists Launch a Major Drive for Free Public Transport in 2007

By Ken Ferguson



**T**he Scottish Socialist Party has launched a detailed plan to make all public transport free in Scotland as concrete move both to tackle global warming and boost living standards.

The plan will form a major part of the party's campaigning and public work over the early part of 2007 with thousands of leaflets to be distributed at major transport hubs across Scotland and a series of public meeting outlining the idea.

Free public transport was endorsed at the SSP National Council in December and activists see it as an attempt to tackle the environmental crisis with a concrete policy rather than worthy words.

Economically it would also represent a major shift of wealth in favour of the thousands who currently subsidise the privatised transport fat cats with costly fares and would bring a major part of the economy back into public control.

The proposal has four phases.

- Phase one would involve the re-regulation of all Scottish bus operators, bringing the Scottish Parliament into line with the Greater London Assembly which has powers over routes, fares etc.
- Phase two would involve the establishment of a publicly-owned bus group, which would include a national bus company running national and cross regional services and eight regional companies covering the Highlands and Islands, Grampian, Tayside, Fife, Strathclyde, Lothian & Borders, Central Scotland, and South-West Scotland; plus a national company running cross-regional services. Each of these regional companies would be placed under the control of 11 local regions covering Orkney, Shetland, Highlands, Western Isles, Grampian, Tayside, Fife, Strathclyde, Lothian & Borders, Central Scotland, and South-West Scotland; plus a national company running cross-regional services. The national bus company would be under the control of the Scottish Executive.

- Phase three would involve the removal of all bus, underground, and passenger ferry fares (foot and cycle), accompanied by an expansion of services to meet increased demand.
- Phase four will involve the establishment of a Scottish National Rail Company and the transfer of the Scotrail franchise to the new publicly-owned company when the franchise expires in 2011. The new publicly-owned rail system would also be fare free.

**T**he Scottish Socialist Party transport spokesperson Rosie Kane MSP commenting on the proposals said: "A free public transport system could be funded for less than one third of the £3 billion annual sum which Scotland contributes to UK defence spending. The cost of a free public transport system would be half the cost of traffic congestion in Scotland (based on the CBI's own estimate of the costs to business of congestion)."

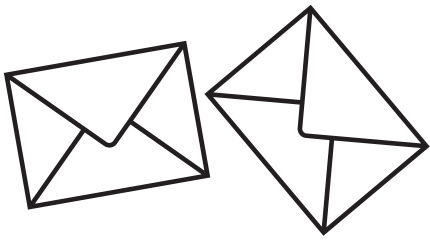
Free fares would cut the number of road accidents, reducing human suffering and relieving pressure on the NHS and the emergency services. The Scottish Executive estimates that road accidents cost £1.4 billion a year to the Scottish economy. (On an average day in Scotland there is one fatal road accident; another 8-10 involving serious injury; and 250-300 minor accidents. The vast majority involve cars.)

The Scottish Conservatives are campaigning for a three pence cut in the basic rate of income tax. A billion pound handout, mainly to the affluent middle and upper classes, that would cost more than a top-quality free public transport system.

The SNP plans to slash top rate Corporation Tax by 10 per cent. This would mean a £1.2 billion to the shareholders of Scotland's ten most profitable companies – substantially more than the cost of Scotland's abolishing fares.

The Liberal Democrats propose a two pence cut in basic rate income tax, which would cover 70 per cent of the cost of free, expanded public transport system

**Free public transport is an idea whose time has come.**



# Letters



## The Monster Is Dead – *Dr Frankenstein lives on*

**O**n reading the *Independent On Sunday* an article by Robert Fisk puts into perspective what some of us has been thinking for a long time. He says –

‘We’ve shut him up. The moment Saddam’s hooded executioner pulled the lever of the trapdoor in Baghdad yesterday morning; Washington’s secrets were safe. The shameless, outrageous, covert military support which the United States – and – Britain gave to Saddam for more than a decade remains the one terrible story which our presidents and prime ministers do not want the world to remember. And now Saddam, who knew the full extent of that western support – given to him while he was perpetrating some of the worst atrocities since the second world war – is dead.

“Gone is the man who personally received the CIA’s help in destroying the Iraqi communist party. After Saddam seized power, US intelligence gave his minions the home addresses of communists in Baghdad and other cities in an effort to destroy the Soviet Union’s influence in Iraq. Saddam’s Mukhabarat visited every home, arrested the occupants and their families and butchered the lot. Public hanging was for plotters; the communists, their wives and children, were given special treatment – extreme torture before execution at Abu Ghraib’

As is the common assumption the help given to Saddam Hussein by America during the Iraq / Iran war was not just traditional weapons, and Fisk states a Senate report concluded that ‘The United States provided the government of Iraq with dual use licensed materials which assisted in the development of chemical and biological and missile-systems programmes’.

The United States has interfered, sometimes secretly and sometimes physically into the democratic processes in most countries of the world, usually installing a dictator in order to secure American capitalists’ interests.

The arms that were supplied to Mujahadin in Afghanistan to defeat the Russians and the arms supplied to Saddam’s army could be responsible for some of the deaths of 3000 American and 127 British troops to date.

WHO THEN IS THE AXIS OF EVIL?

**Brian Turley**

The editor welcomes short letters on political issues, particularly those covered in *Green Socialist* Letters may be shortened or edited.

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The fire is out of control. Send me another 120,000 gallons of petrol.

## *Does Anyone Believe...?*

*Does anyone believe what they tell us?  
The politicians, that smile, yet murder while they smile  
Those oily smiles that never reach their eyes,  
Or the malicious smile, the glee in the misfortunes of others.*

*Does anyone believe what they tell us?  
Does anyone believe the lies, that they're cutting taxes, cutting carbon dioxide emissions, going green?  
Can anyone be that gullible?*

*Do they think we're taken in by their manipulations  
Of words, their twisty, transparent evasions?  
Do they think we're fools?*

*Do they think we believe their empty promises, their meaningless policies?  
Is anyone taken in? Does any one believe they act on ideology, on principles?*

*Do they really think we can't see them for what they are?  
Corrupt, lying weasels, that bite and scratch their way to power.*

*And with all the lies and fantasies stuffed down our throats,  
Are they really surprised when we can't even be bothered to vote?*

**Simone Webb**  
(aged thirteen)

This poem was taken with permission from *Forest Creative Writers: A Collection of Poetry*.  
Published December 2006. ISBN 0 9530240 3 2.

This slim volume from Epping Forest is packed with poems reflecting "hope; optimism and cheerfully observed reality symbolic of the vibrant and living colours of the nascent rainbow".

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# The Eddie Adams Column:

## Trellick Tower

The news that the Tory council are thinking of selling off Trellick Tower to the private sector because they claim they cannot afford to do the repairs is nonsense. Kensington & Chelsea council is about the fourth richest in the country. If it cannot afford the repairs who can? And what's in it for the private sector? The tenants and the housing stock will be the losers. The once hard to let block is now a desirable residence and any new owner will be out to make a killing.

## Edenham Nursing Home

The Tory council wants to close Edenham Nursing Home. The home was in the *Kensington & Chelsea News* as having a lively and thriving environment with friendly cheerful staff. What good reasons could the Tories on the council have for wanting to close Edenham? The local community does not want it closed. The people living there are heartbroken and worried, and the staff is undermined. One can imagine that waiting in the wings are the Tories' friends and allies the property speculators. What a prize this would be if they got their hands on it.

## The Little House

The Tories are putting tenants and nursing home residents under pressure and causing them anxiety, and now it's the turn of the parents of disabled children who are under attack with the threatened closure of the Little House in Oxford Gardens. The claim is it needs £2 million for refurbishment. A supporter of the trust that runs it claimed "They make a difference to so many in serious difficulties, I think what the council is doing is disgusting." Could there really be £2 million of refurbishments or is this really a smoke screen to hide the council's real intentions?

## Echoes of Spain Mosaic

On the 18th October 06 the *Echoes of Spain* mosaic was inaugurated by Jack Jones the veteran trade unionist who fought in Spain in the International Brigade. The mosaic, situated where the motorway crosses the Portobello Road, is the work of about 20 local people. It commemorates the 16 volunteers from Kensington who also fought in Spain to support

# Tories and New Labour on the Attack in London

the elected government in their fight against fascism and the Spanish refugees who came to Britain, particularly the 4,000 Basque children on the ship *Habana*. Carlos Miranda, the Spanish ambassador, pointed out how their efforts were not in vain and that Spain is now a democracy. Amanda Hayes, vice principal of Kensington & Chelsea College, talked about how the college was involved in community projects. Over 200 people were present, and an exhibition on the Spanish Civil War was also shown.

## St Thomas's school – Local residents ignored

The news that the church commissioners have got permission to go ahead with their planned redevelopment of St Thomas's school, placing a block of flats on top of the new school, is bad for the local tenants who opposed the plan. The development will place most tenants right on top of a building site for many months with all that means, and when it is finished their outlook which was once pleasant will be changed for ever with a reduction of light. The process of granting permission for this development was marred by incompetence with the committee failing to have before it all the relevant information. For instance, 44 objections was reported as 4 and on two occasions the meeting had to be postponed because of wrong information, but the Tory majority pushed it through in the end. There must be some truth in the old saying the Church of England is the Tory party at prayer!

## St Charles Community Hospital?

Kensington & Chelsea with Westminster Primary Care Trusts are consulting the public on proposals to make St Charles Hospital a community hospital. It is a very old hospital and for most of its existence it's been a community hospital.

After many years of running down services at the hospital we are now told they want to make it a community hospital again. This move should be seen in context of what happening to the NHS in London as a whole. The aim is to have 15 "medically viable" general hospitals INSTEAD of the 50 they had in

1995. And the reorganization will create a conduit for private firms to exploit the NHS for profit

We need to know exactly what services will be available and why it will be necessary to move some services away from St Charles. Are these services to be privately run? The Health Service is at the crossroads. Now government reforms threaten both the NHS and the planned and equitable way in which it delivers care to patients.

One example is Ravenscourt Hospital, now closed. The NHS spent £14 million on modernizing it to provide hip and knee replacements. This service was considered by local patients to be excellent with no cancelled appointments like general hospitals. Health Minister Andy Burnham explained: "Having successfully reduced waits for orthopaedic services in north west London the extra capacity offered by Ravenscourt Park hospital is no longer required."

## Get Carter – Save our legal services

The Carter review of legal services organised by the New Labour Government will threaten the existence of the North Kensington Law Centre along with about 800 other legal aid practices country wide. This is under the guise of efficiency and of modernising the system, but the real aim is to cut the legal aid bill by £500 million. The organised trend is to larger firms with legal aid on the cheap by fixed fees per case and by not providing adequate funding, and making qualifying for legal aid much harder.

North Kensington Law Centre was the first law centre in the country and since 1970 assisted thousands of people with legal help with housing, employment, education, immigration, welfare, and many other problems. These government plans are an attack on liberty. It is obvious that if you are rich it won't make a lot of difference to you. It will be the ordinary citizens who will be denied the ability to pursue justice.

What can we do? Help the campaign by lobbying, writing letters to MPs, signing petitions, writing letters to the press and a press campaign, Campaign materials can be got from the Law Centre, 74, Golborne Road, London W10. Tel: 020 8 969 7473 ■



**Garth Frankland** introduces two of our Local Election candidates: **Azar Iqbal** and **Beverley Samuels**

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