

rather than the politics behind it. In an interview last year Carla Bley was quoted as worrying that Haden might find her arrangements “too ironic”. Certainly the original LMO album was characterised by an exuberant humour that sometimes verged on parody. However, with the exception of a catchy version of David Bowie and Pat Metheny’s ‘This is Not America’, performed in a cod reggae arrangement (and what is *that* about?), irony is in short measure on the new album. Hackneyed pieces that have an association with the US, such as ‘Amazing Grace’, Samuel Barber’s ‘Adagio for Strings’ and the largo from Dvořák’s ‘New World Symphony’, are played almost completely straight (with the latter sounding disturbingly like the brass band version that was once used to accompany an advert for Hovis bread).

Jazz artists do of course face problems getting radical politics across to relatively large numbers of people by means of a music most listeners find too demanding. Archie Shepp, a prominent tenor saxophonist of the 1960s “New Wave”, was a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist who had embraced Black nationalism, but the free-form music that dominated his recordings of the period proved far too abrasive for all but a tiny minority of his fellow African-Americans. Shepp’s most overtly political album, 1972’s *Attica Blues*, dispensed with free improvisation altogether in favour of soul and other popular musical forms. There is of course a pragmatic argument in favour of moderating a difficult style in order to reach a wider audience – but, frankly, in artistic terms, the album fell far short

of Shepp’s earlier work.

Although the original Liberation Music Orchestra album was itself not lacking in identifiable melodies, the folk themes of the Spanish civil war medley dissolved into some pretty challenging “outside” playing, which undoubtedly restricted its appeal beyond the hard-core fans of that variety of jazz improvisation. When I played the album a couple of years ago in a political campaign office it provoked loud complaints (“What is this rubbish?”) from one comrade, who was dissuaded from removing it from the CD player only after its progressive politics were drawn to her attention.

There is no doubt that the new album contains some impressive musicianship, notably from alto saxophonist Miguel Zenon, while Curtis Fowlkes’ trombone, which recalls Rudd’s dixieland-derived style, does give the music a slightly rougher edge. But at times the restrained and tasteful playing comes perilously close to falling into that dire musical category, “smooth jazz”. You miss the quirky trumpet playing of a Don Cherry and begin to wish that the blistering saxophone of a Gato Barbieri would come crashing through the mix and disrupt the almost suffocatingly polite atmosphere.

Let me finish on a positive note. Despite my complaints this is an interesting album both politically and musically which I have listened to repeatedly, and I wouldn’t dissuade anyone from buying it. But it does underline the brilliance and one-off character of the original 1969 recording. If you don’t yet have a Liberation Music Orchestra album, get that one.

LETTERS

A Message from Uncle Bulgaria

THE MORE I read “Geoffrey Brown’s” article ‘Wombing Free? Anarchists and the European Social Forum’ (*What Next?* No.29) the more it ceases to be odd & amusing & becomes utterly bewildering.

The document ‘reflections & analysis: the wombles, the esf & beyond’ (<http://www.wombles.org.uk/auto/reflections.php>) may clarify some of “geoffrey’s” attempts at trying, & failing with almost subtle brilliance, to construct a valid argument against our continued criticism & antagonism towards the European Social Forum.

What interests me more though is his clueless (& I mean genuinely clueless) attempt to discredit the wombles over Dublin mayday. Let’s be clear: the relationship between the wombles & DGN [Dublin Grassroots Network] has never been stron-

ger, indeed the wombles & groups involved in DGN have every intention of working together in the future. We respect (though do not always necessarily agree with) the groups involved with DGN. Odd that we should be described as “the anarchists” whereas in fact most of the group involved in DGN would happily describe themselves as such & vehemently argue the anarchist corner. The ritual attempts at creating false divisions may work in reactionary left circles (& indeed it is the favourite tactic of state agents) but anarchists are made of sterner political stuff & stronger friendships.

The fact that much of “geoffrey’s” source material is from anonymous posting on irish indymedia it makes it virtually impossible to take what he has to say seriously. It reminds me a little of the right wing media & their woefully apolitical, but equally hysterical, criticism of the wombles. But, again, just

to be clear:

1) the meeting the evening before mayday where it was decided collectively how we would approach the police was attended by over 100 people, almost 3 times the amount of people who decided at DGN meetings (no more than 30) about how they would approach the police. Even by “geoffrey’s” standards a bigger majority.

2) as the demonstration approached the line of police on the navan road it was stopped by a spokesperson from DGN who informed people that was where the “official” demonstration was to end. He went on to explain that those who wished to confront the police should move to the front while everyone else could leave & go home, thanking them for their participation. Naturally nobody, not a single person, moved. The entire demonstration stood firm against the backdrop of water cannons & riot police. This we call direct democracy. We as a group neither compelled nor instructed anybody in their behaviour & as such would never condemn anybody for their behaviour. Faced, as we are, with greater hostile numbers of state forces, we call this solidarity.

The rest of “geoffrey’s” article seemed to be culled from past fragments of half-truths spewed from the mainstream media or, wonderfully, constructing a new & unique view of our relationship with the other autonomous spaces.

dean (wombles)

PS Tell “geoffrey” it’s white overall movement building libertarian effective struggles. Oddly it’s only the right wing media & state agents who seem to get the acronym wrong.

Further Reflections on the ESF

GEOFFREY Brown’s piece on the 2004 London ESF makes a number of worthwhile points. However, I felt some brief thoughts on the event with a less specific focus could be of some interest to readers.

Brown is absolutely right to point out that “Others, however, while not prepared to condone the Wombles’ behaviour, have been inclined to see it as a response, albeit a mistaken or exaggerated one, to the supposedly undemocratic process through which the London ESF was organised.” Even *Briefing’s* report by a “mole” was somewhat in this camp, apparently written by someone who didn’t attend a single organising meeting or much of the ESF itself. It is indeed amazing how much of the Left will believe and recycle what they read in the *Weekly Worker*!

Even if one accepted that the process leading to the ESF was particularly “closed”, which this writer does not, one should still have strongly condemned the violent behaviour and understood that it was motivated by ideas fundamentally oppo-

sed to Marxism. The Wombles are a particularly irrelevant example of those who espouse the idea that no one involved with political parties or states should be involved with the ESF or WSF at all. Their irresponsible and destructive behaviour stems from this false analysis – one which must be strongly opposed by those claiming to be Marxists, for whom the importance of state power and parties to both “sides” in the international class struggle should be “abc”.

Indeed, the involvement of forces such as parts of the Brazilian Workers Party, the Mayor of London, European trade union leaders and the Venezuelans in the European and World Social Forums are strengths, helping the Forums attract significant support and be the broadest international alliances today that oppose the twin offensives of neo-liberal “globalisation” and the US war drive.

These forums, including London 2004, should therefore be seen by the Left as positive in at least two ways. Firstly, they enable the international co-ordination and forming of alliances around key issues around which united fronts need to be formed. The February 2003 demonstrations against the Iraq War came out of a call from the ESF in Italy, for example. Secondly, whilst promoting this unity in action, they also allow debate and learning to take places across national borders. This presents opportunities for Marxists to put forward progressive politics forward on issues such as how to fight racism and the centrality of anti-imperialist activity to the struggle for global justice, and thereby win many of those recently radicalised against globalization and war to a socialist analysis. The involvement of political parties and those involved with them, including those who control regional or national states, are crucial to ensuring success in both these areas.

The Left should therefore support politically broad and inclusive social forums, which at times will mean they have to be firm in their opposition to the likes of the Wombles, when they are acting against this happening. One should not expect this from most of the British ultra-left though, who are more interested in scoring sectarian points and reading the *Weekly Worker* than building and engaging with emerging mass movements against the “twins” of neo-liberalism and US imperialism.

Nicky Law

War Crimes in Falluja

TONY Greenstein [see ‘The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty: Britain’s Revolutionary Imperialists’ in this issue – ed.] alleges that “[Alan] Johnson himself has written in *Red Star* defending the US war crimes in Falluja”. Greenstein is wrong.

In advance of the assault, I was the author of a model Labour Party resolution opposing it. That resolution stated: “This CLP is alarmed that military

action against the terrorists in Falluja and other towns will result in large scale loss of civilian life. The aerial bombardment of a built-up civilian area will drive ordinary Iraqis towards the men of violence. We implore the Labour government to exercise all its influence to prevent these casualties and to pursue all political and humanitarian channels to resolve the crisis. We urge the Labour Government to do all it can to support the UN process that envisages a democratic sovereign Iraq and to support all democratic forces within Iraq, including the newly emerging trade union movement. This CLP recognises that a flourishing democracy and civil society in Iraq will powerfully undermine the terrorists.”

After the assault, on January 13, 2005, I wrote an article for the Labour Friends of Iraq website, titled ‘Bush Does Not Get It (Part 5): Lessons from the agony of Falluja’. I wrote:

“The scale of the humanitarian and political failure in Falluja is as stark as the military ‘victory’. Elections are only three weeks away and many Sunnis are unsure whether to vote. Their participation is vital to the legitimacy of the results and ability of the Iraqi assembly to restore peace and security by marginalising the ba’athists and terrorists. Yet the US and the international community have failed to care for, or to speedily return to Falluja, the hundreds of thousands of Fallujans who fled the city; failed to organise the distribution of voting papers to Fallujans; failed to check the spread of disease among Fallujans. As a result, on January 9 (reports the United Nations Aid Mission to Iraq website) ‘Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in al-Naimiya area in Fallujah Friday calling on the interim Iraqi government and U.S. army to open new routes for displaced residents to return to the war-torn town. Demonstrators carried banners saying “Is it the solution to displace women and children and destroy houses?” and “Occupiers, get out of our city”.’

“Purely military ‘solutions’ in Iraq are a chimera. We need ‘political warfare’: capacity-building the organisations of democratic grassroots Iraq, economic reconstruction on a scale and urgency that would deserve the name ‘Marshall Plan’, a step-change in international community involvement in security, all to underpin the UN-backed political process which remains Iraq’s only hope. Labour Friends of Iraq will continue to argue this view.”

Even my article posted at *Red Star* does not support Mr Greenstein’s assertion. In it I explicitly oppose the assault. I wrote “another way has to be found” and called it a “recruiting sergeant for the terrorists”. But I also made the point that those who opposed the assault on Falluja had a responsibility to face the fact that our position would itself have had victims – the people trapped in thug-imposed Taliban-like regime inside Falluja. Yes, I gave space to the voices of those Fallujans who spoke of their suffering – torture, rape, shootings, murder – in the fundamentalists’ little statelet. Did their voices not deserve to be heard? And with these voices in mind, I argued that it was the UN-backed political process that should be critically supported not the fascistic Saddamist-Jihadi “resistance”. In particular, urgent solidarity should be extended to the democratic and progressive forces inside Iraq, such as the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions. (Greenstein, by contrast opposes the UN-backed political process, is viscerally opposed to the largest force of the Iraqi labour movement, the IFTU, oddly calling it a scab and a “strike breaker”, and he supports the victory of a fascistic jihadi “resistance” which has murdered labour movement leaders such as Hadi Saleh.)

I wrote in *Red Star* (the article took the form of an open letter to a far left-er): “If we are not to be faced with this agonising choice in the future (between leaving the fascists in charge of cities or storming the city with the attendant civilian casualties) we need the political process to succeed. That’s why your peculiar combination of policies (troops out now, victory to the resistance, no support to the ‘fake’ unions and the ‘fake’ elections and the ‘fake’ political process and ... workers power and socialism!) is so, well, childish. You are thinking like a child. In Iraq the democrats have a name for people like you. They call you ‘the people of the slogans’.” (For the full article go to http://redparty.org.uk/redstar004/rs4finalfinal_030105.pdf)

My position can be disagreed with, for sure. It may be wrong. It may be right. But it can’t reasonably be read as “defending the US war crimes in Falluja”.

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