

Britain: Socialist Workers Party member becomes government adviser

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It was a golden moment for the Conservative press and they made the most of it. The October 8 *Mail on Sunday* headlined its article, "Teenage Trotsky is Cabinet's new adviser on radical Islam."

The focus of the article was the nomination of 18-year-old Sabiha Iqbal to act as a consultant on the 22-strong Young Muslim Advisory Group.

The YMAG has been set up by the Brown government to advise it on how to combat the influence of Islamic extremism, especially on the Internet. It will also advise on "The development and delivery of faith projects, including addressing issues of theology" and "An examination of how best to boost the representation and participation of young Muslims in civic life such as becoming local councillors or school governors."

In addition to this core task, the "advisers" will work directly with Communities Secretary Hazel Blears, Families Secretary Ed Balls and other cabinet members to supposedly probe the "challenges they face as young Muslims and their vision for their future as British Muslims" and to "encourage active citizenship through increased volunteering."

What supposedly outraged the *Mail on Sunday* is that Sabiha Iqbal "belongs to the Socialist Workers Party, which is dedicated to the overthrow of parliament, the state and capitalism."

The *Daily Express* complained, in addition, that Iqbal was part of a group given "direct access to Cabinet Ministers in a £1.3 million 'community cohesion' initiative." "The budget has doubled in a year and is expected to increase to £2 million in 2009," it added.

The *Mail* and the *Express* were keen to embarrass the Labour government by associating it with a supposed revolutionary and member of the SWP. However, the

picture that emerges of Sabiha Iqbal is of someone far removed from socialist politics whose membership of the SWP testified only to its own political opportunism regarding a longstanding orientation to young people influenced by Islam.

Sabiha Iqbal is a respectable middle class girl, who no one within ruling circles--including, it should be stressed, the *Mail* and the *Express*--would find truly objectionable in her new role. She states that her religious views are paramount, while her politics can only be described as generally liberal rather than socialist.

Privately educated at the £10,500-a-year Bradford Grammar School for Girls and now a law student at Leeds University, Iqbal told the press that her religious beliefs were "the most important thing in my life." As to her politics, "I am left-wing about some things and right-wing about others."

She said of her appointment, "As a young, proud British Muslim ... I want to use my position in the YMAG to create achievement through understanding, acceptance through empathy and a balanced but diverse community which can evolve together for a stronger, more positive British society."

When asked about her membership of the SWP, she explained only that she appreciated "what the party is trying to do.... I agree with the equality ideas of socialism. Having a sense of equality is important."

Little wonder then that Hazel Blears was sanguine in the face of the feigned outrage of the *Mail* and the *Express*. "If you don't want to change the world at 17, that's a shame," she said. "This group (YMAG) is made up of people with a wide range of beliefs. Getting them around a table to talk is all about democracy in action."

Iqbal would become one of what Blears described as "the next generation of Muslim community leaders,"

acting as "role models by coaching and inspiring their peers to achieve their potential."

Labour is a government that has waged two wars that have provoked mass outrage in the working class, particularly amongst Muslim youth; has enacted anti-terror legislation that threatens fundamental democratic rights; and is responsible for a massive deterioration in the living standards of working people.

Iqbal's decision to become an adviser to Blears and Balls may be a question of extraordinary naiveté, a belief that she can help represent voiceless young Muslims. But for her to accept such a position certainly reflects negatively on her party, the SWP, which can have made no effort whatsoever to politically educate her.

It was for the SWP, when the invite was extended, to tell Iqbal that her responsibility as a member was to oppose all efforts to encourage illusions that Labour would be responsive to the needs of working people and youth, Muslim or otherwise, and to insist that she publicly reject the offer. It did no such thing.

Moreover, even after Iqbal's appointment was announced, the SWP leadership felt no obligation to distance itself from the actions of its young member, to remove her from membership and to make clear to those who look to it for leadership that collaboration with the government is impermissible.

After several days with no comment being made, this writer contacted the SWP and asked whether they had anything to say. A representative said no. When I asked whether Iqbal was still a member of the party, the SWP spokesperson replied that she did not know.

The SWP's silence betrays a complete disregard for political principle. Either it disagrees with Iqbal's actions, but would rather remain silent than explain how it is that one of its members took such a course--possibly for fear of alienating others it has recruited with a similar political and class outlook. Or, alternatively, silence denotes consent and the SWP has no objection to working with the government if the offer is made and the opportunity arises.

At any rate, the party obviously believes that it need make no account for the political fallout from its own rampant opportunism.

In the aftermath of the disintegration of Respect--the alliance between the SWP, George Galloway and various Muslim politicians--the party has lost hundreds

of members, including several from its leadership who went with Galloway. It has also seen former councillors and SWP members desert to both the Labour Party--in the case of Waiseul Islam in Tower Hamlets--and to the Conservatives in the case of Ahmed Hussain. Now one of its members has joined a Labour think tank.

Having recruited broadly on the basis of religious identity politics and confused anti-war sentiment, it is certain that others will take a similar path towards the greener pastures of the "political mainstream."



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