

An injury to one is an injury to all

Solidarity

& WORKERS' LIBERTY

Volume 3
No. 119
13 October
2007
30p/80p

**Post: this is
the “miners’
strike”
of our
times**

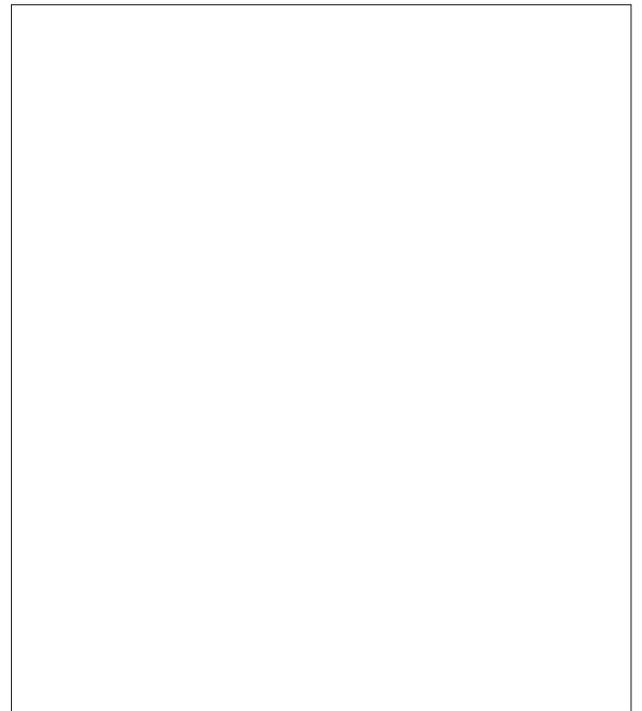


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CWU needs to match bosses' daring

BY GERRY BATES

THE postal workers' four day walk-out on 5-9 October was, once again, approaching 95% solid. More strikes are planned from 15 October, and there can be no doubt that they will be solid too. But will they be enough to win?

The Royal Mail bosses have shown daring and determination — cynically using talks to demobilise the union without any intention of making concessions, then launching a series of attacks. They have unilaterally imposed changed working hours, shut Royal Mail's final-salary pension scheme, and announced closure of militant Mail Centres such as Oxford and Reading. It is clear that they want to break the union. That is why trade union and left activists must consider this dispute the "miners' strike" of our time. A lot is at stake.

Unfortunately the CWU leadership has dithered and compromised.

First they suspended action for talks; then, when these talks predictably yielded little, the union took nearly a month to put the action back on. (The word was that the CWU Postal Exec was working on "counter-proposals" to Royal Mail's plans, but it has published nothing about those "counter-proposals"). Even after the strike had restarted, the CWU leaders were hinting it might be called off before the end of the four days.

This sort of on-off, maybe-we-will-maybe-

we-won't, we-don't-really-want-to-cause-trouble, give-us-some-crumbs-and-we'll-think-again approach is not the best way to fight bosses who are on a determined offensive. But from the same bureaucrats who bent their knee to Brown at Labour Party conference it's hardly a surprise.

Postal workers need to fight for control of the dispute, so that Hayes and Ward do not have it all their own way. A new strategy is clearly needed: one that campaigns a determined national drive to beat Royal Mail with creative local tactics such as mass pickets, meetings, demonstrations and other activity to mobilise the members. Anything else will mean a gradual ebbing away of strikers' energy and determination.

At the same time, all this is much more likely to happen if the CWU receives strong support from across the labour movement. As *Solidarity* has already reported, local support committees exist in Bristol, Luton, Leeds and SW London; a rally to launch a public sector unity committee will take place in Hackney on 31 October.

The key, of course, is united industrial action by different unions. Even the TUC Congress voted unanimously for such action, but the reality is predictably that the union leaders are dithering. Even in unions already balloting, such as Unison Local Government and PCS, it will take the maximum possible pressure to win the coordinated action which can guarantee the postal workers victory.

Local solidarity committees get moving

IN Leeds, a local public sector unity committee was set up in June. It drew over 100 to a launch rally on 12 July, with speakers from Unison Local Government and Health, NUT, CWU, PCS and UCU.

Luton's solidarity committee was set up at a meeting of over 40 on 12 September, initiated by PCS and CWU activists and with representation from Unison, TSSA, NUT, and UCU. It is setting up a local hardship fund and will be organising delegations to the CWU picket lines.

Email lutonunionsunite@btinternet.com. In South West London, Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council, together with CWU activists from Nine Elms local centre, is sponsoring a public meeting about the public sector struggles at Lambeth Town Hall on the evening of Thursday 11 October. Email ruthycashman@yahoo.co.uk.

Nottingham's newly-revived Trades Council is also coordinating action.

A victory for democracy: Stop the War defies police ban

BY AMINA SADDIQ

SEVERAL thousand people, including many hundreds of London students, marched from Trafalgar Square to Parliament on 8 October as part of a Stop the War Coalition protest timed to coincide with Gordon Brown's Commons statement on Iraq — in defiance of the police's refusal to grant permission for the demonstration.

Workers' Liberty was there, as usual, combining our opposition to the big powers' military adventures with support for workers' and other democratic movements in countries like Iraq and Iran.

This protest had a special significance. The police had tried to ban it.

Instead of using the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (SOCPA), which prevents demonstrations within a kilometre of Parliament without permission, the police decided to use a "sessional order" passed by Parliament in 1839 to prevent Chartist demonstrations. They banned the march — believe it or not — with the claim it might block the way of MPs and peers wanting to get to Parliament, despite repeated assurances from Stop the War that no one would be stopped from entering.

As Henry Porter commented in the *Observer* on 7 October:

"The organisers have guaranteed that access, but the ban stays in place, which is odd given that the Prime Minister is on record as saying he wants to repeal the section of SOCPA that requires police permission. As everyone now realises, the use of Sessional Orders may stop all demonstrations while Parliament is sitting. The repeal of the relevant sections of SOCPA, if it happens, will not make the slightest difference."

The use of legislation framed against the Chartists is an appropriate symbol of New Labour's hostility to democratic rights — and the success of Stop the War in defying it is a victory in the battle for democracy.

Bush ally threatens war on Iran

BY MARTIN THOMAS

JOHN Bolton, who was US ambassador to the United Nations until a few months ago, told a fringe meeting at Tory Party conference on 30 September: "I think we have to consider the use of military force [against Iran]. I think we have to look at a limited strike against their nuclear facilities."

According to the *Guardian*, Bolton added that: "If we were to strike Iran it should be accompanied by an effort at regime change... The US once had the capability to engineer the clandestine overthrow of governments. I wish we could get it back."

Bolton had been renominated by George W Bush for another term as US ambassador to the UN from December 2006, and withdrew only because he feared a rough ride at confirmation hearings from a Democratic-controlled Congress. There is every reason to suppose his views are shared inside Bush's inner circles.

Seymour Hersh reported in the *New Yorker* back in April 2006 that: "A government consultant with close ties to the... Pentagon said that Bush was 'absolutely convinced that... saving Iran is going to be his legacy.' [A] defence official... told me that the military planning was premised on a belief that 'a sustained bombing campaign in Iran will humiliate the religious leadership and lead the public to rise up and overthrow the government'."

And now, as for example Peter Galbraith reports in the *Sunday Times*

(7 October), "The US and international press are full of speculation that Dick Cheney, the vice-president, wants Bush to attack Iran before his term ends".

If it were possible to imagine some "surgical" operation that would stop Iran's hideous regime acquiring nuclear weapons, and take out the foul Ahmedinejad, it would be good. The fact that Bush is threatening Iran doesn't mean that the Iranian regime itself is not a threat.

But then it would have been good if some "surgical" operation could have taken out Saddam Hussein without harming Iraq. Remember the headlines from late 2002? Like "Revealed: Iraq's quest to build nuclear bomb" (*Observer*, 22 September 2002)? And see where Iraq is now...

A US attack on Iran, let alone an attempt to topple the regime by "sustained" outside military force, would not only mean destruction in Iran but also probable conflagration in Iraq, where (oddsy, considering the rhetoric on both sides) whatever modicum of stability there is depends on cooperation between Iran-linked Shia Islamists and the USA.

Bush's reported plans seem crazy. The *Times* reported back in February that "some of America's most senior military commanders are prepared to resign if the White House orders a military strike against Iran". Yet Bush's invasion of Iraq looked crazy before 2001, and unlikely even for much of 2002.

Against the Islamic Republic, against US imperialism: support the Iranian workers!

Make Crossrail a public project!

BY SIMON HOLEHOUSE

THE government has finally given the go-ahead to the £10 billion Crossrail project to build new railway connections under central London, broadly connecting east and west. The project, involving 10 miles of tunnelling, and which still has to be approved by Parliament, is due to be up and running by 2017. The railworkers' union, the RMT, has welcomed the project, and is campaigning to keep funding for the Crossrail public. Gordon Brown will not listen to that demand without a big public fight.

Some people, including George Galloway and Respect, have opposed the construction describing it as an expensive west to east commuter service that will primarily benefit City and Docklands businesses, while bring-

ing enormous disruption to East London.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow says: "Crossrail makes sense from every angle. It will help ease overcrowding on other routes, get more people off the roads and onto public transport and give the capital a massive economic boost.

"But we need to learn the lessons from a decade of rail and Tube privatisation and ensure that Crossrail is a public project in every sense, publicly run and publicly accountable, and with rolling stock built in Britain to help rescue our skilled train-making industry.

"We still do not have the assurances we need about the threat of displacement and disruption to many residents in East London. The government retreated over the Brick Lane drilling but there is still a threat even there.

"I also have continuing profound concerns about the impact on one of the city farms in Stepney Green and to residents in Bow who are threatened with years of traffic disruption, noise and pollution because of Crossrail."

George Galloway's response to the announcement was not to oppose the use of private capital, but to express concern about the overall cost. "£16 billion is a huge sum of money, and these massive projects almost invariably come in way over budget. I remain very concerned that the cost of this prestige project will end up severely squeezing investment on other vital parts of the transport infrastructure such as tube improvements. And it is strange the government has found money for Crossrail whilst investment to alleviate the enormous housing crisis in East London is still hopelessly inadequate."

Derek Simpson addresses the crowd at a Love Music Hate Racism festival. But what does he offer them?

The unions after Bournemouth

EVEN in 2005, Tony Blair's Labour must have seemed to most voters at least marginally less illiberal and less rigidly attached to inequality than the Tory party of the old Thatcher minister Michael Howard.

But what about now? Younger people, looking at the parties afresh, have nothing presented to them which makes Labour seem even demagogically more on the side of the "common people" than the Tories. Sometimes, indeed, the opposite.

It has not always been so. The 1959 Labour Party manifesto was issued at a high point of "Butskellism" (the term was coined in 1954) and of the drive by the then Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell to push Labour right. Yet it was free with the words "socialism" and "socialist", gave over its first sentences to a promise to end "the division between the Haves and the Have-Nots", and pledged to introduce a "Workers' Charter, designed to raise the status of the wage-earner".

Until 1987 Labour manifestos regularly included some sort of wording, however anodyne, which suggested special attention to the disadvantage suffered by "workers" or "working people" or "have-nots". Until 1992 they included the words "socialist" or "socialism". No longer.

Anyone under 40 now would first have paid attention to the parties' rival pitches in an era when Labour no longer presented itself as socialist even in the loosest sense.

Elderly voters will of course tend to continue to identify "Labour" and "Conservative" with stereotypes of those parties formed when they were younger. Some of that will be passed on to their children. But what we think of as the traditional working-class perception of Labour is a fading quantity. According to a report done for the Electoral Commission, by 2005 the percentage of the electorate identifying "very strongly" with a party had dropped from 45% (in the late 60s) to just 9%.

In 2005, only 45% of voters aged 18 to 24 voted. Only 49% of people on incomes less than £15,000 a year voted.

In short, with the evolution of "New Labour" that culminated in the Bournemouth conference decision to ban all motions from unions or local Labour Parties on current political issues, the "Americanisation" of British politics has been ratcheted along another few notches.

This is not as simple as a general decline in class-consciousness or in political interest. The proportion of people identifying as "working class" remains steady — remarkably so, when the term has disappeared from mainstream political discourse. The percentage

professing themselves as have "some" or much interest in politics has increased from 62% (in 1974, first year there are figures for) to 71%. The percentage identifying themselves as having participated in political activity (a demonstration, an argument to convince someone else how to vote, etc.) has also remained steady or increased.

Bournemouth showed the trade unions' structures to be clogged and unresponsive to rank-and-file political input, as well as New Labour's. There is a difference. No union leader could get branch delegates at his union conference to vote to ban themselves from putting any branch motions to conference in future!

But the Bournemouth debacle was not just a matter of right-wing union leaders pulling a fast one. It was the unions collapsing when, in formal broad-left/ broad-right terms, they are about as "left-wing" as they have been in living memory. This was not primarily an affair of the old-style right-wingers like USDAW General Secretary John Hannett, but of the left-wingers like Billy Hayes, Tony Woodley, Derek Simpson, and Paul Kenny, who had been denouncing Gordon Brown's rule changes only days before Bournemouth.

It was the unions renouncing their political voice at Labour Party conference at a time when they have more to say at Labour Party conference — in the sense of clear public disagreements with Labour's direction — than ever before in the history of the party. In recent years, the unions have submitted and voted through motions at odds with the Labour leadership's direction with a frequency previously unknown.

In many unions now, the "right wing" in the old sense scarcely exists any more. In the TGWU, for example, there is no force that would be recognised by the members as an organised "right wing". In Amicus, the great bastion of the old trade-union right-wing, left-winger Derek Simpson was elected general secretary in 2002, and the left won a near-majority of the Executive in 2003. The result? Not a convulsive change of direction, or a big battle, but a virtual merger of left and right.

In PCS (not Labour-affiliated) the official "left" now, electorally merged with the softer segment of the previous right wing, dominates a union previously hard-right-controlled. How much difference did it make to the union on the issue of pensions, or does it make now on pay, that it now has a supposedly "Marxist leadership" in place of an avowedly right-wing one? Remarkably little.

In other words, Bournemouth also shows that the broadly-defined "trade union left" has suffered an epochal collapse. It crosses

the t's and dots the i's on the story told by the union left's collapse on public sector pensions and their feebleness this year on the McDonnell campaign and the 2% pay limit.

Bournemouth proves that this is not even a matter of the "left-wingers" being cautious (perhaps properly, perhaps excessively) as regards economic militancy, in an adverse climate. All the union delegations had to do at Bournemouth was cast a vote. There was no question of making a gamble on the union members' willingness to mobilise, or taking a risk on the bosses' reaction. (And in any case, as these things go, the economic conditions are not that adverse for union militancy on economic issues. Since 2000 the unemployment rate — measured on ILO criteria — has been around 5%, consistently lower than any of the years 1980-1999).

Some insight into this epochal collapse can be got from a survey of its shop stewards that Union did in 2002. "The typical steward was male, working full-time and had been a member of the union for 17 years, nine of those years as a steward. He was most likely the only candidate for the post... The average age of a steward was 47 years old".

The picture varies from union to union, of course, but there is no reason to suppose than Union is grossly untypical.

That average shop steward will have been "formed" in her (or more likely his) political and social views in the late 70s and early 80s. That was a period when the general temper of the labour movement, at grass-roots level, was leftist. The traditional right wing was not recruiting new cadres then.

Many leftists of the late 70s and early 80s have become right-wing, of course. The ones who have soldiered on as shop stewards mostly have not. But they have been trained and "educated" by over twenty years of disappointments and defeats, over twenty years of trade-unionism as damage limitation.

The official union "lefts" have — pretty much without exception — become primarily electoral machines; and electoral machines of such a type that, when they win electoral victories, it makes only a small difference to what the union does (as distinct, maybe, from leadership rhetoric).

In 1938 Trotsky wrote: "Even among the workers who had at one time risen to the first ranks, there are not a few tired and disillusioned ones... When a programme or an organisation wears out the generation which carried it on its shoulders wears out with it... Only the fresh enthusiasm and aggressive spirit of the youth can guarantee the preliminary successes in the struggle; only these successes can return the best elements of the older generation to the road of revolution.

Thus it was, thus it will be".

Trotsky there was writing about the weariness and demoralisation caused by the setbacks of the 1930s. We have a generation shaped by a much longer, though less dramatic, period of setbacks.

None of this means, of course, that the older generation of union activists are universally hopeless, still less that socialists should renounce trade-union activity. It does mean that in that activity we must always be looking for opportunities to "dig down" to fresh activists below the "official" left; that we must have a sharper, clearer political profile in the unions as socialists, quite distinct from any image of being just the "best builders" of the official "left".

A five year plan?

ALISTAIR Darling's pre-Budget statement on 9 October promised real wage cuts for public sector workers through to 2011, as well as choking back health and education spending and decreasing extra job cuts in the civil service, especially the Department of Work and Pensions.

The statement decrees "public sector pay settlements consistent with the achievement of the Government's inflation target of 2 per cent" right through to the financial year 2010-11.

Actually, the Retail Price Index currently shows inflation at 4.1%. It has been above 4% pretty much all this year — 4.8% at one point — and is currently going up. For years now it has rarely been below 3%.

When talking about public sector pay, the Government prefers to quote a different index, the CPI, which excludes housing costs. However, public sector workers have to pay rent or mortgages...

In short, and unprecedentedly, the Government is trying to impose real wage cuts on public sector workers for five consecutive years, and not even at a time of particular economic crisis.

Gordon Brown, as Chancellor, was laying down the two per cent limit as early as December 2005, writing to the NHS Pay Review Body stating that the 2006 pay award for nurses and other workers should observe it.

Yet union leaders were scrabbling to see "good things" in Darling's statement! It's high time they united to break this wage-cutting regime.

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Solidarity: Cathy Nugent

UCU

Oppose boycott legal ruling

BY CATH FLETCHER, UCU MEMBER

THE debate within UCU, the University and College Union, on whether to launch a boycott of Israeli academia has been called off after lawyers consulted by the leadership declared a boycott "illegal". After a unanimous vote by the Strategy and Finance Committee, including members of UCU Left, union branches have been told they cannot vote on a boycott, and a planned speaker tour of Israeli and Palestinian academics has been called off, at least for this term.

Despite calls from both supporters and opponents of the boycott, the legal opinions — one reportedly given by the Liberal Democrat peer Lord Lester — have not been published. It is rumoured that they rest on two points: equality law and the commitment to equality set out in the union's aims and objectives. These are the grounds most often cited by those opponents of the boycott who had been threatening the union with legal action if it went ahead.

A boycott of Israeli universities would have been absolutely wrong. It would have meant giving up on solidarity with those Israelis who oppose the occupation. The many arguments against the boycott have been spelt out repeatedly in *Solidarity*. But it is an disgrace that union debate can be shut down on the basis of a legal opinion that members have not even been allowed to see. What other activities could now be ruled illegal?

The background to this decision goes back several years. In 2005, the then Association of University Teachers (AUT) voted for a boycott of Israel. If that was illegal, no-one mentioned it at the time. Opponents of the boycott mobilised for a special conference and overwhelmingly overturned the decision — showing that the argument could be had and won within the existing union structures. Following the merger of the AUT and Natfhe to create UCU, a proposal to hold a national debate on the boycott plan was passed at the inaugural conference. Supporters of the boycott evidently did not feel that they would win an outright boycott immediately, if indeed at all.

In the meantime, the winning candidate for General Secretary, Sally Hunt, had made an all-members ballot on any boycott a key feature of her election campaign. This was strongly supported by members of the anti-boycott group "Engage". It was unfortunate that rather than try to mobilise the membership as they had done successfully in 2005, many anti-boycotters favoured a ballot that would have set a dangerous precedent in allowing the leadership to operate outside the union's established democratic structures. Some of them are now also cheering the legal opinion, with little concern for its broader implications.

Ironically, the acceptance of the legal opinion also suits some of those who were in favour of the boycott. The SWP had already begun to get cold feet. Alex Callinicos argued in *Socialist Worker* (29 September 2007) against proposing a boycott at the next conference, citing two tactical problems:

"The first is that the boycott is an issue that divides critics of Israel. Even as sterling an anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist as Noam Chomsky opposes it.

"The second is that any ballot would be dominated by a well-funded Zionist campaign that would enjoy the overwhelming support of the mass media. Under such pressure, the boycott would almost certainly be heavily defeated. Such an outcome would set back the cause of solidarity with Palestine in British universities for many years."

The lawyers have helped the SWP and other "anti-Zionists" hang together in collective outrage: they can denounce the leadership and continue to call on members of UCU to boycott Israel as individuals without running the risk of being defeated at Congress. Meanwhile those opponents of the boycott — like supporters of *Solidarity* — who wanted a chance to win the argument through the union's democratic structures have lost that opportunity.

Local government — vote yes!

BY MIKE FENWICK, LEEDS

850,000 members of UNISON in Local Government will be receiving ballot papers over the next few weeks to vote on strike action over pay. Having already rejected an improved offer of 2.45% the union is calling for a yes vote for action to win an award in line with inflation.

If successful a strike across local government would blow a hole in the public sector pay "freeze" — four years of pay restraint, only offering 2%. Any award less than infla-

tion, currently 3.8%, is in reality a pay cut. And a general increase in prices for even the basics like transport, energy bills, childcare affects the low paid more than the rich.

It's against that background and the drive by the government to drive down wages and reduce working rights that the vote takes on added significance. With postal workers, civil servants and prison officers all engaged in ongoing disputes, a cross sector campaign on pay is a real possibility.

The last strike in local government over pensions was a great success in terms of

turnout and support. Unfortunately that action was not used by the leadership to win a better deal, and historic rights were lost.

A yes vote this time round must include planning for local branches and strike committees to take control of the dispute and remaining resolute in fighting for their goals. By linking up with other unions in local public sector alliances the strength and confidence of strikers can be increased. Vote Yes for action and a chance to turn the tide on Brown's attacks on pay.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/node/9305

NUT

Pay freeze ballot

BY PATRICK MURPHY, NUT NATIONAL EXECUTIVE (PC)

THE NUT National Executive voted yesterday to confirm plans to ballot members to oppose the government's planned pay limit for public sector workers. These plans will see the union ballot members in schools from 10 December 10 until January 8th with an initial strike day set for January 30.

The Secretary of State for Education is due to receive the report from the teachers' pay review body on the settlement for 2008-11 on 26 October, and usually responds within weeks. The union leadership was keen to delay any ballot until the award for 2008-11 was known to members.

I proposed (and Alex Kenny from East London seconded) an amendment to the timetable to enable us to open our ballot on 29 October, close it on 19 November and take action in the week beginning 26 November. This would mean that we could co-ordinate action with Unison local government members who are due to strike on 14-15 November over the same general issue. Their potential action is very important to teachers as they represent tens of thousands of school support staff.

The civil service union, PCS, is also planning action alongside Unison. We would not have been able to strike on the same day but we would have been able to be part of a joint period of industrial action against the pay freeze which would maximise pressure on the government and public and media attention on what the issue.

The proposal to go for an earlier ballot was defeated by 21 votes to 15 with 4 abstentions.

It was nevertheless worth putting to the Executive because (a) it was a better timetable for co-ordinated action (b) it encouraged people opposed to it to commit more clearly to balloting and action on their own timetable and (c) it increased the pressure on the union to produce effective material to build support amongst members for action on pay.

Now we unite around the campaign to get a yes vote and a decent turnout in the ballot later this term.

PCS

More action?

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

PCS is now in the midst of balloting its members concerning future industrial action.

Members are being told that if they vote "yes" in the ballot there will be a one day strike later this year — the stated aim being to achieve the greatest impact on the media, public opinion and politicians. The one day action is to be co-ordinated with other unions if possible.

Further, the sub sections of the union, called Groups (these cover a department or agency) are to take action "if there is a dispute over an issue which is part of the national campaign such as pay, redundancies or office closures".

The ballot itself is not a legal one. The Union already has a mandate from an earlier legal ballot. This latest vote is designed to let members have a say as to whether the action should continue.

Clearly the action must continue, but there has to be a real discussions concerning the tactics. Delegating action to the Groups is not the correct way forward, and runs the risk of de-focusing the national campaign.

RMT

Organising Tube cleaners

BY A TUBE WORKER

LONDON Underground cleaners in the RMT continue to organise. About three weeks ago, cleaning staff at Morden Underground depot succeeded in fighting their management's imposition of a new 7-day a week roster, which would have allowed them no days off!

The RMT cleaner rep came up with an alternative roster, where the same trains would get cleaned, but over five days rather than seven. The cleaners in the depot were solidly organised, and at a branch meeting, the day before the rosters were due to be implemented, cleaners started to organise to walk out. RMT activists from London Underground helped draw up a pro-forma for refusal to work and went down to the gates to show solidarity when the cleaners took their action.

Management backed down and agreed to implement the alternative roster, a real sign of what cleaners' activity and solidarity from other grades can achieve.

This is one success, but the general abuses continue. Across-the-board, cleaners have inadequate or inhumane mess-room facilities — one mess room is reported to be no more

than a cupboard that you can't stand up in! Each London Underground branch for the stations and trains is now supposed to have a "cleaners' co-ordinator", to make all grades of the union take action on these local issues. One branch, on the north of the Northern Line, will hopefully soon involve local reps in a campaign against cleaning company, ISS, overworking its cleaners. The company claims money from Tubelines, who give them the contract, for workers who don't exist, and the cleaners are left to work as many as five Northern Line stations at a time!

The TGWU started organising Underground cleaners a few years ago. This has divided cleaners, and benefitted management, who have recognised the TGWU to shut out the more industrially threatening RMT. But both unions have started to work together to get the £7.20 London Living Wage, to which Ken Livingstone says he is committed, but will not enforce on the companies he employs. Decent pay will not be won without a fight, and it is a huge step forward that both unions are talking about industrial action to win their demands.

BBC

3,000 jobs cut

ON Monday November 5 the National Union of Journalists are to hold a day of action — Stand Up for Journalism day — across the UK and Ireland, to highlight cuts in the media.

Cuts in the media is accompanied by widespread deskilling. That undermines the ability of journalists to do proper research and serious reporting.

The day of action comes as BBC staff face massive job losses — up to 3,000 which is thought to include the loss of six or seven hundred jobs in News.

The NUJ BBC branch is opposed to compulsory redundancies, and has said it would instruct members not to take part in selection processes which led to compulsory.

• www.standupforjournalism.org.uk

3 November NHS demo

HEALTH

BY A HEALTH WORKER

THE 3 November demonstration in defence of the NHS will be the focus for the growing tide of anger at government attacks on the health service.

Local campaigns up and down the country which have organised communities the country against cuts and closures are building for 3 November. But, as ever, the union leadership have been rather slower to act. There is however still time to organise in

workplaces to get health workers out to London for the day.

The provisional details for the day's protest are to assemble from 11am on Saturday 3rd at Temple Place on Victoria Embankment (Temple Tube), then at noon beginning a march through Westminster for a 1pm rally in Trafalgar Square.

The price of failing to build for the demonstration and reverse the government agenda will be not having free, universal healthcare in the future. Without the option of paying for private medicine like the rich, it does become a matter of life or death for most workers.

An open letter to Chris Harman of the SWP: Break with Galloway and the communalists!

Dear comrade Harman,

I KNOW you of old and hope, or would like to believe, that you still hold to the basic socialist ideas which you and I shared in the past. I wrote you a first open letter in June 2004 (*Solidarity* 3/54), urging you to register that the Respect turn was a betrayal of all that was good about the political tradition you used to hold to.

The rift between your organisation, the SWP, and George Galloway should say a great deal to you, as to me, about the nature of the alliance which the SWP and Galloway have had for the last five years. Stop and think for a moment about the astonishing degradation of your organisation.

What have you now fallen out about? Has your SWP Central Committee belatedly understood that your association with Galloway is demeaning and befouling? Do you now find yourselves suddenly realising what you have got into, with the shock of someone who wakes up to the realisation that he has been sleep-walked into a disease-ridden stream of sewage? Have you suddenly realised whom you've been holding hands with?

With a man who was for a decade the ally in Britain for the fascist Ba'athist dictator of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. Who has publicly admitted to promiscuously taking money for his political activities from a wide range of Arab and Islamic governments, from successive Pakistani administrations through the United Arab Emirates to Saudi Arabia. Of whom the parliamentary inquiry report in July this year said "it is reasonable to presume that what the documents [published in the *Daily Telegraph* in 2003] say is true" and "that some of his activities in support of the Iraqi regime may have been financed through an oil-related mechanism"?

No, none of that is news to you. You have known all that about Galloway at least as well as we did, possibly better. Why have the SWP and Galloway suddenly fallen out, then?

It seems that Galloway wants to go deeper into the ethnic-sectarian politics that have given its peculiar political flavour and odour to Respect, and that the SWP has not entirely abandoned concerns to influence the labour movement.

Galloway has objected to the concentration of Respect resources on the Organising for Fighting Unions initiative and on having a presence on the Pledge march.

Your SWP colleague John Rees retorts that "the constant adaptation to what are referred to as 'community leaders' in Tower Hamlets is lowering the level of politics and making us vulnerable to the attacks and pressures brought on us by New Labour. It is alienating us not only from the white working class but also from the more radical sections of the Bengali community, both secular and Muslim, who feel that Respect is becoming the party of a narrow and conservative trend in the area". Why has it taken him - or you - four years to realise that?

Galloway, it seems, also objects to Respect being heavily controlled by the SWP machine. He claims that the SWP in Respect has behaved as we saw you behave in the Socialist Alliance and in other fields where your organisation operates. I don't have independent knowledge of the internal affairs of Respect; but I do know that SWP machine control - for example, steam-rolling Respect conference to reject motions in favour of secularism which only a few years ago would have been uncontested in any left-wing meeting - has on all the big issues served Galloway's politics, not the socialist ideas which you came into politics with.

Think about it. The leaders of the SWP have made enormous ideological and political concessions to Galloway and the communalist and sectarian forces who make up Galloway's "constituency", in and around Respect.

You have, as John Rees now points out, four years late, allied with Muslim "community leaders", businessmen who have little in common with socialism.

You have appealed for votes on the basis that Respect's candidates are the best "fighters for Muslims".

You have supported the forces of bigotry and

social regression, in demanding the suppression of the Danish cartoons of September 2005, which became the target of Islamic clerical-fascist muscle-flexing as not so long ago certain images of Jesus Christ were targeted by Christian bigots (remember the court case in 1977, when *Gay News* was found guilty of blasphemy?).

Your SWP Central Committee colleague Alex Callinicos, whose ability to write "Marxist" rationalisations of almost anything you must know well by now and perhaps privately despise, has retrospectively repudiated the SWP's earlier, better self, for having supported Salman Rushdie against the Islamist bigots who wanted to shed his blood for writing with "disrespect" of Muhammad in his novel *The Satanic Verses* (*Socialist Worker*, 11 February 2006).

But then, under your own editorship, *Socialist Worker* tried to excuse the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women (1 October 2001)!

Last Sunday, 7 October, you gave the official endorsement of Respect to the "Al Quds day" demonstration called by Islamists in London to continue a tradition inaugurated by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 and sponsored by the Iranian government since then.

Your press has limited itself to the mildest criticisms of the Ahmadiyyah regime in Iran, and enthusiastically welcomed the coup by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. You have marched with the slogan "We are all Hezbollah".

You had your student members join the Federation of Student Islamic Societies in walking out in protest when an Iraqi socialist feminist addressed the National Union of Students conference.

In the unions, your members have lined up again and again with officials who are left-wing in words but not in action, in the cause of trying to entice them into Respect or at least onto the platforms of Stop the War, Unite Against Fascism, and similar.

The SWP has done all this in tandem with Galloway - only to get slapped and rebuked by him, now that Respect has lost momentum and gone into unmistakable decline.

Galloway may well be angling to get the rump Communist Party of Britain into Respect, to give him more solid backing for his Stalinistic politics; his next step after that could be to dump the SWP altogether, leaving him with the Respect name and the CPB's assets such as the *Morning Star*. And yet the SWP is still in retreat.

The entire Respect episode was, is, and, if it continues, will be a sordid political manoeuvre in which the SWP leaders, with the casual indifference of a dog raising his hind leg against a lamp-post, has (to put it in basic English, so you will understand me) pissed on secularism, on international working-class solidarity, on liberalism in the good sense (opposition to religious bigotry and defence of civil, social, and intellectual freedom), and most of all, perhaps, on rational socialist politics.

This whole foul chapter of political adventurism grew, first in the heads of the SWP leaders, out of the anti-war movement - out of your desire on any terms to turn that movement into solid ongoing "assets" for your organisation. In pursuit of that goal, the SWP pumped up the

Muslim Association of Britain (British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood; prior to the SWP's sponsorship, a small and frail group), and had an MAB leader running as a Respect candidate although he openly avowed that "his religion" taught him that there "would always be rich and poor".

Now you are less concerned, perhaps, with conciliating Galloway and his allies. Why? Because you know that with Britain's progressive withdrawal from Iraq, the rump "anti-war movement" is winding to its end? Because you want to try to cash in some of your "winnings", and make a tactical retreat from the "excesses" of "Islamicising" over the last five years?

You must realise that the SWP has gained very little in terms of what matters to you most - recruits, "building the SWP". You know that inside Respect, it hasn't been the SWP winning over Muslim youth drawn in by Galloway, but Galloway winning over former SWP organisers, members, and sympathisers. Even inside the SWP, the SWP Central Committee's efforts to put up a firm front against Galloway at first elicited opposition from members "soft" on Galloway, more internal opposition than the SWP has seen for many years.

From where AWL stands it looks as if the SWP has had only a derisively small level of recruitment of young (or any) people of Muslim background, and that a large segment of the SWP and SWP periphery are bewildered and demoralised.

Even in narrow terms of SWP "gate receipts", the whole exercise has been a grotesque series of ideological and political self-betrays and self-disavowals which have produced none of the political blood-money you thought to gain.

But you can claim "revolutionary virtue" for opposing the Iraq war? None of the things the SWP has done in the last four years, which can all be summed up in the one word "Respect", were a necessary part of opposing the war. AWL opposed the war - but we have also bitterly opposed most of what the SWP and its allies have done since the invasion of Iraq.

To oppose the war and to fight Blair and Bush, it was not necessary to turn yourselves into "reactionary anti-imperialists", the "anti-imperialist" equivalent of the "reactionary socialists" whom Marx and Engels denounced in the *Communist Manifesto*.

It was not necessary - indeed, it was discrediting, counter-productive, self-destructive - to back the sectarian, clerical-fascist "resistance" in Iraq, who are the mortal enemies of the renaissance labour movement there, of all civil liberties, and of all women in the Iraqi state.

It was not necessary to ally with Galloway, or with the MAB. It was not necessary, it was self-disabling, to develop the fantasy that large numbers of Muslims, as they are, without changing except in being roused as Muslims by opposition to the war in Iraq, could be won - to what? - by solidarising with them on their own political terrain and mimicking their politics and their "Islamism".

And what have you got from it? Nothing. Whatever happens now, the legacy of this episode in your organisation's history will remain one of immense political confusion and inevitably, leave an additional residue of cynicism.

For decades your organisation has followed the procedure of tailoring your "Marxism" to its organisational needs and desires. Your organisation's "Marxism" was and is "apparatus Marxism" - not Marxism which guides your organisation, but "Marxism" which rationalises from what the SWP's leaders think will bring recruits and organisational advantage. A scandalous public example of what is usually done inside closed rooms and in the heads of SWP leaders was the "change of line" - twenty years after - on the Salman Rushdie affair.

Galloway did not cause any of what you have done. He bears no responsibility for the SWP, only for his own foul record and his own shameless self. Even so, Galloway is one of the prime symbols and embodiments of what the SWP has become - what you have let it become.

If you force a division in the SWP Central Committee and a break with Galloway - or, even more so, if the SWP rank and file were to push you into doing that - then that would be a possible start (no more, but a possible start) to a self-cleaning and self-regeneration by the SWP.

At least, that is what it would be if the SWP membership call you all to account - those who initiated this chapter in the SWP's history, and those in the leadership who weakly and short-sightedly went along with it. If they let none of you smoothly slide away from the resultant mess, throwing self-serving rationalisations and alibis over your shoulders.

If you won't fight to defend the principles of socialism, secularism, and rational politics - if you won't break with Galloway now, and honestly criticise and analyse the last four or five years - then what good are you as leaders, or as members, of a socialist organisation?

If you won't do it, SWP members should fight to make you do it. True, they have few democratic mechanisms to challenge the Central Committee. But they are not helpless.

They can talk to other members who are unhappy with the foul political and moral morass into which the SWP has been led. They can organise with them, secretly if they need to (they probably would). They can read the criticisms of SWP policy produced over the years by other socialists. They can break through the barrier of misrepresentation, demonisation, and slander which the members of the SWP Central Committee, including you, have erected to stop them even talking to people like ourselves.

Even if the conflict with Galloway comes to a break, what confidence for the future can SWP members have in those responsible for the last four years, including you, comrade Harman? The central SWP leaders today are people bred and raised to "leadership" by the SWP machine which you and others helped Tony Cliff build. Your typical methods have been political demagoguery, bureaucratic and manipulative organisational practices, eternal willingness to shed principles for perceived short-term advantage, and refusal to allow the SWP rank and file any real freedom of discussion or control over the leaders.

Even if, or when, a break comes with Galloway, the SWP will not simply revert to what it was five or ten years ago. Unless the break comes by the SWP openly renouncing Galloway and its own whole record for the last five years - rather than by Galloway, at his own chosen time, discarding the "Trotskyists" for whom he has never troubled to conceal his contempt - the downward political spiral will continue. At best it will only be reversed partially and temporarily.

Comrade Harman, the revolutionary politics which you spent most of your life working for are still worth fighting for! In the SWP they will have to be fought for against the leaders and their "theoreticians", such as you. Comrades of the SWP, the socialist ideas which the SWP claims to represent are worth fighting for! Break with Galloway!

Sean Matgamna

- More on SWP and Respect: www.workersliberty.org/node/7087
- First open letter to Chris Harman: www.workersliberty.org/node/5719

George Galloway during a 2004 anti-war demonstration

French workers strike back

BY ED MALTBY

FRENCH rail, gas, and electricity workers will be striking on 18 October over pensions, privatisation and their right to strike. The new right-wing French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, has bitten off more than he can chew.

So desperate is Sarkozy to prove himself to right-wing voters and his party, the UMP, he plans to destroy as quickly as possible all of the gains won by French workers since the war; gains which the French working class has been able at least partially to defend throughout the 1980s and 90s, while other European workers were suffering a series of defeats.

Sarkozy wants to break the strength of the railway workers' unions, and strip transport and energy workers of their "special regimes" — a raft of pension benefits won decades ago, which allow workers to retire at 55 on a full pension. The last time a minister tried to do that was in 1995, when Alain Juppé's attacks on these workers resulted in a month of massive strikes and a major victory for the unions. Sarko's vaulting ambition may be catapulting him straight towards a replay of that battle.

The unions who organise workers on the state rail company (SNCF) and Paris public transport (RATP) haven't forgotten the lessons they learned in 1995. Although many older workers have retired since then, the new workers who were still at school in 1995 are militant and as organised.

Tensions have been since Sarkozy's government decided in August to close 268 stations and shift their freight capacity on the rails. Workers were also angered by new "minimum service" legislation, which attacks the right to strike by obliging individual workers to tell their boss 48 hours before a strike whether or not they will be taking part.

Mass meetings have been held at workplaces across France, with very high attendances. At a recent such "general assembly" at the Quatre-Mares depot in Rouen, 450 workers out of a total of 750 were in attendance. The final straw came in September, when Sarkozy announced his intention to break the "special regime".

Sarkozy is also copying the press strategy of the Brown government and the Metronet bosses, by trying to drive a wedge between passengers and rail workers. He has publicly attacked "privileged railwaymen" who are

"taking the rest of us hostage". French workers and socialists reply that it is the government who are causing the real disruption: by gutting public services and attacking workers'

It is grassroots militants who are driving this campaign and giving it a political character.

right to strike, and it is they who are "taking the rest of us hostage"!

The electricity (EDF) and gas (GDF) company workers announced in September that they too would be joining the rail workers in going out on strike on 18 October. They too will be hurt badly by an attack on the special regimes. Moreover, following the part-privatisation of both of these companies, forcing them to compete with each other, hundreds of jobs are being cut, or moved into insecure

employment in call centres as the companies "rationalise". Energy workers have announced that they will strike together to defend public services and employees' pensions.

One theme which runs throughout the build-up to this strike is grassroots worker self-organisation. It is the workers themselves who are organising general assemblies, making the political arguments about public services and the right to strike; and forcing their union bureaucracies into action. The unions which organise the energy workers, for example, have said nothing about privatisation or public services: their only complaint to the government is that the proposed pension changes have "not been negotiated".

It is the grassroots militants who are driving this campaign and giving it a political character. They have forced the unions into action, and they have forced the CGT to call a demonstration on 18 October.

We should support these strikes, and learn from them: that the bosses must not be allowed to divide passengers and workers; and that only solid grassroots organisation can create fighting unions and deliver political change — not union bureaucracies.

Pakistan: more arrests

REPRESSION of opposition groups, including the socialist Labour Party, Pakistan continues. At the end of September ten members, including General Secretary Farooq Tariq, were arrested, at a protest against General Pervez Musharraf filing nomination papers for a second presidential term. They have been charged under Pakistan's anti-terrorist laws!

Musharraf has been re-elected as Pakistan's President after winning all but five of the votes cast in a joint Parliamentary and Provincial Assembly election. He would have won even if opposition groups had not boycotted the election.

However Pakistan's Supreme Court has said he cannot be declared the winner until they make a ruling (expected later this month) on whether or not the election was legal. Musharraf was constitutionally obliged to step

down this year.

The Supreme Court has a reputation for some independence, so Musharraf has raised the political temperature by saying he will step down as *military chief*... but only if he is declared re-elected as *President*. Giving up his army uniform will also clear the way for Benazir Bhutto to deliver on her side of a bargain made with Musharraf — to share power after January 2008 elections (the result is apparently a foregone conclusion) in exchange for having the charges of corruption against her dropped.

Whether this is just another blip for Pakistan's corrupt and dangerous military-political establishment or a serious political crisis with long term global ramifications for the "war on terror" remains to be seen.

• Send messages of solidarity to: labourpartyuk@yahoo.com

Stop repression in Burma!

From back page

The Yadana project has benefited from the heavy use of forced labour by Burmese people, including children. There are countless reports of Burmese soldiers in the pipeline region conscripting thousands of civilians to perform forced labour for the benefit of the pipeline.

As onshore work commenced, the military directed the construction of service roads and helpads, as well as their own camps and barracks, through the use of forced labour.

Typically the army called on village leaders to send forced labourers on a rotational basis. Each group works for one to two weeks leaving only when a replacement group arrives. Hundreds of acres of land have been cleared, bamboo and trees cut down, stumps dug out and ground levelled. Villagers have dug wells and trenches, built fences, cut thatch and made posts and boards to build barracks, working through the heat of the day under threat of punishment and ill treatment.

All trade unions that existed before the present military regime came to power have been disbanded. Instead the military has a labour front, the Union Solidarity and Development Association. Organisations such

as the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB), founded in 1991 have to function underground and its members face constant threat of repression and reprisal, including detention, torture and criminal prosecution. It maintains structures both inside and outside the country — for example among the 1.5 million Burmese migrants working in Thailand.

Despite the repression, some strikes have taken place. In May last year over 900 workers at Hae Wae Garment in Rangoon went on strike to demand better conditions of work and increased salaries. When workers demanded a meeting to press their demands, factory management refused — and only allowed a hand-picked group to meet with the authorities.

All of them were forced to sign a written statement that indicated that there were no problems at the factory. Workers were compelled to return to work without any improvement in conditions and faced a climate of intimidation in the factory in subsequent weeks. A detachment of police was posted in the factory to prevent further unrest.

Whilst it is understandable to raise demands for a boycott of the regime and for capital to stop profiting from the misery of Burmese people, the real task is to help build a workers' opposition to the regime. Workers were prominent in 1988 and have also shown their power against the military in other countries in the region, such as Thailand. Socialists should do everything possible to support the Burmese workers and their organisations to develop into an independent opposition pole.

US Auto Workers strike, but concede

Last month, for the first time in 37 years the US United Auto Workers (UAW) union launched a two-day nationwide strike against General Motors. The strike involved 73,000 production workers. It was over a two-tier wage structure, plant closures, outsourcing, forced 10-hour work days, and various classification and work rule changes.

The strike brought GM production to a halt. According to the US rank and file union magazine *Labor Notes* there was confusion over the union's strategy for the strike.

The settlement the union has obtained leaves a lot to be desired, including a wage freeze for hourly workers. The biggest issue remains the off-loading of some health care costs onto the workforce.

Some groups of workers are beginning to organise around a campaign to get publicly funded healthcare plans.

• www.workersliberty.org/node/9315

Iraqi unions unite against oil law

BY RHODRI EVANS

ON 22 September, the Anti Oil Law Front, a joint campaign of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions and the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq, organised a demonstration in Baghdad.

It was a fairly small demonstration, and it failed to draw in the General Federation of Iraqi Workers, which has also denounced the Iraqi government's attempts (under intense US pressure) to push through an oil privatisation law, but it was an important step forward.

It was joint action by different union federations, and joint action on the streets, beyond the joint statements which the various Iraqi union organisations have often issued from internationally-sponsored joint meetings in Jordan.

Not only the unions, but also vast numbers of Iraqis, oppose oil privatisation. Until 1961, Iraq's richest natural resource, its oil, was controlled by an international consortium made up of BP, Shell, what is now the French oil company Total, and minor shares for other, most US-based, corporations.

After Iraq's British-sponsored monarchy was overthrown in 1958, and the country entered a period of democratic ferment and growth of the labour movement prior to the Ba'athist coups of 1963 and 1968, most of the oilfields were nationalised in 1961. The operation was completed in 1972.

Many Iraqis see those nationalisations as an essential step in self-determination. The unions also have good cause to oppose privatisation because it will, as elsewhere in the world, bring job cuts and profit-gouging.

The hold-up in the Iraqi parliament over the law is due to haggling over the terms of privatisation — who gets to decide on the contracts, and who gets the revenues — and

the weakness of the Maliki government, rather than objections of principle. The Iraqi labour movement, if it can muster the strength for it, has a chance to win the leadership of large numbers of people by a big campaign against the principle of privatisation.

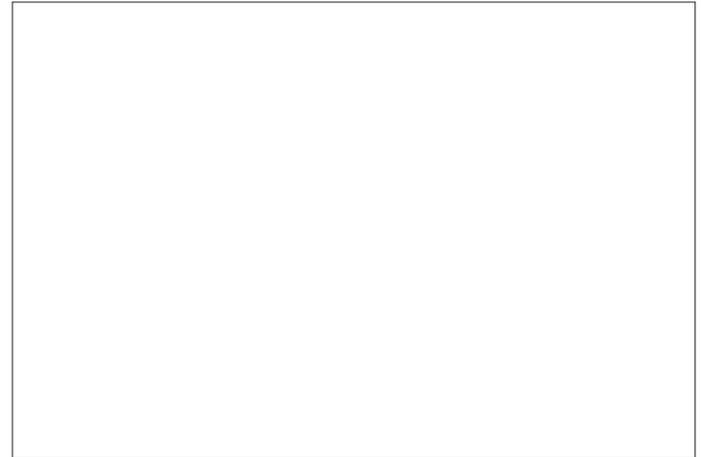
The social collapse in which the unions have to operate continues, however, to worsen. The British government would have us believe that the draw-down of the British troops in Basra signifies completion of a job well done. Far from it.

According to Basra's police chief (cited by the McClatchy news agency, 4 October) an average of 15 women a day are killed on the streets of Basra for insufficient adherence to Islamic dress codes. "The vigilantes patrol the streets of Basra on motorbikes or in cars with dark-tinted windows and no license plates. They accost women who are not wearing the... hijab".

And the clerical-fascist groups are also in conflict with each other. Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, and the Badr Corps of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC, formerly SCIRI) signed a ceasefire on 6 October in Iraq. But it may not hold long; and it may even speed, rather than slow, conflict in Basra, where SIIC's main battle is against yet another Shia-Islamist group, Fadhlila.

On 5 October, Shaikh Harith al-Dhari, a leader of the Association of Muslim Scholars, stated that "al-Qaeda is of us and we are with it". Previously the AMS has been reckoned as the civilian face for the less "ultra" of the Sunni-Islamist militias, who generally dislike al-Qaeda. It remains to be seen how representative al-Dhari is, but his statement cannot but be a blow to US claims that Iraqi Sunnis are increasingly solid against al-Qaeda.

Following the failure of the US troop "surge", George W Bush's strategy in Iraq now seems to be just to "hold on" until he can hand over the mess at the start of 2009.



Contrary to popular impressions, the three front-runners for the Democratic nomination for President, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards, have all specifically refused to promise that they will have US troops out of Iraq even by 2013.

Nevertheless, they cannot but use the mess in Iraq as an issue against the Republicans, and so they will be under pressure to try to offer something new.

In that perspective the US Senate vote on 28 September was worrying. On the motion of the Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, the Senate voted in favour of reorganising Iraq on a federal basis. Biden's original text called for the country to be divided between its "major factions", though those words were lost in the final text.

Prominent US figures close to the

Democrats, like Peter Galbraith, have long been calling outright for the partition of Iraq into Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia states.

Every faction in Arab Iraq — even including SIIC, which actually has a plan for an autonomous "Shia region" in the south — condemned the Senate vote. The US Embassy in Iraq felt obliged to issue an unusually sharp denunciation of the Senate text.

There is reason behind the denunciations. Sunni and Shia are not nationalities, and are inextricably mixed in Iraq, even after the recent population movements. Baghdad, which would be the centre of any supposed "Sunni region", is perhaps 75% Shia.

If the Democrats do venture into pushing partition, it would throw Iraq into even more destructive conflict than the present simmering, multi-faceted civil war.

WORKERS' NEWS ROUND-UP

BY PABLO VELASCO

Iranian sugar workers strike

WORKERS at an Iranian state-owned company went on strike at the beginning of October over several months' of unpaid wages. Workers from the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Plantation and Industry Company gathered in front of the Governor's Office in Shush city, in Khuzestan province in southern Iran and vowed to stay on strike until their demands were met.

The workers have been on strike 16 times over the past two years. But for two years they got nowhere with the management or any government officials.

Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane is the only sugar cane factory in Iran and was built nearly 50 years ago. It has nearly \$100 million debts. The workers believe that since this debt is owed to state-owned institutions like the water, electricity and gas companies, as well as the tax and insurance authorities, it can be written off.

The workers say that a "sugar mafia" is operating in the country and has got the government in its pocket. While many sugar producing companies are facing bankruptcy, the private sector and the government are making big profits from importing sugar!

The workers have no right to form a trade union. Some of the workers who have been following up these issues have been victimised and threatened with the sack.

• More info: Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network, www.iwsn.org

• According to reports on LabourStart from the British Ahwazi Friendship Society, the Iranian regime has deployed members of the Lebanese Hezbollah to break the strike.

Venezuelan repression

WE print this abridged declaration of the Juventud de Izquierda Revolucionaria (JIR) of Venezuela denouncing

the repression against Venezuelan oil workers last month.

THE JIR repudiates the violent repression against the oil workers of Puerto La Cruz, carried out Thursday 27 September at the CVP (Corporación Venezolana de Petróleo) in Anzoátegui.

The workers were mobilising over the Collective Petroleum Contract in the morning, to deliver a document about the situation to the PDVSA President and Minister Rafael Ramírez, but the answer they got was brutal repression by the Anzoátegui state police, who attacked the peacefully protesting oil workers. This mobilisation was part of the national day of struggle for the Collective Petroleum Contract. A small group of workers, among them José Bodas, general secretary of Fedepetrol-Anzoátegui, were locked inside the CVP building. Three workers suffered bullet wounds.

Once more, workers struggling for their basic rights in the country have suffered brutal repression. It is no accident that these repressive acts are against front line workers.

Today the same oil workers who confronted the coup plotters of April 2002, and those who were in the front ranks to defeat the oil work-stoppage sabotage [December 2002 – January 2003], organised by the right wing and ordered from the US, by taking control of several refineries like that of El Palito, and preventing the success of Washington's assault, are repressed.

We call on all the political forces of the left, on the workers' organisations, unions and popular organizations, on the social movements, on student centres and human rights groups, etc., to repudiate this brutal act. The broadest unity is needed, to carry out protests. This deed cannot go unpunished, since it indicates that now workers' protests are beginning to be criminalised.

We hold the government of this state and its police, and the national government, which runs PDVSA, responsible for all these acts, as well as for the fate of the workers who are still in the CVP installations in Anzoátegui.

• Full article at www.ft-ci.org/article.php3?id_article=1009

Climate change

WHILE new records are set for Arctic temperatures and the Amazon rain forest burns, the global capitalist class and its states cannot agree even the most limited palliatives.

Last week, new reports by Canadian researchers working in the Arctic found temperatures of 22°C, some 15°C above average in July and August.

This led to dramatic melting of Arctic sea ice in September and suggests global warming is taking place even more rapidly than feared.

At the same time projects to upgrade road and river transport, as well as plans to create dams and power and communications cabling, mean that the entire Amazon jungle may be lost within 40 years.

Against this backdrop, the US government convened a meeting of the 20 biggest global polluting countries, responsible for nearly 80% of global carbon emissions — but failed to agree on a common international programme to cut emissions over the next generation. At the talks George Bush rejected mandatory caps or specific targets to reduce emissions, and instead pinned his hopes on market mechanisms and unspecified technologies. This puts in question whether any sort of global deal will be struck in Bali at the UN climate change conference in December.

One measure of the paucity of market-driven measures came to light last week. A survey of FTSE 100 by Christian Aid found that fewer than one in five companies have absolute emissions reductions targets, with only seven of them aiming to cut their emissions by 5% a year. Fewer than half include indirect emissions in their figures and one in six doesn't even bother to calculate their emissions at all.

For the capitalist class, profit comes before the planet, just as it comes before poverty and working class peoples' lives. The labour movement simply cannot trust the bourgeoisie to tackle climate change. What we need is to develop our own programme of demands to stop global warming. This must include control over the big production decisions, and drastic changes in working hours.

Poland before the elections

BY PIOTR KENDZIOREK, ACTIVIST IN
POLAND'S NEW LEFT

THE political situation in Poland before the parliamentary elections (scheduled for 21 October), is dominated by competition between two parties of the right. These are Law and Justice (PiS) (now in power) and Civic Platform (PO). Both represent right populist politics, but of different kinds.

PO is a neoliberal party with a neo-Thatcherite view of the social world and PiS has a more traditional type of populism, in which the political, intellectual and economic elites are criticised for serving their own interests without taking into account the problems of ordinary people.

The politicians and intellectuals of PiS base themselves on the idea of needing a clear break with the type of functioning of state institutions dominant until they came to power in 2005. It is connected with a strong anti-Communism, which — paradoxically — serves as a ideological weapon in a specific criticism of the kind of capitalist society which emerged out of the social and economic transformation of the neo-Stalinist social relations.

The populist and rightist content of this criticism are clear.

They say the faults of the capitalist transformation were caused by the economic transition of a part of the former communist nomenclatura into a new capitalist elite. This post-communist capitalists and the support that they got from the dominant political and state institutions are presented as the real cause of the “deformations” of capitalist society in Poland.

This is a well known scheme of right populism — to condemn a part of the economical and political ruling classes for behaving not “correctly” and against the interests of the national community.

The nationalist and anti-Communist ideology of right populism has a big impact on the population. This is connected with the weakness of left ideas and left political activities, and the right's conquest of state mass-media, which are used to show a struggle of the political right against the “corrupted” elites.

The PiS “struggle against corruption”, used by them as an instrument to build a kind of popular capitalism, would not be successful if the opposition were able to show that it is pure demagoguery, behind which the new political bourgeois elite not only exploits state institutions for their own profits, but also tries to overcome the liberal idea of the partition of power between different state institutions. They have concentrated all sources of political state power in the hands of a ruling nationalist-conservative clique led by twin brothers Kaczynski (one of them is president, the other prime minister).

Many groups of liberal and social-democratic intellectuals and politicians are unable to break from illusions in PiS because they are not willing to articulate real social problems and (class) interests. Post-communist social-democracy does not take on the struggle with the right over capitalist exploitation and poverty, but in fact criticises the right's attacks on the brutal social-economic transformation in Poland. This situation is well described by Bronislaw Lagowski, a well known left-liberal intellectual, in the social-democratic weekly *Przeгляд (Review)*. He argues that the 90s were a very good time for post-Communist

social-democracy because ordinary people then supported social-democracy, seeing them the only alternative to the political right.

Disillusionment with the social-economic politics of the Polish social-democracy caused a strong crisis in the party, but no left current emerged as a result, because the politics of the party were controlled by a professional apparatus who belonged to a (privileged) ruling political and economic class.

Despite this, some leftist voters will vote for the social-democratic Left and Democrats

Politics has been transformed into a spectacle of competition between professional political cliques...

(LiD), because there are not many alternatives.

One of alternative possibilities is Self-Defence — one of the two big parties which represent the interests of the peasants. This party participated in the rightist government of PiS but left it. Since then the leadership of the party have made a turn to left social phrasology.

This turn of Self-Defence may be just tactical, but it made possible for the radical left group Nowa Lewica/New Left (which includes AWL co-thinkers in Poland) to participate in the elections on the lists on Self-Defence. Its leader Piotr Ikonowicz, who is known as one of very few politicians who has tried to put socialist ideas into political land-

scape of Poland, is standing.

The difficulties for the far left in participating in political life are the same as in many other capitalist societies. Politics has been transformed into a spectacle of competition between professional political cliques, and material resources for participation in this game lie only in the hands of the capitalist (economic) ruling class.

The idea of a civil society being a base for the proper functioning of democracy was connected by most intellectuals after 1989 with the functioning of capitalism, but nowadays even the liberal press says that the historical connection between capitalism and parliamentary democracy is not unproblematic, because of the tendency of the capitalist market to atomize people and the transformation of social relations in relations based on individual competition.

The nationalist and populist PiS government tries to politicise people through politics which claim to represent the (national) interests of all Polish people against internal (corrupted post-communist businessmen) and foreign enemies (like Russians, liberals from the EU disrespecting Polish Catholic values etc). This politics attempts to undermine Ikonowicz and Nowa Lewica and others — such as the small social-democratic Polish Labour Party (PPP), which is controlled by the leadership of a trade union.

The forthcoming parliamentary elections will be won by the political right, but there is a hope that the socialist left (by Ikonowicz and PPP's participation) will be able to show a distinctive position in the eyes of many thousands of working class people.

A Third Camp in Ukraine's tussle

PARLIAMENTARY elections took place in Ukraine on 30 September; western pundits are proclaiming these may “have saved the Orange Revolution”, of 2004. The elections were an effort to resolve the political crisis in Ukraine, triggered by President Viktor Yushchenko's decree on 2 April dissolving parliament, after a protracted power struggle between rival blocs.

One bloc is the “opposition” associated with the “Orange Revolution”, comprising President Yushchenko's party Our Ukraine and the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYU). There is no popular movement with democratic aspirations underpinning their electoral revival at present.

The rival bloc is headed by Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions, which heads the Coalition of National Unity with the neo-Stalinist Communist Party of Ukraine and the Socialist Party of Ukraine.

Russia has responded to the possibility of a pro-Western government in its former colony with new threats to reduce energy supplies, sparking fears of a repeat of the 2006 gas crisis when the Russian energy giant Gazprom briefly shut off the flow of gas to Ukraine, affecting large parts of Europe.

Some on the British left, for instance the *Morning Star* and various kitsch Trotskyists, align themselves with figures such as Yanukovich and his counterfeit left allies simply because they are opponents of the USA and friendly to Moscow. There are other voices in Ukraine struggling to be heard, those of the reviving genuine working class socialism.

Below we publish part of a statement on the elections by the New Left movement, a coalition of several left organisations, informal groups, web-sites, analytical centres, trade unions, and individual left, environmentalist, feminist and human rights activists. The New Left stands on the principles of anti-capitalism, anti-fascism, and anti-Stalinism, and working on the renovation of socialist theory and praxis.

Among the participants in the New Left movement are the revolutionary socialist group Left Initiative; Network of Civic Initiatives “Basta”; art-group “Ukrainian Vanguard”; Makhnovist club; “Bricolage”, a left history web-site; the trade unions Defence of Labour and Metrostroj [Subway] trade-union; Center of Civil Society Problems Research; and “Stratagema” analytical centre. The Organising Committee of the New Left movement includes well-known human rights activist Volodymyr Chemerys and the head of the Federation of Independent Trade-Unions of Ukraine, Viktor Yavorsky.

Chris Ford

It is apparent to us that the crisis of 2007 is caused by the aggravation of the competition between the groups of large capital, whose interests are represented in both main camps of the political confrontation. Its premise is more intense political corruption from both sides.

The pre-term parliamentary elections this year are the consequence of behind-the-scenes political agreements which contradict the formal premises of the law. Furthermore, it creates preconditions for the organisation of political manipulation (such as the “constitutional referendum”), intended to change the constitution with the aim of placing in presidential hands unlimited autocratic authority...

We are convinced that the parliamentary elections of 2007 do not represent the sovereign choice of the Ukrainian people and are taking place in the conditions of external interference and the aggravation of inter-imperialist rivalry for markets, economic resources and the political orientation of Ukraine between the main actors on the post-soviet space.

These are, in the first place, expansionism of the United States, interested in supporting conflict between Ukraine and Russia and in strengthening the position of “Orange” factions in the domestic ruling class, representatives of

the interests of trans-national corporations;

Closely behind them is the young Russian capitalism, which has consolidated its power in recent years and seeks greater control over the transport infrastructure and the most liquid assets in its “near abroad”;

The third vector of power coincides with big capital of the European Union countries supported by the Brussels bureaucracy. Whilst not wishing to extend the borders of European Union to include Ukraine it cherishes its own exclusive interests.

At present we consider that a victory in the elections of any of the main political powers will only worsen the existing social crisis in the country. Grounds for such an affirmation stem from the nature of the main political actors.

For instance, the pro-presidential, bureaucracy-business bloc “Our Ukraine/People's Self-Defence”, covering itself with the usual “social initiatives” and “national-patriotic” slogans of its leaders, really represents the interests of agents of neo-liberal fundamentalism.

On the other hand, their contingent counterpart — The Party of Regions — defends the positions of the large capital formed during the bloody privatisation in the 1990s. Its main interest consists in the final redistribution of the remaining state assets, in particular in the transport, communications and military-industrial complex, in favour of its own business-groups.

The third actor, according to its own self-identification, is the “radical opposition” Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko flirting with social-populist rhetoric. However, it is well-known that the real aim of “Lady Yu” is the establishment of an autocratic rule that in no way corresponds to the interests of the labouring classes of the Ukrainian nation.

The probable coalition between “Our Ukraine” and the Party of the Regions after the elections will allow for the collusion of ruling classes against the interests of labour. At the same time the creation of an alliance between

ByuT (Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc) and “Our Ukraine” poses numerous risks for the Ukrainian economy encouraging the subsequent sell-off of her most profitable assets to trans-national capital.

The old “left” parties (Communist Party, Socialist Party, Progressive Socialist Party), for a variety of reasons, do not correspond to their self-proclaimed identity and are not worthy of being supported in the parliamentary elections in 2007...

We are convinced of the fact that no matter what the outcome of the elections and the format of a future government coalition will be, Ukraine will face further anti-social “reforms”, particularly in housing and communal services, labour and pension legislation, which will result in a decline of living standards for the majority of the citizens of our country.

The Organising Committee of the “New Left” movement asserts:

1. We will not take part in the pre-term parliamentary elections of 2007 on any side, and call on citizens to boycott them.

2. We call on electors to recognise that the existing electoral system deforms the free expression of popular will, coercing them to choose among powers associated with ruling classes and their property interests.

3. We condemn any endeavours to revise the Constitution which will weaken political democracy and redistribute the power in favour of a presidential autocracy.

4. We call on labour in Ukraine to break from illusions in the present political actors and to understand that through engagement in the formation of grassroots movements for social rights and social emancipation (strike committees, trade-union organisations, ecological initiatives and others) we can defend our interests and create premises for political changes for the better.

• <http://livasprava.in.ua>
• www.livitsa.info

Israel, Palestine and workers' solidarity

BY DANIEL RANDALL

WHEN it comes to Israel/Palestine and the Middle East more generally, as with so many international issues, much of the revolutionary left prefers to compete to see who can be the shrillest "anti-imperialist" rather than seriously analysing the politics of the region from a class-struggle perspective and identifying working class forces with which they can make practical solidarity.

The current leaders in the "anti-imperialist" stakes are the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) who are in fact so anti-imperialist that they have become positive supporters of Hamas and Hezbollah — religious fundamentalists funded by Iran, a major sub-imperialist power in the region. Their blind, classless "anti-imperialism" — which has nothing to do with the working class, democratic anti-imperialism of a genuine socialist tradition — has led them into more-or-less open support for a major capitalist power with imperialist ambitions of its own. For socialists who do not want to make the same mistake, the question of locating working class elements on the political terrain in Israel/Palestine becomes all the more important.

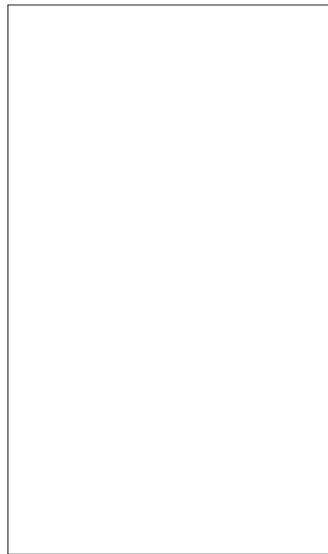
It is important too because of debates currently taking place within the British labour movement. The movement to launch various forms of boycotts of Israeli goods, Israeli academia, Israeli culture or simply Israel itself has gained some currency in British trade unions, with Unison, Unite (TGWU), UCU and the NUJ all passing some variation of boycott policy.

Although the AWL has characterised the boycott project as a counterproductive dead-end with an anti-semitic logic, we by no means wish to suggest that all of the rank-and-file members of those unions who voted for those policies are somehow unconscious anti-semites. Many if not most will have voted for the policy because it seemed like the only immediately positive, practical, explicit thing they could do to express some kind of solidarity for the Palestinian people — atomised, terrorised and brutally oppressed by the full military might of the Israeli state in its own sub-imperialist project in the Occupied Territories.

The instinct to "do something" to help them is right. It is the beginning of much of socialist wisdom and common-sense. It is, therefore, the job of thinking revolutionaries to provide those trade unionists with something real, something progressive and something practical to "do" that is not a counterproductive dead end but that will help them support the only forces in the region capable of precipitating any kind of progressive social change; that is, working class and democratic forces.

THERE is currently an official trade union movement in both Israel and Palestine.

The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) is historically politically dominated by supporters of Fatah, the secular-nationalist party which has been discredited among large numbers of former supporters and is engaged in a bitter civil war with Hamas. Nonetheless the union federation represents a real working class formation despite its bureaucratic leadership.¹ It has a membership of around 380,000 workers in 15 affiliated unions. It also organises amongst Palestinians who are



migrant workers within Israel itself, as well as making inroads into organising the women workers who typically make up some of the most highly exploited sections of the workforce.^{2,3}

In September 2006, the PGFTU protested at the failure of the Hamas government to pay public sector workers such as teachers and civil servants.⁴ Although Fatah politicking against Hamas played a role in the initiation of the strike, it still represented a mass workers' mobilisation against their bosses and paymasters. Despite its bureaucracy and politically compromised leadership, the PGFTU still represents the principal centre of workers' organisation in Palestine and as such its members deserve solidarity.

Beyond the PGFTU, there are several smaller, more independent initiatives such as the Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre.⁵ In summer 2007, the DWRC called a "conference of independent trade unions". Its leader Hassan Barghouti commented "currently, there are four competing labour federations in Palestine — three controlled by Fatah and one by Hamas. None of these federations have had genuine democratic elections of their leadership in recent years and appointments and distribution of positions in the executive boards are made on a political basis. This situation will considerably weaken the trade union movement and it has become necessary to create a movement independent of political factions in order to truly represent Palestinian workers."⁶

The DWRC runs campaigns around freedom of association and the right to organise, as well as social programmes targeting poverty and unemployment. It also holds training and education courses to provide Palestinian workers with basic organising skills.

As well as these workers' organisations, there are organisations struggling for the rights of other oppressed groups in Palestine. The economic chaos brought on by

forty years of Israeli occupation, coupled with the influence of clerical-fascist forces such as Hamas, mean that Palestine is not a safe place to be an LGBT person. Although many of the organisations fighting for LGBT rights (such as Al-Qaws) are based on mainstream, NGO-style political and organisational forms, they too need support in their struggle for the rights of one of the most vulnerable groups in Palestinian society.

Beyond the Occupied Territories, there are some initiatives attempting to build links between Palestinian and Israeli workers, such as the Workers' Advice Centre (WAC — Ma'an in Arabic).⁷ If there is to be any peaceful and democratic solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Israeli workers will have to be key agents in its achievement. They suffer economically from their state's colonial adventure in Palestine, as well as being exploited by liberalisations in the Israeli economy which have led to wage-cuts, job losses and increases in precariousness.

The WAC functions as an organising centre for many low-paid and precarious workers (many of them Palestinian or from Israel's oppressed Arab minority) who feel left out in the cold by the mainstream Israeli trade unions affiliated to Histadrut (the Israeli TUC). Its role in Israel is not dissimilar to that of the DWRC in Palestine in that both organisations attempt to build poles of working class organisation that are not compromised by the discredited, corrupt bureaucracies of the trade union establishment. The WAC is also politically sharp, issuing a principled statement of working class opposition to war during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in summer 2006.⁸

The criticisms that the WAC level at Histadrut are entirely legitimate; it has not done enough to organise the growing number of precarious and migrant workers in the Israeli labour force, many of whom are Palestinians or Israeli Arabs. As the WAC points out, "broad sectors of workers have been left without a union framework, especially temporary workers, Arabs, migrants, and those in personnel companies."⁹

There is a tendency amongst some on the left — even those who understand the importance of supporting working class forces in Israel — to dismiss Histadrut out of hand, pointing to its historic accommodation to, and cooption into, the state apparatus, its position as one of the biggest employers in Israel and its historical support for racist "Jewish only" labour policies. But the attitude of its leaders to the state is not the only criterion for socialists when it comes to assessing a trade union formation; for example, many British trade unions have entirely bought into the capitalist notion of partnership and even within the last few weeks have helped Gordon Brown effectively disenfranchise the British working class by shutting down Labour Party democracy. But the appalling class collaborationism of a union's leadership does not necessarily stop it from being a union and from mobilising workers in dispute against their bosses.

As recently as July 2007, the Israeli economy has been paralysed by general strikes led by the Histadrut.¹¹ The last few years have seen sporadic explosions of industrial militancy, particularly by public sector workers, as well as widespread student strikes in protests at the

government's liberalisation and marketisation of education.¹²

There is also a significant peace movement in Israel, ranging from student activists protesting against anti-Arab racism¹³ to direct-action anarchists campaigning against the separation "fence"¹⁴ to established organisations with long histories of anti-occupation protest and agitation.¹⁵ Organisations representing refuseniks — heroic young men and women who face imprisonment for illegally refusing to serve in the Israeli army — also make up an important part of the peace movement in Israel, including those who identify (however wrong-headedly) with what they see as a social-justice tradition of Zionism.¹⁶

Although the Israel/Palestine conflict is undeniably a complex one, there is one simple aspect for socialists; that is the basic reality that only the working classes of both nations can bring about fundamental and democratic social change. The struggle for Palestinian liberation and independence is of the utmost importance in the region and indeed internationally. If it is fought in the name of religious bigotry and sectarianism it will be fatally hamstrung. In Israel, if the rights to self-determination and security that Israeli Jews, like all peoples, are entitled to are promoted on the basis of national chauvinism, then that can only serve the cause of reaction.

Please use the websites and email addresses to find out more about the Israeli and Palestinian organisations mentioned and, crucially, to contact them to find out what you, your union branch, your students' union or campaigning group can do to support them and their work.

This article is not intended only a general overview of class-struggle organisation in the area but as a resource to aid socialists and trade unionists who want to act on their impulse to "do" something to help the Palestinians but who feel, as the AWL does, that boycotts are at best not enough and at worst positively counterproductive.

If working class and democratic forces in Palestine and Israel are currently weak, marginalised or politically misled then that is no argument for abandoning our faith in them as the agents of change and naively pinning our hopes on some other force. It is only an argument for doing whatever we can to help those democratic, working class forces become stronger.

Notes:

1. PGFTU: www.pgftu.org/pgftu/pgftu.org
2. Interview with Rasem al-Bayari, Deputy General Secretary of PGFTU: www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article1130
3. Palestinian women fight back: www.workersliberty.org/node/3915
4. Civil servants declare a general strike in Palestine www.alternativenews.org/news/english/civil-servants-declare-a-general-strike-in-palestine-union-struggle-expresses-a-political-crisis-20060909.html
5. Democracy & Workers' Rights Centre - www.dwrc.org/info/dwrc.org
6. Conference of independent trade unions in Palestine: <http://libcom.org/forums/middle-east/conference-independent-trade-unions-palestine>
7. Al Qaws: the Palestinian LGBT project: www.alqaws.org/?id=500 info@alqaws.org
8. The Workers' Advice Centre: www.workersadvicecenter.org/maan/maan.co.il
9. "The working class has nothing to gain": www.workersliberty.org/node/6752
10. The unmaking of the Histadrut: www.workersadvicecenter.org/Challenge88-Histadrut.htm
11. General strike shuts down Israel: <http://libcom.org/news/general-strike-shuts-down-israel-25072007>
12. Students to strike at all colleges, universities beginning Tuesday: www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/846646.html
13. Solidarity with the Haifa Seven: www.free-education.org.uk/?p=368
14. Anarchists Against The Wall: www.awalls.org/info@awalls.org
15. Gush Shalom: The Israeli peace bloc: <http://gush-shalom.org/info@gush-shalom.org>
16. Yesh G'vul: www.yeshg'vul.org/index_e.asp yeshg'vul-subscribe@yahoo.com; Courage To Refuse: www.servu.org.il/english/default.asp info@servu.org.il; Refuser Solidarity Network: www.refusersolidarity.net/ info@refusersolidarity.net

NO SWEAT ANNUAL GATHERING 2007

The anti-capitalist workers' rights campaign No Sweat is holding its Annual Gathering on the weekend of 1-2 December, with the theme "beating big brand exploitation".

The event will feature sessions on organising migrant workers in this country, combating privatisation, the human rights of workers involved in preparations for the Beijing Olympics, and a host of other workers' struggles around the world. The Sunday will be an activist training day, with workshops on campaign skills, street theatre and direct action techniques.

The gathering is being held on Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 December, at the Unite/T&G building, Theobalds Road, London WC1 (Holborn tube). Tickets for one day cost £6/£3 concs., or for the whole weekend £10/£5. Please visit www.nosweat.org.uk, where you can buy tickets and find more information including the agenda.

The Labour Party:

BY BRIAN PEARCE *

DOWN to the 1880s there was no “labour movement” [in Britain] in the continental sense at all. There were strong trade unions (of skilled workers), and these unions were politically-minded — but the only parties were the two ruling-class ones, the Tories and the Liberals.

The trade unions expressed themselves politically by serving as the arms and legs of one or other of these parties — usually the Liberals, though in an area such as Lancashire and Cheshire where the employers were strongly liberal the trade unions might retort to this by supporting the Tories! The political prospect of the trade unions was to get one or other of the ruling-class parties to pass laws favourable to the workers; and they tried to consolidate their “poor-relation” influence with these parties by persuading the liberals to accept a few trade union officials among their parliamentary candidates.

During the 1880s there occurred, in a very small way at first, the rebirth of socialism in Britain after an interval of forty years. Old Chartists, reinforced by immigrant workers from Germany, had kept the flame burning in obscure clubs, but now a certain expansion began, with the establishment of the Social-Democratic Federation.

In part under the guidance of Frederick Engels, pioneer socialists began a twenty years’ propaganda for the launching in Britain of an independent class party of the workers with socialism as its aim. The setting up of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 constituted the first breakthrough to success of a campaign which for long had seemed to many just the bee buzzing in the brains of a few cranks and fanatics, inspired by antiquated (Chartist) and foreign (German) notions. The workers learnt the hard way the need for a Labour Party.

The eventual success of the socialists’ efforts was made possible by profound changes in the economic and social situation of the British workers. It is important to get clear just what these changes were. Was it that the workers were “getting poorer” in this period between 1880 and 1900? On the contrary, these years saw a drop of about 50 per cent in the cost of living; even allowing for increased unemployment there was a big advance in real wages. In that important aspect, the workers had never had it so good!

But there was more unemployment than there had been in the previous period, and this led to a new feeling of insecurity and doubt about the social system. There was also a big drive on for speed-up and stricter discipline in the factories — American methods as the phrase was. Increased mechanisation was undermining the strong position of the craftsmen, the skilled workers, introducing on a large scale the category of the “semi-skilled”. The growth of the scale of industrial ownership, the concentration of capital into ever-larger holdings, was reflected in greater remoteness of employer from worker and also in the appearance of an important new stratum of office workers who interposed themselves between the employers and the manual workers and came more and more to take the place of the old “aristocracy of labour”.

All these changes unsettled sections of the working class which had been most uncritical loyal to the “great Liberal party of Mr Gladstone, the people’s friend”. Other factors which came into play were a growth at the end of the nineteenth century in lavish, ostentatious spending by the ruling class, providing clear proof that whatever was happening to the poor the rich were certainly getting richer; and the rise of a generation of workers educated under the [Education] Act of 1870, who knew a lot

more about the details of ruling-class life than their fathers had done.

The socialists sought out the most politically-minded rank-and-file workers in the places where they were — especially in the Radical (left-wing liberal) clubs in traditional working-class centres of that time like the East End of London. Besides their propaganda, the socialists carried on agitation around issues of interest to these workers and fights for which would help them to clear their minds of the confusions that kept them in the liberal ranks.

Struggle for trade-union organisation in trades and factories where the employers were well-known Liberals; struggle to defend and extend the right of free speech for street-corner orators and in places like Trafalgar Square, against police attempts to encroach on this right; above all the campaign for the eight-hour day. (At this time many workers worked a ten-hour day or more, and with the appearance of unemployment and the intensified strain of speed-up and so on the need for a shortening of hours was felt more and more keenly.)

The battles fought around these issues made many questions clearer to the workers who were involved in them, and prepared their minds to understand a great deal in the socialist message which previously had seemed strange and unreal to them.

A factor of very considerable weight in helping the idea of an independent workers’ party to take root was the example provided by the Irish nationalist party at this time. A small but well-disciplined group of members from Irish constituencies kept themselves independent of both of the British parties, concerned themselves exclusively with pushing Ireland’s claims for “Home Rule”, and by their obstructive tactics compelled attention to their case.

Increasingly, many politically-minded British workers came round to the view that British labour needed a party of its own that would act like this.

What made up the minds of a wide section, and in particular influenced a number of trade union leaders who had no wish to take any new step unless they were obliged to by unbearable pressure, was the employers’ offensive which began in the 1890s. It was as much, or more, under the blows of the employers that these people came round as under the pull of their militant members. This was the time when the ending of Britain’s former monopoly position in the world’s markets, as “workshop of the world”, became apparent in a big way, with the rise of German and American competition.

To safeguard their developing industries the Americans even put up a tariff barrier against British goods. The reaction of British capital was twofold: on the one hand, the path of the export of capital to backward countries, with a shift from textiles to railway materials as typical goods exported, the path of “imperialism” accompanied by political and military grab; on the other, an intense drive to force down the standards of the workers at home, to make them accept unrestricted speed-up, abolition of “restrictive practices” and lower wages all round.

A WAVE of lockouts and provoked strikes swept the country in the 1890s. A body called the Free Labour Association was set up to organise mobile squads of assorted strikebreakers ready to go anywhere and do anything.

Not only police but also troops were used against strikers on a scale unprecedented since Chartist times. There were shootings and

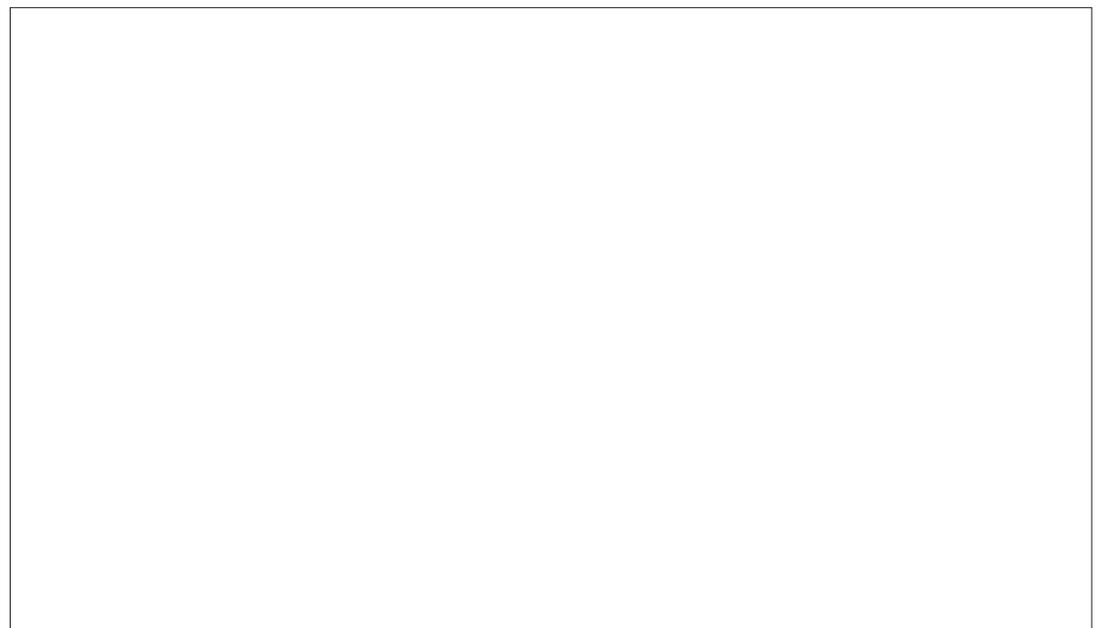
killings — one case, at Featherstone, became a bitter byword in the movement, especially as a liberal Home Secretary was responsible.

In response to this sharp dose of basic political education, the idea of an independent workers’ party began to catch on in areas where it had been resisted by traditional “Radical” prejudices up to then — in particular in Yorkshire and Lancashire, key areas then for the working-class movement. “Independent Labour Unions” arose in centres like Bradford and Manchester, and working-class papers like the *Workman’s Times* organised to bring them together in a national association. In 1893 a big step towards the Labour Party as we know it today was taken when the Independent Labour Party came into existence as a national party aiming to win the labour movement for independent class politics.

Contrary to the legend which has been cultivated by the right wing, while the small group of British Marxists did play a part in the creation of the ILP, the Fabian Society had nothing to do with it. This latter group of reformists were still at that stage devoted to achieving socialism (or what they called socialism) through “permeation” of the Liberal Party, and they regarded the ILP as “wreckers”. Only as it became apparent that the cause of Independent Labour was going to succeed in spite of them did they change their line. The bandwagon was rolling along before they climbed on it!

A T first the ruling class of this country, or its responsible representatives, did not realise the significance of what was happening. We have a very acute and very flexible ruling class, but they weren’t born that way, they had to learn it by being taught some disagreeable lessons by the workers. They don’t enjoy having to be so acute and flexible in their

A CARTOON HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



This cartoon from the socialist paper *Justice* (17 August 1907) catches the optimism, and some of the illusion of that year after the Liberal election landslide of 1906 and the winning by the Labour Representation Committee, from then on known as the Labour Party, of 40 seats in the House of Commons. The Liberal government would lay some of the foundations of the welfare state that the Labour Party after its landslide victory of 1945, would erect. The “tide” in 1907 and 1945 was favourable to socialism, but the mass British socialist movement, even at its best misunderstood the necessary weapons and objectives for winning the “socialism” it wanted — the capture of state power and the abolition of the capitalists, as a class, and inaugurating socialism. The Labour government of 1945 carried through important reforms, including the state capitalist nationalisations of a sizeable part of industry — and then settled in to live with a “tamed” capitalism. But as the state socialist writer RH Tawney put it: “You can’t skin the tiger claw by claw.” Red in tooth and claw capitalism reasserted itself in Britain in the 70s and 80s and, with the help, inadvertently or deliberately, of the Labour and trade union leaders beating down the labour movement. The cartoon depicts the Tory party drowning, the Irish party as floating ballast, the Liberal Party in a rickety raft and “the Lords” a sinking edifice on the horizon.

* Brian Pearce was a Trotskyist, a translator and author of many articles on working-class history.

born of struggle

dealings with their workers, and would like to get rid of what forces them to act like that.

The Liberal Party, reflecting the hardened attitude of the employers towards the workers, became colder than ever towards the attempts of trade unionists to get themselves adopted as "Liberal-Labour" candidates. Some quite insulting rebuffs were handed out. This is what Ramsay MacDonald meant when he wrote explaining why such as he had taken the path of independent labour politics which they didn't feel at all enthusiastic about: "We didn't leave the liberals. They kicked us out, and slammed the door in our faces."

The 1897 engineering lockout, the ruthless beating down of the engineering workers and imposing upon them humiliating terms of settlement, designed to make plain who was master in the works, left many of the most conservative section of the British workers in those days with little grounds for doubt that times had changed.

In 1900 the socialists of the Independent Labour Party and other groups made their historic first breakthrough into an organised relationship with the trade unions, with the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee. A limited number of trade unions at last agreed to associate with the socialist societies in promoting parliamentary candidates who should be independent of either of the ruling-class parties.

It was the ruling class which, still not grasping what was happening "down below" gave several more still-hesitant trade unions the necessary final shove to bringing them behind the Labour Representation Committee. Following a series of articles in *The Times* which called into question the very existence of trade unionism, the House of Lords upheld against appeal a judge's decision which dealt a practical blow, in terms of hard cash, at the whole functioning of trade unions. This was the "Taff Vale judgement", when the railwaymen's union found themselves forced to pay out enormous damages to a company which had incurred loss through a strike they had called. If this was the law, no strike could take place anywhere on any issues without the risk of financial ruin for the union concerned. At long last a number of trade union leaders saw the point — the working class must put itself in an independent political position from which it could compel changes in the law in its own interest, instead of relying on the sweet reasonableness of one or other group of the ruling class. In 1901 and 1902, after "Taff Vale", the Labour Representation Committee received a big accession of strength — though still, it is worth recalling, the miners remained wedded to liberalism and did not come in until eight years later, after a lot of "unofficial" activity had been put in at lodge and district level. The decision to create and adhere to the Labour Party was not hastily or lightly taken by the British working class.

As already mentioned, a lot of the leading men in the movement had to be pushed every inch of the way into their new political stand, and they wanted even now to separate from the Liberals to as small an extent as possible. Few had any idea of operating as more than a pressure group — though now at least nominally outside the Liberal Party instead of inside it. They did not in the least contemplate supplanting the liberals as one of the two major parties in the country and of course there could be no question in their minds of becoming the government of the country. When, therefore, the Liberals, shocked at last into awareness of the working class getting out of hand politically, took steps through private negotiation to show themselves "conciliatory", a man like MacDonald, secretary to the LRC, was only too pleased to meet them halfway.

MacDonald's correspondence with the Chief Liberal Whip had to be kept a secret from all but a few of MacDonald's

colleagues, lest some crude-minded types might take exception to it. So early began the practice of talks between Labour leaders and the ruling class behind the backs of the movement as a whole. The outcome was a "gentleman's agreement" for the LRC to restrict its candidates to certain seats, in return for which the Liberals would not oppose them in some of these. Characteristic was MacDonald's reaction to the news of Arthur Henderson's victory as a Labour candidate at Barnard Castle, over both Liberal and Tory opponents: he welcomed it as strengthening his bargaining power in dealings with the Liberals, but hoped it would not encourage the "wild men" to demand openly that Labour should go it alone in every possible constituency, just sufficient life in the working-class movement to give them something to use in horse-trading with the capitalists, and no more; that has always been the ideal of the right wing.

When, therefore, a group of 50 Labour MPs were returned in the 1906 general election, which gave a Liberal majority, there was heavy dragging of feet to do no more than accord critical support to the new government, merely pressuring it a bit in the direction of social reform. The socialists in the Labour Party (as it was now formally called) faced the task of forcing the pace against this entrenched resistance. In 1907 the socialist Victor Grayson was run as candidate, against Liberal and Tory, in a traditional Liberal seat, by local Labour organisations who defied the ban imposed by headquarters. His triumphant success encouraged the left in the movement but infuriated the "statesmen" of the Parliamentary Labour Party. A typical incident occurred in 1908 when Grayson tried to protest in the House against the welcome by the Liberal Government to a visit by the Tsar of Russia, but the official Labour spokesman at once got up to move the closure!

Nevertheless, the growth of socialist influence within the party compelled the leaders to apply for admission to the Second International, so associating the Labour Party with openly socialist parties in other countries. This was the occasion on which Lenin

Keir Hardie's 1906 election material

matter of course.

The BSP was allowed to carry on its propaganda for socialism, which was helped by the harsh experiences of the workers at the hands of the Liberal-Tory coalition government. And though the Labour Party leadership accepted a place in the coalition, an attempt by Arthur Henderson, "Labour's minister", to keep in with the growing international anti-war feeling of the workers led to such rude treatment of him by his capitalist colleagues — the famous "doormat" incident when Henderson was kept cooling his heels outside the Prime Minister's door till it was considered to have him in — that life on these terms was made very hard for the Labour leaders concerned. The co-operative societies, too, which had held aloof until now, were forced during the war to align themselves with Labour by the discriminatory policy of the Government in its working of the rationing system and its application of excess profits duty.

The Russian Revolution gave the final jolt, and in 1918, at the conference of that year, the Labour Party formally adopted socialism as its aim, in the historic Clause Four of a new constitution. The right wing tried to offset this concession by depriving the socialist societies of their reserved places on the party executive, in connection with the starting of individual members' sections, the future local Labour Parties. This ousting of the socialist societies from their place in the party was followed up in 1932 by driving the ILP right out of the party; in 1937 by banning the Socialist League, which had taken its place; and in 1946 by introducing a rule prohibiting the affiliation to or formation within the Labour Party of societies such as had initiated the very creation of the party.

The Labour Party became the chief opposition party, in 1922 and the largest party in Parliament in the following year.

The first Labour Government, 1924, marked a new phase both in the advance of the working-class movement and in the degeneration of its leadership...

proposed that the Labour Party be accepted into membership of the International on the carefully-defined grounds that "it represents the first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of Britain towards a conscious class policy and towards a socialist workers' party."

The fight to get the Labour Party to adopt socialism as its aim instead of merely tolerating socialists as members along with others had to go on for another ten years. Among important landmarks in this struggle was the formation of the British Socialist Party, in which the old Social-Democratic Federation came together with significant breakaway groups of the ILP in a new organisation under at least nominally Marxist leadership, and this affiliated to the Labour Party in 1914. During the First World War the BSP followed, after 1916, a different line from that of the official one of support for the war, but was not disciplined for this, much less expelled; such was the freedom for working-class trends of all kinds allowed in the party in those days as a

Arthur Henderson

New Labour: making the rich richer

BY MARTIN THOMAS

THEIR triumphalism has been a little chastened. New Labour politicians these days are not quite as bold as Tony Blair was when he told Jeremy Paxman on BBC Newsnight before the 2001 election that he was not bothered about a widening gap between rich and poor.

"Paxman: Is it acceptable for gap between rich and poor to widen?"

"Blair: The key thing is not... the gap between... the person who earns the most in the country and the person that earns the least... The issue isn't... whether the very richest person ends up becoming richer. The issue is whether the poorest person is given the chance that they don't otherwise have..."

Inequality still increases under New Labour. But Ed Miliband, who has the job of drafting the New Labour manifesto for the next general election, bangs on about equality being important. Only, he says, "in the kind of world we live in it is much harder to do anything directly through tax with people at the top end".

Of course, it is true that a drastic drive for equality — a socialist revolution — could not succeed in Britain alone without provoking a flight of capitalists, an economic blockade, and so on. Fortunately it would stimulate workers' struggles in other countries as well as flight of capitalists to them...

It is true, also, that "globalisation" — sharpened global competition, including competition between governments to offer their home economies as sites for world-market production — creates pressures to cut social overheads.

But take the simplest snapshot measure of inequality, the Gini coefficient, calibrated so that it is 100 when one person gets all income

and everyone else zero, and 0 when everyone gets exactly the same.

The UK's latest Gini is 35 (for 2003). It was 33 in 1996; it was around 25 in the 1960s and 70s.

Almost all other north-west European countries have lower Ginis (less inequality) than Britain. Sweden's Gini is 23; Denmark's 24; Finland's 25; Belgium's 26; France's 28. All those countries are just as "globalised" as Britain.

Contrariwise, the USA, somewhat less "globalised" than Britain, has a Gini of 46; Japan has a Gini of 30. High Gini seems to correlate with weak labour movement (not exactly, of course) rather than high globalisation.

Most rich countries have corporate tax rates above the UK's.

tion.

Figures for child poverty — the living standard of a child who is poorer than 90% of kids in the given country, but better off than 10% — show up the UK even worse. That child in poverty is 54% better off in Sweden than in the UK; 42% better off in France; 38% better off in Germany; and 11% better off even in the USA.

Poorer countries tend to have higher Ginis than richer ones. But there again there is wide variation between different countries, despite them all being "globalised" — from Taiwan at 34 and South Korea at 37 to mainland China and Venezuela at 45, Mexico at 50, and Brazil at 57.

The backstop Miliband argument is that capital and capitalists are too mobile. Raise top income tax rates, or corporate tax rates, and they will flee. Britain will be left with no more than a few dozy locally-based industries, run by managers who couldn't organise a snack in a tapas bar.

In fact there is no rigid compulsion that fixes the top income tax rate at the UK's 40%. Sweden's is 57%, France's is 56%, Germany's is 47% (all 2005). There certainly is no inescapable imperative for the sort of tax loopholes which leave private-equity bosses in the UK paying (as one put it) "less tax than their cleaners", and makes Britain a desirable base for Russian oligarchs.

Most rich countries have top corporate tax rates above the UK's 30%: Japan, 41%; Germany, 40%; USA, 39%; Italy, 38%. France and the Netherlands, 35% (all figures 2003).

Top rates don't tell the whole story. Every country has many loopholes for those taxes, and companies tend to adjust their revenues so as to "show" their profits in the country with the laxest tax regime. Another measure is revenue from corporate taxes as a percentage of GDP. The UK, at 2.9%, is below Belgium and the Netherlands at 3.5%, or Finland, at 4.3%.

Big business tends to prefer low taxes across the board, because higher taxes on their workers put them under some pressure to raise pre-tax wages. But, contrary to popular impression, what the UK has been doing since Thatcher came in is not cutting taxes. It is shifting taxes from direct to indirect, and thus making the tax system regressive. The poorest 20% of households pay 42% of their incomes in tax, and the richest 20% only 34% (2003). No iron law of globalisation stops British governments rebalancing taxes to make them fairer.

Social provision requires some taxes, of

course. But the level of the sort of social provision that reduces inequality depends on how the government chooses to spend tax revenue, as well as the size of revenue.

Although UK military spending has decreased (as a percentage of GDP) since the Cold War, it is still higher than any other NATO European country bar France: it takes 2.4% of GDP, as against 1.3% in Belgium or 1.5% in Germany.

It's true that the British government has spent more on schools and health in recent years. But much of the spending has gone to pay PFI contractors, or new hospital managers, or super-paid head teachers.

Pensions in the UK are lower than in almost any other rich country. The New Labour government has chosen to alleviate that not by raising pensions, but by adding a means-tested benefit, Pension Credit. Inevitably, many, and especially the poorest, fail to get it. The UK has more old people in poverty than any other North European country except Ireland: 17% of 65-74 year olds and 26% of over-75s, as against, for example, 4% and 11% in Sweden, 4% and 14% in Finland.

In any case, it can't be the case that there is an iron law about the percentage of top incomes taken in taxes, because those top incomes vary a lot from country to country even in the midst of globalisation. Top bosses' pay is on average about twice as much in the USA as in the UK, and much more in the UK than most other countries in north-west Europe. No iron law there.

Inequality is not just inequality between top bosses and the poorest pensioners or children. Since the Thatcher years, *inequality within the working class* — the difference between better wages and worse wages — has increased sharply in Britain.

That is affected by government policy, too, on at least two counts. A lower (or no) minimum wage means more inequality. Australia's minimum wage is 54% of GDP per head; Belgium's 48%; the UK's 45%; the USA's 25%. The UK does not come out as badly on this comparison as others, but plainly there is no rigid rule that sets an exact rate for minimum wages in a globalised economy.

More vicious anti-union laws mean weaker unions, which means more inequality. There is no iron law of globalisation that keeps the UK's anti-union laws as vicious as they are.

In fact, a major driving force to increase inequality is... an already high level of inequality. With inequality already high, more of the well-off opt out of public provision, and that public provision becomes pauper provision, with no strong political lobby to defend it.

The well-off tend, more and more, to live in different areas from the worse-off, and provision in the poorer areas falls into a hole. The UK is not nearly as far along this road as the USA is.

And — here again the USA shows the future, despite the fact that it is *less* vulnerable to global pressures than smaller economies — more and more, the poor cease to vote, and politics becomes a matter of chasing the votes of the comfortably off. Politicians become more and more responsive to the lobbyists who tell them — who have *always* been telling them — that ruin will follow unless they slash taxes on wealth, top incomes, and profits, and make poverty so desperate that the poor will be forced to take any job going however low the wage.

That is what has been happening with New Labour. Not a gallant but unavailing attempt to counter the pressures of globalisation, but subservience to the rich.

Figures from:

Ben Jackson and Paul Segal: Why inequality matters (Catalyst, 2004)
Luxemburg Income Study
US Congressional Research Service: Comparisons of U.S. and Foreign Military Spending (2004)
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No to Little Englandism!

BY COLIN FOSTER

AS the banker James Pierpoint Morgan said, everybody has two reasons for things they do: the good reason, and the real reason.

A new pamphlet, *The Big EU Con Trick*, from a "Trade Unionists Against the EU Constitution" (TUAUEC) gives several good reasons "why trade unionists should demand a referendum on the EU's Renamed Constitution".

The new "Reform Treaty" contains many of the proposals that were in the draft EU constitution a few years ago. That constitution was rejected in referendums in France and the Netherlands (in 2005). Tony Blair had promised a referendum on it (which didn't happen because the constitution was abandoned after the French and Dutch votes).

The "Reform Treaty" contains language in tune with the general neo-liberal drift of EU policy, and its Charter of Fundamental Rights is too vague to secure increased trade union rights in Britain.

Anyway, they could add, why not a referendum? Why not let people vote on something they are agitated about?

The problem is, and the text of the pamphlet makes it clear, that the "real reason" is an attempt to mobilise opposition to *any* closer integration of the EU.

The Reform Treaty strips away much of the text that stirred up the French referendum vote against the constitution (most of which, however, was just taken from pre-existing EU treaties, unaffected by the referendum), and just goes for tidying-up measures to enable the EU to operate more or less coherently with its much expanded number of member states (now 27).

Although the Reform Treaty does increase the powers of the elected European Parliament marginally, most decision-making under it will (as at present) come through haggling between representatives of the different governments.

Socialists and democrats have no particular reason positively to endorse the Reform Treaty. It is not our business to devise ways to make the EU easier to manage, or to approve whatever makeshifts the governments come up with.

But our criticism is in the name of a united, federal, democratic Europe, with sovereign powers for a democratically elected European Parliament. We want the barriers between countries in Europe to be reduced. Our criticism of the EU is not that it is bringing down those barriers, but that it is doing it slowly and bureaucratically.

We oppose the neo-liberal drift of EU economic policy; but we oppose it in the name of a Europe-wide working-class socialist policy, not in the name of championing the autonomy of the different national governments (which are just as neo-liberal as the EU, or in Britain's case more so!) against European coordination.

Pretty much all the French left other than the *Convergences Revolutionnaires* faction jumped (wrongly, we believe) onto the anti-constitution bandwagon at the time of the 2005 referendum. And they rejoiced when the vote went against the constitution. At last, after years of political defeat, a political victory for the left! A new left-wing majority had been assembled around the "no" campaign!

The two years since have shown how false that rejoicing was. Far from French politics being shifted to the left by the referendum, it

has been allowed to move to the right by the fact that the left was running down the wrong road. In this May's presidential election, a hard-edged right-wing candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, won, and his challenger was the most openly right-wing Socialist Party candidate for many years.

The idea that the trade unions and the left in Britain can move forward by hitching a lift on the Tories' Reform Treaty referendum campaign - and given the relationship of forces, that is what is, the union/ left contingent tagging along with something shaped and directed by the Tories - is equally illusory.

In the fresher days of left-wing anti-EUism, in the 1970s, left anti-EUers at least had the courage to say plainly what they wanted - British withdrawal from the EU, and a World War Two type siege economy ("Alternative Economic Strategy") - and would make an effort to claim that their motivation was quite different from that of the right-wing anti-EUers (of the type of the Sun, or the Tories, today). TUAUEC cannot even summon up the energy to make that claim. Instead, the back page of its pamphlet boasts that a parliamentary Early Day Motion propounding its views (and initiated, shamefully, by the otherwise left-wing John McDonnell) "has already gained signatories from all the three main parties". Why wouldn't it? It's Tory party policy.

TUAUEC is, fortunately, an anaemic body. Although it has been going for over two years, its website is still advertised as "coming soon". No list of affiliates is given in its pamphlet, or available anywhere else I can find, but the main sponsors seem to be RMT, CWYU, and the Bakers' Union.

• TUAUEC: PO Box 46295, London W5 2UG.

Breaking with Islamism

CHARLIE SALMON REVIEWS THE ISLAMIST, BY ED HUSAIN

"The Islamist does not flatter the people, is not courteous to the authorities or care for other people's customs and traditions, and does not give any attention to whether people will accept him or not. Rather, he must adhere to the ideology alone."

Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, founder of Hizb ut-Tahrir

"Islam is a revolutionary doctrine and system that overthrows governments. It seeks to overturn the whole universal social order."

Abdul Ala Mawdudi, founder of Jamat-e-Islami

THE publication of *The Islamist* earlier this year prompted both criticism and praise. Hardly a surprise given the attacks made on various individuals and organisations within its pages.

Those it indicted, people such as Inayat Bunglawala of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) responded by questioning Husain's knowledge of Islam and levelling some accusations of their own. Some liberal commentators — in the main, those who seem to confuse Islamism with the beliefs of the majority of Muslims — also responded badly. Seamus Milne of the *Guardian* accused him of being a "neoon pinup boy". Writing in *The Independent*, Ziauddin Sardar claimed that "You have to be of a certain bent to come under the influence of a cult [HT] and join as a fully paid-up member". Meanwhile, Husain received support from the most unpleasant of places with Melanie Phillips informing the notoriously open-minded readers of the *Daily Mail* that Husain was a "brave Muslim".

So what are we to make of this writer, a man who flitted from one reactionary outfit to another until he finally rejected the lot and

started pointing the finger. What, if anything, can his book tell us?

It is only on the rarest of occasions that mainstream Islam receives a hearing in the press, on television or in books. More often than not Islam and those who practice it are viewed through the prism of a terrorist act, an extremist group or at best a sense of otherness. Those who "speak for British Muslims", the figures promoted by the government and parts of the left, are generally unrepresentative "politicians". They have deep roots in the broad landscape of political Islam. Of the more than 900,000 Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims in the UK, how many have any affiliation to or accept Islamism, how many are supporters of say, the Muslim Brotherhood or (the Pakistani-rooted) Jamaat-e-Islami? If the answer is "not many", how is it that groups like these achieved a position of semi-legitimacy and recognition? What and who do they represent?

HUSAIN grew up in Limehouse, East London, with an Indian Muslim father and Bangladeshi mother. He opens the book with a glowing description of his earliest school-days at the Sir William Burrough primary school. For Husain the school was "an extension of my home", an island of "goodwill and kindness" in a sea of hate. With the National Front on the streets and widespread racism the teachers made every effort to protect and enrich their students. All this changed when Husain moved on to Stepney Green secondary school.

After a period of deep involvement with the Sufism of his father, who was an ardent follower of a particular shaikh, Husain began to question and reflect upon religion and his place in the world. Like many teenagers he strove to find a sense of identity separate from the family: "I was drawn to Islamic groups because there was no alternative: either I became involved in Islam or I joined a gang. There were simply no other outlets for young Muslims. That hasn't changed.

I don't think there's a single family in this area that's not had a family member influenced by Islamism."

At Stepney Green he found people more than willing to "help". Husain got involved with the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO), a front group for Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Organised around the East London Mosque, the YMO concentrated its efforts on providing social and "educational" activities for young boys from Muslim backgrounds, that is indoctrination into the writings of Abdul Ala Mawdudi, the founder of JI, who conceived of Islam as a political doctrine, a call to revolution.

The JI group dismissed the validity of the mainstream Islam practised by most Muslims. It provided a political framework for understanding the world and a sense that things can and must change. But Husain found limits in their teachings and practice. Although the idea of the "caliphate" — a united, international Islamic state — was central to YMO thought, there were limits to how this extended into their activity. During attacks on Bosnian Muslims in the early 1990s Husain toured East London calling for jihad. When he came across Hizb ut-Tahrir he found a group seriously organising for such efforts. Whilst the YMO and other Islamist groups spoke of "unity", "Islamic revolution" etc... it was HT who seemed to put these ideas into action.

"Young Muslims are no more likely to join Hizb ut-Tahrir than young Christians are to join the Moonies"

Ziauddin Sardar in *The Independent*

THE above quote completely misses the point and hides the true nature and organisational approach of a group like HT. Far from relying on people slowly drifting into the group, HT makes special efforts to recruit and organise.

Husain claims that HT borrow some methods from the far-left, employing ideas of hegemony

and organising in a "cell structure". Well, this may or may not be the case but you don't have to read Gramsci to realise that making your ideas dominant in any one place helps you recruit and that getting people in a room together is a good way to keep them actively involved.

At Newham College, Husain and his HT colleagues put these ideas into practice. During his time there the number of women students wearing the niqab rocketed, the terms of political discussion were set by HT — even if lecturers and other students managed to avoid direct contact with the group, they would certainly have known HT existed.

Whilst the fundamental idea of Islamism is the caliphate, other more revealing issues were a constant matter of concern. Anti-semitism and homophobia are the bedrock of many reactionary organisations and HT positively dripped with both. The sort of "international united state" envisioned by HT and other Islamists would be one based on a warped and prejudiced "reading" of Islamic writing.

At Newham, Husain's association with HT came to an abrupt and bloody end. One afternoon, sitting in the library he witnessed the murder of a fellow student. Husain is convinced that the activities of HT precipitated the murder of this black, Christian student. Although no claim is made that the killing was directly sanctioned by the group, Husain claims that the atmosphere — the heightened political and religious hot-house — generated by the actions of HT was to blame.

It's often been said that "it's easier to learn than it is to unlearn". For Husain, the truth of this statement was borne out. After severing ties with HT he thought the last vestiges of Islamism had been expunged from his system. What shocked Husain again was his initial response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

Having returned to the Sufism of his family he attended a prayer meeting and asked "what will we do to celebrate?" The others in the room were shocked by his statement.

Determined to positively struggle against these ideas, Husain decided to learn Arabic — so that he could read the Koran for himself — and travel the Middle East. Experiences in Saudi Arabia convinced him of the hypocrisy of self-defined Islamic states. Repeated flirtations with various educational and religious groups convinced him of the massive impregnation of Islamism and its supporters in many Muslim organisations. The result of these experiences are detailed further in the book.

Husain is longer an Islamist but he still harboring some stupid ideas. A supporter of the Blair government but able to see how abandoned the working class communities of London still are. Repelled by his experience of the wide-spread influence of Islamist ideas but imagining that the legal proscription of Islamist groups will solve the problem. A Sufi who interprets Islam as a religion of peace, but someone who finds excuses for the war on Iraq: "In early 2003 Saddam Hussein effectively invited the US army to invade Iraq by playing cat-and-mouse games with United Nations arms inspectors." A mass of inconsistencies and contradictions. But, then again, is it any wonder?

The key value of *The Islamist* is the way it exposes the wide-spread influence, the aims, objectives and ideology of Islamism. Husain is clear — and we should be too — that the multifarious groups adhering to the teachings of people like Mawdudi have reactionary intentions. What separates the "mild" Islamism of the YMO from the proto-jihadism of HT is simply choice of tactics.

Whilst the left should fight against the racist portrayals of Muslims that are so common, we should not flinch from describing the reactionary politics and intentions of Islamism. We should not pretend that those who claim to "speak for Muslims" do anything of the sort. We should understand the tensions and antagonisms within the broad Muslim community without relating to people based merely on the colour of their skin, assumed religious affiliation or sense of communal identity. Whatever his faults, Husain shatters the dominant political understanding of Islam as a homogenous block. This can only be a good thing.

Class action

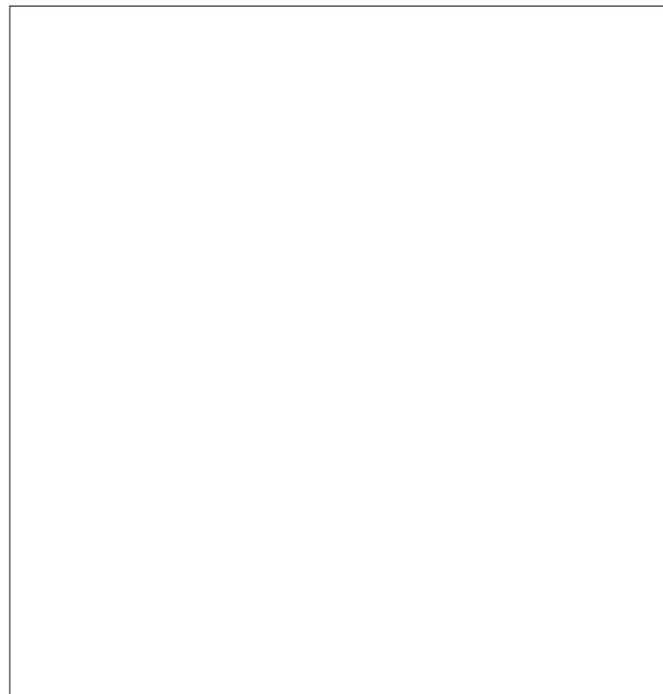
ROSALIND ROBSON REVIEWS MICHAEL CLAYTON

MICHAEL Clayton (played by George Clooney) is "the fixer" for a top firm of New York lawyers. He's the one that they ask to clean up the mess created by the crimes and misdemeanours of their corporate and millionaire clients. Or, to use the perjorative term he himself prefers in a moment of self-loathing, Clayton is a bag man. That puts him just above the hired assassin and dodgy accountant in the corporate food chain. Or, as his fellow lawyer and friend Arthur Edens says, Clayton is a bad man. And he is someone who has never let ethics get in the way of feeding an expensive gambling habit.

Everything is set up for an ethical challenge and a bit of moral redemption — will Clayton stop Edens blowing off the successful settlement of a class action law suit? In this artfully produced, noirish thriller I could believe that story line. However the political backdrop of the film — the machinations of an evil agro-chemical firm — were less believable, for two reasons.

Tilda Swinton's portrayal of the evil corporation's head-honcho lawyer control-freak was way over the top. She appeared to have got stuck in her role as the wicked Snow Queen of Narnia. Maybe there was a message here about what women have to do to get on in business, but it escaped me.

Also too much attention was centred on Clooney (yes, that really is possible) and not enough on what it was the evil agro-chemical firms were supposed to have



done; the terrible things that happen in real life such as the manufacture of deadly poisons which cause cancer and other

illnesses. The film could have spared us a few more of its 120 minutes telling us exactly how deadly corporations can be.

A first in labour history

I HAVE been on many picket lines in my time, but until recently they have all taken place in the real world. 27 September saw the first ever strike and picket to take place in virtual reality. Second Life allows you to create a virtual person (or avatar) and go around doing the sorts of things you supposedly do in your normal life – like going on strike and picketing.

Italian workers for the computer multinational IBM, members of the international union federation UNI, have been in dispute with their employers, who, after they demanded an increase in pay, responded by cutting their performance bonus. IBM has traditionally been a paternalistic and anti-union firm and it refused to negotiate with the workers' representatives. IBM profits have been soaring and they have just spent \$10 million on building sites on Second Life. So someone had a bright idea... Why not supplement a day's strike and picketing in Italy with a similar protest in the virtual world?

So the word went out across trade union websites and e-lists, the organisers created virtual placards and t-shirts and started signing people up, ending up with over 900 from 18 countries. They also launched an online petition at www.unionnetwork.org/uniondep.nsf/ProtestIBMSL-en?openform.

After a bit of wandering around with my placard, I eventually met up with a couple of groups of protesters from around the world. Everyone sorted of milled around chatting – I don't know if anyone has worked out how to chant slogans in

Second Life. However IBM certainly knew we were there, as one protester tells:

Remember the IBM Business Center I was telling you about? The one that closed down some parts so protesters couldn't enter anymore?

Well I don't know what miracle happened, but my avatar got in... to a real staff meeting!

They were discussing the corporate website's new functionalities, it seems. So since I managed to get in, why not call some of my protester friends?

Minutes later, some 20 participants and staff teleported to crash the meeting. We had people saying slogans, some beeping sounds and jumping up and down with our banners and flying fish... It was the most disrupting event I've witnessed so far...!

The poor IBM staff were quite confused and asked us to protest outside. We, in return, demanded to speak to IBM management to put forward our requests.

They ended up canceling their meeting.

It is unclear from reports on the web whether the protest had any direct impact on IBM, but it certainly served to bring together trade unionists from around the world. Subsequently workers at Dutch call centres run by KPN, who have undertaken a number of wildcat strikes, have also staged a naked protest at KPN's head office in Second Life.

PS: Avatars can fly, giving a whole new meaning to the term flying pickets...

Bruce Robinson

Labour left unfocused

ABOUT 50 left Labour activists met in Hebben Bridge on 30 September under the banner of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) to discuss the situation in the Labour Party following this year's conference.

This discussion was dominated by a clear line between those for whom the decision to remove any policy-making powers and union voice from Labour Party Conference was a turning point (including the AWL and John McDonnell) and those for whom it was "business as usual" (Socialist Appeal and many of the non-aligned activists). Socialist Appeal set the tone for the second group by just getting up and literally shouting "You have to be in the Labour Party", without any indication of what it was now possible to do there. Their old idea that the Labour Party should be "committed to socialist policies" now lacks any means by which it might be carried through. The only practical suggestion was that, given the dramatic loss in Labour Party membership, it was now much easier for the left to take over moribund constituency parties (and presumably the smaller they get, the better, as it then becomes even easier).

John McDonnell argued very strongly that Brown's victory without a fight by the unions was a turning point. Rather than proposing anything practical to reverse it, however, he seemed to say the game was up and "the old strategy was over... and the idea of the unions reclaiming the LP had failed too." This was despite him saying he thought the left could have

won at Bournemouth "if the trade unions had drawn a line in the sand." This must reflect the failure of his own campaign for the leadership to convince any of the supposedly left union leaders to take a stand against Brown.

His contribution largely consisted of saying that we should go outside the Labour Party to link up with all sorts of campaigns in building a sort of general counter-hegemonic movement for socialism. In this, the unions are just one social movement among many.

McDonnell probably sees this as something of a re-run of the GLC of the 80s.

The whole package was contradictory in that, despite saying the left could do nothing effective in the Labour Party, he didn't advocate leaving or an alternative. Rather he saw this action outside the party as somehow creating an atmosphere such that the left inside could no longer be marginalised, despite the absence of democratic structures. The idea that these movements and the unions required political representation was totally left out of his speech.

There was little other discussion of what the LRC could practically do now – for example, by organising in the affiliated unions to call the leaders to account. Whatever the merits of linking the LRC with broad protest movements in the abstract, it amounts to a de-focusing from the practical steps necessary to fight back against Brown's plan and preparing the ground for an alternative in the event of defeat.

Clifford Brown

For the Palestinians, not political Islam

BY SACHA ISMAIL

ABOUT three hundred people marched through central London on Sunday 7 October as part of the "Al Quds Day" march organised by the Islamic Human Rights Commission.

In fact, the IHRC has nothing to do with human rights and everything to do with rabidly right-wing political Islam. As the Awaaz/South Asia Watch group, which campaigns against all varieties of religious fundamentalist politics originating in South Asia, puts it, the IHRC is one of a number of UK Islamist organisations which "adhere to the ideology of the 'absolute rulership of the clerics' and 'Islamic government' advocated by Khomeini and developed by other representatives of political Shi'ism."

Similarly, Al Quds Day has very little to do with "solidarity with the Palestinians", as its organisers claim, and a great deal to do with support for Hamas, Hezbollah and the Iranian state. It was invented by Ayatollah Khomeini as a way of mobilising the people of Iran in an orgy of rabid chauvinism against Israel (al Quds is the Arabic, and by extension the Farsi, for Jerusalem) and, of course, support for their "own" government.

The 7 October demonstration in London was openly and proudly in support of the Iranian regime and its clients. Disgraceful, then, that it

received official support from Respect, with George Galloway speaking at the closing rally. (Though, interestingly, there very few if any SWPers there: is asking your members to participate in that would be an embarrassment too far?)

Workers' Liberty members took part in a small counter-demonstration which was initiated by David T from the website Harry's Place, but also included contingents from Outrage!, the Worker-Communist Party of Iran and Class War. (Unfortunately, it also included two Iranian nationalists waving the shah-era flag.) As the Al Quds demo went past, the counter-demo chanted: "Support the Iranian people's fight / for workers', students', women's rights"; and "We support the Palestinians / not Ahmedinejad's opinions".

In addition to participating in the counter-demo, some of us joined Peter Tatchell on the main demo, to try to intervene and talk to people. As you can imagine, we didn't get a very positive response: we were accused of being "Zionist agents", "spawn of Satan" (yes!) and so on. One female comrade had a group of women spit at her, demanding to know what she knew about women's rights in Iran. Moreover, a crowd of young men started shouting "Paedophile" and "Child-killer" as soon as they recognised Tatchell.

However, a small group of hijab-wearing women did approach him and say they were glad that we were there: hope for the future, I suppose...

The shameful face of Al Quds day

BY PETER TATCHELL

ON the Al Quds march, I held two placards. One with a Palestinian flag and "Free Palestine", and the other with a photograph of a 16-year-old girl, Atefeh Rajabi Sahaaleh, who was executed in 2004 by the Iranian regime for "crimes against chastity", having been sexually abused since childhood.

As soon as I turned up, I was subjected to a barrage of violent, threatening abuse from large sections of the crowd. Some chanted: "Tatchell is a Zionist, Tatchell is a paedophile. Get out! Get out! Get out!" On six occasions, some of the protesters tried to physically attack me and the Workers' Liberty activists. It was only police intervention that stopped them from battering us.

Many of the marchers were carrying

Hezbollah flags and chanting: "We are all Hezbollah!" When we pointed out that Hezbollah kills innocent Israeli civilians, and endorses the execution of women and gay people who transgress their interpretation of Islam, we were told things like: "That's good. Society has to have order. These punishments are necessary for the good of society."

On a positive note, several of the marchers, nearly all women and nearly all wearing the hijab, expressed their support for our protest. One said: "We don't agree with the Iranian regime either. Killing that young girl was wrong." Another said: "Islam is about love and peace. Don't listen to the fanatics. We are only here because we support Palestine." Such responses were very gratifying.

• For a full report from Peter Tatchell, see www.workersliberty.org/node/9317

WHERE WE STAND

TODAY one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The **Alliance for Workers' Liberty** aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social

partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

WE STAND FOR:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

• A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.

- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

The 1968 left and Ireland

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

IN the last issue of *Solidarity* we began a series of articles about the events in Northern Ireland in 1969 — when the nearly 50 year old Northern Ireland state broke down, and the British Army went on the streets to hold it together — and the debates and disputes which that provoked in the British left.

That first article described the situation in Northern Ireland on the eve of the crisis, and the outline of the events there in 1968-72. The series of articles will go on to examine, specifically, the debate at that time in IS (today's SWP), where at that time there was internal democracy (unlike in the other groups of the left), and an open discussion of the issues did take place.

It was an important episode in the formation of the modern revolutionary left in Britain.

More than that: it took up many of the important issues that still bedevil the left — the relationships between propaganda and agitation, Marxist theory and revolutionary practice, the revolutionary party and the working class.

The arguments today about the attitude of socialists to the US/UK troops in Iraq parallel to some extent the dispute about the British troops assuming a central role in Northern Ireland in August 1969.

I no longer think that the side I was on in the disputes of 1969 — that of the Trotskyist Tendency of IS — was right on everything. We too, descendants of the Trotskyist Tendency, can learn from reviewing the experience.

Before we examine in detail the first discussion on Ireland in IS, in January 1969, the reader, in order to make sense of the story, needs to know about a number of things:

1. The interactions that the main participants in the discussion had had, in the previous year or so, in and around the Irish Workers' Group;
2. The relations between participants in the discussion within IS, and groups in Ireland;
3. The origin and political nature of the Trotskyist Tendency;
4. The transformations that had just recently taken place within IS;
5. The background of British left attitudes on Ireland before 1968.

ONE: THE IRISH WORKERS' GROUP

THE nucleus of the Trotskyist Tendency; the IS leaders most involved in the work around Ireland, Tony Cliff and John Palmer; and their close ally and "client" in Irish work in 1968-9 (who was not an IS member) Gerry Lawless, had all been involved, in varying ways, in a pretty brutal faction fight in the (mainly émigré) Irish Workers' Group which had split the IWG down the middle in mid-March 1968. Some of the issues in that IWG dispute continued over into the dispute in IS in 1969-70.

The question of what exactly a revolutionary Marxist organisation is, how it functions, the relationship of its theory to its practice and of its "propaganda" to its agitation, had been discussed in the IWG, with the future Trotskyist Tendency representing one viewpoint and Lawless, actively backed by the IS leaders, another.

The IWG is usually referred to in the "histories" as Trotskyist, but it wasn't. Certainly most of the people in it who called themselves Trotskyists didn't think it was. It was a conglomerate ranging from left-wing Irish nationalists through Deutscherites (critical, "liberal" Stalinists), soft Maoists, Guevarists, and supporters of the Mandel Fourth International, to "harder" orthodox Trotskyists. Some of the Guevarists who were members or fringe supporters of the IWG became urban guerrillas, part of the Saor Eire Action Group which robbed banks and shot a policeman in Dublin in 1970 and after. One of them, Sean Morrissey, who had been one of the named editors — with Gerry Lawless and myself — of the IWG magazine *Workers' Republic*, was jailed for robbery and acquitted of murder in the early 1970s. Another IWG member, Peter Graham, who had been on our side in the IWG faction fight, would lose his life in a dispute



4 January 1969: a People's Democracy march from Belfast to Derry is ambushed by a Loyalist gang, including off-duty "B Specials". Thirteen marchers were hospitalised.

within the Saor Eire Action Group.

The biggest sub-grouping in the Lawless bloc in the period before the IWG split was made up of supporters of IS — supporters of the IS who had been politically shaped and educated in a period when IS was emphatically not "Leninist" or "Trotskyist".

At the end of the mauling six-month faction fight, the IWG met for a conference at Moran's Hotel in Dublin on 17 March 1968, and finally split down the middle. As we shall see, that event coincided almost exactly with Cliff announcing a return "to Lenin" and the opening of six months of factional battles around the issue in IS.

Yet Cliff and Palmer had played an irreplaceable role in lining up their supporters on the side of the Lawless faction — one of whose main political features was opposition to building the sort of "Leninist" organisation that Cliff in mid-1968 decided he wanted to turn IS into!

That could be explained by Cliff in the autumn of 1967 (when the IWG fight broke out) not knowing what he would think in the spring of 1968. Another extraordinary aspect of the IWG dispute cannot be so easily explained away. For one of the precipitating issues in the IWG was our attitude to Stalinism; and Cliff, Palmer, and their co-thinkers in the IWG were on the side of the Deutscherites and similar people who were pro-Stalinist or "soft" on it. Indeed they were the biggest subgroup in that bloc!

The open break in the IWG started on the evening of the second big Vietnam demonstration in London, 25 October 1967, at the London IWG branch. (To commemorate Che Guevara, killed in Bolivia in early October, and following an Irish custom of naming branches of political parties after species of secular patron saints, the branch had renamed itself the Che Guevara Lynch branch. An 18th century ancestor of Guevara had been Irish.)

The faction fight started there in a dispute, moving from an old private argument in letters and private discussion into an open verbal row that quickly became into a shouting match between Gerry Lawless, the IWG's secretary, and myself, over the attitude Trotskyists should have taken to the June/July 1953 East German uprising against the Russian-puppet state and the occupying Russian army. That had been a central issue in the 1953 split in the Fourth International. In that the Cannonites, those led by the veteran US Trotskyist James P Cannon, calling themselves "orthodox Trotskyists", accused Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel, and their co-thinkers who ran the FI's international centre — whom they named "Pabloites" — of not siding unequivocally with the German workers against the Russians, and subordinating a basic class question to calculations of the balance of forces in Europe as between the Russian bloc and NATO.

I was a "1953" Cannonite, entirely on the side of the German insurgents. I believed that any siding with the Russian bureaucracy and its army (on grounds of great-power bloc calculations or whatever) against insurgent workers was a "capitulation" to Stalinism, and

therefore the opposite of Trotskyism and revolutionary socialism. Lawless grandly dismissed the whole affair as "just a building workers' demonstration in East Berlin", and insisted that socialists should have sided with the "Red" Army. It was either the "Red" Army or NATO in Germany, and that had to be the prime guide to our attitudes. Yet, of course, a "Red" Army it was not: that was the point. It was the army of the totalitarian Russian bureaucracy.

Neither this nor any similar political position determined the dynamic of what happened in the IWG. (I intend to put an appendix on the IWG at the end of these articles). Even so, it was extraordinary to find all the avowed "state capitalists" going along with the Lawless bloc, which included people who thought any criticism of the "socialist motherland" impermissible. The "Pabloite" line on East Germany in 1953 was repeated in writing by Lawless in an internal bulletin; and one of the campaigning points of the Lawless bloc was the accusation that I was (among other similar things) a "secret state capitalist" (because, the learned Mr Lawless said, I had been reading Max Shachtman's *The Struggle for the New Course*. In fact, though he plainly hadn't read it himself, he had lent the book to me!) Thus he hoped to divide his opponents all of whom were Trotskyist "workers' staters" on Russia.

Cliff and Palmer kept the IS supporters in line behind Lawless, in a bloc one of whose activities was to heresy-hunt an alleged "state capitalist"!

Palmer had been involved in Irish émigré politics from the beginning of the 1960s; Cliff had lived in Ireland from 1947 to 1951. Their calculation (so our side believed) was that their group would control the organisation after we were hived off. In that they were right, though the rump of the IWG lasted only until autumn 1968 before dissolving (when exactly, I don't know: if the group published an announcement of its own demise, I never saw it).

If the Workers' Fight/Trotskyist Tendency had been pursuing political vendettas, we would not have "fused" with IS and tried to work constructively there, as we did for the nine months before the semi-expulsion of the Trotskyist Tendency by way of confining us to "ghetto" branches. But still the IWG experience did not encourage us to think of Cliff and Palmer as principled or trustworthy people, on Ireland or anything else.

The IWG events were still very recent in January 1969. They played a poisoning and divisive role among those in Ireland who had been on either side, with the additional complication that those on our side happened to be based in the South, and the others in the North.

TWO: THE GROUPS IN IRELAND

WHEN the reverberations of 5 October in Derry hit the students at Queens University Belfast, and led to the formation of the curiously named People's Democracy ("People's Democracies" was the official self-designation of the East European Stalinist states), the IS-aligned IWG people in Belfast dissolved the "Young Socialists" group they controlled into it. The YS was a loose

association of groups in Belfast, Derry, and Clonmel, and individuals in one or two other areas.

Soon the IS supporters — Michael Farrell, Cyril Toman, and others — were the leaders of PD. It was at first a big, loose grouping, including anarchists, liberals, and every political shade to the left of official Northern Ireland Unionism, even the odd Unionist. PD would play an important, in some respects a shaping, role in the events that led to breakdown of the Northern Ireland state in August 1969.

The PD leaders consulted frequently with the IS leaders. Much of what IS did in 1969 and after was determined by their will to keep in step with PD, whose size impressed them.

When a PD member, the 22 year old Bernadette Devlin (later McAliskey), who had not been in the IWG, was elected as the Catholic "Unity" Westminster MP in a Mid-Ulster by-election early in 1969, she worked closely with IS, for example, speaking to IS-organised meetings on building sites in London.

It needs to be stated here that the IS leaders did not control PD. Whether they might have helped guide them more and better than they did is an important question, but one I won't attempt to answer here.

Eamonn McCann, who had been in the IWG and was on the side of the Lawless bloc, while being far more of a Trotskyist than the PD leaders in Belfast, was based in Derry, and started to write for *Socialist Worker* at the end of 1968.

The Irish part of the other side of the IWG, our side, became the League for a Workers' Republic, a small organisation with people in Dublin, Clonmel, Dundalk, and Dun Laoghaire. The LWR and our group in Britain — Workers' Fight, which became the Trotskyist Tendency of IS — were linked as separate but "fraternal" groups. That relationship, like the IS leaders' relationship to PD, impinged on events in IS.

The variegated "Trotskyists" who found themselves within the LWR had been politically formed under the influence of the different existing British and international Trotskyist groups. The consequence was that Workers' Fight/Trotskyist Tendency and the LWR began to draw apart quite early.

In 1969-70 we still had close political relations, but came into bitter (private) conflict over what Workers' Fight/TT called the LWR's "sectarian passivity" in relation to events in the Northern Ireland.

WF did not control the LWR any more than IS controlled the PD. Yet, there was a radical difference in the two sets of relationships: the LWR did not control the Trotskyist Tendency, and to a defining extent PD "controlled" IS by way of the IS leaders' efforts to keep in step with them no matter what. In IS's relationship with the IS-sympathising PD leaders, it was a matter, so to speak, of the born-again "Leninist" Cliff dealing delicately with the products in Northern Ireland of his pre-1968 anti-Leninist period. There is a strange passage in Cliff's memoirs which shows him still impressed, three decades later, with PD's initial size. That seems to have shaped what he did at the time.

Gerry Lawless, without being a member of IS, functioned as one of the central organisers of IS's Irish work until late August 1969.

He had been secretary of the IWG, and as we've seen, organiser of one of the warring blocs within the IWG in 1967-8. Lawless was quite well known in Irish political circles. He had been chosen by Sean McBride to bring a case against the Irish government at the European Court of Human Rights for internment Republicans.

Lawless had been a member of the IRA and then of a splinter group, and was interned for five months before December 1957, before securing his release by promising to be of "good conduct" (what in Republican circles was condemned as "signing out").

He had belonged to a fascist current within the Republican movement, an ultra-Catholic group called Maria Duce (Maria, the mother of Jesus; Duce, as in Mussolini, leader). Its inspirer, Fr Denis Fahey, a professor at an Irish clerical college, had published a version of the

notorious Tsarist police forgery and handbook of 20th century anti-Semitism, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, under the title *Waters Flowing Eastward*.

A "Trotskyist" in London from the early 60s, Lawless functioned as a professional Irishman in a series of client relationships with the different Trotskyist groups. The Trotskyist Tendency held him responsible for wrecking the IWG and thought him a poisonous Irish chauvinist, and one who pursued personal and not political goals in politics. His desperate no-holds-barred factionalism was, we said, "the sort of thing that gets the double Oedipus complex a bad name".

THREE: THE TROTSKYIST TENDENCY

IN October/November 1968 IS had united with Workers' Fight, WF had ten or a dozen people in Manchester, Coventry, and Teesside; it was the political ancestor of the AWL. Inside IS, where "Trotskyist" was still a term of opprobrium, Workers' Fight took the name "Trotskyist Tendency".

On a proportionate basis we had two elected IS National Committee members, Phil Semp and myself. Almost immediately we recruited three other NC members: Geoff Hodgson, Dave Purdy, and Andrew Hornung. Hodgson and Purdy came from a bloc (of which we were part) on the IS National Committee who wanted a more serious "turn to Lenin" than Cliff would venture, and Hornung was a former supporter of a grouping called, jokingly, "the micro-faction", which had opposed centralisation.

Over the next two or three years, IS would become "Trotskyist", sort of, and piece by piece adopt the organisational culture of the worst kitsch-Trotskyist "orthodox" groups, specifically of the Healy organisation. But in late 1968 and early 1969, "Trotskyism" was still for most IS members a term of condemnation and abuse, and for some vehemently so.

We defined IS as "centrist" — meaning inconsistent, wavering, eclectic — and ourselves as a "tendency" as distinct from a "faction". That meant that we saw ourselves as adhering to a different political tradition from that of IS; and that our perspective in IS was not that of organising primarily to dispute particular immediate issues; rather, that of a long-term grouping, loose as regards immediate issues, which would as appropriate do educational work for our tradition.

When we said our tradition was different from IS's, in fact we meant the tradition of the "Luxemburgist" IS of the previous decade; we, like most others in IS, had a hazy and seriously inadequate idea of the group's history and the phases it had passed through in the 1950s and early 60s.

We were orthodox Trotskyists, adherents of the view that the Stalinist states were "degenerated and deformed workers' states" which should in war be "defended" against the West. In 1968-71, the period when we were part of IS, the USSR was the second pillar of world reaction, and we saw "defencism" as having no practical meaning. It was, we said, an "orientation issue" (and though we did not say it, an important part of a Trotskyist "tradition" which we felt obliged to take as a whole).

By "orthodox Trotskyism" we understood the politics of the international grouping around James P Cannon and the Socialist Workers' Party of the USA, which in 1953 had split the Fourth International in protest at what they said was the pro-Stalinist politics of the Pablo-Mandel international leadership. The "badge of honour" of "1953 orthodox Trotskyism" was unwavering and consistent hostility to Stalinism.

We were not less anti-Stalinist than those who called the Stalinist states "state capitalist".

We were for a "political revolution" — defined as having major social implications, and not as a shallow "merely-political" overturn — in all the Stalinist states, including Cuba (the only one I've ever been anything like "soft" on). Theoretically coherent we were not; politically, we were revolutionary socialists against all varieties of Stalinism.

It would be misleading to understand from this that we did not, with the feelings and emotions inseparable from seriously held political beliefs, argue for the degenerated and deformed workers' state thesis and for "defencism". We regarded the "state-capitalist" heretics with contempt, and "bureaucratic collectivists" with a great deal more contempt: at one of the two IS conferences in 1969, I denounced the organisation for maintaining links with the Independent Socialist Clubs of the USA, a "bureaucratic-collectivist" group inspired by Hal Draper.

Yet the fact tells its own story: in the three

years 1968 to 1971 there was no disagreement between the Trotskyist Tendency and the IS leadership on current policy towards any aspect of the Stalinist states. When the prominent IS member Chris Harman denounced the slaughter of Vietnamese Trotskyists by Ho Chi Minh's Stalinists, at a commemoration meeting for Ho in 1969 organised by the Mandelites, with a North Vietnamese representative on the platform, and was condemned by the "orthodox Trotskyists" with whom we felt most in common, we defended his action. It surely was "disruption" of the meeting, but it needed to be done.

Our main difference with IS, so we thought and said, was on the question of the Revolutionary Party, and the whole complex of questions — "Economism", the relationship of Marxist theory to what Marxists do, democracy within the party, etc. — which that encapsulates. What that difference meant in day-to-day politics will be made abundantly clear in the dispute on Ireland.

IS had decided to redefine itself as Leninist and to adopt a new "democratic centralist" constitution.

FOUR: IS'S "LENINIST" TURN

IS was making a sharp turn. After a noisy discussion, it had decided at a special conference in November 1968 to redefine itself as Leninist and to adopt a new "democratic centralist" constitution.

The organisation had previously called itself "Luxemburgist" — since 1958, when, then called Socialist Review after its paper, it had published in a duplicated pamphlet Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Russian Revolution. In a vague but insistent way, some responsibility for Stalinism was attributed to Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

"One should not draw the conclusion that there was no causal connection at all between Bolshevik centralism based on hierarchy of professional revolutionaries and the Stalinism of the future", as Cliff put it (*Trotsky on substitutionism*, International Socialism (first series) no.2, autumn 1960).

And: "For Marxists, in advanced industrial countries, Lenin's original position can serve much less as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's, notwithstanding her overstatements on the question of spontaneity" (*Rosa Luxemburg*, 1959).

IS had also been what was called "anti-substitutionist". They held that the Bolsheviks had "substituted" for the working class, and drew the conclusion for themselves and for their criticism of others that since revolutionary socialist groups must at all costs avoid "substituting" themselves for the class, attempts at leadership that could shape and "dominate" working-class struggles were "toy-town Bolshevism" and incipiently Stalinist or "Healyite".

The "anti-substitutionist" dogma of the group was understood differently by different individuals in the group, and differently from case to case, but in general it led to an accommodating yet manipulative approach to working-class and other struggles. Specifically, in trade-union affairs it led to "tail-ending" industrial militancy (following after it, in a politically passive way) — a variant of what Plekhanov, Martov, and Lenin had around 1900 called "Economism".

In the one factory in which the group had leadership — and had had a base for nearly 20 years — this approach contributed heavily to a great defeat for the workers. So the group itself, in its drive for self-renewal, concluded: see Colin Barker and Joyce Rosser, *The ENV story*, IS 31, 1967.

The pre-1968 IS approach was made to seem attractive and proper to many good youngsters by the horrible contemporary counter-example of the main allegedly "orthodox Trotskyist" group in Britain — then and for two decades past — the SLL. IS, growing rapidly, was now big enough to be a serious competitor with the SLL, which by the early or mid 60s was extremely "substitutionist" and organisationally self-promoting, often with destructive consequences for trade union and other struggles. (The SLL would change its name to WRP, become more and more politically aberrant, then fall apart in 1985. Only tiny fragments of it remain today).

IT was a renewed IS and still changing, still self-redefining organisation that responded to the Northern Ireland crisis in 1968-9. The National Committee that discussed it in January 1969 was a newly-created body. This was only its second or third meeting. It was supposed in theory to replace leadership by a federal committee to which branches sent delegates, and de facto control by a London-based group constructed around the family circle of Cliff, his brother-in-law Michael Kidron, and his wife Chanie Rosenberg (and others at different times). The National Committee could and did challenge Cliff and his close political friends and impose things they didn't like, at least in words and resolutions. Binding them and their co-thinkers by such resolutions was another question; it became acute in relation to Irish work.

It should be stressed that, whatever needs to be said about the continuation of the old "first family" role, this was, all in all, a democratic organisation. The "first family" had to assert itself through democratic structures. Real discussion did take place.

The January 1969 National Committee was important as an open discussion of the issues. Yet the EC had already, on 12 December 1968, decided a "line" and published it in the new weekly paper. The January National Committee, by majority vote and against the vote of all but one of the EC members, would impose a fourth slogan in addition to the three the EC had decided, and exactly 50% of those present voted to impose a fifth — but, to repeat, what it would all mean in the practical affairs of the group remained in the hands of the EC.

Throughout 1969, one of the shaping factors of what IS did, and what happened inside IS, on Ireland was that the National Committee was rarely presented with accurate accounts of the Northern Ireland left in general and of IS's close associates in Northern Ireland, the People's Democracy, in particular.

A variegated minority bloc existed on the National Committee, eleven out of the forty members, consisting of those who wanted a "harder" and more consistent Leninism, and a more self-critical appreciation of the group's past, than Cliff and his associates would concede. Cliff, though he'd recently turned political somersaults, insisted that he had never been wrong! This bloc had one representative on the EC, Constance Lever, a member of a subgroup known as the Democratic Centralist Faction. (At present this long-gone grouping is "represented" in the SWP by Ian Birchall, the semi-official apologetic historian of the Cliff group). The Democratic Centralist faction would survive through 1969, when others of the eleven-person bloc had "gone home" to Cliff, and it would back the Trotskyist Tendency on most things, including what would be a contentious resolution on "secession" by Northern Ireland's Catholic areas.

A number of other NC members were at an opposite pole — "libertarians" who had resisted and still did not accept the "centralisation". Quite a few "libertarians" would leave the group in the first months of 1969.

FIVE: THE BRITISH LEFT ON IRELAND BEFORE 1968

AT the start of the Northern Ireland crisis in 1968, the dominant conception of the "Irish question" on the British left was essentially that of middle-class Irish nationalism. The partition of Ireland was a brutal British imperialist imposition on Ireland; it was contrary to democracy and the rights of the Irish majority; and it created Protestant-Catholic division.

Most of those tenets were true. But not the last one; and the truth contained in the other tenets was only part of the truth. Without understanding that the fundamental root of Partition was the existence of a distinct Irish (Protestant-Unionist) minority, the partial truth could be extremely misleading.

The autonomous political and social movement of that Protestant minority on the island of Ireland would shape and ultimately determine the outcome so far of the long travail that faced both Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

The popular labour-movement view of the "Ulster problem" was rooted in the period before World War One, when both Irish middle-class Home Rulers and the early Labour Party had been political tails of the Liberal Party. It had for decades been replenished by the Irish middle-class Catholic nationalist "anti-imperialist" propaganda of the Connolly Association, through its monthly paper *Irish Democrat*, the Communist Party (the CA's parent group), and

the big and wide CP-tinted networks in the Labour left. The people doing that work were by 1968 often indistinguishable from straight Irish nationalists — good people, in my experience of them — but the CP drive on Ireland was shaped by Russia's wish to exploit the Irish issue against its enemy Britain. It had been so since the 1920s.

Moreover, Stalinists, some of them trained by the Connolly Association, notably Dr Roy Johnstone, had by 1968 effectively gained control of what there was of the IRA. The most momentous consequence of that fact would be the appearance of the Provisional IRA, as a split from the Stalinist-led movement, in December 1969.

Both sides in the TT/IS dispute of 1969-70 had, or had had, more or less worked-out views on Ireland. SR/IS had conducted a discussion on Ireland in their paper in the 50s. In the Irish Workers' Group, I had gone part of the way to making a Marxist analysis of the Irish question, which informed what the TT said. We will later examine both positions.

IS'S FIRST RESPONSES TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND CRISIS

WE are now in a position to discuss the disputes inside IS. What can be called the "first IS position" emerged between October 1968 and January 1969. There would be a number of other positions.

The IS paper had on 7 September 1968 changed from a monthly called *Labour Worker* to a weekly called *Socialist Worker*. It began to cover Northern Ireland affairs intensively in the first issue after 5 October in Derry. The keynotes were struck very early, in two articles.

Socialist Worker of 12 October carried a page one account by Eamonn McCann of events in Derry on the Monday after the police attack on the demonstration on Saturday 5 October: "Irish Police Bludgeon Marchers In Siege City".

"This is not a riot. It is an uprising. It is an elemental outbreak of rage by a class that has been denied jobs, houses and human rights by a regime that is as near fascist as makes no difference".

Northern Ireland was still a strange place, the nuances of such things as names a foreign language in *Socialist Worker*. "Londonderry is a city under siege", wrote *Socialist Worker*, using the Protestant-Unionist name for the city.

"Barriades have been erected and Molotov cocktails, bricks and other improvised weapons are being used by the people", wrote McCann. He described the events on 5 October. Water cannon had been used. The police boxed off lines of people and systematically bludgeoned them. Fighting spread to the centre of the city. Catholics were beaten back to the Bogside area.

McCann explained about the gerrymandered electoral boundaries which gave the Protestants sixty per cent of city corporation seats for 33% of the vote. A businessman, Sir Basil McFarlane, had 26 municipal votes, and McCann himself, "a 28 year old worker" living in his father's house, none.

He explained the build-up in Derry to the events of 5 October. In February 1968, socialists, Republicans, and Labour Party people (McCann was in the Derry Labour Party) formed the Derry Housing Action Committee. Landlords' houses were picketed, and official Derry Corporation meetings broken up. Up to 20 people had been prosecuted for those activities.

The illegal Derry Republican Club had come out openly on a demonstration, carrying Republican tricolour flags, whose display was banned in Northern Ireland.

The rule in Derry of "a clique of undemocratic gangsters" had generated a sectarian consciousness in their Catholic working-class victims. McCann reported that Labour Party and Young Socialist speakers at the demonstration denounced "attempts by fringe hooligan elements to use 'get the Protestants' as a slogan".

Those were the sort of events that, spreading and growing, constituted the ferment that now began to work its way through Northern Ireland Catholic communities, generating a fearful backlash among some Protestants, and then a growing number of them. McCann and others would report these events in *Socialist Worker*.

IS's own, typical, approach to these events was present in *Socialist Worker* early in an article by Paul Foot. On 26 October Foot reported under the headline: "Do-It-Yourself Politics Threatens Northern Ireland's Police Rule".

Foot too gave *Socialist Worker* readers, who in the main would know next to nothing of the

realities of Northern Ireland, details of the discrimination in housing, jobs, and votes against Catholics. Politically speaking, the important part of the article, defining IS's approach, was this: "The exploited people of Northern Ireland, denied even the semblance of parliamentary democracy available to the rest of the UK, are beginning to 'do it themselves', to act to seize the basic rights and services denied them by the intolerant and reactionary government".

Direct action shows the way. The ruling Ulster Unionist Party sets religious sectarianism to divide the workers. Foot approvingly quotes Johnny White, secretary of the Republican Clubs: the Republicans "are socialists" who want a Workers' Republic. "And we will work with anyone who works in a militant way towards that aim".

Foot notes the upsurge of student militancy for civil rights. The "terror of the authorities at the prospect of workers and students acting for themselves can be measured by the readiness of William Craig [Stormont home secretary, who had banned the 5 October march, and then set the RUC on the marchers] known variously as the Papadopoulos [leader of the military regime in Greece after the 1967 coup] and Lardner-Burke [minister of justice in the white-minority UDI government of Ian Smith in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe] of Ulster..."

All of IS is there. There had been a strong strain of quasi-anarchism in IS's youth segment. Direct action, "do-it-yourself" reforms, and "militancy" were the central values.

IS had worked in the Labour Party and the LPYS with the perspective of staying there up to the socialist revolution. Through most of the 50s and into the 60s, it presented its aims in every issue of its paper, *Socialist Review*, as a programme for a Labour government to carry out. But from the mid-60s the group had drifted from commitment to the Labour Party, political action, and a parliamentary focus, towards incoherent, quasi-anarchist anti-parliamentarism.

(It was not only anarchist anti-parliamentarism. In his mid-1967 pamphlet *The Struggle in the Middle East* Cliff made an astonishing judgement on the police states in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq by citing, as an item of agreement between "real socialism" and "Arab socialism", the fact that the "Arab socialists" "reject bourgeois parliamentary democracy as a fraud"). Socialist criticism of bourgeois democracy — because it is one dimensional democracy and we want a better, working-class democracy — was akin to the attitude of fascist military dictators like Nasser!

Alongside the quasi-anarchism in Foot's article, and of IS's typical approach then, there was also, right from the start, a lack of awareness of, or a refusal to notice, central features of the reality of Northern Ireland.

In Foot's picture the fact that "the people" in revolt are only (a section of) the Catholic minority is resolutely pushed aside. It is a worker and student uprising against the Northern Ireland equivalent of a Greek military dictator or a white supremacist in Africa (he isn't sure which). A fundamental characteristic of IS in this period would be its failure to make a coherent analysis of the situation in the Northern Ireland, the situation in which their local allies were playing a central and shaping role.

ON 12 December the new IS Executive Committee discussed its political responses and line on Ireland. The muddle and confusion that characterised IS in 1968 was thick and dense at the very beginning of the discussion on Ireland. Paul Foot and Gery Lawless (who, formally, was not a member of IS) were invited to attend, and Lawless — certainly after prior agreement with Cliff and Palmer — gave the "keynote speech". The minutes record what he said.

Comrade L felt that the British working class had a racist, chauvinist attitude towards the Irish question. The British left was not very much better informed. IS should educate its own members, as this attitude was also amongst them.

If IS is serious, it should not simply organise demonstration on Ireland but try to educate the working class (and IS members) to campaign and organise on the Irish question (remembering there are over a million Irishmen in this country, mostly workers). There was perhaps scope for a campaign on Vietnam Solidarity Campaign lines which should be more fruitful because it could bring workers into contact with the revolutionary left. The campaign should take in questions

coming from the south as well, although main emphasis on the North.

Comrade Palmer felt that as the Irish Question was so complicated the left's attitude was not so much racism as ignorance.

Comrade Lawless felt that the resources for a revolutionary Trotskyist group in Ireland were very small, and it would need an organiser and a press. He felt there would be very little response to a campaign among Irish exiles unless there is evidence of a large campaign to educate the British workers on Ireland...

Comrades Harman and Protz felt a seriously analytical piece on Ireland was needed which could set out the complexities of the Irish situation. Reported that Comrade Gillespie is expected to have something ready for the Spring International Socialism [journal]...

It was agreed several things were needed:

- To educate the group (and the British left, especially revolutionary Marxists)
- Start an Irish campaign
- Assist the re-formation of an Irish group.

The EC must discuss these and present some proposals to the NC.

The scene at the EC was very like a once well-known cartoon by Jules Feiffer from about the same time, in which a Black Panther is shown for panel after panel abusing a white upper-class cocktail-party audience until the last one — in which, like a flagellating sex-worker confronting a satisfied customer, he has his hand out for payment.

The Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet, *IS and Ireland*, published at the end of November 1969, commented on the exchange:

The ideas there uttered were to dominate the group's approach for at least the following five months. The idea that we could only get at Irish workers by campaigning to educate Britain on the Irish question was implemented as meaning a pseudo-anti-imperialist campaign — that is, we could only expect to reach Irish workers by pretending to attune absolutely and unconditionally to their existing level of nationalist consciousness. No question about our duty to bring specifically socialist analysis and comment to those we can reach of the one million strong group of the working class who originated in Ireland.

The VSC [Vietnam Solidarity Campaign] analogy was to bear fruit in the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign five months later. But at best it is a doubtful comparison. Solidarity with Vietnam, with a revolutionary movement struggling against imperialism in the most advanced way possible (and which we cannot directly influence) is in itself a semi-revolutionary step for those who take it. Solidarity with Civil Rights movement in Ireland — per se — can mean simply liberalism or Irish nationalism.

The idea that "the resources for a revolutionary Trotskyist group in Ireland" were very small governed everything IS did through 1969. It was, as events would show, utter nonsense, defeatist nonsense. The call for a serious analysis led to an article in IS journal four months later, by John Palmer and Chris Gray. We will see how serious it was.

The job of "educating" both British Marxists and British workers was given to... Gery Lawless. On 4 January *Socialist Worker* carried a "programmatically article" called "Ulster — what the left must do". It was signed "from Sean Reed", a pseudonym used by Lawless). Some of the ideas in it were, word for word, carried over from the IWG — but garbled to meanings absent from the originals.

The Northern ruling class kept its close links with British imperialism. In maintaining those links the Northern capitalists were aided by British terrorists who assisted in holding sufficient people and territory to make the Northern state viable...

Had the Orange enclave been confined to the environs of Belfast, its popular base might have allowed the development of democracy. But that was never on the cards. The economic base is not big enough; politically, without British aid for the Northern rules, the Southern regime would undoubtedly have swallowed it.

The necessary inclusion of a Nationalist population amounting to one-third of the total means that opposition to the regime, from whatever political quarter, tends to become opposition to the existence of the Six Counties state as such. Hence the need for the Special Powers Act.

From this follows the importance of the struggle for democracy in Ireland. This struggle must be based on a programme which rejects Toryism, Green as well as Orange.

The Northern worker will never be won to a

programme which calls for the absorption of the Six Counties into the present Southern regime with its Rome rule in the schools which tends to confirm his ever-present fear that a break with Orange Toryism will open the floodgates and relegate him to the position of a second-class citizen.

He will only be won for the establishment of a Republic when it is clear in his mind that what is envisaged is a Workers' Republic in which he as a worker will control his own destiny without fear of Thames or Tiber.

The complexity of the situation has in the past been used by many in the labour movement in Britain as an excuse for doing nothing, or else indulging in the old British habit of telling the Irish how to run their own affairs.

This British... attitude to Ireland will come as no surprise to Irish revolutionary socialists, who have long recognised if not accepted the inability of the labour movement in Britain to show an understanding of the Irish problem.

The result of this attitude in practice is that even the best-informed British left-wing organisations fail to take any part in the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland.

What is to be done? First and foremost [!] British socialists must refrain from penning long high-flown theoretical articles (which all end up telling Irish socialists what to do) and instead launch a campaign of solidarity with the Irish movement. In this campaign, the best thing British socialists can do is demand:

- The withdrawal of all British troops from Ireland;
- An end to the supply of British military equipment to the Northern Irish Tory Party and para-military Black Hundreds, the B-Specials;
- Stop British subsidies to the Tory police state of Northern Ireland.

The November 1969 Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet said:

This third demand is one which no-one in Ireland, North or South, ever agreed with. It

A number of people objected to the self-determination slogan on the grounds that it was "prejudging the issue",

implied the very opposite of the real relationship of Northern Ireland and Great Britain — that is, the fact that Britain draws more from Northern Ireland in profits than she pays out in social service subsidies. Much more. This slogan, acceptable to no workers in Northern Ireland, Catholic or Protestant, disguised the real nature of the relationship, and could legitimately be accused of miseducating British workers.

The first two demands are anti-imperialist demands. But a strange anti-imperialism — which called for certain things and then, surprisingly, avoided the essential and logical conclusion: the call for the right of self-determination for Ireland as a unit.

To raise the self-determination demand would have been to raise the question of the Border, because to have any meaning in the present state of Irish politics self-determination must mean self-determination for those explicitly denied it: the Catholics of Northern Ireland. It must mean to regard the existing Irish state structures as fluid.

The absence of this demand was a strange omission from the list which Lawless (obviously with the agreement of the EC and probably with the collaboration of Palmer) was putting.

But a section of the article made it clear that this was no accidental omission. It read: "The northern worker will never be won for a programme which calls for the absorption of the Six Counties into the present southern regime, with its Rome rule in the schools, which tends to confirm his ever-present fear that a break with Orange Toryism will open the floodgates and relegate him to the position of a second-class citizen.

He will only be won for the establishment of a Republic when it is clear in his mind that what is envisaged is a Workers' Republic in which he as a worker will control his own destiny without fear of Thames or Tiber".

Obviously the demand had been deliberately tailored to take the above into account: only under socialism would self-determination — that is, concretely, the abolition of the Border — become a desirable possibility.

This might be a defensible position for a

group in Northern Ireland to take. But [not for] a campaign in Britain... Marxists in imperialist countries who raise demands for self-determination do so only to defend the right of the oppressed people to take self-determination to the point of seceding if they want to, and even without socialism. The choice is theirs.

Why, therefore, omit this from the slogans for a campaign in Britain? Because, in the actual case under discussion, it would have meant to implicitly differentiate from those in Northern Ireland who didn't raise the national question, self-determination, and the Border, and for IS in effect to put a position independent of the PD.

The problem for Palmer and Lawless was that their Northern Irish co-thinkers (Farrell and co.) had a position which committed them to accepting the given partition this side of socialism. They had a sectarian socialist — a pre-Leninist — position...

At the January NC meeting there was a long discussion on Ireland, with the EC minutes (above) and "Sean Reed's" article as the basis of the discussion. The minutes for this NC are inaccurate, in that they miss out one of the central ideas put by the Workers' Fight members. The February NC agreed that the minutes were in fact inaccurate, and the actual Workers' Fight case is made in a letter by S Matgamma to Socialist Worker no.106.

We argued that the three demands presented as the basis of the Irish campaign were not "nationalistic" enough for the task of educating the British workers on the Irish question, insofar as they omitted the demand for self-determination with all that it implied. At the same time they were too exclusively nationalistic for the task of educating Irish workers in Britain, the most nationally conscious of whom we would be likely to reach, in a class understanding of Ireland's problems.

Two additional slogans were proposed, representing in our opinion the two essential prongs of a serious campaign on the Irish question. (1) The right of the people of Ireland to self-determination; (2) For a united socialist republic of Ireland.

A number of people objected to the self-determination slogan (interpreted in discussion as above) on the grounds that it was "prejudging the issue". Comrades Palmer and Cliff (the group's "Irish experts") were among those who took this line initially. At the time their attitude was hard to understand — later it became clear that they were subordinating their duty as socialists in Britain to the need to keep in step with their supporters in Northern Ireland. However, the proposal was carried [against the votes of the EC members] by a big majority.

But after the NC had decided to carry the fourth slogan on self-determination, its spirit was never adhered to by those running the Irish campaign... John Palmer chose to interpret the self-determination demand like this in IS journal 36:

"Point 4 above also has the advantage that it allows for a possible decision by the whole people of Ireland to merge the two statelets on the basis of some degree of autonomy for the Protestants..."

Interpreted thus, it allowed the leadership to relegate the whole thing to a distant future and still treat the imperialist set-up, the Border, etc., as given, as unmitigable. Ultimately this was to be one of the factors leading to the acceptance of British troops after August.

The Workers' Republic slogan led to a long discussion. The idea behind it was that IS's campaign needed to have one prong aimed at Irish workers. It could have been raised as an expression of solidarity with the left in Ireland, and this would have been IS's specific line with the Irish workers in the campaign.

Those who had forgotten or opposed the self-determination slogan were not in the least inhibited in this discussion in saying that to raise the Workers' Republic slogan in Britain would be an intolerable qualification of the self-determination demand, and would be "telling the Irish people what to do". The proposal to include it in the campaign was rejected by the chairman's casting (second) vote.

[There was nothing out of order in that — that is what the chair, Jim Higgins, had a second vote for, to break ties].

Cliff and Palmer were also among those opposing the inclusion of the demand...

Of the many and varied inadequacies of the TT which I can now see though I didn't then, one glaring gap in our criticism of the position of the IS EC in January 1969 strikes me as, arguably, the worst. It will be discussed in the next instalment.

Why we should oppose the expansion of nuclear power

BY PAUL VERNADSKY

NUCLEAR power is dangerous, expensive and unnecessary to cut global greenhouse gas emissions. It is bound up with nuclear weapons. We should oppose the expansion of nuclear power in today's conditions of capitalist globalisation. In particular we should oppose the British government's promotion of a new generation of nuclear reactors.

According to a recent report by the Oxford Research Group (ORG), there are currently 429 nuclear reactors in operation in the world today in 30 states. It says another 25 reactors are under construction and a further 76 have been planned, mainly by China, Japan, Russia and South Korea.

These reactors produce around 16% of the power necessary for global electricity consumption, although this is unevenly distributed. In France, nuclear provides 79% of electricity, 32% in Germany and 19% in the USA. (Greenpeace)

In the UK nuclear power provides 20% of the UK electricity and around 8% of overall energy, when transport fuel and non-electric heating are taken into account. However with the decommissioning of Magnox and Advanced Gas Cooled Reactors (AGRs) by 2025, leaving only Sizewell B, this will decline to around 7% unless further reactors are built.

It is difficult to find an accurate estimate of the number of workers in the nuclear industry worldwide. However the Nuclear Industry Association says there are 40,000 workers employed in the industry in the UK.

The nuclear industry is promoting new types of nuclear reactors, known as Generation III and Generation III+. There are four Generation III reactors currently in operation, the Advanced Boiling Water Reactors (ABWR) developed in Japan, with two under construction in Taiwan. The only Generation III+ plant under construction is the European Pressurised Water Reactor (EPR) at the Olkiluoto site in Finland.

Eight new reactors may be built in the UK, two at each of four existing sites on which an existing nuclear-power reactor is operating. In its 2006 Energy Review, the government said these would be proposed, developed, constructed and operated by the private sector. This includes the full decommissioning and long-term waste management — the government says it is not offering any direct or indirect subsidies, unlike with previous nuclear projects.

IM not opposed to nuclear power, or any other technology in principle. It was right for scientists to develop nuclear technology after World War Two and to assess its potential as a source of power for electricity generation. It might be necessary for a workers' government to utilise and develop nuclear technology in the future.

However the experience of nuclear power over sixty years under capitalism shows that there are formidable arguments against it. These are: cost, waste, safety and nuclear weapons proliferation. There are also arguments that nuclear undermines the necessary changes to energy consumption, to energy efficiency strategies and to the development of renewable energy sources.

We are a long way from the fantasy scenario painted by the nuclear industry, expressed by Lewis Strauss in 1954 that, "it is not too much to expect that our children will enjoy in their homes electrical energy too cheap to meter".

The cost of building, running and decommissioning nuclear reactors must be a key consideration for socialists, given that costs are likely to be paid for by workers, either in the form of additional taxation or through higher energy prices. For example the collapse of British Energy in 2002 means that a significant proportion of decommissioning costs of old UK nuclear power plants will be paid for out of general taxation.

Nuclear build is notorious for cost overruns. The most recently built reactor in the UK, Sizewell B, was projected to cost £1.7 billion but actually cost £3.7 billion. The Torness reactor in Scotland increased from £742 million to £2.5 billion. The Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP) at Sellafield was expected to cost £300 million but in the end cost £1.8 billion. The Generation III+ Olkiluoto site in Finland, which began construction in 2005 has been beset with difficulties, is already 18 months behind schedule and £500,000 over budget.

Then there are the costs of generating electricity. In 2002 the government's Performance and Innovation Unit produced a study of the estimated costs of electricity generated from different sources in 2020. The results were:

Technology	2020 cost
Large combined heat and power	<2p/kWh
Micro combined heat and power	2.5-3.5p/kWh
Photovoltaic (solar)	10-16p/kWh
Onshore wind	1.5-2.5p/kWh
Offshore wind	2.0-3.0p/kWh
Energy crops	2.5-4.0p/kWh
Wave	3.0-6.0p/kWh
Fossil generation with carbon capture	3.0-4.5p/kWh
Nuclear	3.0-4.0p/kWh
CCGT (gas)	2.0-2.3p/kWh
Coal	3.0-3.5p/kWh

(Source: SERA 200)

Other estimates bear out these figures. US research has estimated the cost of nuclear energy at 3.7p/kWh (MIT) or 3.9p/kWh. The MIT study concluded that given these costs, nuclear "is just too expensive".

The costs of waste and decommissioning also need to be included. The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) estimates that it will cost £13 billion to deal with existing nuclear waste and £56 billion to decommission existing facilities, including those used by the military.

Nuclear energy would not be significantly cheaper than many renewable sources, and more expensive than others, on most projections by 2020.

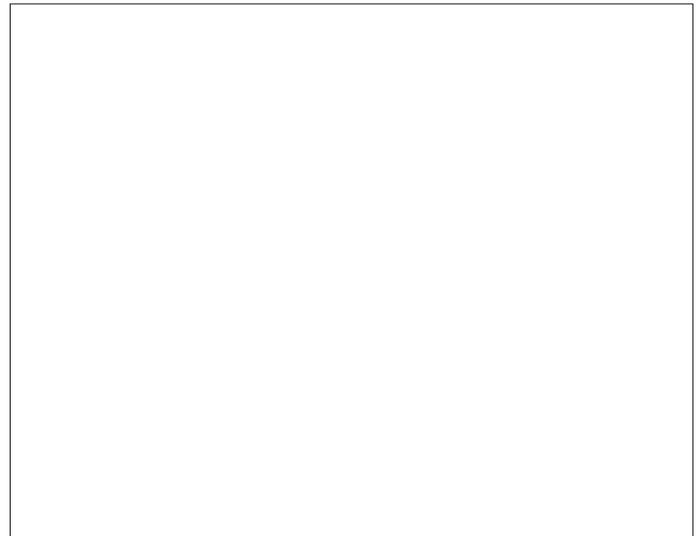
THE simple fact is that no long-term solution has been found for disposing of high-level nuclear waste.

By the end of 2005, the US had an estimated 53,000 metric tonnes of commercial spent fuel, mainly stored in cooling pools. US government plans to dump this waste deep underground in the Yucca Mountain have been mired in problems and the site is still not operational. However an expansion of global nuclear power would require a new Yucca mountain depository opening every three to six years to keep up with the waste.

According to Michael Meacher, Britain already has 10,000 tonnes of high-level and intermediate nuclear waste, with official estimates putting the figure at 50 times that amount by the end of the century. The government's Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) has said that 18 million cubic metres of soil and rubble have been contaminated by leaks, spills and discharges from UK sites over sixty years.

Given the half-life of radioactive materials generated by nuclear reactors, it is legitimate to question the legacy it will leave future generations. If the debate is shaped around preventing dangerous climate change for succeeding generations, it is clear that the nuclear "solution" is only possible today by creating other significant hazards for thousands of years.

SAFETY in the nuclear industry, measured by deaths and injuries is better than in many other areas of energy generation, but there are some legitimate concerns about ill health.



In the 1990s, the incidence of cancer clusters near nuclear facilities was raised. A study by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) in 2003 found no evidence of raised childhood cancer around nuclear power plants, but it did find an excess of leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma near Sellafield, AWE Burghfield and UKAEA Dounreay.

However nuclear reactors have the potential for a catastrophic incident that extends well beyond these calculations. The debate about expanding nuclear power in the late 1970s and again in the mid-1980s was overtaken by the incidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. Sweden's Forsmark nuclear power station had a near meltdown last year — and earlier this year BNG Sellafield was fined £500,000 after it admitted a radioactive leak.

In the current political situation, there is a greater risk of attack on a nuclear reactor. A *Daily Mirror* journalist managed to "plant" a bomb on a nuclear train last year. A 2004 study by the Union of Concerned Scientists estimated that a major terrorist attack on the Indian Point reactor in the US would result in 44,000 deaths from acute radiation exposure and over half a million long-term deaths from cancer among individuals within fifty miles of the plant.

According to one US study, if there is an expansion of nuclear power over the next period, there is at least a 50-50 chance of an accident by 2050. But whatever the mathematical risk of a major incident, the scale of even one such event should at least make us cautious about advocating nuclear power.

CIVIL nuclear power is intimately connected to nuclear weapons. As the US Committee on Atomic Energy put it in 1946, "the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes and the development of atomic energy for bombs are in much of their course interchangeable and interdependent".

This applies to existing bourgeois states that already have weapons, other bourgeois states that want to develop them and to terror groups. The IAEA Illicit Trafficking database has recorded over 650 confirmed incidents of trafficking in nuclear or other radioactive materials since 1993.

By 2075, the nuclear industry predicts that most nuclear electricity will be generated by fast breeder reactors. If this is correct, more than 4,000 tonnes of plutonium will have to be fabricated into fresh reactor fuel each year — twenty times the current military stockpile.

IF nuclear power has long been an answer looking for a question, then the new question is climate change. But nuclear power is

the wrong answer to the right question.

Cutting carbon dioxide emissions is the new rationale for nuclear power. In May 2006, Tony Blair said that, "Nuclear power is back on the agenda with a vengeance". Gordon Brown pledged support for nuclear in his first prime minister's questions. Climate change is the principal reason given for the "nuclear renaissance".

The argument is that unlike coal, gas or oil, enriched uranium does not release CO₂ when it is used, and in that sense is "zero-carbon". The SDC estimates that counting the costs of construction and the fuel cycle, nuclear generates around 4.5 tonnes of carbon per GWh of electricity, compared with 97 tonnes from existing gas-fired power stations and 243 tonnes for coal.

However any kind of assessment of nuclear also has to include the carbon emissions from mining, processing, decommissioning and waste management of uranium, and from decommissioning and waste disposal. The WWF estimates that over the entire life cycle, nuclear carbon emissions range between 34gCO₂/kWh to 230gCO₂/kWh, compared with 430gCO₂/kWh for gas and 955gCO₂/kWh for coal. Nuclear is a lower carbon not zero carbon source of energy.

The SDC estimates that if the UK existing nuclear capacity were replaced and these new reactors displaced gas fired power stations, then 4% of carbon emissions could be saved annually. A more ambitious programme might save up to 8% of emissions — and more if coal fired power stations were the ones displaced. (SDC 2006b pp.4-5)

Nor is nuclear renewable. The DTI cites figures based on 2004 generation levels, that known uranium reserves will last for around 85 years. Even allowing for more discoveries, or for the use of a combination of uranium and plutonium, nuclear is at best a stop-gap rather than a renewable source of energy for the next century.

SOCIALISTS will convince no one to oppose nuclear power unless we can point to clear alternatives. However options do exist in today's conditions, through changing social relations and developing existing technologies. And given the likely construction time involved in building new nuclear reactors, (probably between 5 and 11 years), the comparison has to be between alternatives over the next decade or so.

A report by the Environmental Change Institute estimated that household CO₂ emissions could be reduced by 60% using a variety of existing available technologies, particularly by promoting energy efficiency — for example

Can the SSP revive?

BY DALE STREET

JUST nineteen motions have been submitted for the 2007 annual conference of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), being held in Dundee on 21 October. Four of the motions have been submitted by the party's Executive Committee. The Republican Communist Network (RCN) platform in the SSP and the SSP Assistant Secretary have each submitted one motion. The other thirteen motions have been submitted by eleven different SSP branches. That about sums up the sorry state that the SSP is in.

And just over a third of the motions — seven of them — deal with the SSP's internal organisation, covering issues such as party staffing (at the moment the SSP employs only part-time staff), party finances (not in a healthy state), filling vacant office-bearers' positions (in the event of an office-bearer standing down), and re-organisation of the SSP's regional structures (which currently function with varying degrees of effectiveness).

Another motion curiously included under the heading of "Internal Affairs" contains a number of proposals for improving the SSP's trade union work, ranging from organising networks of SSP members in different unions to increasing SSP input into local Trades Councils and existing Broad Lefts, as well as providing greater input from SSP trade unionists into the SSP's newspaper.

One of the two motions on environmental issues advocates a planned economy and a lower aggregate level of consumption as the solution to the environmental crisis, and proposes "building bridges with all those sharing the aims of sustainability, equity and democracy to create a movement for radical change."

The other motion on the environment proposes "regionally based day-schools" in order to promote education and activist training, and to bring "red and green" closer together. In the absence of the SSP having a publication of its own, the motion recommends that SSP members read the *Socialist Resistance* publication "Eco-Socialism or

As an organisation, the SSP has not recovered from the Sheridan trial, the subsequent split, and the loss of all its MSPs in the Holyrood elections. With only patchy exceptions, branch life and street activities are at a low ebb

Barbarism?"

A motion on religion and education (an issue of some degree of controversy within the SSP) proposes that all teachers should have the right to teach in all schools (i.e. no power of veto by the Catholic Church), religious or denominational schools should be "phased out", and the practice of collective worship in school assemblies should be scrapped.

Motions submitted under the "Campaigns" heading variously advocate: campaigning in solidarity with migrant workers and in support of the "No-One Is Illegal" campaign; campaigning around Scotland's housing

crisis; and campaigning in defence of free weekly bin collections, in order to force council to "give firm guarantees that they will not move to fortnightly bin collections."

Another campaigning motion makes a series of essentially organisational proposals regarding how the SSP should prepare to intervene in the next General Election, which "may be called as early as spring 2008", bearing in mind the organisation's depleted resources.

A lengthy Executive Committee motion on campaigning argues that while internal reforms of the SSP are needed (to be proposed by a Commission set up at an earlier conference, and currently consulting members on party reforms), the SSP "needs to need to go back to what we do best — campaigning in communities and in trade unions on the issues that matter to people."

These include "national issues such as independence, anti war, scrapping the council tax and free school meals," and also, on a more local level, "fighting for 'People not Profit' against privatisation, public spending cuts and environmental destruction."

Finally, there are three motions on the conference agenda dealing with international issues. One calls for support for the "Hands Off the People of Iran" campaign. A second calls for the SSP "to work with the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign in its struggle for boycott, disinvestment, and sanctions against the Israeli regime until it recognises the right of the Palestinians."

The third motion on international issues, submitted by the RCN and the longest one on the agenda, argues that the British ruling class's strategy of "devolution all round" in order "to maintain its political domination and control over these islands" has been partially undermined by the election of "a DUP/Sinn Fein coalition, an SNP/Green minority coalition, and a Labour/Plaid Cymru coalition."

Against a background of "the current UK government having been awarded US imperialism's political 'franchise', as junior partner, in the North East Atlantic," the motion proposes that the SSP "organise a conference, in early 2008, which invites socialists from Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England to discuss a republican socialist strategy to counter current US and British plans to maintain imperial control over these islands on behalf of the global corporations."

As an organisation, the SSP has not recovered from the Sheridan trial, the subsequent split, and the loss of all its MSPs in the Holyrood elections. With only patchy exceptions, branch life and street activities are at a low ebb. And there is a heavy emphasis on reform of internal SSP structures, through implementation of the conclusions of the Commission, as being central to turning around the fortunes of the SSP.

But the Sheridan trial and split took place over a year ago. The Holyrood elections took place nearly six months ago. Although the Executive Committee motion on campaigning is right to say that rebuilding the SSP "will take time" — assuming that the SSP can be rebuilt — there is as yet still little or no sign of the SSP moving on from the trauma of the period between Sheridan's trial and the Holyrood elections.

Moreover, the morbid and obsessive fixation on Sheridan and his breakdown for the SSP also obscures the fact that the SSP had already begun to encounter substantial difficulties well before his departure.

Putting everything "on hold" until the Commission comes up with its findings next February or March would only make matters worse. (In fact, more likely than not, one of

the reasons for the paucity of motions submitted to the SSP conference is that the staging of the conference is seen as playing second fiddle to the eventual findings of the Commission.)

In any organism, paralysis, after a certain amount of time, can end up having fatal consequences. And the SSP is no exception to that. The SSP needs to draw a line under the past and start from where it is now, not

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There is certainly no magic solution to the current malaise in the SSP (and no-one is pretending there is). And it's a lot easier to say what the SSP cannot do (produce a weekly newspaper, employ full-time staff, use its MSPs to gain publicity for the SSP, etc.) than to say what it should be doing.

But even allowing for all such qualifications, the SSP will turn itself around only if it confronts some basic political questions.

First and foremost: is it an organisation which seeks to root itself in the trade union movement on the basis of class-struggle politics, or is it a kind of left-wing counterpart to the SNP (or, in its most extreme form, an organisation of left fellow-travellers of the SNP)?

Secondly, does the SSP still have a serious commitment to left unity, including with socialist organisations in the rest of Britain, even if such unity takes place for the time being only in specific joint campaigns (especially in the trade unions) as opposed to closer organisational ties with other groups?

Thirdly, how can the SSP integrate campaigning around specific issues — whether it be housing, migrant workers, free school meals, anti-militarism, or whatever — into the broader political perspective of why the SSP exists as an organisation, rather than such campaigning ending up as disparate 'single-issue' activism?

Fourthly, is the SSP going to remain stuck in the rut of a caricature of socialist internationalism (boycott Israel, support Cuba, cheer on Chavez, and idolise Che) or is it going to approach international political issues within a perspective of class struggle politics?

But whether the SSP's forthcoming conference in Dundee begins to answer any of these questions is a question in itself.

More on Scotland:

• Bosses for Scotland:
www.workersliberty.org/node/9274

• Index of articles:
www.workersliberty.org/scotland

getting rid of standby on electrical equipment. Even the DTI admitted in 2003 that energy efficiency measures were the cheapest and safest way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Workplaces and work-related activities account for at least half of all carbon emissions. A drive by workers and unions could deliver substantial savings in CO₂ emissions. Cheap or free public transport could also save energy used through car use, and rail is less polluting than road freight.

Nevertheless, energy efficiency savings alone are not enough. Alternative sources of power generation from fossil fuels are necessary. A study by the Institute of Engineers in 2002 found that the "technical potential" of renewables such as wind, tidal, geothermal and biofuels far exceed current or projected energy demand in the UK. The Energy Saving Trust estimates microgeneration could provide 30-40% of the UK's electricity generating needs by 2050.

A study by the Tyndall Centre in 2000 estimated that the UK's "practicable resource" is equivalent to around 87% of current electricity production. A report by the government's Interdepartmental Analysts Group for the 2003 Energy White Paper put the figure for renewables at 68% of current electricity consumption.

Technologies like carbon capture and storage — already in use in the US, Norway and Algeria — may provide a means of reducing carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels.

Clearly we need to have a strategy for nuclear workers as the existing plants are decommissioned. We would have to have the same discussion with workers in the military and asbestos industries. The ideas of "just transition" pioneered in the United States and prefigured by Lucas and other workers' control plans, of guaranteed long term income, retraining and the production of alternative socially useful products, is the right way to go.

The enormous sums of capital that are needed for nuclear new build could be invested in renewable and other technologies that help cut carbon emissions, but with fewer side-effects. The decision to build new nuclear reactors or renewables will be taken by private capital on the grounds of profitability (egged on by the state), with little regard to its social or environmental impact. We need to wrestle control from them.

Concentrating on nuclear also dilutes the political message that changes such as energy efficiency are necessary. Given the governments' commitment to market solutions to climate change and its limited support for renewables, this is a serious problem. However there is substantial scope for pressure and campaigning; in other words for our politics.

A NEW generation of nuclear reactors would only make a small contribution to cutting carbon emissions, but with huge side effects, such as an increased risk of nuclear weapons proliferation, a catastrophic reactor accident and the generation of waste. Nuclear power is not going to be cheaper than many renewable energy sources by the time new plants are built, and may detract from efforts to develop renewables or improve energy efficiency. We should oppose it.

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workers' liberty & Solidarity

Stop repression in Burma!

BY HARRY GLASS

As thousands of monks and others protesters remain under arrest and subject to torture in Burma, campaigners in 30 cities around the world staged a series of rallies last weekend against the bloody crackdown.

In London, around 10,000 people joined the demonstration on 6 October, with the TUC, Unison, NUI and other unions backing the protest. Campaigners and unions have focused their demands on getting multinational firms to stop propping up the military regime and withdraw from Burma.

For the last 45 years Burma has been ruled by a military dictatorship with a savage reputation for brutality. In 1962 a military coup inaugurated "the Burmese Way to Socialism" — a military dictatorship which nationalised much of the economy and formed a one-party state.

In 1988 thousands of people are killed after anti-government protests and general strikes in Rangoon and across the country. Although the National League for Democracy (NLD) led Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide election victory in 1990, the generals disregarded the result and continued with military rule.

At the same time the military launched a big push for foreign investment and found many multinationals willing to look away from human rights abuses if a profit could be made. And the military used the revenue gained to build up a massive army, spending between a third and a half of its budget on its armed forces during the 1990s.

Several multinationals have well-documented business links to Burma, including Caterpillar (USA), China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), Daewoo International Corporation (Korea), Siemens (Germany), Gas Authority of India (GAIL), GlaxoSmithKline (UK), Hyundai (Korea), ONGC Videsh Ltd (India), Swift (Belgium), and TOTAL (France). The ITUC international union federation is currently investigating several hundred other companies for links to Burma.

The Chinese, Indian, Thai and Japanese governments all have strong links with the regime. China is Burma's largest supplier of imports and its third-largest export market. China supplied rocket launchers, fighter

aircraft and guided-missile attack craft in the 1990s.

One of the difficulties with demands for economic sanctions on Burma is that large sections of Asian capital, as well as some European firms have filled the breach after much of US capital withdrew in the 1990s.

According to a new report by the Burma Campaign UK, the TOTAL multinational is the largest European corporate funder of the regime.

Although best known as a French oil company, TOTAL also has substantial interests in the UK. It is the fourth-largest oil company in terms of North Sea production and reserves. It has two refineries, at Milford Haven and Killingholme. It operates the St Fergus Gas Terminal in Scotland, which processes around 15% of the UK's daily gas requirements from some 20 fields.

TOTAL's chemical subsidiary, ATOFINA UK, is one of the largest suppliers of plastics materials in the UK and a major supplier of chemicals for use in industry. Its brands include Bostik Findley — now the largest adhesives and sealants company in the UK, Spontex cleaning products and Mapa professional cleaning products. And another subsidiary, TOTAL BUTLER, is one of the largest suppliers of domestic fuel oil in the UK. It also supplies oil to schools, hospitals and commercial businesses.

TOTAL has a big stake in Burma. For example it is a partner in the Yadana gas project. Arms sales closely are linked to TOTAL's gas project. The regime used its first down payment for gas exports to buy 10 MIG jets from Russia. TOTAL's presence in Burma has influenced French, European Union and British foreign policy on Burma, with France vetoing effective EU sanctions in order to protect TOTAL.

Horrible human rights abuses have been committed in the region of TOTAL's gas pipeline by the security forces. In 1991, to "secure" the area for TOTAL and other foreign oil companies, the entire pipeline region was militarised. Thousands of troops renowned for their extreme brutality were drafted into the area to police farmers, plantation workers and fishing communities. In all, at least 16 battalions have either been stationed in the area or patrolled the pipeline region at one time or another since 1991.

Student bureaucrats move to smash democracy

BY SOFIE BUCKLAND, NATIONAL UNION
OF STUDENTS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE (P.C)

WHEN the National Union of Students commissioned its "no holds barred" governance review after annual conference 2007, the left was criticized for preemptively declaring it an attack on democracy. The findings of the review was discussed at a national committee meeting on 9 October, and guess what? It's a massive attack on democracy.

The main points are:

- To split the current National Executive into two. The "Board" will deal with "non-political" areas like budgets, overseeing senior staff, remuneration of senior staff and legal policies (no, we don't understand how that's non-political either), and will be made up of six full-time NEC members including the President, three to six external trustees and three students appointed by conference. The "Senate" will deal with "political" areas like setting priorities and coordinating work between regions and nations.

This Senate will be radically different from today's executive committee. For a start, it'll effectively remove the "Block of 12" part-time officers, a factor in guaranteeing political pluralism. Instead 15 "committee members" will be elected by conference, having no officer status and remuneration for attending meetings only.

The NUS right-wing have already almost neutered the political power of the block of 12, forcing members to take part-time jobs through under-funding — this move will finish the job. In addition, the roles of Treasurer and Secretary are simply being axed, with their workload shifted to the Board — that's external trustees handling NUS's finances at the highest level.

- To radically change National Conference, with prior debates at five "zone" conferences early in the calendar year. These conferences will supposedly enable non-contentious policy to be passed, then simply presented to the renamed "Congress" for ratification, leaving time for "contentious" policy to be discussed. The review makes clear that zone conferences should be small, suggesting one union, one vote. This is intended to leave time for Congress to "celebrate" the work of the national union, alongside AGM style reports of finances.

The review also suggests removing the current requirement that conference delegates are elected by cross-campus ballot, suggesting that unions can be "trusted" to pick their own method and ensure "representative" delegations.

In short, NUS's right-wing leadership is backing proposals to hand large chunks of our work over to a Board almost certain to be dominated by unelected, unaccountable external trustees; to scrap the block of 12; to allow student union officers to hand pick their delegations to conference, and to remove almost all policy debate from National Conference in favour of tiny one union, one vote zone conferences.

These moves dramatically narrow the oppor-

tunities for any political activist who doesn't have a sabbatical union position, or mates on the NEC, to even get to national policy debates, let alone stand for election, hold their representatives to account or, if elected, challenge the guaranteed right-wing dominance on the Board or Senate. It will create massive layers of bureaucracy in terms of submitting policy (it's hard enough for some unions to get policy to one conference, let alone five separate ones) and passing decisions on ruling committees (the Board has a veto). As a supposed answer to NUS's genuine lack of involvement and general activist disillusionment, it's pathetic.

Pretty much all the problems laid out in the paper, about students not taking NUS seriously, a lack of engagement in democratic structures and poor involvement in campaigns, are due to the consistent efforts of the right-wing to depoliticise NUS. For years successive leaderships have refused to lead a fight on anything (witness the ridiculous lack of a demo the year top-up fees came in for a start). Now they harp on about "getting the ear of government" and looking "credible" to policy-makers by ditching militant tactics in favour of cosying up to Brownite politicians. Is it any wonder the average student feels like NUS is little more than a discount card?

Instead of looking to their own actions, the NUS bureaucracy are blaming our democratic structures. And the solution? Ripping pretty much all the democracy out of them.

Yesterday, Wes Streeting, the leading Labour Student and NUS Vice-President Education, had the gall to suggest that factions, long cited as a confusing and alienating aspect of NUS democracy, will behave better under new structures.

It's true that many factions are shadowy, secretive and conspiratorial at the moment (and Education Not for Sale attempts much better behaviour, for example exposing internal NUS debates, and organizing openly and democratically). But that's certainly not the fault of the structures — they can't let themselves off the hook by blaming the way NUS is set up for their own behaviour!

This review will be voted on at next week's NEC, and it's clear that the right-wing are geared up to tout it to student officers as the answer to all their problems. It's not. Dumbing down NUS to meet the current level of political culture isn't an answer — instead we should be leading a democratic, campaigning NUS that lifts the political culture.

ENS will be discussing how we can defend NUS democracy at our Education for Freedom gathering on October 21, at the University of East London. We urge all student activists and officers who want to preserve NUS democracy, whether or not they support ENS, to come and take part in launching a broad campaign. For more information, or to get involved, email volunga@gmail.com or call 07815 490 837.

• ENS: www.free-education.org.uk