

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

**FOR DEMOCRACY IN
THE PALESTINE
SOLIDARITY
MOVEMENT P3**



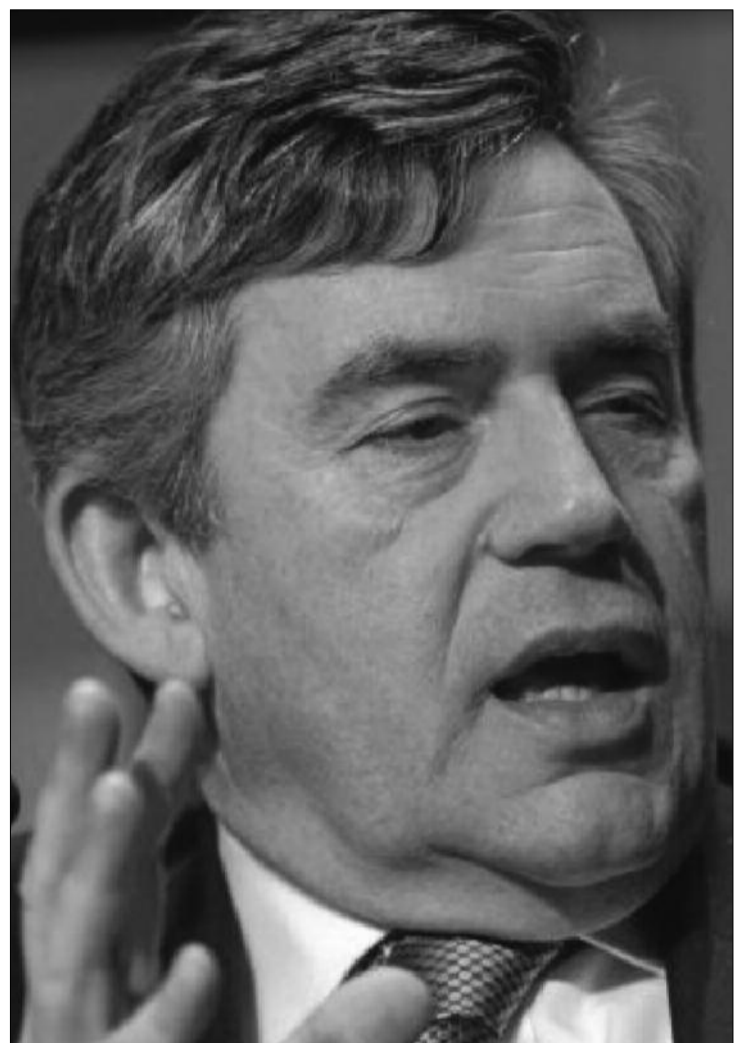
**CRACKDOWN AGAINST
THE TAMIL
TIGERS
P9**



**REMEMBERING
LUXEMBURG &
LIEBKNECHT
CENTRE PAGES**



Has New Labour moved left? No!



BY RHODRI EVANS

Government economic policy has shifted drastically. But it is not a shift to the left. Today's capitalism is, as the *Financial Times* writer Martin Wolf has put it, a machine for "privatising gains and socialising losses". The change is that, in the crisis, the focus has shifted from the private gains (currently more meagre) to socialising big losses.

A genuine left-wing response to the crisis requires a workers' plan — a drive to mobilise the working class to take control of the huge accumulated gains of capitalist production, currently monopolised by the rich elite.

- When Northern Rock first ran into trouble, in September 2007, the New Labour government shied away from talk of nationalising it (as the Lib Dems quickly advocated) like an old-fashioned prude from talk of sex.

Now talk of nationalisation is as commonplace in government as talk of sex in a brothel. The latest step-up in Government ownership of the banks could even be a slide towards full nationalisation.

Yet the same bank bosses, or similar people, like nationalised Northern Rock's £90,000-a-month new boss Ron Sandler, still run the banks. And they run the banks on the same principle: private profit. A real left-wing answer would mean taking all of high finance into public ownership (with no compensation for the big shareholders).

- The first New Labour measure in 1997 was to decree that in future the Bank of England would be run by bankers free from even formal democratic control. The bankers would restrain inflation by keeping the supply of money and credit in check, without worrying about whether people liked it or not.

Now Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, speculates about full nationalisation of all the banks, declares the need to "to protect the economy

from the banks", and prides himself on his "unconventional measures" to pump unprecedented amounts of cash and credit into the banks.

But Mervyn King has not become left-wing. "Left-wing" would be sacking the bank bosses and reorganising high finance as a public banking, pension, and mortgage service under democratic control.

- When New Labour took office in 1997, it stuck rigidly to the public spending limits of the outgoing Tory government for its first two years, even while Tory ex-ministers said derisively that they would not have held those limits sacred themselves.

Now the Government boasts about how much extra public spending it plans to counter the slump.

Yet the planned extra public spending is generally construction projects and aid to bosses, and certainly not more public service jobs or wage rises for public service workers to make up for the real wage cuts they have suffered in recent years.

The choice is made for simple class reasons. Increased public service wages and jobs would raise the "baseline" from which workers will start in an economic recovery; once-off construction projects won't.

"Left-wing" would be to increase public service jobs and wages.

- For a decade New Labour echoed the Thatcherite dogma that "the markets" must and should rule economic choices, with political intervention limited to securing the framework, infrastructure, and conditions for orderly markets. Now there is massive intervention, for example Government guarantees for the ordinary processes of firms' trading credit.

But New Labour's latest bail-out, for the car and car components bosses, was greeted by the Tories with the criticism that it wasn't big enough. The Tories have not become left-wing.

• Continued on page 2

ECONOMIC CRISIS

The problem with the “People’s Charter”

By AMINA SADDIQ

Labour movement activists may have received the draft text of a “People’s Charter” for the crisis that is currently circulating.

The origins of this document are slightly mysterious. It was, according to the website of the rump-Stalinist Communist Party of Britain, launched by the CPB at the Tolpuddle festival in July; but the text being sent round is not on the CPB website.

Since then, the Charter has been described as sponsored by the RMT and FBU. But there is nothing about it on either of those unions’ websites. The Labour Representation Committee’s national committee meeting on 17 January decided in vague terms to support the document, but again it was unclear where it had come from.

The Charter is by no means worthless. In fact, it is significantly better than the utterly minimal “People Before Profit Charter” which was until recently being promoted by the SWP. (At a recent Socialist Teachers’ Alliance meeting in London, it was actually SWP members who raised support for the People’s Charter.) Nonetheless, it is deeply flawed.

In the first place, it contains no clear conception of *class* politics. The populist

name, defended at the by the CPB’s Mary Davis at the 10 January RMT conference on working-class representation on the laughable grounds that many workers are unemployed, is in fact a throwback to the cross-class politics of “popular fronts”, and a telling one. This is reflected in the preamble to the document, which poses things in terms of “bankers and speculators” versus “the people”, not the working class versus capital. (Cringe-worthily, this introduction concludes with “Can we do it? Yes, we can!”)

The Charter is not a tool for rebuilding independent working-class politics, even if some of its backers think it is.

Secondly, and flowing from this, the demands are relatively limited — though some of them, for instance “democratic public ownership” of finance and cutting the working week without loss of pay to create jobs, orient in the right direction. (And again it should be stressed that they go much further than the SWP’s charter.) Most of the framework is social-democratic — “keep interests rates low... Tightly regulate the City markets... Restructure the tax system so big business and the wealth pay more... Public and private investment must create new jobs... A cancel the debts of the poor of the planet”. There are many important things

missing — the rise of the BNP, for instance — but the overall failings are more significant.

Lastly, and most importantly, it is not clear at all what the People’s Charter is for.

It is quite clear from the way the text is written that this is not an action plan for the working class; there is no discussion of strikes or other forms of direct action, let alone of how to rebuild the labour movement so that it is fit to fight. That is bad enough. But we may also ask: since this is purely a list of policies for a government to carry out, what kind of government do the authors envision doing it?

On the CPB website, Anita Halpin describes the Charter as the basis of a “change of direction” by the Labour government, i.e. a proposal for the Brown government to alter its policies. The same thing is implied by the preamble, which declares that the organisers “need one million signatures to show we mean business” — suggesting that this is essentially a glorified petition from the trade union bureaucracy to the Brown government.

The reality is that Brown and co. are not going to carry out anything like the Charter, because they lead a down-the-line bosses’ government 100% committed to neoliberalism (now in a modified

version, with much more state intervention than before the crisis). In order to get pro-working-class demands implemented, we need to fight for a different government — in which case shouldn’t we aim for a *workers’ government*, based on, accountable to and serving the working class, rather than a pale-pink version of Old Labour?

The main authors of the Charter oppose both independent working-class candidates against Labour and using what remains of the Labour-union link to confront Brown. Their agenda is one of lobbying for more crumbs, not building working-class political representation.

We need to rally the labour movement to confront the bosses and fight militantly for working-class interests at every level of society, from the workplace to Parliament. To given this struggle shape and purpose, we need to link every battle, no matter how small, to the overall goal of working-class power, in the first instance the goal of a workers’ government. If the circulation of the People’s Charter helps develop the discussion about how to fight, good. But the Charter itself is not the kind of program we need.

• Our Workers’ Plan for the Crisis is at www.workersliberty.org/workersplan

Has New Labour moved left? No!

From front page

“Left-wing” would be to take failing firms out of the hands of the bosses, and to put funds into reconverting them to socially-useful production, under public ownership and workers’ control.

• As long ago as 1976, old-Labour prime minister James Callaghan said that: “We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists...”

For much of three decades, old Labour, New Labour, and Tory politicians all took that announcement as signalling the end of what had been called “Keynesianism”, the doctrine of keeping capitalism stable by countering downturns through increased public spending and easing credit.

Now the *Financial Times* reports that: “Richard Nixon, the Republican US president, [once] declared: ‘We are all Keynesians now’... The phrase rings truer today than at any time since...”

Actually, though the right-winger Nixon did say in 1971 that “I am now a Keynesian in economics”, the phrase “we are all Keynesians now” was coined by Milton Friedman in 1965. Friedman was a fierce right-winger, the intellectual inspirer of the economic policies of the military regime which took power in Chile in the coup of 1973.

Contrary to myth, Friedman always admired Keynes. He differed from some of Keynes’s ideas, and more pointedly with the cod-Keynesian idea influential in the 1960s that capitalist economies could be kept in a more or less permanent boom by “fine-tuning” public expenditure.

Keynes probably would not have

agreed with the “fine-tuning” doctrine either. In a broad sense, “Keynesianism” was never discarded by capitalist governments. The economic successes, such as they were, of the very right-wing Reagan administration in the USA in the 1980s were based on “military Keynesianism” — government military spending pulling the whole economy up.

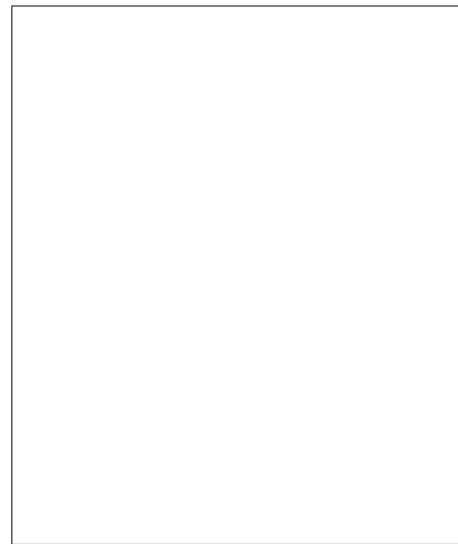
The cod-Keynesianism of the 1960s, in Europe and the USA, went together with increased welfare spending and some measures of social reform, left-wing as far as they went. John Maynard Keynes, the economist after whom the doctrine is named, was a reform-minded Liberal, though he declared openly that “the class war will find me on the side of the educated bourgeoisie”.

Keynes also said that “the difficulty is that the capitalist leaders in the City and Parliament are incapable of distinguishing novel measures for safeguarding capitalism from what they call bolshevism”. Those capitalist leaders have since become less short-sighted. It does not make them left-wing. There have been and are plenty of “right-wing” versions of “Keynesianism”.

• While New Labour semi-nationalises the banks, it pushes ahead with privatisation in public utilities and services, for example in Royal Mail. While it talks about counter-crisis public spending, it puts pressure on local government to make more privatisations and cuts. It is as adamant in keeping the Tory anti-union laws as ever. It has not moved left.

In fact, the policies in the crisis are the clearest expression so far of New Labour becoming (as Tony Blair stated his aspiration in 1994) “the party of business”.

The quirk in current politics is David Cameron’s Tories, for whatever reason, choosing to court middle-class ignoramus *Daily Mail* readers by ranting about



“save, save, save” — pandering to the sort of people who splutter indignantly in wine bars over *Mail* headlines like “Let’s print more money! Labour’s latest big idea to fix Britain’s economic crisis”. (*Mail* writers evidently don’t know that Milton Friedman’s major work of economic theory was an attempt to demonstrate, essentially, that the Great Depression was due to the Federal Reserve not printing enough money).

The “educated bourgeoisie”, in papers like the *Financial Times*, is frankly aghast at the Tories’ nonsense. Presumably the more educated Tories reflect that Cameron’s stuff is just small-change vote-catching, without serious implications for what a future Tory government in 2010 might do. In any case, the Tories’ demagoguery certainly does not show that New Labour has moved left.

• There is, however, a sense in which the shift in capitalist economic policies — all across the world, and in George W Bush’s USA much more than in Gordon Brown’s UK — opens up things for the

left.

Actually, large-scale modern capitalist economies have never been regulated solely by the market. In recent decades more of the “planning” has been done by big global corporations and banks rather than governments, though mostly government economic management has been changed in character rather than abolished.

But with the crisis, what Frederick Engels pointed to over a century ago is forced upfront. “This rebellion of the productive forces, as they grow more and more powerful... this stronger and stronger command that their social character shall be recognised, forces the capitalist class itself to treat them more and more as social productive forces, so far as this is possible under capitalist conditions...”

“The crises demonstrate the incapacity of the bourgeoisie for managing any longer modern productive forces... The modern state... essentially... the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital [steps in]...”

“The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head. But, brought to a head, it topples over...”

Engels meant: it could be made to topple over. To admit the necessity of the state regulating economic life is not necessarily left-wing. But once that admission is out in the open, a new question is pushed upfront.

Who then regulates the state? How, with what criteria and aims, should economic life be regulated?

The working class, the creator of wealth, should regulate the state: that is the essence of our call for the labour movement to reshape itself so as to fight for a workers’ government. And economic life should be regulated by social need, not private profit.

GAZA DEMONSTRATIONS

We need democracy in the Palestinian solidarity movement

On Saturday 17 January, a contingent of Workers' Liberty members in Sheffield attended a demonstration to oppose the Israeli assault on Gaza, as we had done for the previous two Saturdays.

One of our placards bore, on one side, the slogan "no to the IDF, no to Hamas" because we wanted to make clear our position that supporting the Palestinian people's struggle for independence does not mean endorsing the deeply reactionary politics of Hamas.

The placard which read "No to the IDF. No to Hamas" was forcibly removed from a young woman's hands and torn up and stamped on in front of the crowd, a majority of whom cheered and clapped (including members of the Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the SWP and Permanent Revolution, who are all very hostile to any "two states" position). This is an intolerable level of censorship.

Many people do not share our political perspective. Much of the "left" detests it. There are also many who do have sympathy both with our "two states" position and our opposition to Hamas.

AWL members did not in any way disrupt, or attempt to disrupt, the demonstration. We brought placards and a banner which expressed our solidarity with the Palestinians — and our opposition to Hamas.

Members of the AWL have been involved in demonstrations and actions for years. Never before have we experienced anything like what took place on Saturday 17 January 2009 in Sheffield.

We hope that activists in Sheffield and elsewhere will take a serious look at this incident. We ask you to support our right to raise criticism of Hamas and other clerical-fascist organisations on demonstrations — to fight back against the attempt to make all pro-Palestinian activities politically identical with clerical-fascist politics, for that is what it comes down to.

The AWL is completely opposed to the ongoing siege on Gaza. The recent bombing campaign by Israel on Gaza was a mini colonial war. We are for solidarity with the Palestinian people, and for full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza.

We support a consistently democratic solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: an independent Palestinian State alongside Israel (and with the same rights as Israel).

We consider it important to highlight the struggles that do take place of working class organisations in both Israel and within the Occupied Territories. We support those in Israel who oppose the actions of the Israeli state, for example, the refuseniks and the anti-war movement.

This political position is highly unpopular with some on the British left. Groups such as the SWP are opposed to the continued existence of Israel. Debate and discussion of these differences is necessary.

We believe our main job at present is to make solidarity with the Palestinians. But solidarity with the Palestinians should not mean solidarity with their Hamas leaders. Hamas rejects a democratic solu-

tion on the lines set out above. Their goal, instead, is to destroy Israel and deny the Israelis national rights.

Our slogan does not imply that the two forces (the IDF and Hamas) are equivalent but simply that revolutionary opposition to the Israeli state does not mean supporting any force that also happens to oppose it, irrespective of that force's politics. As we have put it before — yes, the Israeli state is "the main enemy", but the existence of a main enemy does not convert other enemies into friends.

Since Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006, movements in Britain against the actions of the Israeli government have been hegemonised by forces which, tacitly or explicitly, support the Islamist politico-military parties, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, that claim to make up the "resistance" to Israeli colonialism. The fact that they "resist" is not enough; it matters a great deal what alternative they fight for.

The alternative to Israeli state terror offered by Hezbollah and Hamas — theocratic, sectarian terror against secularists, women, LGBT people, trade unionists and apostates backed up by the powerful capitalist ruling-class of Iran — is one we reject and fight. Furthermore, refusal to condemn Hamas's ideological, anti-semitic project to destroy Israel cuts pro-Palestinians off from the entire Israeli-Jewish nation — including the Israeli opposition movements.

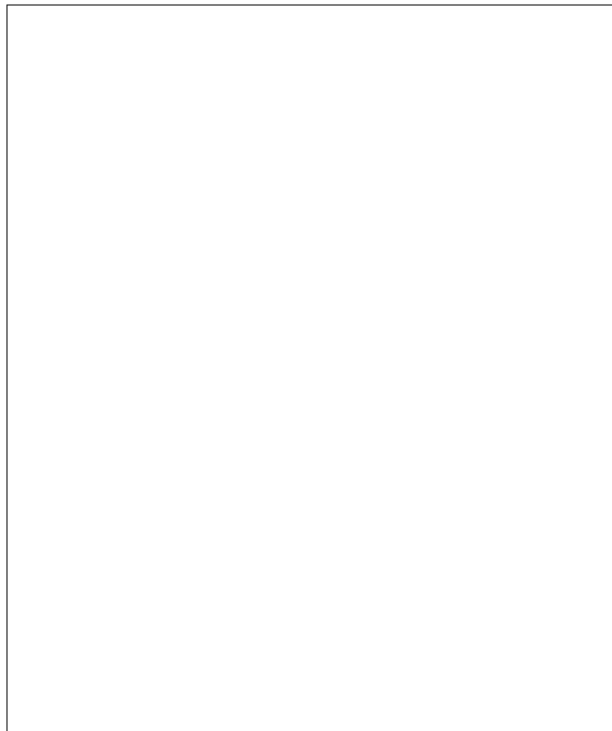
We therefore believe it is necessary to challenge the pro-Hamas politics of the demonstrations from the standpoint of working-class solidarity with the Palestinians. Basic progressive politics on issues such as women's and LGBT rights cannot simply be suspended in times of war. Palestinian workers, women and LGBT activists courageously endeavor to combine struggle against Hamas with struggle against Israeli occupation.

To support Hamas, or fail to criticise them, is a betrayal of the Palestinian workers whose strikes they have suppressed; the Palestinian women they have attacked for refusing to put on the hijab, and so on. That is why we included our opposition to Hamas on the placard that was ripped up at the demonstration outside the Sheffield Town Hall on Saturday 17 January 2009.

Already one anonymous posting on Indymedia has said we were "lucky not to be beaten up" and another, that they would join in "chasing us off". Someone claiming to be a member of Sheffield's Palestine Solidarity Campaign called "Steve" has written: "maybe simply ripping down and stamping on their banner is not going far enough. Maybe they need a stronger disincentive, preferably undertaken away from the glare of those on the demo where so they can't go bleating on about their 'rights'. This wouldn't have to necessarily be violent".

We are for solidarity with the Palestinians and will continue to participate in actions and demonstrations in support of them — with our own politics. In the future we will also, as necessary, organise to defend ourselves.

There to show solidarity...



Approached by a PSC steward....

Placard snatched and torn up

Lecturers strike to tell colleges: pay up!

BY A UCU MEMBER

Members of UCU, the lecturers' union, are due to strike on 5 February in an ongoing dispute over pay harmonisation. Eleven FE colleges nationally, including three in London, will be affected initially.

The 2004 'Modernising Pay' agreement was supposed to lead to all FE colleges harmonising i.e. moving from their previous 14-point pay spine to an 8-point spine.

The effect of the shorter spine is to make annual increments larger and to shorten the time to reach the top of the pay spine. This would mean a £4,500 a year increase for a lecturer at mid-point of scale. Good news for those whose colleges have implemented it! However, four years after the deal a little over 50% of colleges have actually done so.

In those colleges that have not harmonised many lecturers have lost out to the tune of £10,000 and more. This shows the relative weakness of UCU in FE. National negotiations may mean little without the college-level organisation to force management to implement agreements.

Towards the end of last year's pay dispute, an FE sector conference of UCU voted to make winning pay harmonisation a priority. Thus eleven selected colleges nationally were balloted for strike action and industrial action short of a strike. The ballot result was a resounding 70% for strike action and 86% for action short of strike, a strong vote given a short balloting period broken up by Xmas.

UCU's declared strategy is to start with the more winnable colleges and following successes with these to ballot further groups of colleges as the dispute gains momentum. This strategy depends on success with the initial colleges. A point not lost on the college managements, who have held joint meetings to plan a united response.

All of these colleges are of course

pleading poverty including my own, the College of North West London. Of course you don't get to be a senior manager in FE without having a brass neck. Over the period 2003-8 our principal has had a 43% pay rise. The college currently has reserves of £4m and has had up to £10m reserves within the last four years! If "pressures of funding" exist they can only come from funding the exorbitant pay the senior management team get.

Of course in a sense it's unfair to stigmatise CNWL senior management for exorbitant pay when they are simply following suit with what goes on across the sector.

Looking at CNWL the campaign to win the ballot has led to a huge increase in life and vitality in the branch. Membership has increased from 170 to 230 and whole staff rooms have joined en masse. An organising approach linked to agitation around deeply felt unifying demands has paid off thus far.

UCU has held meetings for reps from the balloted colleges which have been a first step in allowing some space for rank

and file members to discuss and share ideas and strategies. However rank and file links need to be widened and deepened to really give an opportunity for the members rather than head office to take full ownership of the dispute.

Colleges involved

College of North West London
Croydon College
Greenwich College
Askham Bryan College
Sandwell College
Evesham College
Sussex Downs College
Nelson and Colne College
Doncaster College
Dearne Valley College
Rotherham College

- For a list of branch contacts and more info on how to support the dispute see www.ucu.org.uk/iou (the campaign is called IOU because the colleges in question have not yet paid up!)

- To contact AWL members in UCU, email ucu@workersliberty.org

TEACHERS: On a turnout of 88 percent, 81 percent of National Union of Teachers members at St Paul's Way Community School in Tower Hamlets, East London, have voted for discontinuous strike action to defend their sacked rep Adrian Swain.

Adrian, a trade union and revolutionary militant of many years and member of the Permanent Revolution group, was sacked for failing to comply with a new dress code by wearing trainers. Although this vote is purely indicative, it is a big boost to the campaign for his reinstatement. Management should have been notified this week of a move with immediate effect to an official strike ballot.

The East London Teachers' Association, which previously failed to back Adrian, has now voted unanimously to support the campaign, though there are signs that some of its leaders are still unhappy about it. In any case, we need to step up the pressure.

Following a 40-strong protest on 16 January, a further demonstration will be held on the evening of Monday 9 February outside a full meeting of Tower Hamlets council. Be there!

Support Adrian Swain – demonstrate 6.30pm, Monday 9 February Mulberry Place, London E14 Bus 277 or East India DLR

CHEMILINES: workers in Alperton, north London, met on Sunday 25th, in a meeting closed to non-GMB members. A pay dispute at Chemilines late last year turned into a fight to regain the jobs of 21 workers laid off.

The union called off the second planned strike day for negotiations, but on the third scheduled day the strikers, mostly Asian women, were upbeat and for half an hour physically stopped vans trying to leave the site.

The GMB called off the latest action, voted for unanimously and due on 23 January. In the meantime, 30 more workers have been laid off. Some workers previously laid off have been reinstated in the place of union activists. 56 more redundancies are on the agenda.

The union officials are accepting the financial story presented by the millionaire bosses, though it is known that pharmaceuticals and cosmetics have been less affected than other sectors. (The factory repackages and relabels imported pharmaceuticals and cosmetics for distribution in Britain). The official strategy seems to be to fight only for voluntary (rather than compulsory) redundancies.

- Updates at www.workersliberty.org

LONDON UNDERGROUND: The attacks on RMT cleaners' reps on the underground continues, with another rep suspended without pay and threatened with dismissal. Calls for sacked cleaners' union rep Mary Oboakye to be reinstated were amplified on Wednesday 28 January with an action at Metronet offices, and a meeting to discuss further action has been planned for Friday 30th.

On Monday 26 January there was another protest at the ISS offices in Greenwich to support Phillip, who has worked on the Underground for 7 years, but found employers questioning his immigration status only since he became active as a union rep.

Mary Oboakye's crime was to sit down after finishing her work while she was waiting for the train doors to be opened. Three days earlier, she had sustained an eye injury at work - but was denied sick pay and annual leave. She has been targeted for her union activity. Mary must be reinstated!

AMICUS-UNITE ELECTION: Ballot papers for the election of a new general secretary of the Amicus section of the semi-merged Amicus-TGWU organisation (Unite) will go out on 16 February.

Laurence Faircloth was the candidate endorsed by Amicus Unity Gazette, the "official" left in the union, but he has withdrawn after receiving only 44 nominations from union branches and 32 from workplace reps.

Unity Gazette at one point seemed an impressive force, at least electorally, but has failed to develop a coherent response to the rightward drift of current Amicus general secretary Derek Simpson, elected as a left-winger in June 2002. Faircloth had little credibility as a left candidate because most of his history in the union has been as a right-winger.

Faircloth says that "the decision to stand down was made after consultation with the Editorial Board" [the ruling body of Unity Gazette]. He is "recommending that Derek Simpson should receive the support of Amicus Unity Gazette". For its part, the Unity Gazette website declares: "The Editorial Board will make a fuller statement on the elec-

tion in due course".

The remaining left-wing candidate is Jerry Hicks, a victimised former convenor at Rolls Royce Bristol. Hicks's candidacy has been criticised by some Amicus leftists because of his use of legal machinery to force the election and the personalised nature of his campaign, but he got clearly more nominations than Faircloth.

Two open right-wingers, Kevin Coyne and Paul Reuter, complete the field. Despite the advantage that Derek Simpson has from already being in the job, insiders say that Coyne could win. With Simpson already well aligned with right-wing full-time officials, and increasingly autocratic in his methods, whether that will make a big difference for the worse is an open question.

Derek Simpson had got it written into the terms of the merger that he could remain general secretary until 2011, but an appeal by Hicks to the government Certification Officer pushed Amicus into organising an election.

Jerry Hicks
jerryhicks.wordpress.com

Kevin Coyne
www.coynecampaign.co.uk

Paul Reuter
amicusgselection.wordpress.com

Amicus
www.amicustheunion.org

Amicus Unity Gazette
www.amicusunitygazette.org.uk

Tubeworker blog

www.workersliberty.org/twblog

EDF Power and DLR strikes, victimisation of union reps, fare increases, the fight for a decent pay rise and many more stories, plus the latest issue of the *Tubeworker* bulletin to download.

GAZA

The ceasefire is fragile

BY COLIN FOSTER

On 28 January Israel launched its heaviest attack yet on Gaza since its official ceasefire, sending in bombers in retaliation for a Hamas attack on an Israeli army patrol. Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert said that the bombing, and an earlier ground incursion, would be followed by a heavier response.

On 18 January Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire, just two days before Barack Obama was inaugurated as US president. Hamas rejected that ceasefire, but later the same day declared a unilateral ceasefire of its own, conditional on Israeli troops withdrawing from the territory within a week (which the Israeli government had already said they would).

The ceasefires came after 22 days of full-scale attack in which some 1300 Palestinians, many of them children and other civilians, were killed (and Hamas rockets, aimed at killing Israeli civilians, killed a very small number of them).

The ceasefires are visibly very shaky, sustained mainly by the fact that the USA and most Arab governments are applying strong pressure to sustain them.

The Israeli government claimed victory, but it must be near-certain that its violence has driven more of the people of Gaza — certainly among the active element — behind Hamas. It is likely to have strengthened Hamas politically in the West Bank too, as people there react against the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority's tepid response to the Israeli attack.

Thus in the long term, and the not-so-long term too, the Israeli attack will have strengthened the Islamic-chauvinist, destroy-Israel element among the Palestinians. It will also have made the peace-with-recognition offered to Israel by the Arab states since 2002 more elusive. (Syria has said that the offer should be withdrawn).

Hamas claimed victory too, meaning that it could still fire rockets into Israel. But so far it can't, in the short term. Gaza is even more shattered and pauperised. One of the motives for the war among Israeli politicians was to strengthen their position for the February general election in Israel, but the latest polls show the most right-wing of the major parties, Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud, ahead there.

Netanyahu criticised the Israeli attack on Gaza for not going far enough - for not pressing on to remove the Hamas administration there. That removal is probably impossible without Israel reimposing direct occupation. In any case, a Netanyahu victory will probably signal further bloodshed.

Both claimed victories are hollow. And the great and unambiguous losers are the people of Gaza.

The only way out is:

- Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories;
- Support for the creation of a fully independent Palestinian state alongside Israel;
- A general regional peace agreement, including recognition of Israel's right to exist;
- Peace and workers' unity across the borders.

Israel-Palestine's alternative voices

The Israeli peace/Palestinian solidarity group Gush Shalom reports that 3,000 Israelis (the equivalent of 30,000 in Britain) marched from Tel Aviv to Jaffa on 17 January to protest against Israel's war on Gaza. It says that while Arab and Jewish Israelis were about equally represented on the 10,000-strong 10 January demo, this time there was a clear majority of Jewish marchers. Among the protesters was a large group of students from Sapir college near Sderot, one of the main targets of Hamas rocket fire in southern Israel.

Websites

www.gush-shalom.org

www.seruv.org.il — website of Israeli "refusenik" soldiers

www.december18th.org — campaign to free the Shministim, jailed school student refuseniks

www.wac-maan.org.il — Workers' Advice Centre, grassroots Israeli workers' organisation

www.dwrc.org — Democratic and Workers' Rights Centre, grassroots Palestinian workers' organisation

For a more comprehensive list of anti-war, working-class and democratic organisations in both Israel and Palestine see www.workersliberty.org/node/9346

'ISRAEL SOLIDARITY' PRO-WAR RALLIES

Who speaks for Jewish people in Britain?

BY IRA BERKOVIC

While many, perhaps most, Jews globally do feel some sense of identification with the Israeli-Jewish nation (its people, at least, if not the State of Israel itself), and while many Jews are understandably a great deal more sensitive to the threat posed by Hamas's anti-semitic project than many on the British left, it is by no means the case that world Jewry is united in support for the colonialist adventures of the Israeli government in the Occupied Territories.

The "Israel solidarity rallies" organised by the Board of Deputies of British Jews (the most significant and influential communalist organisation within the Jewish community in Britain) will have particularly depressed those large numbers of Jews in Britain and around the world who have no desire whatsoever to

express solidarity with Israel's current brutal, colonialist onslaught in Gaza.

While the organisations are not directly analogous, the role of the Board of Deputies within the Jewish community and wider society may be roughly compared to the role played by groups like the Muslim Association of Britain and the Muslim Council of Britain within the Muslim community; they exist as bastions of reactionary, bourgeois politics within their own communities and to promote themselves as the official representatives of those communities in wider society.

For socialists, ethno-cultural communities have no "official representatives"; they are deeply divided along a wide variety of axes, most crucially along class lines. Just as we do not unquestioningly accept the right of reactionary, ruling-class bigots like Sir Iqbal Sacranie (of the Muslim Council of Britain) to define

what it means to be part of the Muslim community in Britain today, nor should we accept the Board of Deputies' assertion that being Jewish means supporting the actions of the Israeli state.

Unfortunately, much of the left has been involved in helping to promote an even more reactionary set of "community representatives" for the Jewish community; the ultra-religious Neturei Karta sect (made up of Hassidic Jews who oppose the state of Israel on the basis that Zionism is, historically, a largely secular movement and that only the coming of the Messiah can deliver the Holy Land back to the Jews) is frequently held up by groups such as the SWP as an example of dissident Jewish community opinion.

But the Medievalist bigots of Neturei Karta have even less of a claim to speak for Britain's Jews than the Board of Deputies do. They are a Jewish community analogue of the Taliban and, for

socialists who still remember that we're supposed to oppose such forces, they should be treated as such.

In the days leading up to the most recent "Israel solidarity rally" (which the Board claims was attended by 15,000 people), the Board's e-list was hacked and a message was sent round purporting to cancel the rally and proclaiming the Board's adoption of a position of opposition to Israel's siege on Gaza based on consistently democratic two-states politics. The radical Jewish community website Jewdas claimed responsibility for the hoax — an encouraging sign for socialists, radicals and dissidents both within the Jewish community and without that the Board's pro-war position is not going unchallenged, and that the obscurantist lunatics of Neturei Karta are not being allowed to present themselves as the sole voice of anti-war Jewish opinion.

BANGLADESHI TEXTILE WORKERS

They won't keep us quiet

In December 2008, Shahida Sarker, president of the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) and Suma Sarker, NGWF activist, visited the UK on a tour for the No Sweat campaign. They spoke to Harry Glass.

Can you explain about the NGWF – its history and organisation?

Shahida: The National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) was founded in 1984. It is made up of 31 garment factory-based trade unions in Bangladesh. It now has 22,655 members.

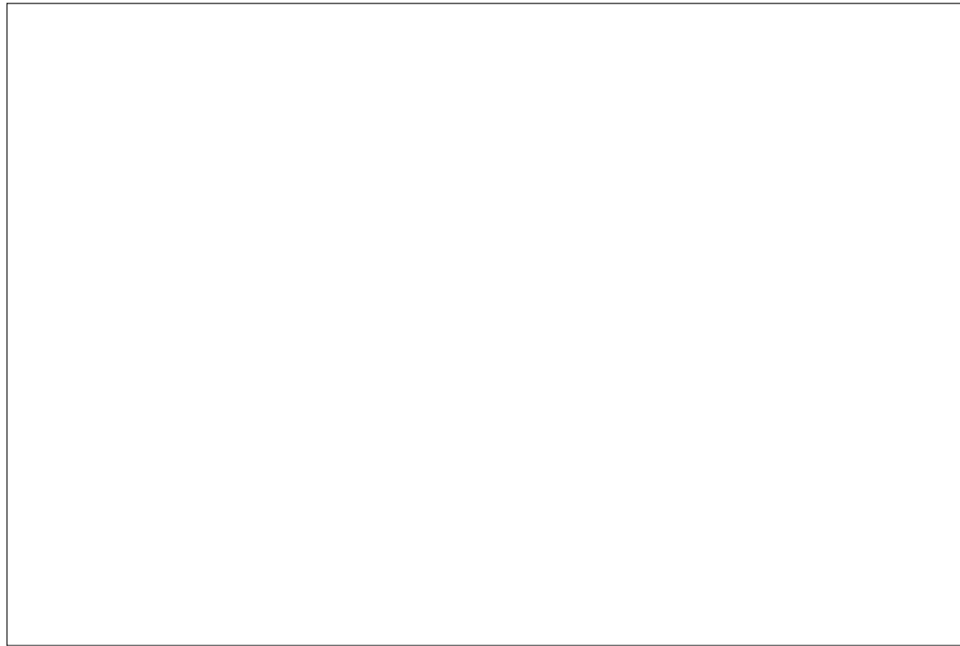
Overall there are 4,500 garment factories in Bangladesh, with a workforce of around 2.8 million. There are 104 factory-based unions in total in the garment sector.

Why was the NGWF set up?

Shahida: The ready-made garment industry started in Bangladesh in 1978. There were some unions organised before this — for example among tailors, which were registered with the government. Some of these trade unionists understood that the industry would expand rapidly and that there were opportunities to organise larger numbers of workers. The NGWF re-registered with the government as an independent union for garment workers. It was the first formally do so.

What is the relationship between NGWF and other garment workers unions e.g. Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF)?

Shahida: The Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF) was established more recently [registered in 1997], with the help of the Solidarity Center, the international department of the AFL-CIO union federation in the United States. The NGWF is separate from BIGUF, but we work together on common issues — for example in organising



garment workers in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs), which was illegal until recently.

The NGWF did have discussions about relations with the AFL-CIO and did work more closely with them for a year (during 2006). The NGWF felt that the AFL-CIO was pushing its own agenda, whereas we wanted to be independent, and concentrate on our own workers and our own country. For example the AFL-CIO does not support garments produced in Bangladesh having duty-free access to the US market, which the NGWF demands. That's why we stopped collaborating with them.

Is the NGWF independent of political parties in Bangladesh?

Shahida: The NGWF is an independent trade union in Bangladesh. All the big political parties — the Awami League (AL), the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and the Jatiya Party (JP), have their own trade unions. Each of

Bangladeshi textile workers

these parties has its own trade union to maintain a hold over the labour sector when they are in power. The NGWF doesn't have ties to these parties because we don't want to be bound by them when they are in power, or to be associated with their policies.

Can you explain about the anti-union laws in Bangladesh?

Shahida: Even though the laws were changed in 2006, unions still need to have 51% of the workers in a factory before they can register with the government. Unions are the only bodies that can bargain collectively under Bangladeshi law — workers have to go through the union even to go to court over a work problem. But union activists face victimisation and the sack when they try to organise unions.

Since the state of emergency was declared [in January 2007] unions have been prevented from registering, even from holding meetings. These restrictions were relaxed in the summer this year, to allow small informal meetings of less than 50 people — but many restrictions remain.

There is no right to strike. The law bans strikes in the garment sector for three years for new firms. Some firms have closed for a few months and then reopened to keep the no-strike ban in place.

What are conditions like for workers in the garment sector?

Shahida: Workers live below the official poverty line. Salaries have worsened in recent years because of inflation. A skilled operator like Suma earns less than £30 a month — not enough to feed a family.

Suma: Many garment workers work for 12 to 14 hours a day, from 8am to 10pm, often for seven days a week to complete an order. Holidays and time off are ignored in many factories. My husband, who also worked at a garment factory, died as a result of a factory fire. I got no maternity leave during my pregnancy, no compensation for the death of my husband. I didn't even get medical leave while suffering from jaundice. My pay is so meagre that I cannot afford to keep my child with me

— she lives with my mother in a village.

Shahida: Women garment workers also face sexual harassment from managers. Workers are more aware of the issue now, and have fought against it collectively. Unions and NGOs have organised training, older workers have supported younger women, and we've put up posters in factories.

Suma: Health and safety is also a problem. There are still concerns about fires, and fire exits being blocked. Workers have long suffered finger injuries — though this has improved since needle guards were introduced, after some buyers insisted on it. The lighting in the factories is very bright, making temperatures very hot. There's no ventilation. The machines are loud and workers don't have access to clean drinking water. Toilet breaks are not allowed and workers often travel long distances from the slums to get to the factory.

Can you explain about the state of emergency?

Shahida: For nearly two years since the state of emergency was declared [January 2007] unions have had to keep a low profile and our lips sealed. The police and the special forces have been very active — even May Day and international women's day celebrations have been suppressed.

Some trade unionists have been arrested — particularly in the power and bank sectors, but not in the garment sector. We've been questioned, but not arrested, as they've found no pretext.

The emergency laws have banned all forms of protest and all strikes. Even three workers together are not allowed. But as real wages have been eroded, there have been protests, strikes, riots and highways blocked. The police have attacked workers at these protests.

Why has the state of emergency been relaxed?

Shahida: Workers protests have mainly been about wages and economic issues, not about the government in power. But this fight has shown that the government can't keep workers quiet. Workers protests have contributed to relaxing the state of emergency and forcing the government to hold elections.

Many people are predicting that the Awami League will win the elections, but this will not benefit workers. All the political parties make promises to workers, but don't deliver in power. In these elections the AL has formed a coalition with the Communist Party and the Workers' Party. Some say these parties could be a voice for workers in government. But they are Stalinist parties. [Note: the Awami League did win.]

Does the NGWF stand candidates, or support others in elections?

Shahida: The NGWF discussed standing its secretary as a candidate in the elections. However we didn't have the money and when others were released from prison, we decided against. Would we stand in future? This is unlikely. The elections are often corrupt. Workers are bribed for their vote — and they will take the money from the big parties because they are so poor. We don't have a vision for the future yet.

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HOUSING

Decent homes for all!

By DAVID KIRK

All the capitalist pundits, from the *Financial Times* to the Council of Mortgage Lenders, now agree that Britain is facing a housing crisis. Mortgage approvals in December 2008 fell to less than a fifth of what they were 18 months ago. House repossessions almost doubled in the three months to September last year, according to the Financial Services Authority — a total of 13,161 homes repossessed in the third quarter of last year. The crisis in private sector-owner-occupied housing will be all the more severe because it comes on the top of the 20 years of standard housing and shortages which have most affected poor people in the UK.

After the Second World War the labour movement had always put pressure on governments to tackle homelessness and provide decent homes for all. Of course the reality of the government measures were very different from the rhetoric. Slum clearances of the 50s, 60s and 70s were done without the direct participation of the communities involved; new estates were often cheaply built and poorly designed. Planners and architects' arrogance along with political mendacity and corruption were exposed in scandal after scandal. Council tenants often found it difficult to get basic repairs done to their homes. Arguing and campaigning for the provision of local facilities was an uphill struggle.

Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party governments of the 1980s and 90s deliberately played on working-class council tenants' feeling of powerlessness. They made propaganda for a "property-owning democracy" while destroying council-provided social housing and letting the market let rip in housing. They abolished rent controls in private housing, de-regulated mortgages and introduced the "right to buy" council housing. The Tory government deliberately used housing as an means to economically and then politically divide the working class. By promoting home ownership amongst those who could get credit they sought to win a layer of better off workers away from the politics of socialism and the labour movement.

Meanwhile the Tories pushed responsibility for housing a growing army of unemployed workers on to councils and housing associations that were systematically starved of cash. The result was homelessness on a scale unprecedented in modern Britain.

New Labour has continued to promote private ownership and private rental by the de-regulation of planning and credit. That context has been disastrous. A rise in demand for housing created an unsustainable property boom and promoted profiteering, poorer quality new build housing and fevered speculation. The government responded to that by tinkering with the system, introducing such things as shared private/council tenure, subsidised homes for "priority" workers, mixed housing estates and most recently pledging an increase in local authority involvement providing social housing provision. The net result was just 350 council homes built in England during the last year.



Demonstration in support of 1915 Clydeside rent strike

Now, and it seems inevitable, the housing market has completely collapsed. Mortgages are hard to find, house-building has virtually ceased. Millions who could not afford to buy a house in the good times may soon find it impossible to pay the rent on private rental accommodation. Their only option — to go on a waiting list for social housing — joining four million other people. Meanwhile nationally hundreds of thousands of private flats stand empty.

LEFT RESPONSE

The general response by socialist groups, the left of the Labour Party and the unions has been to call on the government to push through a massive council house building programme.

But as a stand-alone demand this is inadequate; it takes no account of how council tenants feel they have no control over the quality of the housing and environment they live in. It is not accompanied by a firm strategy of how the workers movement can effectively campaign to bring more publically owned social housing about.

By contrast anarchists who have set up squatter's rights centres have long been arguing for direct action to seize empty property from the exploiting class and convert them into homes. Some of the actions taken by these squatters have been audacious and admirable. However they deliberately abstain from making demands on the state; they distrust people in the labour movement who are inclined to make such demands.

Because of the importance attached to the liberated "space" of the squat these projects often collapse into being about living an (often precarious) lifestyle rather than thinking about how a mass working-class movement can be built out of the action.

Another approach has been taken by campaigners like the London Coalition Against Poverty who use a mixture of direct action and legal means to demand the state finds accommodation for individuals. Like the squatter's rights centres the action is often laudable but big political questions are secondary to the

main work of fighting off evictions and legal case work.

The left as a whole lacks an overall adequate political response. That is a problem because it creates a vacuum where a lively, active and comprehensive political space should be. A vacuum that is, and more so in the future, be filled by the hate-filled falsities of the BNP who want poorly-housed white workers to blame poorly housed black, Asian and migrant workers for the housing crisis created by the various vested capitalist interests of the last thirty-odd years.

A workers' response to this crisis is desperately needed. Fortunately history provides us with some interesting and constructive examples.

WORKERS' CAMPAIGNS

Bombing during the Second World War compounded decades of general landlord neglect and caused a housing crisis beyond the one of our own time.

At the end of the war millions lived in temporary shelters or were massively overcrowded into relatives' homes. The Communist Party in Britain organised a large-scale campaign by homeless families of occupations of disused army bases, holiday camps and even in one famous case a street of abandoned luxury Kensington flats.

Anarchist squatters' movement tend to claim this action as an example of squatting; but in their sense, it was not. This was not about creating a temporary liberated space or about living a different lifestyle. The CP campaigned to regularise the occupancy of the homeless and to stop the possibility of eviction. They successfully agitated for councils to lay on facilities and utilities for these sites, while also campaigning (less successfully) for more council housing.

The CP did this exemplary campaign even though hobbled with dreadful reformist and Stalinist politics; they did however refuse to exploit the idea of mass occupations as part of revolutionary agitation.

Another more common workers' movement response to attacks by landlords has been rent strikes.

The most famous British example was on Clydeside during the First World War. Working-class women were forced to respond to slum landlords' attempts to exploit the fact that so many of men were mired in the slaughter of the western front. The rents on tenements were hiked up, in some cases by a third, but despite dreadful conditions the women organised and led a successful rent-strike.

Another successful council rent strike in Normanton, West Yorkshire in the 1960s was won with the help of the (then sectarian and later mad) Trotskyist Socialist Labour League which won support from the rank and file of the local labour movement.

An even more basic working-class fightback is an anti-eviction campaign. During the miners' strikes of the 70s and 80s striking miners went without pay for months; basic solidarity and organisation meant bailiffs were forced to treat many mining communities as no-go areas. The National Coal Board could not effectively use mass evictions as a strategy against the strikes.

The series of reverses the working-class movement has suffered over the last thirty years has made these basic working-class responses seem a distant memory. However the current crisis makes it vital that the labour movement is ready to act directly and politically in support of decent homes for all.

If more and more working-class people are being forced to fight off eviction notices, bailiffs and landlords the labour movement must act in their defence. The workers movement should practically support and encourage all attempts by workers to secure homes for themselves, keeping their existing homes, and increasing the stock of social housing.

We should not dismiss squatting but champion it as a starting point for debate and wider action, whilst pressing for labour-movement involvement and for a serious political programme. To repeat, this in itself is just a basic minimum, a defensive response.

We need a long-term strategy, recognising that we need to move beyond even a revitalised broad workers movement. Ultimately socialists need to unite in an organisation, a workers' party willing and able to make the demand for a decent home for all and workers' control in housing, a concrete reality as part of a socialist political programme.

A campaign of direct actions such as mass occupations, rent strikes and anti-eviction battles will only be ultimately successful if integrated into a revolutionary strategy for the abolition of the entire system of private property and landlordism.

A Workers' Plan for the Crisis

Text, trade union motions,
Facebook group:
[www.workersliberty.org/
workersplan](http://www.workersliberty.org/workersplan)

OBAMA PRESIDENCY

Against this capitalist populism, workers must organise

BY RUBEN LOMAS

The inauguration of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States of America, is a source of intense hope for a great many American workers. More people than ever before, including more people from Afro-American and Latino backgrounds, turned out to vote for Obama in the November 2008 elections. His emphasis on the importance of "change" mobilised tens of millions, deeply disillusioned with the state of their country and the inability of the current political system to change it, to reinvest some hope in American democracy and become active politically for the first time.

265 trade unionists, including members of both of America's main union federations (AFL-CIO and Change to Win) participated in Obama's official inauguration day parade. The union float carried placards with slogans such as "healthcare for all", and "good jobs, green jobs."

The AFL-CIO's website highlights the participation of Maria Somma, a Vietnamese immigrant, who said: "it's very exciting to be welcoming a person of colour into the White House and to be a part of history. For Barack Obama to come from his background and rise to the top is not the typical American story. His inauguration is part of the transition of this nation to fully embrace all its citizens."

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Somma's attitude reflects the feeling among many American workers that Obama's election represents a real, qualitative "transition".

Socialists shouldn't be dismissive of these hopes; with segregation still a living memory and slavery only a few generations in the past, the election of a black president is a deeply significant event. And despite the vacuity of so much of Obama's rhetoric, the fact that millions of workers in the most powerful capitalist country in the world are coming to believe that progressive political change is possible is good news for revolutionaries. So we abjure cynical disdain for the hope which would castigate ignorant Yankee proles who don't realise that Obama merely represents capitalism.

But our job, to paraphrase Leon Trotsky, is to tell the truth at all times, no matter how bitter it may be.

Obama's party, the Democratic Party, is as much a party of capital as its Republican rival. Obama is as much a politician of the ruling-class as his defeated opponent John McCain. Despite making healthcare a primary plank of his campaign, he opposes a single-payer system which would, according to American socialist Barry Finger, writing in *Solidarity* before the election, "cut duplicative, overhead administrative costs and applies those savings to cover the uninsured."

Despite his anti-war posturing, he supports the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan and moreover favours its escalation.

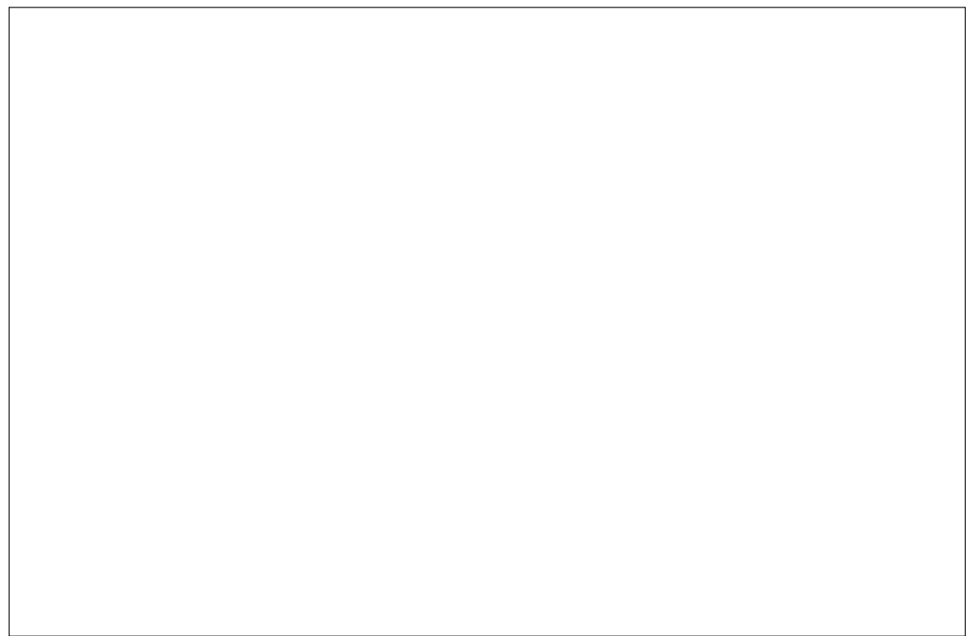
He supports the death penalty.

He voted in favour of building a 700-mile long fence across the Mexican border designed to stop desperate immigrants fleeing Mexico for the US.

Despite the euphoric hope of many US trade unionists it is far from certain that the Employee Free Choice Act, a basic piece of pro-union legislation that would make it easier for unions to gain workplace recognition, will get passed under an Obama presidency.

Obama's appeal to America's disenfranchised, workers and poor is not on the basis of accountable, direct representation, or even on those people mobilising to assert themselves politically. It is a populist appeal, based on asking people in general, of all classes, to invest their hope for change in the figure of Obama himself.

In this, and indeed in many other respects, he bears a striking similarity to



Change we can't believe in

Franklin Roosevelt — a similarity which is made even more profound by the economic crises that define the beginnings of both presidencies.

Obama's election also has a certain amount in common with New Labour's victory in 1997; a shared euphoria at finally ending a length period of government by brutal conservatives. Then, as now, the hope was understandable but it cannot be based on illusions.

None of this is to imply that Obama will necessarily be as bad in office as the arch-conservative John McCain would have been, (or as George Bush was). We should be clear about what we believe he is, but equally importantly we (or rather our American comrades) should attempt to harness the hope and direct it.

Obama has promised "change", but we know that lasting, fundamental and meaningful social change can only be won by workers' struggle from below.

The inspiring campaign of the Chicago workers who occupied their workplace in protest against job-losses proves that elements of the American labour movement are still capable of taking radical direct action.

The Roosevelt era was full of workers' struggles that occasionally reached near-revolutionary pitch; the Minneapolis and Toledo strikes of 1934, in which Trotskyist activists were central, are particular examples. The

American left must aim to reinvigorate the spirit and tradition of those struggles.

It is entirely possible that Obama's presidency will open up greater opportunities for workers' struggle than have existed in America for a decade or more. If those opportunities do present themselves, it will not be enough to simply "hope", and rely on Obama to deliver change from on high. Don't celebrate, organise!

**Workers' Liberty London forum:
Kim Moody on Barack Obama and class struggle in the USA**

Thursday 29 January, 7.30-9.15pm

School of Oriental and African Studies, Russell Square, London WC1H

What can US workers expect from Obama? Will there be big changes, or will it be business as usual?

Speaker: Kim Moody, an American socialist activist and former editor of the US rank-and-file labour movement publication Labor Notes.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

BY IRA BERKOVIC

ZIMBABWE

The Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe has vowed to strike when school term begins on 27 January if the government does not increase its basic minimum salary, currently at US\$2. The union is also protesting at appalling work conditions, and argue that schools should not open following the cholera outbreak in the country.

Some parents' have made charitable donations to teachers to keep them in work and the schools open. Union official Oswald Madziva said, "parents now want to usurp the role of government by paying salaries. We have situations

where parents are buying pairs of trousers for teachers while some are buying food to keep them in schools... teachers do not need food only. Teachers need to have a social life to talk about. They need an economic life to talk about."

BOTSWANA

Nearly 500 mineworkers who were sacked in 2004 following strike action are expecting to hear from the Court of Appeal over whether their case will be heard in an industrial tribunal.

Over 3,000 workers members of the

Botswana Mineworkers' Union, participated in the illegal strike. The company Debswana, which mines for diamonds, is in a partnership between the De Beers mining company and the government of Botswana, highlighting how workers in much of the developing world are forced not only to contend with ruthless capitalist corporations but with governments eager to collaborate with them.

HONG KONG

200 Nepalese migrant workers working as security guards for the G4S firm in Hong Kong are on indefinite strike action for better pay and condi-

tions. After four days G4S — one of the world's largest security firms — sacked 100 of the strikers.

Previous negotiations had resulted in an agreement that guards over the age of 45, and those who passed a three-month probation period, would be hired on permanent, full-time contracts.

The workers are also demanding an extra HK\$300-500 (equivalent to around £30-£45) per month on top of their basic salary, but management were only offered a monthly incentive bonus of HK\$300, which workers rejected following fears that the bonus would be revoked as a punishment for lateness.

300,000 CAUGHT IN CROSSFIRE

An onslaught to crush the Tamils

By ROBIN KUGAN SIVAPALAN

For most Tamils in the world today, the events of the last month have been devastating but they must also have been expected. Maybe 300 Tamils have been killed in the last few days [28 January] by Sri Lankan army shelling; 300,000 civilians are trapped in a full-scale warzone being denied the right to leave by the Tigers or genuine safe passage and humanitarian aid by the Sri Lankan government.

The seizure of the de facto Tamil Tiger capital Kilinochchi on 2 January 2009 came exactly a year after the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse formally abrogated the Norwegian-brokered ceasefire of 2002, and declared there could only be a military solution to defeating the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam. Thus is the wisdom of the "war on terror" we have come to know so well.

It has been the conventional military endgame, and a victory for the Sri Lankan Army, but could also usher in a renewed period of guerrilla warfare by the Tigers and suicide bombings on state personnel and civilians.

NEW OPPRESSION

The Tigers have suffered an immense set back. In the days after Kilinochchi fell, the remaining strongholds that had been under Tiger control for the last 10-15 years were taken. There are now more than 100,000 SLA troops occupying the North, and the Tigers have been driven back to villages and jungle, holding with them 300,000 civilians who are being killed in the crossfire.

The Sri Lankan army is known to have detained all those who tried to leave the Vanni region. After the recent rounding-up and forced registration of all Tamils in Colombo, and the widespread sense that this government is genocidal — with or without the LTTE — the Tamil people are currently a separate and oppressed people under siege. And the war against the Tigers is set to be generalised in to an escalated war against all opposition, the trade unions and leftists and Tamils and plantation workers — the masses that are tired of a war and economic hardship that the Sri Lankan state is unable to solve.

The situation is bleak. Over the last two years 200,000 Tamils have been internally displaced as a result of the first part of the strategy to defeat the Tigers. In the Eastern Province, Pillayan, leader of an armed breakaway from the LTTE, is now in power in concert with Rajapakse. The elections were characterised by the open violence of his TMVP armed thugs in a process that de-merged the Northern and Eastern provinces. Demerger was a blow to one of the agreed principles of Tamil sovereignty that underpinned previous peace talks.

There is some talk of the government implementing the 13th amendment, a provision of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987, which would strengthen provincial autonomy. But few people even know about this legal relic. It is rejected in advance by the Tigers as a sleight of hand, and even by Pillayan as "just a

step".

The President's stance jettisons all previous consensus in Sri Lanka that there must ultimately be a political solution negotiated with the LTTE. His stance was prepared by an international ban on the Tigers, in the US since 1997 and in the EU since 2006. India renewed its ban for a further two years in the midst of fierce fighting just last November.

No socialist organisation in Sri Lanka has supported the ban, though some vehemently oppose the Tigers.

The ban has already had a far-reaching impact. Money still flows from Europe and the rest of the diaspora to the Tigers (an estimated 40% of LTTE funds come from the UK), but political space has been drastically shut down, including for any kind of peace process.

In the UK, the British Tamil Forum, which supports the Tigers, has opted to lobby inanely for peace and human rights and self-determination in the abstract, refusing to campaign for the ban to be lifted for fear of the ban imposing on their comfortable lives.

My uncle, Dr Vinayagamoorthy, an GP in Enfield, North London has been detained for two years in the US under counter-terrorism powers without having been brought to trial. He has a record of working with the LTTE for peace and for self-determination for the Tamils.

After years of violently suppressing most other Tamil opposition on its watch, the LTTE has become the accepted face of the Northern Tamils for many, whether they like it or not.

It is a testament to the contradictory attitudes of the Tamil diaspora that when longstanding LTTE peace negotiator Anton Balasingham died in December 2006, some 70,000 filed past his coffin at Alexandra Palace in North London; but LTTE heroes day on the 27 November attracted far less people, and even then numbers were mainly due to the ongoing fighting. The Sri Lanka Democracy Forum is hostile to the LTTE and the Tamil Information Centre concentrates on human rights issues.

Over the last two years, the human rights abuses perpetrated by the Sri Lankan state have been so terrible and open that even the US and India have stemmed direct military aid to the government. China, Iran and Pakistan have no such qualms and have stepped in as the main creditor-lifeline-exploiters as part of their political manoeuvrings.

The EU have maintained preferential trade agreements signed after the Tsunami, called GSP+, which are supposed to be tied to labour, environmental and human rights standards. These constitute 2% of GDP for Sri Lanka and also deliver the products of high-skilled

sweated labour to Europe. GSP+ is due to have lapsed at the end last year.

Perhaps the liberal tears shed over the assassination of the *Sunday Leader* editor and his dramatic death note reprinted by the *Guardian* and the *Times* will force the UK to do something. While Brown advocated a ceasefire, the Foreign Office has avoided calling for a ceasefire, let alone an end to the occupation or negotiations with the LTTE.

CLASS AND THE CONFLICT

Rajapakse's war has been overwhelmingly supported by the Sinhalese working-class. He was known previously as a defender of human rights and seems to have been promoted because of his rural "low-country origins", as a means of stemming the rapid growth of the (Communist Party rooted) JVP movement in its recent parliamentary form.

The JVP, which in some ways mirrors the Tigers among the poor in the rural south, is virulently anti-Tiger, as is the Buddhist-fascist NHP, both of which prop up the government's ruling coalition.

The war's popularity, combined with court injunctions and state repression, has kept down latent strike action among the Sinhala working class despite Sri Lanka's highest inflation in South Asia. A 7% growth in the economy has largely benefitted the rich and better-off skilled workers in the west of the island. For the low-country Sinhalese, this war is one way for a young person to generate income for his family.

The war is, unsurprisingly, opposed by most Tamils and other minorities though whether this translates as support for the LTTE is difficult to tell. The Tigers have tightened up their regime of forced recruitment over the last two years, and have imposed forced frontline labour on the relatives of those who have failed to return to "Eelam", the LTTE condition for granting passes to leave. Whether the thousands fleeing to India over the last months have done so with permission is unclear; with journalists banned and terrorised throughout Sri Lanka, getting a clear picture is difficult.

Communal-class conflict is responsible for more than 70,000 murders on the island over the last 30 years; hundreds of thousands of migrations; countless thousands of victims of abduction, extrajudicial killing, torture, maiming and rape; the youth of the poor have been exterminated through an island-wide war machine and in communal riots.

30,000 Sri Lankans were wiped out by the tsunami: that the Tamils came out worse, immediately and thereafter, fits the gross logic of the current reality. Tens of thousands were made homeless and lost their livelihoods to cyclone "Nisha" last November. That the northern and eastern provinces of the island, the terrain of the would-be Tamil homeland of Eelam, may be claimed by the sea due to climate change, is a shattering irony.

SOLIDARITY

This crucial juncture in a long war, demands the action and solidarity of all those who stand for

freedom and equality and peace.

Millions now across the world have chanted "We are all Palestinians"; will the same now be said of the Tamils (or indeed, the Congolese, the Somalis, the Kashmiris, the Darfuris)?

Our solidarity should go to those sections of the international socialist movement and trade unions that have a proven record of fighting for equal rights in Sri Lanka. It appears to me that what remains of the LTTE should be granted an amnesty, as a means to shifting this violent conflict onto political tracks. There must be a full accounting of human rights abuses on both sides, with full reparations paid to individuals and to rebuild civilian life across the country. Immediately there must be a ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian aid and the release and safe passage of civilians.

A democratic solution to this tragedy must allow for the self-determination of Tamils, including a separate state, even if this is a petty-bourgeois dream maintained by the Tamil diaspora as an answer to the oppression faced by the decimated Tamil population that remains.

There is deep affinity with the suffering of Tamils in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu; increasing solidarity and co-ordination between workers in the garment industry and other sectors across the region.

During the recent No Sweat tour, Shahida Sarkar, president of the Bangladeshi garment workers' federation told me of a protest she had organised in solidarity with the Tamil workers.

The main hope has to lie with the Sinhala working-class. Class-lines need to be redrawn. The struggles that have been in abeyance the last year while the people have suffered for the war effort will have to find their resolution.

In the 20s and 30s, students from (then) Ceylon in London became socialists and built up a formidable force for socialism in Sri Lanka. That heritage needs to be remembered and renewed for our times as opposed to the expedient myths and legends of Sinhala supremacist and Tamil nationhood.

Hundreds of thousands of Tamils live across the world, an estimated 150,000 in the UK, and many Sinhalese who want an end to this war, especially students. It is an urgent duty of solidarity for those workers and students to organise as part of the class struggles across the world and to act for peace and workers' unity in Sri Lanka and across South Asia.

Workers' Liberty will be joining the upcoming protests and will be holding meetings in Tamil areas in London and will work with socialist groups in the UK who have sections in Sri Lanka. There have been discussions to relaunch the trade union solidarity campaign which ended following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the Tigers in 1991.

A programme for today should be conceived along the lines of internationalist socialism so impressively demonstrated by the Trotskyist pioneers of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, but driving forward class consciousness and political self-education, pushing beyond the communalist fetters that have divided, subjugated and brutalised the Sri Lankan working class for the last decades.

Remembering Luxemb

It is one hundred years since the “Spartacist rising” in Berlin in January 1919. Only two months after revolutionary tumult started to erupt in Germany, with the sailors’ revolt in Kiel in November 1918, workers and revolutionaries in Berlin were provoked into a botched and irresolute revolutionary rising, opposed at the time by Rosa Luxemburg.

As the rising dispersed, the government thrust to power by the November upheaval — led by Social Democrats whom many workers still saw as leftists, but who themselves, privately, in their own words, “hated the revolution like sin” — sent the right-wing Freikorps militia into Berlin. The Freikorps sought out Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the foremost leaders of genuine revolutionary working-class politics, and murdered them.

This tribute to Luxemburg and Liebknecht was written by Ludwig Lore, briefly a prominent figure in the early Communist Party of the USA, and published in the journal *Class Struggle*, edited by Louis Fraina. James P. Cannon called Fraina “the single person most responsible for the founding of the American Communist Party” because of his work in translating and circulating the idea of Bolshevism.

Fraina, however, also disappeared from CP activity early in the 1920s, first to Russia, then to Mexico. He resurfaced in the 1930s as an unaffiliated Marxist writer using the name Lewis Corey.

KARL LIEBKNECHT

Karl Liebknecht was born to a revolutionary heritage. He was the son of Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the founders of the socialist movement of Germany, who, side by side with August Bebel, led the young and undeveloped party through a period of the stormiest struggles against public sentiment and governmental autocracy. He was one of a family of five children, three sons and two daughters, all of whom have faithfully carried on the great work that their splendid father began.

It was reported in the American press that the sisters of Karl Liebknecht were arrested in connection with the Spartacus uprising. Whether they were actually directly connected with the revolutionary movement, or were simply arrested because of their relationship to the troublesome revolutionist, did not appear from the news that was received in this country.

In their early youth, the three sons of Wilhelm Liebknecht completely vanished from the public eye. It was a common thing in the editorial rooms of socialist papers to receive letters from comrades far and wide asking to know what had become of the three sons of the staunch old fighter, whether they had deserted the cause for which their father had made such enormous sacrifices. These questions invariably remained unanswered, for a public avowal of allegiance to the socialist cause in Germany at that time would have made it impossible for the three young students, (two of whom were studying law, while the youngest had chosen the medical profession) to complete their university courses or to obtain their degrees. It is true, Karl Liebknecht founded a “Sozial-Wissenschaftlicher Verein” among the students of his Alma Mater. But this organisation remained always simply a medium for more or less radical discussion of social-political topics without a definite party allegiance.

LIEBKNECHT BECOMES A PUBLIC FIGURE

When Karl Liebknecht was admitted to the bar, however, he immediately threw off all restraint and threw himself whole-heartedly into the movement. His appearance was greeted everywhere with open delight, and the welcome that was accorded to the son of the beloved old fighter was enough to have turned the head of many an older and wiser man. But the young Liebknecht at once won the sympathy of the masses for himself as well. His fearless radicalism, his untiring zeal and devotion to the cause and his undoubted gift of public speaking and his great personal magnetism captured his audiences wherever he went.

His first efforts were directed toward the building tip of a radical and militant Young People’s Movement, which at that time was just beginning to gain a foothold in Germany. At this period in his career Liebknecht

already evidenced the intense anti-militaristic spirit that runs, like a red thread, through his whole life in the socialist movement. He foresaw that militarism in Germany was fast becoming the dominant factor in German political life. He insisted that the struggle against capitalism in Germany must go hand in hand with an intense, determined agitation against armaments, against military service, against war. He was among the first to recognise that militarism in Germany was more than the tool of the capitalist class, that it was becoming the spirit that dominated and controlled the very destinies of the nation.

“Since we are not in a position,” he said at the National Party Convention at Bremen in 1904, “to carry out our agitation in the barracks, as is being done in other countries, let us carry out our agitation while we can still do so within the law... Let us systematically spread our ideas among the young people of the proletariat, laying particular emphasis upon the character of militarism; social-democratic recruits will know what to do when once they are drafted into military service ... But we must see to it that the powers that be, when once they come into actual conflict with the organised proletariat, cannot feel themselves as invincible as they does at the present time, that they will no longer be able to rely absolutely upon the obedience of their army, even for illegal purposes.”

The persistent anti-militaristic propaganda that was carried on under the direction and influence of Liebknecht and his followers was not without effect. It is a fact that at the outbreak of the war Young People’s Organisations in many parts of Germany were in open revolt against the position adopted by the party, and that in Hamburg and other localities, their organisations were summarily dissolved by the official party organisation. The same radical anti-war position was adopted by the Young People’s International, which was founded chiefly by Liebknecht’s efforts, and which, in the early part of the war, actually furnished the only channel for international communication at the disposal of the radical anti-war minorities in the belligerent countries.

LIEBKNECHT UNPOPULAR WITH PARTY LEADERS

Karl Liebknecht soon enjoyed the whole-hearted dislike of the party officials of the German Socialist Party movement. They attributed his radical speeches and actions to a natural desire to be something more than simply the son of a famous father and refused to take him seriously.

Their bureaucratic souls were completely out of sympathy with the whole-hearted disregard for petty considerations that characterized his every action, and regarded him with ill-concealed contempt. Even in later years, after he had served a four-year sentence in a military prison for his anti-militarist agitation, even after he had won international fame in 1913-1914 by his celebrated Krupp revelations, he was looked upon as an irresponsible troublemaker by the more “solid” elements in the party.

“He makes himself absolutely ridiculous,” said Scheidemann of Liebknecht during his American visit. “Whenever you see him he is in a tremendous hurry, with a package of books and notes under his arm. He rushes from one meeting to another; in the morning he speaks in the Landtag, in the afternoon he has an important commission meeting. Then he runs into the Reichstag to deliver a speech there before the session closes. It is impossible to get him to attend to his law business. If it were not for his brother William, he would not earn the salt for his bread.”

The first Russian Revolution in 1905 and the period of black reaction that followed made a deep impression on the intense personality of Karl Liebknecht. He threw himself heart and soul into the propagation of revolutionary tactics in Germany, and, together with Rosa Luxemburg, launched a campaign against the pacific, purely political tendency that was taking root in the Social-Democracy. At the National Convention of Magdeburg (1910) he bitterly assailed the party authorities for failing to arouse the whole country to a determined protest against the visit of the Bloody Tsar to Germany.

“The Tsar has dared to appear openly, as if he were a citizen, before the public in a number of German cities. He is moving through Germany at the present time more freely than he has ever dared to move in Russia.

The thought is unbearable that he may dare to do in Germany what he could not think of doing in Italy or in France, or anywhere else, that Germany, of all nations should have been the one to give this man, who must flee from place to place in his own country, who must hide everywhere, like a robber, can appear before the German people like one who has a right to command the respect of his fellow-men.”

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Liebknecht was by no means alone in his demands for a spiritual and revolutionary revival in the party. For years he fought for the realization of these ideas side by side with some of the finest men and women that the International has produced: Clara Zetkin, Franz Mehring and the heroic Rosa Luxemburg.

Luxemburg were chief among the supporters of this more radical trend in the movement, and every party conference, every great party movement found them at their post, staunchly braving the ridicule and the misunderstanding of the party leaders. Among them all, none was braver and more courageous, none more ready to carry out her ideas to the last bitter consequence, none more far-seeing and theoretically sound in her opinions than Rosa Luxemburg.

Rosa Luxemburg was born in 1870 in Warsaw, Russian Poland. As a very young girl she came to Germany as a student, and immediately became so active in the revolutionary movement that she was forced to flee to Switzerland in order to escape deportation into the land of the Tsar. She continued her studies in Switzerland, but remained in constant communication with her German comrades. In order to be able to return to Germany she entered upon one of those political marriages that were very common in those days among young Russian women who had been driven from Russia and desired to acquire German citizenship. She married a young German student, thus, as his legal wife, acquiring German citizenship, and returned to Germany where she immediately became one of the most promising agitators and writers the movement had at that time.

She was one of the most profound students of Marxist philosophy in a movement that was rich of theoreticians. She possessed a remarkable memory for facts, and her speeches were full of references, quotations and examples from the most diversified sources. In repartee she was unexcelled, she gave no quarter, and her attacks were feared by her opponents as much for their merciless clearness, as for the logical brilliancy with which they were presented. An accomplished linguist, she was equally at home in Russian or German, in Polish as in French, and was well known in most countries of Europe as a fascinating and thoroughly learned speaker.

In Poland she became a member of the Polish Social-Democratic Party, the strictly socialist, anti-national wing of the Polish socialist movement and led the fight against the nationalistic PPS (Polish Socialist Party).

Although always at variance with the majority of the German party, she was unalterably opposed to all separatist tendencies, opposed to all outside organisations and propaganda to such a degree that she refused to countenance any kind of separate organisations or agitation even for propaganda among women*.

THE FIGHT FOR REVOLUTIONARY METHODS

During the last two decades, every Party Congress, every important discussion of party tactics found Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht together in the radical minority. Political conditions in Germany, the unparalleled success of the party on the political field, the enormous membership, the power and strength of the trade union and co-operative movements, the extraordinary development of its educational institutions

— all of these factors encouraged the growth of a distinctly conservative spirit in its membership, but especially in its leaders. Strikes and labour struggles in Germany had become the exception rather than the rule, because the labour organisations, backed up by the Social-Democracy, were too formidable an opponent to be lightly alienated, even by a powerful capitalist class.

Success on the political field had made it possible for the socialist movement to achieve the passage of important reforms and social legislation, achievements that were naturally stressed and pushed to the foreground in

Luxemburg and Liebknecht

“While the Party Congress opposes the use of the general strike as an unfailing weapon that may be used at all times for the abolition of social wrongs in the anarchistic sense, it is of the conviction that the proletariat must be prepared to use its whole power for the achievement of political equality. The political mass strike can be successful only with the united effort of all organs of the labour movement, by class-conscious masses, inspired by the ultimate aims of socialism, prepared for all sacrifices. The Congress pledges every comrade, therefore to work tirelessly for the political and labour union organisations of the working class.”

On this occasion Rosa Luxemburg delivered a half hour speech that has become famous in the annals of the socialist movement of Germany.

...“We declare that in Germany, as in all other countries, it is not necessary to wait with the eventual application of the general-strike weapon until the last man and the last woman have paid their dues as organised members of a socialist local, when we call attention to the fact that where a revolutionary situation has arisen, when we face great historical tasks, the organisation of the party will exert a moral and spiritual influence that will sweep the unorganised masses into our movement, when we... declare that the policies and tactics of the party must be such that will awaken enthusiasm and the self-sacrificing spirit outside of the organisation, for only in this way can we carry the masses with us — the Executive Committee protests, and says that we are preparing to disrupt the organisation. That means lack of discipline, that is sowing suspicion against the party functionaries!

“They have spoken of our lack of responsibility, of our unscrupulousness. I will not use such expressions, but allow me to say that such methods in the discussion of party questions border on demagogu... We have been accused of being direct actionists and conspirators. We here declare that they are the conspirators who would apply the typical tactics of the conspirators to the strike, because they believe that the outbreak of a mass strike must be a surprise, that it must be worked out and prepared secretly, behind closed doors, by a handful of officials...

“Can you not understand that the masses themselves must become familiar with this new weapon? After all, we here are not speaking to the masses, we are merely formulating propositions that must be thought out, digested and accepted by the comrades outside... The mass strike in Germany, as in all countries, to be sure, must come from the masses, and that is the reason why we say in our resolution that the mass strike cannot be ordered, from one day to another, by party and union leaders, as our party authorities seem to assume. Nor can it be stopped once it has reached the historic stage of ripeness. But this does not, by any means take from us the responsibility for the conduct of the mass strike if it is to be successful, if it is to bring us the maximum of positive results and advantages, in the political and socialist awakening of the masses...

“The party must stand at the head of the movement, but in order to be at its head when it comes, it must not wait patiently until the revolutionary situation has become a fact, to be dragged along by the masses, no, it must prepare the masses, by the a complete reorientation of its tactics and methods toward a revolutionary tendency, to take the offensive, that the masses may follow us with full confidence in our powers.”

In this connection, and because both Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht, and in fact all supporters of a more general adoption of mass action in Germany, and other countries, have been accused of anarchistic and syndicalistic ideas and aspirations, it is of interest to know that both at all times fought against anarchistic and syndicalistic tactics. They consistently opposed the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Germany that was organised in the so-called “Lokale Gewerkschaften.” In 1910, at Magdeburg, Comrade Luxemburg expressed this in a speech on the same subject:

“A political mass strike can only arise out of historic conditions, out of the ripeness of the political and industrial situation.

“If anything could prove that one may talk indefinitely of mass strikes without the slightest practical result, so long as the initial conditions for its outbreak are not

Above left Luxemburg addresses a workers' rally, above right Karl Liebknecht; Liebknecht addresses the workers

the propaganda work of the party, thus acquiring undue importance and influence upon the tactical programme of the party. In consequence the party bureaucracy met every suggestion in favour of more radical measures with active resentment, because they honestly feared that such measures might alienate its voters, that the failure of such revolutionary demonstrations might shake the confidence of the masses in the party and strengthen the power of the capitalist class. Years of success had bred in the bureaucrats of the party a holy horror of failure. They were desperately opposed to any action that did not, at the outset, bear assurance of a successful outcome.

The radical minority waged constant war upon this deadening conservatism. In Prussia it demanded the adoption of a policy of active opposition to the three-class election system, against which the party had used its political weapons in vain. In 1904, at Bremen, Karl Liebknecht moved that the question of the general political strike against the unequal suffrage laws of Prussia be discussed. At the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart, in 1907, Rosa Luxemburg called out to the delegates who had adopted a resolution celebrating the martyrs of the Russian counter-revolution: “If they could speak they would cry out to you, ‘We do not need your praises. Learn rather from our example.’” In 1913, at the

celebrated Party Convention of Jena, the unceasing agitation of this small group of revolutionists had so far born fruit that they succeeded in securing the adoption of the following resolution, against the vehement opposition of David, Bernstein, Scheidemann, and others:

“The Party Congress of Jena, 1913, sees in the general application of mass cessation of labour, under certain circumstances, one of the most effective methods, not only against proposed attacks upon existing political rights, but also for the conquest of new political reforms and rights.

“The achievement of general, equal, direct and secret suffrage for all public offices is a necessary condition for the liberation of the proletariat. The existing three-class suffrage system not only deprives the propertyless class of its political liberties, but hampers them in every movement for the improvement of their standard of life; it makes the worst enemies of labour-union activity and social progress, the Junker caste, the controllers of all legislation.

“The Party Congress, therefore, calls upon the politically enslaved masses to use all their powers in the fight against the three-class election system, realizing that this struggle cannot be carried out without great sacrifices to a victorious conclusion.

Continued on page 12

given, it is the history of the idea of the mass strike itself. You know that anarchists, of the type of Nieuwenhuis, propagated the idea of the mass strike for decades, as a panacea against all evils in society and against war as a means of bringing about the social revolution within 24 hours. And today, who talks more of the general strike than the French Syndicalists of the anarchistic school? . . . And yet the country where the general strike has been least put into practice is France, where the syndicalists are forever mouthing its phrases."

DURING THE WAR

The position taken by Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg from the beginning of the outbreak of the war, their struggle not only against the power of a war-mad government, but what was far harder to bear, against a deluded people, need not be repeated here. Only those who understand what party discipline means in Germany, only those who know what the Social Democratic Party as the expression of the political and social aspirations of the working class meant to Karl Liebknecht, can appreciate that inner struggle that he and his comrades that later formed the Independent Social Democratic Party had to undergo before they took the step that separated them irrevocably from the movement that had been the end and aim of their very existence.

In the caucus that preceded the vote in the Reichstag on the first war loan, Liebknecht, Haase, Ruehle and a few others stood alone against an overwhelming opposition. And so strong was the hold of the party upon them that not even Liebknecht voted against the first loan in the Reichstag, that Hugo Haase, the chairman of the Socialist Reichstag group, delivered the declaration explaining the action of the majority, although every word he uttered seared his very soul.

When the second war loan vote was taken, Liebknecht alone voted against it, and was condemned by the Executive Committee of the party, by a vote of 65 to 26.

On Christmas, 1914, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg sent letters of greeting to their comrades in England:

"Confusion reigns in the ranks of the Socialist movement," writes Liebknecht. "Many Socialists make our principles responsible for our present failure. The failure is due, not to our principles, but to the representatives of our principles.

"All such phrases as 'national defence' and 'freedom of the people,' with which imperialism decorates its instruments of murder, are lying pretence. The emancipation of each nation must be the result of its own efforts. Only blindness can demand the continuation of murder until its opponents are crushed.

"The welfare of all nations are inseparably interwoven. The world war that destroyed the International will surely teach the world a mighty lesson. It will bring a new International, an International with a power greater and more unshaking than that which fell last August before the blows of the capitalist powers. In the cooperation of the working classes of all nations alone, in war and in peace, lies the salvation of mankind."

The greeting sent by Rosa Luxemburg breathes this same confidence in the victory of the socialist ideal, in spite of the downfall of the socialist movement:

"It is necessary that we express the bitter truth, not to encourage futile despair and resignation, but, on the contrary, to learn from the mistakes we have committed in the past and the facts of the existing situation, valuable lessons for the future."

In the second year of the war Liebknecht was sent to the front as a non-combatant soldier, where he was shortly afterward seriously hurt by a falling tree trunk. In March of the same year Rosa Luxemburg was sentenced to a year in prison for alleged libels of officers' corps and the Crown Prince, in a speech in which she protested against the ill-treatment of the soldiery.

During 1916 Liebknecht was sentenced to thirty months in prison for a speech delivered in a soldier's uniform, at a peace demonstration held on the Potsdamer Platz, Berlin. This sentence was increased to four years on an appeal to a higher court. Various after that there came to this country reports of Liebknecht's illness and death in prison, until he was released, a few weeks before the German revolution broke out, by the Coalition-Socialist-Liberal-Ministry that had been created in Germany as a last desperate attempt to pacify a nation already in the throes of revolution.

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

In the few weeks that preceded the German revolutionary uprising Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were in the forefront of events. They addressed gigantic demonstrations. Liebknecht was met with tremendous

ovations whenever he appeared in public. The memory of the meetings he addressed from the portico of the Embassy of the revolutionary Russian government will be unforgettable in the memory of those who witnessed them.

And yet, by the strange irony of fate, the very men who had always vehemently opposed revolutionary tactics in the German proletariat, the very men who, up to the last day of the coming of the revolution tried with all means to stem the rising tide that threatened the overthrow of the German military autocracy, assumed the reigns of government upon the Emperor's abdication.

Ebert and Scheidemann became the rulers of the new German Republic. But even though majority socialists stood at the head of the government, the spirit that filled the masses was undeniably revolutionary. Soldiers' and Workmen's Councils everywhere took over the reigns of government in the cities, and proclamations and orders were usually signed in the name of the "Socialist Republic of Germany". Even the *Vorwarts*, the organ of the majority group, spoke of "social revolution".

The control of the government was placed in the hands of a council made up of three supporters of the Social Democratic Party and three Independents. But at the outset there were radical differences of opinion between the two groups, that were only with difficult overcome. True to their old theory that Germany would grow into the socialist state by a process of gradual evolution, the Socialist Democratic Party remained, as it always has been, opposed to any action that might precipitate the working class of Germany into an active conflict, either within the nation or without. To a proposal made by the Executive Committee of the Independent Social Democratic Party, on 8 November, as a basis for united action, that "in this Republic the entire executive, legislative and judicial power shall rest exclusively in the hands of the entire labouring population and soldiers", the Executive of the Social Democratic Party replied: "If this demands means the dictatorship of a part of a class that has not the support of the majority of the people, we must decline it, because it is not in accord with our democratic principles."

Street demonstrations everywhere breathed the most revolutionary spirit. The decisions and decrees of the different Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils showed a radicalism and firmness towards the socialist goal that was refreshing and promising.

And yet, prompted probably by the fear of renewed warfare of the Allies against Germany should the spirit of unrest grow, the leaders of the Independents in the end acquiesced and abandoned their opposition to the National Assembly. For a time even closer affiliation with the Social Democratic Party was under consideration. But the lengths to which the Ebert-Scheidemann group went in their concessions to the capitalists and militaristic clique of Germany, the boldness with which military leaders like Hindenburg and officers of all ranks came out with counter-revolutionary sentiments and proposals under the spiritual protection of the government that retained them in power in spite of all protests, showed the hopelessness of such an alliance, and finally led the representatives of the Independents to resign from the socialist cabinet.

During the entire period of indecision and concessions Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and with them the Spartacus group, remained in the Independent Social Democratic Party. On the Sunday before Christmas the Independents held a convention at Berlin in response to a demand made by the Spartacus group for a clarification of its position. At this conference Haase defended the action taken by the Independent leaders in trying to come to some kind of an understanding with the majority Socialists. The position of the Spartacus group was defended by Rosa Luxemburg, who attacked the government (at that time the Independents were still in office) and maintained that the present rulers of Germany were doing nothing to prevent the growth of a counter-revolutionary movement. The Spartacus group then presented a resolution containing the following demands:

1. *The immediate resignation of the Independent representatives from the government.*
2. *That the conference repudiate the calling of a National Assembly which can only strengthen the counter-revolution and cheat the revolution of its socialist aims.*
3. *The immediate assumption of all political power by the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils, armament of the working-class population, the creation of a Red Guard for the protection of the revolution, dissolution of the Ebert Council of People's Plenipotentiaries and the placing of full political control into the hands of an Executive Council of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils.*

A resolution by Hilferding was finally adopted with 485 against 195 votes.

The most important task of the ISP at the present time is the

organisation of the campaign for a National Assembly. We must now muster the supreme power of the proletariat to assure the victory of socialism over the bourgeoisie.

On 30 December a National Conference of the Spartacus group was then held that finally severed all connection with the Independents and organised its forces into the "Revolutionary Communist Labour Party" by unanimous vote.

From this we see that Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and the Spartacus group by no means rushed rashly and madly into the revolutionary uprising that followed. They left no stone unturned to secure the support of their comrades of the Independents, and far from being prompted by motives of self-aggrandisement, actually remained in the background of events until the situation showed that only by independent action could they hope to prevent the overthrow of the proletarian revolution that threatened. Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg made one mistake. But they erred, not on the side of rashness, but, on the contrary, on the side of the great hopefulness, to create confidence in the steadfastness of principle, to create confidence in the steadfastness of principle of the Independent Social Democracy. Had they struck at once, while the whole country was still aglow with the excitement of the first revolutionary uprising, had they taken advantage of the socialistic spirit that dominated the first days and weeks of the revolution to firmly establish the power of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils, the Germany proletariat would not be facing today a National Assembly in which the combined bourgeoisie can and will wrest from the hands of the socialist movement the power to control the destinies of the new Republic.

MARTYRDOM OF LIEBKNECHT AND LUXEMBURG

When the Spartacus revolt set in, the proletariat of Germany had already accepted the new conditions, and resented the reawakening of the revolution excitement that, in the first days of the revolution, had driven everything before it.

The Majority Socialists left nothing untried to fan resentment into an open flame. Not only did the government make use of the notoriously monarchistic regiments to quell the uprising, its press was filled with scurrilous attacks on the Spartacus followers. In one of its articles the *Vorwarts* declared that it would henceforward refuse to take Liebknecht seriously until he had been examined and declared sane by at least three reputable psychologists.

But their attacks reached the climax of virulence in the whole-page appeal to the working class that appeared in the *Vorwarts* of December 23.

[Extract:] *Bolshevism, the militarism of the lazy, knows neither freedom nor equality. It is vandalism, terror at the hands of a small mob that has arrogated itself to power. Therefore, refuse to follow the Spartacides, the Bolsheviks of Germany, lest you destroy our industries and our commerce. For the downfall of Germany industries and commerce means THE RUIN OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE...*

Truly, the Socialist majority leaders bear upon their souls not a little of the responsibility for the dastardly murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION IN GERMANY

The immediate future of Germany lies shrouded in darkness. But the discouraging result of the elections to the National Assembly and the increasing boldness with which the counter-revolutionary and militaristic elements are raising their heads seem to indicate that the people of Germany are still far from the peaceful era of "development into a socialist state" that this National Assembly was to usher in.

There will be no peace in Germany, there can be no peace until the revolutionary proletariat, realizing the futility of "democratic" government, hand in hand with the capitalist class, will arise once more to overthrow the uncrowned kings that are preparing to take control of the nation.

Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht are dead. But the spirit they and their comrades have awakened will live on in the hearts and minds of the Germany proletariat, in the hearts and minds of the revolutionary working class of the world.

Out of their ranks new leaders will come, new leaders, who, like those honoured dead, have confidence and faith in the destiny and power of the working class.

Footnote:

* It is not clear that Luxemburg did have the view. Although not active in the German socialist women's movement led by Zetkin, she did not attack Zetkin's work.

FILM

A fairytale of Mumbai

ROSALIND ROBSON REVIEWS **SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE**

Although *Slumdog Millionaire* has generally received very good reviews it has also had its fair share of critics. Some of the criticism may be worth consideration. For instance: that it is an “outsiders” view of India, that the political movement against poverty in Indian city slums should have been shown, that the film’s child actors have not been adequately helped.

Other criticisms strike me as a bit silly or snobby — the film’s “magical realism” is not up to the genre’s high standards (Salman Rushdie aka Chief of the Magical Realism Police); the film steals scenes from Indian cinema (but when is a steal a steal and not an homage?)

That all said, what did I think of the film? The most curious thing for me (and it is a very curious film) is that I didn’t cry once. That’s an unusual event in my cinema-going life. Yet here is a film about street-living, train-hopping, orphans — what’s not to cry about?

The answer lies in Simon Beufoy’s script (based on a book by Vikas Swarup) and the way it does not try to manipulate your emotions. The children’s lives and opinions are not there to be paraded as grim reminders of how “lucky” we in the First World are, but as inter-

esting, and worthwhile in themselves. There is something to be said for a film script wearing its social conscience lightly and this Beufoy managed to do very well, just as he did in the *Full Monty*.

Along the way we are told rather a lot about Mumbai, it’s rapid capitalist development. Along the way we do see both the good and the bad in Indian society: how social change is breaking down traditional values, how these are being replaced by consumerism. But the writer does all this by telling a cracking fairytale of a story.

Of course, the film’s plot, a good story or not, is wildly incredible and much has been made of that — a young homeless “chae wallah” (tea vendor, in this case a tea boy in a mobile phone company’s call centre) — gets on the Indian version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* Another byproduct is that the inclusion in a serious story of some laughs and lightness turns the characters into archetypes. This happens with the brothers at the centre of the story. Jamal is a good person, his brother Salim is *not so good*. Both represent choices in the human struggle to survive.

In my view there is room for this kind of story-telling in cinema. Between the dross of most cinema and unbearably grim documentary there is room for bright, imaginative, and humourful appreciations of other people’s lives.

ROBERT BURNS ANNIVERSARY

A man’s a man for a’that

By PETER BURTON

The 250th anniversary year of Scottish poet Robert Burns’s birth has seen even more events and merry-making than usual. The writer Andrew O Hagan has a series on TV, there are highlights of Burns poems on Wiseman Dairies milk cartons, there have been a bunch of new books on the bard — Robert Crawford and Patrick Hogg have produced new biographies — Donald Smith has written a novel about Burns and photographer Andy Hall has persuaded Sir Alex Fergusson and other famous people to pick a favourite poem and say a few words about what Burns means to them. Hall and Patrick Hogs’ books are worthwhile — particularly Hogs’ radical reinterpretation of Burns’ work.

The Burns events form part of the Scottish Governments’ year-long “Homecoming Scotland” campaign supposedly designed to celebrate Scottish culture and boost tourism in these hard credit crunch times. Nothing to do then with the fact that there is a referendum on independence next year which the SNP has no guarantee of winning. So Burns is being used by politicians with agendas — plus ca change!

Burns was a product of Scottish Enlightenment ideas in an age of revolutions — first the American then the French. An age of change in Scotland too: the peasantry were being squeezed, unable to maintain their debt bondage to landowners, many farms were failing.

Burns was a voracious reader and wordsmith from an early age. Arthur Masson’s Collection of Prose and Verse which included the work of Shakespeare, Milton Thompson, Pope, Gray, Shenstone, Addison and Akenside was read by Burns till it fell apart. But fellow Scottish poet Robert Fergusson became Burns greatest influence

In the aftermath of the French revolution (1789) Robert Burns — by then an Exciseman — was engaged in refuting accusations that he was a member of the reforming Friends of the People in Dumfries and in joining a rendition of the French revolutionary song ‘Ca Ira’ in the Dumfries theatre.

His denials came against a background persecution of dissenters by the British state, fear of the reform movement in Britain and the ideas of the French revo-

lution that the movement stood for. By 1793 the repression was set to crush the whole democratic and reform movement, a network of spies hunting down dissenters.

Robert Burns had been a ploughman, but his attempts at farming had failed. His class was being squeezed out of existence by enclosure and agrarian reform.

Fearing the destitution of his family he fell back on the guile and native wit of an educated poor peasant — a public face to his employers of being a good Exciseman. Burns came up with the idea of a local tax on the breweries in Ayrshire and the excise vastly increased revenue. At the same time he was sending radical poems and songs anonymously or pseudonymously to dissenting papers such as the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*, *Morning Chronicle* (London) and *Glasgow Advertiser*. Burns was careful about who he sent his work to and avoided the mail system.

The Victorian mythologisers presented Burns as a heaven-taught ploughman who quickly gave up dissenting work when the going got tough. This is wrong. Poems and songs such as *Scots What Hae* were coded attacks on the ongoing repression of the Pitt government. Ostensibly this song was about the Bruce and Wallace of centuries ago but was full of veiled references to the French Revolution. It’s last line “let us do or die” came from the famous Tennis Court Oath made during the French Revolution.

By Oppression’s woes and pains!
By your Sons in servile chains!
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be free!
Lay the proud Usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
Liberty’s in every blow!-
Let us Do or Die!

Burns had written political poetry all his life. In *Holy Willie’s Prayer* he attacked the idiocy of the ideas of the “salvation of the elect” that Calvinism stood for — again circulating the poem privately amongst friends.

In a fantastic piece entitled *Address to Beelzebub*, Burns combined support for the ideas of the American and French revolutions with reference to the Highland Clearances and the escape by the poor to the colonies.

It is a dramatic monologue in form, addressed from hell, and one of Burns best, if lesser known poems.

Address Of Beelzebub

To the Right Honourable the Earl of Breadalbane, President of the Right Honourable the Highland Society, which met on the 23rd of May last at the Shakespeare, Covent Garden, to concert ways and means to frustrate the designs of five hundred Highlanders, who, as the Society were informed by Mr. M’Kenzie of Applecross, were so audacious as to attempt an escape from their lawful lords and masters whose property they were, by emigrating from the lands of Mr Macdonald of Glengarry to the wilds of Canada, in search of that fantastic thing — Liberty.

Long life, my Lord, an’ health be yours,
Unskaited by hunger’d Highland boors
Lord grant me nae duddie, desperate beggar,
Wi’ dirk, claymore, and rusty trigger,
May twin auld Scotland o’ a life
She likes-as butchers like a knife.
Faith you and Applecross were right
To keep the Highland hounds in sight:
I doubt na! they wad bid nae better,
Than let them ance out owre the water,
Then up among thae lakes and seas,
They’ll mak what rules and laws they please:...
Nae sage North now, nor sager Sackville,
To watch and premier o’er the pack vile, —
An’ whare will ye get Howes and Clintons
To bring them to a right repentance —
To cove the rebel generation,
An’ save the honour o’ the nation?
They, an’ be d-d! what right hae they
To meat, or sleep, or light o’ day?
Far less-to riches, pow’r, or freedom,
But what your lordship likes to gie them? —
But hear, my lord! Glengarry, hear!
Your hand’s owre light to them, I fear;
Your factors, grieves, trustees, and bailies,
I canna say but they do gaylies;
They lay aside a’ tender mercies,
An’ tirl the hallions to the birses;
Yet while they’re only poind’t and herriet,

Continued on page 14

MARXIST ECONOMISTS ON THE CRISIS: LEO PANITCH

The chain broke at its weakest link

The world economic crisis took a sharp turn for the worse in September 2008. Some of the Marxist economists who had discussed the crisis in our first series of interviews, March-July 2008, have commented again. We continue a new series with Leo Panitch.

Last time we talked, you said that out of this crisis we will see more directive oversight by capitalist states, and we might even see something you called “the social-democratisation of globalisation”. Do you see things going that way? And what will it look like?

With all the calls for regulation; with states buying shares in banks, not taking any directive control over them, but using moral suasion the way Brown has been doing to get them to reduce interest rates as the Bank of England reduces interest rates; with the kind of fiscal stimulus programmes that all the governments are committed to — the British and the Americans, interestingly, more than the Germans — I think you are getting a “social-democratisation of globalisation”.

Bear in mind that my view of “social-democratisation” is that it is in no sense the old type of reformist, gradual socialism. It is “social-democratisation” in the

sense of what the Labour Party has become under Blair and Brown.

So this is not social democracy as in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s?

No. I never had a very positive view of that in any case. That orientation was more about corporatist arrangements with labour. I don't see much of that going on. I see that it's unlikely that Obama will press for the labour legislation that US unions have been calling for. That would be more like an old-style social-democratisation.

STABILISATION POLICIES

The governments are trying to put into practice everything that economists can suggest to them, in the way of stabilisation policies, that they have learned from the study of the 1930s and from the depression in Japan in the 1990s. How would you assess the possibilities, the limits, and the defects of these as stabilisation policies?

We have seen massive drops of liquidity into the banking systems. We have seen it being decided that the problem is solvency, not liquidity, and the govern-

ments putting public capital into the banks, so that the banks will have enough trust in each others' solvency to lend to each other. None of this is solving the crisis.

This indicates that the banks may not be able to go back to lending at their previous rates. The decades-long process of banking and financial-system securitisation, where lending has been done on the basis of slicing and dicing and repackaging loans so as to turn them into securities to be traded internationally, was a fundamental basis for the dynamism of financial capitalism and globalisation in the last twenty years or more.

That system of securitisation is now weak everywhere, even in corporate financing, and not only in the financing of mortgages and consumer debts. It has largely imploded. That is in large part why the banks have not been lending — they have been restructured to depend on doing lending through that securitisation.

That indicates that the crisis is really very severe. In terms of what is to be done about it, it raises — and we should be raising, as socialists — the obvious question of converting the banks into a public utility.

In a complex society, you can't have banking for the

Radical Burns

From page 13

They'll keep their stubborn Highland spirit:
But smash them! crash them a' to spails,
An' rot the dyvors i' the jails!
The young dogs, swinge them to the labour;
Let wark an' hunger mak them sober!
The hizzies, if they're aughtlins fawsont,
Let them in Drury-lane be lesson'd!
An' if the wives an' dirty brats
Come thiggin at your doors an' yetts,
Flaffin wi' duds, an' grey wi' beas',
Frightin away your ducks an' geese;
Get out a horsewhip or a jowler,
The langest thong, the fiercest growler,
An' gar the tatter'd gypsies pack
Wi' a' their bastards on their back!
Go on, my Lord! I lang to meet you,
An' in my house at hame to greet you;
Wi' common lords ye shanna mingle,
The benmost neuk beside the ingle,
At my right han' assigned your seat,
'Tween Herod's hip an' Polycrate:
Or if you on your station tarrow,
Between Almagro and Pizarro,
A seat, I'm sure ye're well deservin't;
An' till ye come-your humble servant,
Beelzebub.

Against a background of a national seamen's strike Burns wrote a satirical political song *Why Shouldna Poor Folk Mo*. It was one of many bawdy songs that Burns used to undermine the repression of the state and church authorities with their Calvinist ideas on sex and the pre-destination of the elect and to demonstrate their impotence!

When Princes and Prilates and het[hot]
-headed zealots
All Europe hae set in a lowe [flame],
The poor man lies down, nor envies a crown,
And comforts himself with a mowe [fuck].

The poem goes on to express solidarity with the Poles who were being oppressed by the Russia of Catherine the Great, each stanza undermining the pretensions and authority of those in power everywhere.

There were countless other satirical poems and songs such as *A Good Mowe* and *Nine Inch Will Please a Lady*.

Burns always points up the hubris of totalitarian pretensions and their futile attempts to suppress sex by edicts. While other writers talked of the democracy of death, Burns preferred to contemplate the democracy of sex — sex ran “frae the queen to the tinkler” (*Bonnie Mary*).

The Kirk and State may join and tell;
To do sic things I manna:
The Kirk and State may gae to h-ll,
An' I shall gae to Anna

Burlesque anti-official language and popular culture were utilised by Burns to subvert authority and its methods of control.

First you John Brown, there's witness borne,
And affidavit made and sworn,
That ye hae bred a hurly-burly

'Bout Jeany Mitchell's tirlie -whirlie,
And blooster'd at her regulator
'Till a'her wheels gang clitter-clatter.

Burns' satire went as far as setting up a 'court' to penalise those who were not good at fornicating amongst Edinburgh society, “The Crochallian Fencibles”. They used the same legal language as the authorities in their poems and songs. Burns was, of course, its President.

At the heart of all Burns political satires and poems

lay a deep desire to expose and defeat an absolute political power, shored up by a reactionary institutional Christianity that presented hierarchy, class, rank, status and power as natural givens.

This was an ambition shared by Burns' contemporary William Blake though the two men seemed not to know of each other.

Victorian Scotland turned Burns into an iconic national figure of whiskey, shortbread and haggis at Burns Suppers, in opposition to the political values he passionately stood for. The first attempt to place Burns in historical context, Catherine Carswell's 1930s biography led to her receiving a bullet through the post — but the arguments rage on.

His influence are wide and various. The most intelligent and committed of Burns' admirers were the Ulster poets, Burns ideas influencing the intellectuals of the 1798 rebellion. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley were hugely influenced. Others followed — from Emerson and Whitman to Maya Angelou. Burns translation into Russian by Marshak led to his celebration as the working-class embodiment of the soviet ideal. In Scotland he was used by Gladstone in his Midlothian campaign, at the opening of the Scottish parliament and, of course, in the current nationalist campaign for independence. That can only be answered by *A Man's A Man for A'that*:

The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.
Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a cuif for a' that:
For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that:
The man o' independent mind
He looks an' laughs at a' that...
Then let us pray that come it may,
(As come it will for a' that.)
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That Man to Man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that.

Reading

The Canongate Burns

The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, Patrick Scott Hogg and Andrew Noble.

Robert Burns – The Patriot Bard, Patrick Scott Hogg

Burns the Radical, Liam McIlvanney

Robert Burns – The Lost Poems, Patrick Scott Hogg

www.robertburns.org/works (most of his work)

masses without having state guarantees of deposits. The system has been kept going on the basis of central banks acting as lenders of last resort. The case for the banks being brought into public ownership properly needs to be put on the agenda, much more vociferously than the left is putting it on the agenda.

I do not mean, as in Britain, just giving public capital to the banks and saying please operate on commercial lines, a move involving no executive powers whatsoever. I mean taking the banks properly into public ownership and changing the function of the banks, as Mitterrand did not do in France in the 1980s, so that the criteria on which they invest are redefined as social purposes, to be democratically determined.

SCALE OF CRISIS

Looking back on it, the subprime mortgage crisis seems to involve tiny sums, compared to the fallout now. How did that subprime crisis — sizeable, but small compared to what is in play now — produce such huge repercussions?

The subprime crisis was comparatively small, but subprime mortgages were packaged with other mortgages and then the securities were sold on. People were buying general mortgage-backed securities based on a mixture of mortgages. When the defaults started in the subprime sector, it became difficult to sell, or to sell on, any mortgage-backed securities.

It had the effect of making the banks more reluctant to lend for new mortgages, and that helped burst the house-price bubble. Then the loans made more generally on the basis that house prices would continue to rise were called into question. You got a vicious circle in the whole housing and mortgage sector.

Once you had this loss of confidence, and inability to value securities — you didn't know how to value those securities any more, because you couldn't sell them; the formulas on which the valuations of those mortgage-backed securities fell down — then a whole set of questions came onto the books in respect to other sorts of securities and how those might be valued.

Here there is an element of confidence and psychology. However much we as Marxists see that as not primary, it is an element. The banks knew damn well how over-leveraged they all were. They began to wonder whether even the people they lend overnight to — the other banks — were solvent. They became reluctant to lend.

And so the disturbance moved beyond the original source of the problem. Insofar as the risk was spread so widely — and that was the point, credit was cheap because risk was spread so widely — it pulled in vast sectors in other countries and across the world.

You could say that the crisis was triggered by the subprime crash. There is a certain racist element to the story, insofar as the growth of subprime mortgages was the attempt to incorporate the black working class through finance into the American dream. When that weakest link in the chain of financial capitalism went, then — unlike when Lenin used the metaphor of the weakest link for Russia in the chain of world capitalism — it began to undo the whole chain.

It all began with the subprime mortgage implosion

US HEGEMONY

A few months you said that you thought US hegemony had not waned, and would not wane in the very near future. I agreed with that then.

But you compared that US hegemony with the sort of hegemony that a financial centre like New York or London has in its national economy. It used to be the case that the global financial markets, centred in New York, centred round the dollar, were where any large capitalist anywhere in the world could go for credit. Isn't that ceasing to be true? Aren't governments and firms looking elsewhere for credit? Aren't we seeing the beginning of that process of US hegemony waning?

I don't think so. I'm not sure where else people would go for credit. And in fact capital has flowed to the dollar and to the US Treasury Bill. That is puzzling unless you understand that the US state is the state of global capital. Despite everything that has happened, global capital still looks on the US as the safest haven and the ultimate guarantor. And the US government has behaved that way.

The decisions to nationalise Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and AIG were taken very much with an eye to the US's responsibility to honour its commitments to China and Japan and Germany and Britain — above all to China, because the Chinese had bought a lot of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac securities.

The American state is absolutely central. It is no accident that the G20 meeting took place in Washington. Everyone sees that whatever resolution there is to this crisis will have to be undertaken under the aegis of the American state, and everyone is hoping that Obama will be able to provide the kind of leadership — for capitalists — that will accomplish that.

So I think the American state is still very much at the centre of global capitalism. The material underpinnings of that hegemony have rested in part on New York as a financial centre. So it's a good question, what happens to that hegemony if New York seizes up as a financial centre? But I just don't see what could conceivably replace it.

Certainly nothing in Asia could replace New York as a financial centre. People can start arguing that the Chinese state has financial clout, but we see how much the Chinese economy has been affected by this crisis originating in the US economy.

It will certainly be an enormous challenge for the Americans to hold it all together. But it is only the Americans that can hold it all together; and all the world's capital, more than ever, is looking to the Americans to hold it all together.

But if the US government does it very imperfectly...

Yes, but I don't see any grounds for serious inter-imperial rivalry unless there are fundamental changes in the balance of class forces and state structures in other parts of the world, so that countries move in a national-socialist, fascist direction which would break down globalisation, or there is the kind of change in class relations that would put socialist options on the agenda, which would mean disarticulating from capi-

talist globalisation and attempting to re-articulate on the basis of new international socialist strategies. On the basis of the class configurations that exist in the regions outside North America, I don't see either of those things happening soon.

The question remains of whether the Americans will pull it off. If they don't, will that produce social and political disruptions that would lead to something else? Maybe. But on the basis of the current configurations, with the types of capitalist classes and state bureaucracies that are oriented to maintaining the relationships that have developed over the last 30 years under global capitalism, I don't think we can speak seriously of inter-imperialist rivalry.

• Interview with Martin Thomas December 2008. Leo Panitch has been editor of the annual *Socialist Register* in recent years. He is also the author of many books and articles, most recently (with Martijn Konings) *American Empire and the Political Economy of Global Finance*, Palgrave Macmillan 2008, paperback edition due later this year. He is active in the Socialist Project group, www.socialistproject.org and is a professor at York University, Toronto.

• Leo Panitch suggested the scenario of "the social-democratisation of globalisation" in an article in the US magazine *Monthly Review*, 50/5, October 1998. The article was a discussion of the World Bank's World Development Report for 1997, *The State In A Changing World*.

In the fresh days of neo-liberalism, it was all for rolling back the frontiers of the State", as Margaret Thatcher put it in 1980. But now, Panitch noted, "the World Bank advocates a large role for the state in correcting and protecting markets", and worries about countries "overshooting the mark" in the direction of the "minimalist state".

This is social-democratisation, however, in the sense of 1990s European social-democracy — which led 14 out of 15 EU governments at the time of Panitch's writing — or the Clinton Democratic Party in the USA.

It is for:

1. "privatisation in general... especially the 'hiving off' of utilities and social insurance";
2. "liberal trade, capital markets, and investment regimes";
3. market provision of welfare, albeit with a safety-net for the poorest: "even in the areas of urban hospitals, clinics, universities, and transport... the report takes the view that markets and private spending can meet most needs, except for those of the very poorest...";
4. "the regressive shift in taxation from corporate and personal income taxes, and trade taxes, towards consumption-based taxes like VAT";
5. central bank independence, geared to restraining inflation.

It is distinguished from the most gung-ho neo-liberalism in wanting:

1. "not... a minimal state, but rather an efficient capitalist state";
2. strong regulation of the financial sector, not for "channelling credit in preferred directions" but for "safeguarding the health of the financial system".

Nine Marxist economists analyse the crisis

Interviews from March to June 2008 and December 2008-January 2009

- Michel Husson
- Fred Moseley
- Leo Panitch
- Andrew Kliman
- David Laibman
- Costas Lapavistas
- Simon Mohun
- Trevor Evans
- Dick Bryan

Appendix: AWL 2008 conference document on the world economy
www.workersliberty.org/marxists-crisis

STUDENT ACTION ON GAZA

Occupying against the occupation

By Ed Maltby

Students at nearly 20 universities across the UK have staged occupations in protest at Israel's war on Gaza. Some, such as LSE and Essex, have already ended successfully, with key demands (such as official university statements of condemnation of the war and support for scholarships for Palestinian students) being met by university management. Others, such as Sussex and Cambridge, are ongoing at the time of writing.

Many occupations have been important spaces for political debate, with discussions taking place about the politics of the Middle Eastern conflict and issues facing the movement, such as the efficacy (or otherwise) of tactics such as a boycott.

AWL members, and supporters of the anti-capitalist student network Education Not for Sale (that we helped launch), have been active in building for and supporting the occupations wherever we have been able to. Because of the role of our comrades, the Cambridge occupation was addressed by Muyad Ahmed of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq and by two AWL members.

Workers' Liberty supporters in the student movement have been arguing for some time that it is vital to rediscover and reclaim the radical, direct action tactics that student movement right-wingers dismiss as "relics of 1968." AWL members were central to the

organisation of the UK's first occupation in protest against top-up fees, which took place in Cambridge in October 2006.

Even leftists in the student movement are wary of such tactics and the invariably hostile response they illicit from the majority of fellow students. This wariness is understandable, given that it is has been a generation since the activist confidence to organise such actions — and the activist knowledge about how — was anything like widespread. Although the current wave does not, sadly, represent a stepping-up of Britain's student activist culture to continental levels, it does represent a significant step forward.

There is a note of historical irony in the fact that these occupations have coincided with the hammering in of the final nail in the coffin of official student movement democracy. A National Union of Students Extraordinary Conference on January 20 passed a new constitution that transforms the organisation from a union into something more closely resembling an NGO or lobbying group, a move which was justified by many of its supporters by the claim that the sort of activist culture which had required more traditional union-type organisation in the past was now dead.

If the only thing these occupations achieve is to convince a wider layer of student activists that radical direct action is possible in this country, they will have been extremely worthwhile.

Support our socialist candidate!

Workers' Liberty member Jill Mountford will be standing in the south east London seat of Camberwell and Peckham at the next general election — against New Labour deputy leader and cabinet minister Harriet Harman.

In the midst of a recession which for working-class people means job losses, wage cuts and repossessions, the need for working-class socialist candidates to take the class struggle into elections and into Parliament could not be more obvious.

On Sunday 25 January, local Workers' Liberty activists were joined by comrades and supporters from across London for a day of action in the constituency. Our stalls and leafleting got a very good response.

In addition to our normal activity, we will be building the election campaign in the constituency every Sunday — and inviting other activists to join us for a weekend of action once a month. The next one will be Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 February — why not come and take part for an afternoon?

- For more info email jill@workersliberty.org
- For the Facebook group, search "Support our socialist candidate against Harriet Harman!" or email rachael_ferguson@yahoo.co.uk

Debating Gaza

About 60 people, mostly young, crammed into a Green Park social centre on 15 January for a forum on the war in Gaza held jointly by Workers' Liberty and the Worker-communist Party of Iraq.

We held the meeting to provide a space for activists from the Palestine solidarity movement to discuss the issues involved in opposing the war, and in order to put forward our own shared view — an internationalist position which looks to mutual working-class recognition and solidarity across the borders on the basis of a two-state settlement, opposed to political Islam as well as Israeli imperialism and aggression.

Our support for a two-state settlement and sharp opposition to Hamas was controversial with some more long-standing socialist activists who attended. One independent socialist comrade who I believe is a bus driver and a Unite/T&G activist, and one who is in the NUT and a member of Permanent Revolution, accused us of being soft on Israel and pro-imperialist. The former contribution in particular was quite useful in a negative sense. In rightly comparing our opposition to Hamas with our refusal to support the mini-colonialism of the Argentinian dictatorship in the 1982 Falklands war (the speaker supported both "against imperialism"), it opened the way for a good discussion of what is wrong with the standard "left" view of "imperialism" and "anti-imperialism".

There are probably differences between our view and that of the Iraqi comrades; we hope we will be able to discuss these further. Meanwhile, we will be holding further joint meetings in cities across the country.

Demonstrate against fees — for free education!

National student demo, London, Wednesday 25 February 2009

Meet 12 noon outside University of London, Malet Street, WC1E (Russell Square, Euston or Goodge Street tube)

2009 is the year that the government will review the £3,000 "cap" on student top-up fees — yet the National Union of Students, led by careerist supporters of New Labour, is organising no action. That's why student unions and student activists from across the country are working together to organise our own demonstration — to oppose the lifting of the cap and demand free education and a living grant for all students, HE and FE. Please organise transport and a contingent from your college or university.

- For more information, including the full supporters list, or for publicity email studentdemo2009@gmail.com and visit studentdemo2009.blogspot.com

WORKERS' LIBERTY FUND DRIVE

Thanks are due to the following people for donations in the last fortnight, all going towards our £18,000 target: Helen £150, Phil £400, M £20. A total of £470 for the last two weeks.

Can you help us? Take out a standing order. Donate via our website or by post. Take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell. Join the AWL.

Email us at awl@workersliberty.org or call 020 207 3997.

Fund total £6,799

EVENTS, DATES, PUBLIC MEETINGS

For more information and downloadable leaflets see www.workersliberty.org/whatson

AWL London study group on the history of British Trotskyism: 7.30pm, second and fourth Mondays of the month, Highbury: phone 07950 978 083 for details

National student demo organising meeting: Saturday 31 January, 12-5pm, room L67, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London

Anti-fascist march: 31 January, 10.30am. Assemble at Kuumbaimaki Centre, off Princes Street, Liverpool.

"How can we best help the Palestinians?": meeting supported by Hull AWL, Monday 2 February, 5.30pm,

Hull University. Email chrisjmarks@hotmail.com

Teesside Solidarity Network: inaugural meeting. "Ecology, feminism, solidarity". Wednesday 4 February 7:30pm, 193-195 Linthorpe Road Middlesbrough TS1 4AG

London AWL benefit night: film showing — Rocking the Foundations: 5 February, 7pm, Bread and Roses, 68 Clapham Manor Street, London

Gender, Race and Class conference: 14 February, 10.30am-6.30pm, London. Agenda and more details see www.anticapitalistfeminists.co.uk

Socialist Feminist Discussion Group: 7.30pm, Friday

20 January. The life and politics of Clara Zetkin. SOAS, Thornhaugh Street

National student demonstration against fees, for grants, for free education: Wednesday 25 February, 12 noon. Assemble outside ULU, Malet Street, London WC1

"Why capitalism is in crisis and what we can do about it": AWL youth dayschool, Saturday 14 March, venue tbc

AWL summer school 2009: Friday-Sunday 10-12 July, London

SOCIALIST PARTY

“Socialism” as evasion

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

Among those who criticise AWL for openly proclaiming our policy on the Middle East — Israel out of the Occupied Territories; two states, i.e. a Palestinian state alongside Israel; hostility to political Islam and Islamic clerical fascism — on the Gaza demonstrations have been members of the Socialist Party.

This is of interest because the Socialist Party agrees with Israel's right to exist, or used to anyway; and because the SP's own behaviour on the Gaza demonstrations offers an object lesson in how socialists should not behave.

On both the 3 January and the 10 January marches SP members gave out the same leaflet — a printed broadsheet distributed at demonstrations all over Britain.

For muddled thinking, moral and political cowardice, irresponsible demagoguery, and attempted mimicry of the dominant political forces on the demonstrations, it would be hard to find anything worse.

I will first describe it (it is on the AWL website at www.workersliberty.org/sp-gaza) and then analyse its politics.

One side of the A4 leaflet is given over to slogans and a picture of a Palestinian carrying a boy, limp and bloody, in his arms. The main slogan, covering half the page, is “Stop The Slaughter in Gaza”.

Below that, printed in gold letters, much smaller but still very large type, is: “Mass struggle needed for liberation”. Under that again, in smaller but bold type, are five slogans:

- Stop the military onslaught now! End the blockade and occupation
- Escalate the anti-war demonstrations and initiate workers' actions
- No trust in the world's capitalist governments or the United Nations
- For independent workers' organisations in Israel and Palestine
- For a struggle for democratic socialism throughout the Middle East

This is the “face” of the SP. The other side of the broadsheet is a rumination on the politics stated in the slogans.

The main slogan — “Stop The Slaughter in Gaza” — is a commendable humanitarian protest against Israel's onslaught. It doesn't go very far; it is scarcely political; it subsumes Hamas, including its military wing, into the people of Gaza — but it is all right, as far as it goes.

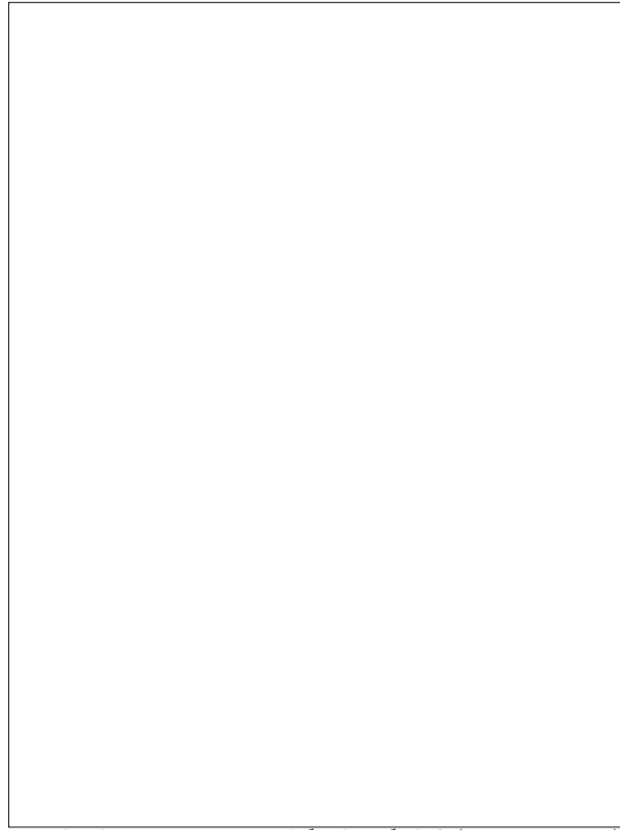
But what about Hamas's rocket war on Israel? It is a very great deal less lethal than the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, but not because Hamas wouldn't like it to be as lethal and more so. A central political fact during the war was that Hamas continued to explode rockets in Israel, aimed at civilians: if Hamas had stopped doing that and declared an end to such rockets, it would at least have increased the moral and political pressure on Israel to “stop the slaughter” and the “onslaught”.

The leaflet contains implicit criticism of Hamas dressed up as tactical advice to it — the rockets have been ineffective — but nowhere is there any explicit political condemnation of Hamas's rockets against Israeli civilians, or of Hamas's politics that underly its militarism against a state whose right to exist it denies.

As a whole, the political message is an uncritical siding with Hamas. The second main slogan — “mass struggle needed for liberation” — is advice to Hamas, and the demonstrators, on how to achieve their objectives, which the leaflet seemingly accepts. This strange “socialist” leaflet is couched as advice from “socialist” friends — to clerical-fascists!

There are two striking things about the “mass struggle” slogan. The first is the use of “liberation”. Straightforwardly, this would mean liberation of the West Bank and Gaza. In fact, a main political feature of the Gaza demonstrations — and of all the “anti-war” demonstrations for the last seven years — has been the use of the term “liberation of Palestine”, or “free Palestine”, to blur and hide a massive political divide.

The most politicised element, the organisers, and the main placard-providers of the Gaza demonstrations — understood by “free Palestine” the “liberation” (Arab or Islamic conquest) of all of pre-1948 Palestine, including



Israel. Islamist groups and the kitsch-left (SWP, ISG, etc.) chanted it: “From the river to the sea/ Palestine will be free”.

Interpret it as you like, and “explain it away” as you will, the slogan “mass struggle for liberation” was, and certainly would be taken as being, endorsement of Arab-chauvinist, Islamic-chauvinist, Islamist, or Hamas objectives in the Middle East, specifically in relation to Israel. It allowed the SP to blend in on the demonstrations.

Does the SP agree with those objectives? No! To repeat: like AWL, it thinks Israel has a right to exist.

The second striking thing in the slogan is the mystery of what it means. “Mass struggle”? Mass struggle has been absent, or very weak? The fact is that there have been mass mobilisations by Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. There is mass support for Hamas's military campaign, including its homicide bombing campaign inside Israel — just as there is mass Israeli support for Israel's military onslaught on Hamas in Gaza.

What would the SP propose to add in the way of “mass mobilisation” to what Hamas is already doing?

Nothing! The phrase “mass struggle” is — or is chiefly — code for the SP and its politically tuned-in periphery expressing their private opposition to militarism and “terrorism”. It is the SP pretending that Hamas militarism can be classed as “individual terrorism”.

What most people on the demonstrations would get is vague and rather needless “advice” on how the political Islamists could achieve their goal.

In this vein, Hannah Sell, the main organiser of the SP, was on a loud-hailer telling people that Hamas's rockets on Israel had “failed”. This could not but be understood by most of her audience as the SP accepting everything Hamas tries to do, and criticising the rockets on Israel only for their lack of success in achieving their desired level of politically effective murderousness!

The first of the leaflet's five summary slogans is a rephrasing of its main headline: “Stop the military onslaught now. End the blockade and occupation”. The second of the five is: “Escalate the anti-war demonstrations and initiate workers' actions”.

The first part, “Escalate the anti-war demonstrations”, is no more than saying to the demonstrators: “Good on you”!

The second, “initiate workers' actions”, meant what? What sort of “workers' actions”? *With what politics?*

The second question is easier to answer than the first: with the politics of the demonstrations, what else?

Here the SP elevates sociology above politics. It doesn't matter about the political aims of “action”, so long as it is action by workers. The focus on “workers” sounds very left-wing, but in context, on the demonstrations, it is the opposite: an appeal to workers to merge in with

reactionary Arab or Islamic chauvinist politics and aims.

And what “workers' actions”? Strikes? Refusal to load and unload goods to and from Israel? Airport staff to refuse to deal with passengers to and from Israel? In real terms, over and above lip-service to “workers' action”, the only possible meaning of the SP slogan on the demonstrations was a call on Muslim workers to strike, whatever; and backing for the appeal, placarded and sloganised heavily on the demonstrations, for a general boycott of Israel.

The third slogan, “No trust in the world's capitalist governments or the United Nations”, is socialist ABC stuff. In what circumstances could it ever be redundant? So why is it worthy here of being one of only five slogans?

In terms of the demonstrations, the emphasis in the SP leaflet on what is seemingly socialist ABC worked to merge what the SP was saying with the political Islamist hostility to most existing governments, to the UN — and to western bourgeois-democratic society as a whole, including its democratic elements.

But more. While we never give our confidence or confer political credence in advance on bourgeois governments or the UN, the fact is that the only thing that exists now, and in the calculable future, which can win a Palestinian state, is large-scale international pressure on Israel — in the first place, US pressure on Israel.

The alternative? The leaflet suggests that it is some sort of “mass” movement on the politics common, in varying political degrees, to the main “resistance” movements in the region now.

That is not a progressive alternative to the USA, the UN, or Britain. To pretend otherwise on the grounds that revolutionaries do not look to existing governments is not working-class politics. It is to sink oneself into a reactionary right-wing populism.

The broadsheet talks vaguely of “mass struggle” as the positive flipside to its negative slogan: “No trust in governments”. In fact, in the existing situation, “mass struggle” most likely is, and would be, mobilisation on Islamist politics and concerns and for Islamic goals — in many cases, for clerical-fascist goals. Mobilisation necessarily hostile to and repressive of independent working-class organisations.

Here the SP, under cover of pietistic “socialist” slogans, blends itself in with a reactionary populism and with the reactionary anti-imperialism of the SWP and others.

In the fourth slogan, “For independent workers organisations in Israel and Palestine”, there is debilitating vagueness. What exactly do they mean? Organisationally independent of existing states? Politically independent? There is question-begging: what are independent working-class politics, specifically, on the Israeli-Arab conflict. There is here too a downgrading of the Israeli trade union movement, the Histadrut, and a pandering to those on the demonstrations who would say that, being Israeli, it is no sort of trade union.

For the working class even to begin to be able to act as an independent force in Israel and Palestine, tremendous transformations in working-class political outlooks have to be made to happen. Independent working-class movements have to be built and, probably, a degree of political freedom for independent working-class organisation has to be won across the Middle East.

It is not a matter here of dogmatically postulating, Menshevik-style, the attainment of democratic rights as a necessary first step, but of recognising the tremendous difficulties which the present regimes in most Middle East countries put in the way of working-class politics.

The fifth slogan is a variant of asserting, but too abstractly, that “socialism is the answer”: “For a struggle for democratic socialism throughout the Middle East”. Yes, indeed. But for people who understand that only the working class can create socialism, “mass struggle” cannot be a struggle for socialism before the working class is organised and convincingly socialist.

These five slogans constitute the SP's programme for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: stop the slaughter, independent “workers' organisations” in Israel and Palestine, “struggle” for “democratic socialism”.

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As a whole the programme is vague and startlingly sketchy and incomplete. What is missing is even more startling than what is present: other than “stop the slaughter”, and the call to organise independent working-class organisations to struggle for socialism throughout the Middle East, the SP has nothing explicit and spelled-out to say to the political issues that convulse the Middle East. It says nothing about the relationship between Israel and the Arab states and, very much to the point here, Hamas; and nothing about the national question in the Middle East. In the face of the Arab and Islamic chauvinism dominant on the demonstrations, in both direct versions and kitsch-left adaptations, it does not dare to argue for the SP’s own political positions on Israel, confining itself to a vague and ambivalent recognition that Israel exists now and for the immediate future.

The SP leaflet assumes, in passing, the continuing existence of Israel. The dominant political forces on the demonstrations deny Israel’s right to exist — vociferously and, in slogans, explicitly. The SP, addressing the demonstrators, does not argue for its political position on Israel’s right to exist!

Therefore the two passing references to “Israel” — “independent workers organisations in Israel and Palestine”, “The Israeli working class could potentially develop into a powerful and decisive force against the Israeli ruling class” — are ambivalent too. Acknowledging that Israel exists — and calling it Israel rather than some such term as “the Zionist entity”, as many demonstrators would — does not necessarily mean, and (to the point) for many or most demonstrators certainly did not amount to, an assertion that it has a right to continue existing.

To have any political meaning on the demonstrations, that assertion would have to be solid, underlined, and argued for.

The SP’s political tendency has a very long history of using “socialism now” — meaning nationalisation of the economy — as a platitude to substitute for specific policies. For the SWP “build the revolutionary party” (i.e. “build the SWP”) is frequently a substitute for specific revolutionary policies; for the SP, “socialism is the only answer” does the same job.

So much for the “front” of the leaflet. The small print on the other side tends heavily towards demagogic exploitation of and pandering to the raw feelings and political assumptions of the demonstrators. The poison is in the mixing of proper humanitarian outrage with political accommodation to the Islamic chauvinists.

The leaflet asks: “Why is Israel carrying out this slaughter?”. The writer rejects the idea that the Hamas rockets could be even a subordinate part of the causes of the war.

“The Israeli ruling class do not care about the Jewish working class inhabitants of the towns bordering Gaza...”

Of course the Israeli ruling class don’t mind Jewish workers being killed by, or living in fear of, Hamas rockets! What do you think they are — people very conscious of Jewish history in the 20th century and for whom a common national identity would lead them to defend Jews, including workers, against Hamas?

National consciousness is not a category the SP recognises! For them, anything nationalist is always a disguise or outlet for some direct economic motive or interest.

For the SP, the Israeli ruling class merely “uses their plight” of Jewish workers under Hamas rockets “to justify this vicious war, which in reality is taking place for very different reasons”.

Which are? “The Israeli government feels humiliated by the war on Lebanon in 2006, and is beset by failure and scandal. Now they are trying to save themselves from defeat in next month’s elections by means of a wholesale slaughter of Palestinians”.

Most analysts, including those in *Solidarity*, list the felt need of the Israeli military to show that it can do better than it did in Lebanon in 2006, and the political jockeying between the Israeli parties, as elements in the decision now to go to full-scale war with Hamas. But the SP’s clumsy, dumb denial that the rockets were any part of the cause of Israel’s onslaught served, yet again, only to help the SP blend in with the dominant Arab and Islamic chauvinists on the demonstration. The chauvinists support the rocket attacks; the SP proclaims that they do not matter.

“The war also temporarily diverts attention away from the impact of the worldwide economic crisis as none of the main parties, which all support capitalism, have a solution that can guarantee jobs and living standards”. Again, the Hamas rockets were only the pretext. This is the “socialism”-as-placebo school of social medicine!

Under the crosshead, “World powers complicit”, the SP tells us that Bush backs Israel “to the hilt”. “Brown belatedly called for a ceasefire, but why trust this call when he leads a government involved in slaughter in Afghanistan?” As ever, the chief tool of SP analysis is the non-sequitur!

In fact, most of the governments deplored the Israeli onslaught; and one of Obama’s first acts as president has been to declare that there should be US negotiations with Iran, Hamas’s chief sponsor.

Again, the SP falsifies the real picture. Why? Because a crude, primary-colours comic-book picture of the world best matches their own crude comic-book-level version of politics in general and socialism in particular.

The SP’s concern with “slaughter in Afghanistan” comes strangely from people who for a decade, through the 1980s, avidly backed the Russian Stalinist colonial war in Afghanistan, which killed one in twelve of the people of Afghanistan and drove six million of its estimated 18 million population over the borders as refugees.

The next crosshead is “Arab league leaders”; the SP dismisses those leaders’ condemnation of “the massacre” because “they were complicit in Israel’s starving of Gaza’s inhabitants by Israel’s three year [in fact 18 months] siege”.

The SP makes the following statement of “socialist” principle: “Socialists fully defend the Palestinians’ right to armed resistance against the brutal occupation”. (If it were less “brutal”, it would be acceptable? And socialists would not defend the right of resistance?)

Yes, any Palestinians, whatever their politics, have a right to resist the occupation. But that right of resistance, and socialists’ automatic support for it, is here complicated by the fact that for Hamas the “occupied territories” include all of post-1948 Israel. Its objective is to destroy Israel; the rockets and the homicide bombings express that; and Hamas militarism cannot be disentangled from that fact. Moreover, the Hamas sub-state in Gaza ceased to be occupied in 2005.

Despite the statement of principle about supporting armed resistance, the SP does not actually support Hamas’s rockets. It rejects them. Why? “These attacks cannot defeat the Israeli state. On the contrary, they will make it easier for the Israeli government to win the support of the Israeli population for the war”.

The future tense is, I guess, designed to square this recognition of the rockets as a factor in winning Israeli popular support for the war with the leaflet’s earlier denial that the rockets were any part of the cause for the Israeli onslaught. Which means that their effect of winning mass Israeli support for the war is rendered mysterious.

While implicitly endorsing, or seeming to endorse, Hamas’s politics on Israel, the SP does not entirely neglect to criticise Hamas. What is wrong with Hamas politically?

“Hamas doesn’t have any viable strategy for defeating the occupation or for providing decent living standards for the Palestinian population, basing itself — as it does — on the continuation of capitalism with all the horrors that this system brings”.

The power of the SP leaders to pack vast quantities of political confusion, evasion, and muddle into one sentence is here, as always, impressive.

The SP does have a “viable strategy for ending the occupation”? Of course it has — “mass struggle”. What about the fact that the “mass struggle” of the second Intifada, after 2000, quickly led to the homicide bombing campaign in Israel, which had mass Palestinian support? Facts never banish belief in a cherished panacea for those who need it.

Alternatively, the trouble with Hamas is that they are not socialist, not anti-capitalist, and socialism and anti-capitalism would provide “a viable strategy”? In fact, the pauper’s-broth economic-reductionist “socialism” of the SP wouldn’t.

Unless the socialists, Palestinian or Israeli or Egyptian or whatever, have a “viable” democratic programme for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, their mere commitment to a collectivised democratic economic policy will be irrelevant to the burning issues of Middle East politics.

The Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution talked of socialism — and did more than talk — but they did not and could not dispense with the democratic programme on the national questions in the Russian empire. The SP broadsheet might usefully have tried to explain that to people on the demonstrations — as AWL did — but for that the SP leaders would have to understand it and have the nerve to proclaim it to a very hostile audience.

Instead, they demagogically merge as much as possible into the chauvinism of the demonstrations, and use the assertion that abstract “socialism” is the answer to evade the issues.

They preach “socialism” as a magic all-transforming blueprint. It is not that, but a programme for workers to

fight for, including its democratic elements on the national question.

Finally, under the crosshead, “Israeli working class”, the broadsheet says: “The Israeli working class could potentially develop into a powerful and decisive force against the Israeli ruling class, which must be defeated to solve both Israeli workers’ own aspirations and those of the Palestinians”.

Class divisions in Israel are widening. “There is tremendous anger towards the government, on economic issues and over deteriorating security. Israeli Jews will never be free of the constant cycles of violence as long as they are led by capitalist politicians who regularly have an interest in resorting to national conflict”.

So for the SP, the national conflict between Israel and the Arabs — where only two Middle-East Arab states recognise Israel’s right to exist, and political Islam, including Hamas, proclaims and acts on the goal of destroying Israel — is nothing but a cheap political ploy by Israeli politicians. The national question is not real. Socialists do not need to have answers to it. Only bread-and-butter day-to-day economic questions provide the reality and dynamic of politics.

The SP’s barebones economic-reductionist version is — so to speak — the only real reality. The rest is only ruling class machinations.

In general, the politics of the SP are blighted by what Lenin, combatting it during World War One against such as the then ultra-left Nikolai Bukharin, called “imperialist economism” — the idea that issues like national rights are irrelevant in a world of giant capitalist powers.

How would the broadsheet’s sudden invocation of the Israeli working class go down with the Arab and Islamic chauvinists whom the SP panders to in the rest of the leaflet? Even here the SP rats on its own politics! It talks of Israel and the Israeli working class, but it does not proclaim and argue for Israel’s right to go on existing.

Many of the Arab chauvinist and Islamic chauvinist demonstrators — to go by talking to some of them — say that they would allow Jewish workers and others to carry on living in a Palestinian state encompassing what is now Israel. They present themselves as inclusive, and Israel as exclusive and “racist”.

What makes this nonsense even if sincerely believed in is that the conquest of Israel necessary to the state’s destruction would have to kill large parts of the Jewish population and subdue the rest. A state of equal Jewish and Arab citizens cannot be created by conquering the Jewish nation and depriving it of self-determination.

The SP’s talk in this leaflet of the Israeli working class, in the absence of any argument that Israel has a right to go on existing, does not necessarily contradict those benign-seeming delusions with which some Arab or Islamic chauvinists and some kitsch-leftists comfort themselves.

If what the SP — accepting as it does Israel’s right to exist — did on the demonstrations is the alternative to what AWL did, then there is no alternative that is loyal to the basic politics other what AWL did.

In our situation it is necessary to spell out and emphasise your own politics and analysis, irrespective of the hostility you face, and no matter how “provocative” it seems to those who reject your ideas.

The socialist who is afraid to be unpopular, who cannot stand against the tide, or even the stream, is a poor little specimen indeed. When, for lack of political courage — and, at root, lack of sufficiently hard political conviction — the socialist trims, skilfully or as with the SP clumsily and stupidly, and tries to ingratiate himself with alien forces by, chameleon-like, adapting their colours, the result is self-effacement and political self-corruption. It has more than a little in it of political suicide.

For decades the SP predecessor, the Militant Tendency, adapted itself to the vague socialism that used to permeate the mass labour movement in Britain — for instance, divorcing the question of socialising (“nationalising”) the economy from the question of working-class state power, and so reducing socialism to mere “nationalisation”.

After a period of spectacular growth in the early 1980s, it eventually suffered a spectacular political collapse. The SP is part of the wreckage of that collapse. What the broadsheet shows is that its leaders have not learned from the experience.

The tendency has never been other than muddled, but long ago, before the collapse of European Stalinism and before the Blairite coup in the Labour Party, it was internally coherent muddle. Now Ted Grant’s patricidal orphans are only muddled — and shamefully unprincipled.

THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

Time for political accounting

BY CHARLIE SALMON*

When is a resignation not a resignation? Well, in politics of course. We know from bourgeois politics that disgraced politicians — even those exposed, bruised and publicly humiliated to the extent of Peter Mandelson — can make dramatic comebacks. A return to the limelight is made all the easier when the political differences between warring factions are paper thin. Easier still when those who've been sidelined are seasoned political operatives. Such is the case with the former leadership of Socialist Workers Party.

The resignations of John Rees and Lindsey German from the official leadership of the SWP may have dampened the debate burning inside of Britain's largest self-proclaimed revolutionary organisation but for Martin Smith's Central Committee majority, the current situation is a mere lull in a gathering storm.

The SWP can make things happen, or to borrow some commonplace party lingo "create facts". The full-time party machine is sufficiently large and has sufficient active support from the membership to generate, in fairly short order, organisations and campaign groups that extend beyond the immediate party membership. The SWP calls these organisations and groups "united fronts". We've already seen how the political composition of these "united fronts" demands a dramatic redefinition of the term as traditionally understood. What the SWP has built — groups such as 'Stop the War', 'Respect' and 'Unite Against Fascism' — are not "united fronts" but popular fronts: cross-class alliances where socialists voluntarily suppress their politics and suspend criticism of our class enemies. They built these alliances, or so they have claimed, to fulfil two essential tasks: (1) to create mass movements of opposition to war, racism and the attacks from New Labour and (2) to build a revolutionary organisation. They have done neither of these things.

The SWP's theory of party-building over the past decade has revolved around creating a series of steps through which those on the correct political trajectory travel before finally joining the party.

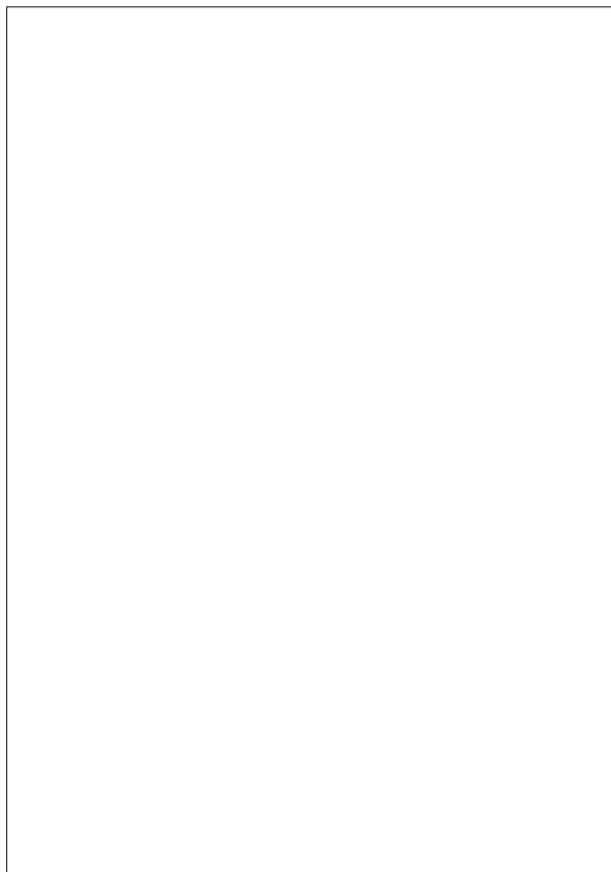
Take 'Stop the War' as an example: the SWP branch calls a 'Stop the War' meeting, they sell the paper to someone and ask them to an organising meeting. At the organising meeting they sell them another paper and invite them to an SWP public meeting. At the public meeting they sell them another paper and perhaps a copy of the party magazine, *Socialist Review*, and ask them to come to 'Marxism' — the SWP's annual summer event. At 'Marxism' they buy a few books and a subscription to the *International Socialism* journal. By this time they're probably ready to answer in the affirmative to a question already levelled at them a considerable number of times: "will you join the party?"

As a model for building a revolutionary party, there is nothing here that stands out as either wrong-headed or reactionary. The problem comes when you assume everyone's political compass is pointing in the same direction.

The SWP told itself and its critics that the "Muslim community" — traditional Labour voters, highly agitated about the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, now politically homeless, under attack from racists who viewed all Muslims as one homogenous political bloc determined to perpetrate terrorist acts — was, in the aftermath of 9/11, moving to the left. In making this claim they made the error of mirroring the assumptions of the racists who viewed "Muslims" as politically unified and borrowed from Tony Blair — or perhaps it was the other way around — the idea that those who claimed to "speak for Muslims" did just that.

These errors of assumption were compounded by several errors of cognition, namely the idea that it was possible to persuade Muslims, via the conduit of self-anointed 'Muslim leaders' — some like the Muslim

* Part one of this article can be found at: www.workersliberty.org/node/11830



Lindsey German

Association of Britain clerical-fascist at their core, others run-of-the-mill communal reactionaries — to adopt a socialist agenda. The SWP forged the Stop the War Coalition not on class-lines but by appealing to communalism.

For some critics of the SWP's "united front" strategy, there is another problem, not necessarily connected to the political character of one particular group. A direct transposition of the classic examples of united front work — from the Comintern's *Theses On Tactics* or from Trotsky's writings on anti-fascism — would suggest that a united front that is anything other than a tactical proposition for unity from revolutionaries to a mass, reformist organisation is out of the question. Of course, such a reading would isolate revolutionaries from genuine joint work and from taking the initiative to build mass mobilisations on countless issues. It would reduce the organised left to paranoiac posturing of Gerry Healey's Workers Revolutionary Party who refused to involve itself with the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the late 60s because, amongst other equally silly reasons, the VSC was not a "proper" united front.

The issue with the SWP's "united fronts" — however big or small — is squarely a matter of politics but the debate inside of the party has hardly touched on these fundamental issues. The breakdown of the relationship between the SWP, George Galloway, the Islamists and small businessmen in 'Respect' cannot be explained in its entirety by John Rees' lack of accountability or his willingness to accept money from dodgy sources.

Lindsey German comes closest — in a shamefully clumsy way it must be said — to pinpointing the problem when she describes how socialists, particularly women, were barred from selection as electoral candidates by a communal block inside of "Respect". She claims that if more "white socialists" — why socialists have to be "white" is a mystery — had been selected as candidates, then the party would have had more influence inside of "Respect" and the crisis would have never developed. German's analysis suffers to a large degree from the empiricism inherent in the SWP's theoretical method, "apparatus Marxism".

German's post facto analysis remains locked into ideas common to both sides in the SWP's dispute, that is: "we were fundamentally correct". Correct to ditch class politics, correct in our patronising and reactionary assumptions about the 'Muslim Community',

correct to lash ourselves to George Galloway — that self-serving champion of reactionary regimes the world over — correct to assume that the SWP would grow in these circumstances. Where German comes close to the truth, the new leadership has reduced the crisis to a matter of personal accounting.

THE CRISIS TO COME

Only the most slavishly loyal or ignorant SWP member (there are substantial numbers of both, it must be said) could convince themselves that the most significant dispute to hit the organisation for thirty years is over or that the political problems exposed in the recent months have been accounted for. A quick survey of the response to Israel's brutal attack on Gaza must confirm as much.

Who called a succession of rallies, pickets and national demonstrations in response to Israel's attacks? Which three former members of the SWP central committee were the only leading party figures — along with only a handful of SWP members — to attend the first of these demonstrations? Who, in fact, runs the Stop the War national office and who maintains ultimate control of this valuable political asset? John, Lindsey and their friend Chris (Nineham) of course.

What was the overwhelming character of these demonstrations? With whom did the slogans and placards originate? What was the political flavour of the rally speeches? What organisations co-sponsored the demonstrations and where did SWP members run to book and fill coaches the length and breadth of the country? Working class organisations, trade unions, socialist and campaign groups ... no. At least one of the demonstrations was overwhelmingly clerical-fascist in content and very few trade union banners were to be seen on the streets of London or anywhere else. These demonstrations were an almost identical re-run of those in the wake of 9/11.

Neither side in the crisis can tolerate the organisational situation for long. Rees and company will use Stop the War as a platform for political rehabilitation, as a means to pressurise the new leadership or to build a new base for themselves. Martin Smith and the Central Committee cannot allow them use StW in this way and, by its very nature, cannot allow such a large party front to go unchecked, beyond immediate day-to-day control. This situation must come to the crunch some time soon.

The repetition of the slide into communalism and accommodation to communalism demonstrates that no real political changes have been made. That — whatever the hedging and moderately phrased self-criticism from leading party figure — the SWP's preferred method of party building will remain not involvement in united front work but the creation of popular fronts.

The SWP cannot have it both ways. Party leaders cannot perform — however much they might try — the same trick as the light particle. On paper they have hedged their bets, finessed their arguments and attempted to cloud the politics. In the real world — the day-to-day of political work — they cannot pass through two slits at the same time. SWP members should demand real political accounting at the recall conference later this year and fight for class politics against the popular frontism of the past decade.

The SWP, some fundamental questions

A collection of 23 articles by members of AWL or its predecessor organisations on some basic questions of SWP theory, history, politics and people.
www.workersliberty.org/node/11574

Palestine solidarity

For two states and workers' unity!

BY SACHA ISMAIL

In the last issue of *Solidarity*, we called for a campaign to make solidarity with the Palestinians on a rational, internationalist basis, fighting for a two-state settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and making solidarity with working-class and democratic forces against political Islam as well as the Israeli ruling class. (See www.workersliberty.org/node/11824.)

We want a rank-and-file committee of those committed to two states, peace and workers' unity across the borders.

Such a movement could provide a pole of attraction for all those who rightly identify with the Palestinians but are alarmed by the Arab and Islamic chauvinist politics endorsed by the leaders of the Palestine solidarity movement.

In the coming weeks and months, Workers' Liberty will be pursuing discussion and joint work with others in pursuit of this goal. As a contribution towards it, we have produced a joint statement with the Worker-communist Party of Iraq. Please add your or your organisation's name and circulate it as widely as possible.

STATEMENT

As internationalists, socialists and secularists, we opposed the Israeli offen-

sive in Gaza and oppose Israel's continuing oppression of the Palestinians.

We call for:

- Israel to stop its war on the Palestinians and withdraw immediately from Gaza and the West Bank;
- Israel to withdraw to the 1967 borders and concede a genuinely sovereign, independent Palestine state in contiguous territory — a Palestinian state alongside Israel, with the same rights as Israel, with full equality for minorities on both sides.

We believe that the working class and internationalist socialists in Israel and in the Arab countries should advocate peace and working-class unity across all the divides, on the basis of Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and a two-state settlement.

We advocate such a settlement as an important step in resolving the Israel-Palestinian conflict and removing a major obstacle to the working-class struggle for socialism in the Middle East.

The working class must oppose and fight both the Israeli chauvinists and religious-nationalist parties on one side, and political Islam and the Arab and Islamic chauvinists on the other.

- To sign or for more information email brent@workersliberty.org

General strike in France as socialists found new party

BY VICKI MORRIS

On Thursday 29 January, all of France's main trade unions will participate in a general strike. The strike is also backed by the ('social-liberal' opposition) Socialist Party and has the overwhelming support of the public, according to polls.

The large trade unions are partly responding to pressure from smaller left-wing unions, in the run-up to elections in workplaces in March that will determine which unions represent the workers. The Socialist Party has just elected a new leader, Martine Aubry — she won narrowly against Ségolène Royal — after a period of internal turmoil following Royal's failure against Nicolas Sarkozy in the 2007 presidential election.

The strike will involve a vast range of social actors and is a protest about a number of issues, including:

- Dissatisfaction with Sarkozy's response to the economic crisis
- A challenge to anti-union laws recently introduced to guarantee a minimum level of public services during strikes
- Continued anger among high school students at education "reform" plans, which they have succeeded in delaying through sit-ins and protests
- Rising unemployment, set to reach 10% by 2010.

The strike will reach beyond the public sector which is the usual bedrock of protest; a *Guardian* article (27 January) reports:

"It's very rare for our bank workers to join in this kind of strike action," said Lionel Manchin, of the SNIACAM independent union at the bank Credit Agricole. "This is about protecting jobs and protecting our purchasing power. The bosses have been well protected with their salaries, it's now time to protect the workers."

The strike takes places a few days before the launch of the New Anti-capitalist Party (soon, hopefully, to settle on a new name) on 6-8 February. The new party will be formed by the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, which is dissolving itself, by some other small groups and by individuals persuaded during the recent period of social unrest to join the new party. Supporters of the AWL will attend the founding congress.

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