

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all



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OCCUPY!

Dundee workers show the way to fight factory closures

BY DALE STREET

As *Solidarity* goes to press in mid-March, the occupation at the Prisme Packaging factory in Dundee is about to enter its second week. Its slogan: "Oor Workers. Yoor Workers. A'Body's Workers. Support the Fight for Rights."



Tens of thousands of jobs are being axed across a vast range of industries. Now one brave group of workers has given a lead to all the rest of us.

Rather than pleading, and rather than submitting resignedly, they fought back. They seized control of the equipment and stocks which the bosses shutting down the factory might have wanted to sell off, and made the workplace into a centre of defiance.

The Prisme workers' battle echoes that of Republic Windows in Chicago, USA, in December 2008.

The Prisme occupation began on Wednesday 4 March, after the twelve-strong workforce had been handed letters telling them that the company was ceasing to trade with immediate effect, and that they were therefore being sacked without notice.

The letters, which were accompanied by the workers' P45s, acknowledged that the workers were due back pay, pay owed in lieu of Annual Leave, pay in lieu of notice, and redundancy pay. But, the letters continued:

"We regret that we cannot make this payment to you and we cannot foresee that there will be circumstances in which we could make this payment to you in the future."

The same thing had happened at Republic Windows. By occupying their factory, the Republic Windows won the money they were owed. Not only that: it looks like they have won what at first they did not even dare demand, the reopening of the factory (under a new owner).

The Prisme workers, too, refused to accept that their employer had any right to dismiss them without notice and without paying the money owed. They immediately launched their occupation.

It was clear that the company, which manufactures cardboard boxes, had lost its biggest customer (the Edrington Distillers whiskey company) just two days earlier. But what had been going on behind the scenes at directors' level was a lot less clear.

The Managing Director had announced his resignation just two days before the dismissal of the workforce. The director who sacked the workforce had been appointed only the preceding month.

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AMNESTY FOR MIGRANTS?

A flipside of reaction?

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

A debate over an amnesty or regularisation for so-called “illegal immigrants” has restarted with the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, pushing hard for the idea (in the BBC’s *Panorama* programme on 9 March for instance).

Fortunately Johnson’s arguments for amnesty (which are not in line with Tory policy) may help the labour movement get clarity on this issue, as they expose what “amnesty” can mean in practice. Johnson wants amnesty to complement the drive against “illegal immigrants” (on which there is cross-party agreement).

The current immigration crackdown was begun long before the economic crisis began, but it now assumes a heightened political importance. The crackdown has three broad fronts:

- policing workplaces where migrant workers without papers might be employed;
- policing services which migrant workers and asylum seekers might try to access;

- picking up and deporting “failed asylum seekers”, that is refugees who have failed to comply with the arbitrary and inconsistently applied criteria for asylum.

Johnson believes that, with an estimated 750,000 “illegal” economic migrants and “failed” asylum seekers in Britain, the success of the crackdown — crucially the ability (financially and politically) of the government to deport so many people — has limits. Better, stresses Johnson, to let “illegal immigrants” stay. Of course he doesn’t want people who are unable to work or lack work skills useful to capitalism to stay.

But the government and its immigration minister Phil Woolas reject the idea of amnesty, thinking it will encourage more economic migrants. It’s also not in line with the increasingly reactionary tone of government. Phil Woolas manages to combine “stop them coming over here taking our jobs” with “end lazy job-shy benefit scrounging” (backing the Welfare Reform which threatens vulnerable jobless people with benefit cuts). “We need a tougher immigration policy,” says Woolas, “and we need to stop seeing it as

a dilemma. It’s not. It’s easy. I’m going to do my best to help the British back to work. The message to them is, if you want less immigration you’re going to have to respond with helping us get everyone working who can.”

We need to see the argument in favour of amnesty in its proper context. For Johnson, who cannot ignore the reality of migrant work in London, it is a matter of making the ruling class crackdown on immigration work more rational and more effective.

We need to confront these arguments and argue for our alternative; a crackdown on immigrants will not solve the economic crisis. Migrant workers have the right to come here, refugees need refuge and should also have the right to work. Equal and full rights for all workers from day one of any job.

- **The left wing Latin American Coordination group will be hosting a debate on the issue of amnesty soon. See the Campaign Against Immigration Controls website: <http://caic.org.uk>**

- **For jobs, fight the bosses, not other workers: page 6.**

NEW LABOUR

The new crony party

BY CATH FLETCHER

The conviction of David Mills, estranged husband of New Labour minister Tessa Jowell, for taking bribes is yet more evidence of the party’s growing links to the super-rich.

Mills, a lawyer, advised the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on offshore tax avoidance schemes. His case came to prominence because it was claimed that he’d used a bribe received from Berlusconi to pay off the mortgage on a house he shared with Jowell. Last month Mills was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in jail for accepting a bribe of \$600,000 in return for not revealing details of Berlusconi’s offshore companies in two trials during the late 90s. Berlusconi had also been charged over the affair, but after his latest election victory legislated to give himself immunity from prosecution.

It is unlikely that Mills will go to jail. He denies the charges and says he will appeal. Under the Italian system, defendants — unless they pose a threat to the public — are not imprisoned until all stages of the appeal process are exhausted. In practice, this means that those who can afford it can get their lawyers to drag out proceedings until seven-and-a-half years have passed and the case is deemed to be out of time. Berlusconi has benefited from this “statute of limitations” on a series of occasions: when accused of bribing judges during a publishing take-over, of false accounting related to a football transfer and on three counts of bribing the financial police.

Like Peter Mandelson’s little chat on board Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska’s yacht, the Mills affair illustrates the intimate connections between people at the top of the Labour party and the super-rich players of international capitalism. For today’s Labour party, it doesn’t matter that Berlusconi’s been involved in 2,500 legal hearings over the course of his career and exploited his parliamentary majority to place himself above the law, or that Deripaska’s wealth comes largely from plundering the oil and mineral wealth of the ex-Soviet Union in the privatisations of the 90s. Cronyism, tax-avoidance and corruption are rapidly becoming normal in the world of New Labour.

BLACKLISTING

Fight trouble with troublemaking!

BY DARREN BEDFORD

Even in periods of low-levels of class struggle, bosses do not neglect their basic techniques for making sure their workforces are as compliant and trouble-free as possible. The history of blacklisting in Cold War-era America — where lists of suspected (Stalinist) communists, Trotskyists, trade union militants and other dissidents were compiled to keep troublemakers out of certain jobs — is well-known; it seems that its spirit is alive and well in modern-day Britain.

A story that broke first in the *Guardian* exposed several construction industry giants, including Laing O’Rourke, Sir Robert McAlpine and Balfour Beatty, as having used private investigators to purchase secret information (including information on trade union activity) about potential employees for years.

The commissioner now investigating the scandals reports viewing documents marked with comments such as “communist party”, “ex-shop steward, definite problems, no go”, “do not touch”, “orchestrated strike action” and “lazy and a trouble-stirrer”.

Scandously this type of activity is not illegal. In 1999, the government retreated from passing a law that would’ve banned it on the spurious basis that there was no hard evidence blacklisting was taking place.

The timing of the recent revelations is pertinent; the construction industry wildcat strikes have shown that workers in that sector are still prepared to take militant action. Their bosses, it seems, have known this for some time and have been working against such threats.

The acknowledged existence of blacklisting blows out of the water the widely

held view — including among much of the labour movement bureaucracy — that class struggle is a thing of the past and that antagonisms between workers and bosses can be arbitrated out of existence. If construction industry bosses are prepared to pay good money in order to avoid hiring agitators and activists, then they must still believe that class struggle exists. Blacklisting troublesome workers is one of *their* ways of fighting the class struggle from their, bosses, point of view.

Although blacklisting may shock those whose political point-of-departure is middle-class liberalism, it is old news for working-class activists. Anyone who has been involved in any serious industrial struggle will have experienced firsthand how bosses cook up half-baked reasons and technicalities to dismiss, or refuse to hire, workers they see as potential threats.

Members of the RMT, a union which in contrast to others does regularly take up disputes and industrial action in defence of its members, routinely face victimisation and dismissal on the basis of their trade union activities. But the experience of the RMT also proves that blacklisting can only be resisted by wielding union strength.

In February 2009, RMT activist Derrick Marr was awarded “interim relief” — effectively a continuation of his contract — after his employers, National Express East Anglia, sacked him on a medical technicality. In October 2008, Andy Littlechild’s job was saved after his workmates threatened strike action.

These struggles prove that the only effective response to bosses trying to undermine or avoid the problem of workers’ organisation is to make every workplace a threat and every worker a troublemaker!

ROYAL MAIL

Stop the sell-off!

From the back page

Unfortunately, CWU leaders are fumbling too. In 2007 the leadership of the CWU postal section chose a battle with Royal Mail bosses over pay and restructuring, seeing it not just as a routine skirmish but as a showdown over the future of the industry. When the Royal Mail bosses and the Government responded with a harder line than the CWU postal leaders expected, they crumpled, let the action dribble away, and eventually negotiated a very mediocre deal.

The knock-on effect from that setback seems to have weighed heavily in the CWU leaders’ decision before Christmas to call off a planned strike over Mail Centre closures.

Since the Government announced its plans to part-privatise Royal Mail last October and November, the CWU has been slow to react. Even on the level of briefing and prodding anti-privatisation Labour MPs, it did not really get going until recent weeks. Before then it left much of the political side to the soft-Blairite lobby group Compass.

The union has now called a national demonstration against the privatisation, for Saturday 14 March, but it is in Wolverhampton, which will inevitably mean lower attendance and publicity than a demonstration in London. (Assemble 11.30 at the corner of Greencroft and Arthur Streets).

Some branches are campaigning, and there is talk in the union of industrial action over 16,000 threatened job cuts, but so far there is nothing like the level of mobilisation of 1996. There is still some time to turn this around, but not much.

25 YEARS SINCE THE MINERS' STRIKE

Our glory and our shame

The year-long miners' strike, which started 25 years ago, was one of the most glorious events in working class history. It was also one of the most shameful.

The glory lay with the miners who fought the Thatcher Tory government over its policies in the nationalised coal industry and in British society as a whole.

The shame lay with the wretched trade union leaders who left the miners to fight alone and with the leaders of the Labour Party who refused to back them.

The miners could have won. With the support of other trade unions they could have beaten Thatcher and driven her from office, as her predecessor as Tory Prime Minister, Edward Heath, had been beaten and driven from office in 1974.

If the miners had won, the whole labour movement would have won and put an end to the rampant Tory war on the working class and the labour movement that they had waged relentlessly since Thatcher won power in May 1979.

And we could have won!

At a number of turning points in that year-long social war, the miners came close to winning.

The pit deputies (overseers) were at one point about to come out on strike. Instead they let themselves be bought off at the last minute. A strike by the deputies would have stopped every pit in the country, making it impossible for the scab Nottinghamshire miners to go on working, as they did all through the bitter fight which the rest of Britain's miners were waging.

Nottinghamshire miners thought that their jobs were secure no matter what happened to the rest of Britain's miners. As it turned out they were wrong even about that.

Dock workers struck briefly in July and in August-September; if they had stayed out, it might have tipped the scale in the industrial war against the Tories.

The entire Liverpool labour movement, led by people calling themselves "Trotskyists" — *Militant*, now the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal — came to the very edge of an outright confrontation with the government, then stepped back. That too would have added weight on the miners' side, perhaps made the difference between defeat and victory.

The consequences of that defeat still weigh heavily on us, a generation later. What happened?

The leaders of the Liverpool labour movement backed off, did a short-term deal with the Tories and left the miners to fight on alone. The deal bought them one year's delay in a showdown with the government. A year later, the miners beaten, the government was ready to take on Liverpool and they did.

Then the Labour leadership, Neil Kinnock and his coterie, following in the wake of the Tories like political jackals, drove the "Trotskyists" out of their positions in the Liverpool labour movement.

Not all the shame of the miners' defeat, and the defeat of the labour movement with them, can be laid at the door of the trade union leaders and Neil Kinnock.

The miners' strike was, indeed, as its opponents said and say still, an attempt to smash the Thatcher government. It had to be either that or a crushing long-term defeat for the whole working class.

The Tories had tremendous advantages and they used them with merciless vigour. Soon after they came to power they had put laws on the statute books outlawing solidarity strikes.

Though Thatcher prattled about lessening state interference in people's lives, their government shamelessly used their control of the state to wage deliberate class war.

Their police created something not far from police-state conditions in the coal fields. They occupied mining villages, stopped the free movement on the roads of miners and others. They used as much force as was

The Tories tried to starve the miners' families, taking away benefits (top). They sent their police into pitched battles with the miners, at Orgreave coking depot and elsewhere (bottom).

necessary to quell the miners.

Pitched battles were fought between strikers and police, at Orgreave coking depot for example. Battles on this scale between workers and the state had not been seen for many decades in Britain.

It was naked class war, and the government behaved like people at war. So did the miners' leaders, in the first place Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield.

The whole of official society rallied to the Tories, including the leaders of the official Labour Party, then led by the "soft-left" around Neil Kinnock, engaging in weaseling double-talk about "violence" and "democracy" to hide what they were doing.

The rank and file of the Labour Party, in contrast, backed the miners fullheartedly,

The mass circulation press through its weight behind the government. They turned themselves into shameless propaganda sheets.

They campaigned relentlessly against violence. Whose violence? That of the police, of which miners and often their families were victims? No! Miners' violence.

They raged against those "attacking democracy". Not against the government whose police deprived miners of the right of free movement about the country and the right not to have police batons smashing against their heads — but against the miners who dared to challenge the government's right to do what it liked in the coal industry and to its workforce.

Within a few years of the defeat of the miners the coal industry had been more or less destroyed. The Nottinghamshire miners who had been praised to the skies by the government when they were helping it defeat the other miners got as little mercy from the Tories as the other workers of the industry. Too late they learned that they had been fools to believe the propaganda that they were an honoured part of Thatcher's Tory nation.

Arthur Scargill, who led the strike, has already gone down in the history of the labour movement as the heroic dauntless leader of a great and prolonged working-class revolt. He belongs with labour movement figures of the past such as Jim Larkin, A J Cook and James Connolly. Nothing can take that from him, or retrospectively diminish his role at the head of the militant labour movement confronting Thatcherism in a belated all-out battle.

Scargill was, and is, a man of contradictions. A privileged and over-paid union bureaucrat, chauffeured around in a Jaguar car, he was nonetheless also a would-be revolutionary syndicalist, who looked to and fostered militant industrial action to beat down the enemies of the miners and of the working class.

An organiser of elemental working class revolt in Britain, Scargill was also a political Stalinist who called the ruling Stalinist bureaucrats in East Europe and Russia "comrades" — including those of them who ran the anti-working class police-state pseudo-unions.

In the middle of the strike he tried to set up an international trade union federation that would link the miners' union with the police state unions of the Stalinist states, where striking workers were shot down or jailed (and whose governments, in the case of Poland, sent scab coal to Britain during the 1984-5 strike).

Scargill was a unteachable old-fashioned romantic Stalinist, who, nonetheless, fought the Tories and roused-up hundreds of thousands of workers to fight them.

The glory in working class history that attaches to Scargill's name is in part of course only the reflected glory of the working class fighters he led. So is the lustre that attaches to the names of all working class and plebeian heroes. Yet a substantial part of it is entirely his own.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the strike, when Scargill is long retired, is an occasion on which that should be said and remembered.

Faced with the present tremendous crisis of capitalism workers will have to defend themselves. In doing that they will rediscover the legacy of working-class militancy and solidarity, of which the miners' strike is such a great, indeed, magnificent example.

It is the job of socialists, who must be the "memory of the class", to bring awareness of that history, and of the fight the miners and their families waged in 1984-5, to working people today.

• **The Great Miners' Strike 1984-5: twelve months that shook Britain: the story of the strike**
www.workersliberty.org/node/10382

IN BRIEF

ENGINEERING CONSTRUCTION: Workers demonstrated outside the Staythorpe power station construction site, in Nottinghamshire, again on Wednesday 11 March. But Unite union officials seem to be quietly encouraging a winding-down of the action.

Most of the workers currently on the site are Spanish workers, reportedly non-union and walled off from access by trade unionists, employed by two Spanish sub-contractors. The demonstrations are for labour for future phases of the contract to be hired locally under the national union agreement for engineering construction.

The numbers on the demonstrations — workers from other engineering construction sites, and unemployed workers — have been dwindling. There were about 100 on 11 March.

The union officials' focus is on getting better British legislation to implement the EU Posted Workers' Directive. This is at best a long-term prospect, one which demonstrations at work sites can have little impact on, and one which may well have no serious effect on the problem of subcontracting being used in the industry to undermine the union agreement, union representation, and union strength.

Some activists have been calling for a national demonstration in London on the issues around sub-contracting. A national meeting of shop stewards has however decided against setting a date any time soon for such a march. Union officials say they have two negotiating sessions with the engineering construction employers' organisation on 11 March and 8 April, and campaign plans should be rediscussed after that.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Barnet council in north London is one of many councils looking to make savings by sharing "back-office" functions, such as IT, telephony, stationery, with other local organisations, in so-called "pan public sector" alliances. They do this by going in together on a contract to achieve economies of scale. But the ambitions go wider: some councils are looking at contracting out large parts of public services through various means including joint-venture companies. Essex County Council has offered a contract worth £5.4 billion over eight years to deliver services — without consulting either councillors or residents.

The various instruments envisaged in such privatisations are pet schemes of local government executives and big consultancy bodies, like British Telecom's "Government Innovation Centre" which schmoozes and "advises" council chief execs and council leaders, with a view to one day getting lucrative contracts.

Barnet Council embarked last year on a very ambitious privatisation programme, which it calls "Future Shape". It was driven by Tory council leader Mike Freer, and senior secondees from BT, such as Max Wide. Pricewaterhouse Coopers have had lucrative consultancy fees from the work done so far.

The council unions embarked on a campaign to inform staff and residents about "Future Shape" which has been very successful, in large part because of the council's own complacency: they have simply not thought it important to engage the community. In November a public meeting, addressed by the unions' own "consultant" Dexter Whitfield of the European Strategic Services Unit, drew 300, and a rally outside the Council Cabinet in December that voted to go forward with Future Shape attracted 400 people.

CIVIL SERVICE

Vote John Moloney for PCS Deputy General Secretary

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

The coming election for Deputy General Secretary of the civil service union PCS will be a choice between the old centre-right of the union and a candidate, AWL member John Moloney, backed by the Independent Left.

The PCS union "machine", though on paper left wing — dominated by the Socialist Party — will be backing the centre-right candidate, Hugh Lanning.

Lanning was the right-wing candidate defeated by left-winger Mark Serwotka in PCS's 2000 general election campaign. Since then he has got the deputy general secretary job — he is running for re-election — and worked closely with the union machine. The SP-led Left Unity faction have formed a long-term coalition — the "Democracy Alliance" — with the old centre-right, the "PCS Democrats".

The Democracy Alliance claims an uninterrupted series of triumphs for PCS.

Future Shape is now running behind schedule and there are signs that the council has been taken aback by the strength of feeling against it; nonetheless, the campaign against it is continuing. The council unions have set up workgroups to shadow those set up by the council, to compensate for the fact that unions and residents have no formal representation in the council's deliberation process.

A residents' campaign committee was formed out of a public meeting last week which drew 70 vociferous campaigners from across Barnet. Residents are further angered by proposed council cuts, that will axe a welfare rights unit that advises the most vulnerable, and all the wardens from elderly sheltered housing schemes in the borough. Meanwhile, council leader Mike Freer faces accusations of incompetence in his handling of the Icelandic bank deposits issue where Barnet has lost as much as £27.4 million.

UNIONS AND CLIMATE CHANGE: Workers' Climate Action were invited to speak at the RMT young members' conference on 1 March. Bob Sutton went to made the case that young rail and maritime workers are in a position to make a massive difference on the issue of ecological damage both as an industrially strong and organised section of the working class but also as having a grip on the future of what is one of the key questions in any programme of transition to a low carbon economy, that of transport.

The conference responded well, especially to the idea that action on environmental issues was not counterposed to their activity as trade unionists. Their power to act is as working class activists in solidarity on the basis of an understanding that the exploitation faced by workers and degradation of the planet's ecology are driven by the same logic of rampant capitalist accumulation at any cost.

WCA also took part in this year's Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union conference on 7 March. WCA activists held a joint stall with the Camp for Climate Action and attended various workshops on coal, aviation and

John Moloney argues differently.

An Independent Left leaflet backing John Moloney points out:

"2008 saw a national leadership pulling out of the national pay campaign as fast as it could while below-inflation pay settlements were still being imposed across the civil service. It really is time for a change..."

"The national leadership of PCS sees a national pay agreement where Treasury see below RPI pay awards, the continuation of low and performance related pay, and 200 civil service bargaining units..."

"The so-called national pay agreement did not put one penny in the pocket of a single member in 2008, and the national leadership has not gained one material pay benefit in all their years of running the union. The real meaning of the 'national pay agreement' is the leadership's abandonment of the fight for decent pay, cost-of-living awards, and national pay. It has passed the pay bur-

den back to the members isolated in their individual bargaining units..."

In 2005 John Moloney was the only member of the PCS National Executive to vote against the deal which cut pension provision for all future civil service workers in return for an alleged guarantee to keep it for existing workers.

Now, the Independent Left leaflet points out: "It seems clear that after the next general election there will be an attack on our pensions. Obviously PCS does not have the "pensions guarantee" claimed for it by the Executive. As DGS John Moloney will agitate for a campaign to defend public sector pensions — not wait until the attack is upon us".

John Moloney promises that if elected he will not accept more than £25,000 a year (Lanning is on £60,000) and will hand back the rest of the DGS salary to the union. He will tie any salary increases to the average increase received by lower pay grades in London.

Dundee workers show the way to fight

From front page

The preceding year the bulk of the company's shares had been transferred to a shell company, GO Automatics, set up by a local firm of chartered accountants — presumably in order to evade the company's legal liabilities in the event of a cessation of trading.

Whatever the precise details of the behind-the-scenes creative accountancy, it was all at the expense of the company's workforce, who were now meant to walk away empty-handed.

In fact, the dismissal of the workforce has triggered a high-profile public campaign. Prisme worker Matthew Duffield told *Solidarity*:

"When we began this occupation we said that we had two objectives.

"One was to get the money owed to us, and a clearer picture of why we had been dismissed. We now know that the company has not gone into administration or liquidation. It has ceased trading. The company is therefore not liable for the money owed to us, but the government is. We are confident that, with the assistance of free legal aid from a local law practice, we will get what we are owed.

"The other objective was to raise our plight before the public, the government, and the press, to let people know that there are laws in existence which allow companies to do this kind of thing and to

avoid liability. We think that we have shown that as well.

"In the longer term we are thinking about trying to set up a co-operative. But it's early days yet, and we are still looking into the figures."

In the meantime, the occupation is continuing and receiving growing support from local trade unions and the local left, as well as drawing in support from further afield as news of the occupation spreads.

Over £300 was collected at a meeting of CWU members addressed by Prisme workers on Saturday 7 March, and a collection was also held at the Scottish Labour conference being held in Dundee the same weekend.

The Prisme workers won that support by their initiative, by taking action. They were not even in a trade union.

The fact that a small group of non-unionised workers can achieve this kind of an impact underlines what could be achieved if the organised trade union movement began to offer serious resistance to job cuts.

against the cutbacks. Workers are angry that vast amounts of money have been squandered centrally on expensive privatisations, excessive use of private consultants and a disastrous IT project.

In South Yorks a joint union indicative (pre) ballot gave support for strike action against compulsory redundancies with over 90% in favour. The priority now is to build up support for an official ballot in the event that compulsory redundancies are proposed. A joint NAPO Unison campaign is urgently needed at a national level to mount a vigorous campaign against these cuts and for the probation service to be properly funded.

• Messages of support to: Prisme Occupation, Prisme Packaging, Tannadice Street, Dundee, DD3 7PT (01382 461462; 07970 875 455).

• Facebook group at: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=71987176437

THE WAR-REFUSERS

The other Israel

Following massive demonstrations and a wave of student occupations against Israel's war in Gaza, British activists have been hosting a speaker tour with Tamar Katz, one of the Shministim, Israeli high school students jailed for refusing to fight in the occupied Palestinian territories. The tour has included meetings in universities of up to 100 (at Nottingham University) and an International Women's Day meeting in London. She was interviewed for *Solidarity* by Sofia Lawrence.

How did you come to make the decision to refuse to fight in the IDF?

I was 16 when the second war in Lebanon began and this made me reconsider the prospect of fighting in the IDF after I graduated from school. My family were "ordinary" — not political, and we did not talk about these things at home. I wanted to find out more about the political situation and to think through my ideas. I began to work for an organisation which ran educational initiatives in working-class neighbourhoods. This was my first time in a politicised environment. Through it I met many left wing people. I moved into a collective house and began to get involved with a group called New Profile.

What is New Profile?

New Profile is an anti-militaristic feminist organisation. Its main goal or focus on making society less militaristic, and it also supports refusers and provides an environment in which people can consider the question of refusal. It is a loose network rather than a membership organisation, involving both women and men, pacifists and feminists.

What happened after that?

It helped me to re-think the assumption that I would join the army when I left school. I began to think that I might be a pacifist but had no clearer political agenda than that.

The turning point came when I visited the Occupied Territories along with an organisation called Breaking the Silence — ex-combatants who wanted to speak out about their experiences in the army, the violence they committed on the Palestinians as well as the trauma they now suffered as a result. I also spent time with a Palestinian family who told me about their experiences under occupation.

I visited Hebron. It is one of the worst

areas in the West Bank. The army are there to protect the settlers even though the Palestinians are now only a small minority (most of them have fled as a result of the abuse they faced from the settlers). The whole place felt like a ghost town. Shops were closed. People walking on the streets were all frightened. It was a real shock to a girl like me, who had grown up in Tel Aviv and had never visited the Occupied Territories before.

On my return to Israel I began to look at things differently. I went on more demonstrations, and saw more clearly how the IDF operated, how they treated both Palestinian and Israeli protesters. I looked at the soldiers and saw that they were the same age as me, that they could have been friends of mine or from my school. I realised that the important division was not between Palestinians or Israelis but between those who questioned and those who did not. I had begun to question, and had made a decision to refuse.

What does it mean in practice to refuse?

I decided that I would have to refuse on clear political grounds, rather than try to find another way to avoid military service (some people claim religious or personal reasons that would prevent them from joining the army.) This was a really scary decision to make. With some other people my age, I formed a group called Shministim, which simply means

Tamar (centre) with two other young refusers

"12th Graders", the age you are when you get called up. We sent out a call out to others at this stage in their life who had been thinking about refusing. 20 people came, and we began to realise that there were others who felt the same as us, about what was wrong and what was right. We decided that our group would have no wider political agenda than refusal — some of us were anarchists, others were pacifists, but we were all in agreement that the occupation was wrong.

What did you and the other Shministim aim to achieve?

We realised that we did not have much power, we were not leaders of any organisations, we just felt like kids. So we decided that the only power we had, that the strongest thing we could do, was to refuse. We wanted to publicise as much as possible what we were doing and we wanted to try to wake people up, to make them think. We didn't want people who heard about our refusal to think about us, but to make them re-consider the situation in Israel, to make them doubt and to make them question. To make them think that maybe our decision to refuse was not crazy, but that maybe the fact that we were standing behind our ideas was because we had something important to say.

Most of the mainstream press refused to publish our story. One article was published which attacked one of the

Shministim. But we did get one sympathetic article in *Yediot Aharonot*, the leading liberal national paper. This came out when we had already gone to prison for refusing, so it was very important for us to see it published.

Tell us about your imprisonment.

In the end nine of us refused — seven girls and two boys. Our recruiting date for the army was in September 2008. I went to the army base with some of the other Shministim and we were sentenced the minute we refused to put on our uniform or go to boot camp. We were imprisoned in the army base, along with other soldiers who had been imprisoned for different reasons — perhaps for desertion, or for drugs. Our days consisted mainly of doing drills or cleaning the base.

Most of the other prisoners were very religious. We spent a lot of time talking to them, trying to explain why we were refusing. Many prisoners were however already very anti-IDF because of the time they had spent in it and the trouble they had got into. The commanders were different — they took our refusal personally. They tried to split up the four refusers who were in the camp, and they targeted us for especially bad treatment.

I was released the first time after a few weeks on the expectation that I would agree to join up after this. When I refused again I was sent back to prison. This happened again for a third time, most of which I spent in isolation. By this time I preferred to be in isolation rather than have to face the commanders. In the end I was released on mental health grounds.

How do you feel about your decision to refuse now?

I'm glad I did it, and I have found that other Israelis will listen to my story, even if they disagree with me, and I hope this makes them think. There have been refusers before us, but this was the first time that a group of women refused. For women to refuse is the best way we can say that we are equal to men. The army is the most chauvinist place on earth. Challenging this chauvinism made me feel stronger. The male commanders were shocked that a woman stood up to them, that a woman said to them "No matter what you do I won't change my mind."

I don't regret anything about my decision to refuse now.

IRA diehards attempt new offensive

From back page

Adams and McGuinness have come out openly on the side of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and in effect of the British Army. That will stick in the throat of many of his erstwhile republican followers.

McGuinness has condemned his former comrades in words that leave no room for doubt on what the Adams-McGuinness group would do to them if they could. The killers says McGuinness are "traitors to the entire island of Ireland". "They have betrayed the political desires, hopes and

aspirations of people who live on this island. They don't deserve to be supported by anyone." He has said publicly that if he had information on the killers he wouldn't hesitate to pass it on to the police.

Many will know that McGuinness' words are as a description of what the IRA, led by McGuinness and Adams and others, did after the Sunningdale agreement of late 1973, which gave the Catholics everything the Provos would settle for 25 years later in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

They submitted the peoples to two decades of senseless war to win conditions they could have had without it.

Some will remember the words of Seamus Mallon, then leader of the constitutional nationalist SDLP, who said of the previous 20 years of Provo activity that the Good Friday Agreement was "Sunningdale for slow learners".

Gerry Adams has promised to fight the militarists in the Catholic areas. Sinn Fein will, he says, "go toe to toe" with them and slug it out. Only those armed with guns can go toe-to-toe with gunmen; one implication of what Adams has said is that the IRA, now officially disbanded, will resurrect itself...

With hardline Unionists already calling

for tougher action in response to the killing, Northern Ireland is at a dangerous crossroads.

The "Real IRA" and the "Continuity IRA" deserve no more support than the Provos did. We do not have to take McGuinness's advice and turn police informers, but no socialist should be so ignorant of the real Ireland and the real issues in Ireland as to support these political Neanderthals just because they have begun to shoot British soldiers.

These are murderously confused people. We must oppose what they are doing and condemn it.

NEW CRISIS MEASURES

What “quantitative easing” means

BY MARTIN THOMAS

The Bank of England’s move in early March to a new monetary tactic — “quantitative easing” — came alongside much economic-disaster news.

The banks “bailed out” so lavishly last year still need more bailing out. Lloyds TSB, which was supposed to be a “strong” bank capable of saving HBOS by buying it out with Government aid, turns out to be as much a basket case as any other.

In the USA, giants like Citigroup are in deep trouble, and conservative politicians talk about nationalisation.

World trade has shrunk very rapidly: the *Financial Times* reported on 8 March that “countries with trade data for January [2009] show on average a 31 per cent fall over January 2008”. Thirty-one per cent!

What does “quantitative easing” mean?

Technically, it is a simple matter. In our individual day-to-day dealings, it seems to us that the stock of money in the economy is a fixed quantity — if we gain money, it is because we have sold something, or received a payment or similar, from someone else who now has less money to exactly the same degree that we have more money. From the point of view of the economy as a whole, it is far from fixed.

Most money is not notes and coin. Probably you get your wages in the form of a bank credit rather than notes and coin, and convert the wages to notes and coin only bit by bit. In fact, most money is created by commercial banks, not central banks.

If you have £1000 credited to your bank account for your month’s wages, then the bank does not hold on to all of it. It lends out some of it, say £800. The person getting the £800 loan also does not keep the £800 in notes and coin. They put it into another bank account. Then most of it can be lent again... and so on.

The limit to this multiplication of money is the banks’ decision to keep some reserves, either because they are legally obliged to or out of business prudence.

If banks become more reluctant to lend (or individuals decide to keep more of their money in the form of ready cash, which is also happening), then the *total* of money in the economy shrinks. Many

people have less money, without any counterpart of someone else having more money. Actual money — as distinct from shakier “financial assets” — becomes scarce.

Usually central banks regulate the total of money in the economy by changing the official interest rate (“Bank Rate”) at which the central banks lends to commercial banks. If a series of other relationships are fairly stable — the relationship of other interest rates to “Bank Rate”, the willingness of the banks to lend, the speed at which households and firms spend their cash — then “Bank Rate” tweaking can more or less control both the total of money and the general movement of prices.

In the early 1980s, central banks in both Britain and the USA pushed their official interest rates sky-high in order to beat down inflation — smashing union organisation, driving less-competitive employers out of business, and running mass unemployment in the process.

Since then, over the last twenty years or so, it has become capitalist conventional wisdom that economies can be managed by fine-tuning interest rates to keep somewhere near a pre-set, moderate target for average price inflation, regulating financial markets, and leaving most other things to the supposed magic of global market mechanisms.

Now that conventional wisdom is shattered. In particular, “Bank Rate” is about as low as it can possibly go — 0.5% — and yet credit remains scarce. So the Bank of England is acting more directly to increase

the total of money in the economy, by buying financial assets from the commercial banks. (Doesn’t that mean that the Bank of England loses money to exactly the same degree that the commercial banks gain it? No, because pounds are just IOUs from the Bank of England. If the Bank of England holds an IOU to itself, that is not money).

The immediate effect is to increase the commercial banks’ account balances at the Bank of England. As and when the commercial banks draw on those balances, the Bank of England may have to print fresh notes to pay out. (Thus the description of “quantitative easing” as “printing money”).

So that is what it means technically. What will its economic impact be?

I don’t know. No-one knows. The Bank of England hopes it will ease the general cash famine, and so get lending and spending up again, but possibly it will

have not much effect of that sort.

Won’t it fuel inflation?

It may well do so, but probably with a delay (between 18 and 36 months seems the best estimate). The ultra-low interest rates of the Bank of England and other central banks, and the huge government support for commercial banks, are also likely to have an inflationary effect in the longer term.

For the last six months or so, central banks have been doing everything they previously described as destructive, stupid, and likely to wreck the economy by generating inflation!

Their current worry is *deflation* — seriously falling prices, which have a deadly effect on capitalist economies — and for now they see all worries about future inflation as very secondary. But it doesn’t follow that all their previous calculations were entirely wrong.

The conclusion for workers to draw is that we should beware of bosses telling us that we don’t need pay rises, because prices are stabilising or falling. In fact, food prices are *still* rising fast, and may continue to do so. And general price levels may be rising fast within a couple of years.

What is the ideological significance of the shift to “quantitative easing”?

Huge. It is another public admission that, as Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* put it when introducing a big FT series on “the future of capitalism”: “Another ideological god has failed. The assumptions that ruled policy and politics over three decades suddenly look... outdated...”

It depends on us, as socialists, to get serious alternative ideas heard in place of those failed assumptions.

MARCH ON 28 MARCH

Put workers first!

Thousands of people will march through London on Saturday 28 March ahead of the G20 summit on the global financial crisis. The sponsors of the march, who include the TUC, are raising the slogan “Put People First” We want to march in defence of workers, against the economic system that is putting hundreds of thousands out of work. Join with us to march in international solidarity with workers. Assemble 11am, Embankment

For jobs, fight the bosses, not other workers!

AN APPEAL BY SOCIALISTS AND TRADE UNIONISTS

As the recession brings attacks on jobs, wages and conditions, we are determined to fight back, and to support our fellow workers who do so, for example in the recent engineering construction walkouts.

We demand:

- Jobs for all workers
- Work or full pay
- Pay to be levelled up to the best rates
- Direct recruitment of labour by the companies or by principal contractors, rather than the use of subcontractors, wherever possible
- Union agreements to be enforced without exemptions for contractors
- A register of unemployed union

members which companies must recruit from.

- International cooperation between unions, so that trade unionists from one country can automatically be integrated into unions if they move to another country. Union resources to help migrant workers organise and integrate as equals into the trade-union movement.

- The repeal of the anti-union laws designed to prevent workers fighting back

- That employers “open the books” and give workers and our unions access to all information about finances and contracts

- The repeal of EU legal rulings that allow contractors to avoid giving workers rights in their host countries; workers’ unity across the EU to win EU-wide

guarantees of workers’ rights; action by the British government to guarantee such rights despite the EU rulings.

Workers should not pay for the bosses’ crisis in Britain or in Europe. If the British Government can advance £1,100 billion to save the banks, it can also take the energy and other industries into public ownership, under workers’ control, and with working hours cut with no loss of pay in order to create new jobs. It can step up, not cut, investment in “green” energy projects, thus creating thousands of socially useful jobs.

Capitalism is international. Workers’ only reliable weapon to defend ourselves is unity, across borders and across differences of origin. Otherwise the bosses will be able to play off one country’s workers against another’s, and workers of one origin against workers of another.

We therefore oppose the use of the slogan “British Jobs for British Workers”.

The slogan was picked up by the BNP and the far right to fuel hatred of foreign workers and immigrants. If it spreads, this slogan will become a weapon to divide workers, setting longer-settled workers against the maybe two million migrant workers who are a major part of today’s “British” working class. Only the bosses can gain from that.

The media and politicians have highlighted slogans such as “British Jobs for British Workers” for their own ends. We must not play into their hands.

Workers should direct our anger — and our demands — against the employers and government that attack us, not against fellow workers.

- To add your signature to this appeal, email unity.2009@yahoo.co.uk. or go to

PAKISTAN CRICKET MASSACRE

Why police were “too busy”

Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan, comments on the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team on 3 March.

The religious fanatics have targeted sports such as soccer and cricket, terming these evil sports smuggled in from the West. “It is promoting Western cultural norms, it must not be allowed”, was the justification of the Taliban to ban these sports when it governed Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.

The agenda of the “jihadi” terrorists is clearly not just to enforce what they consider to be an Islamic system, but to overrun and destabilise the state itself. Pakistanis have suffered under this agenda for many years.

This country, which has been under military rule for more than half its 67 years of existence, has paid a heavy price for the policies of military rulers that civilian governments have been unable to change.

These policies include cultivating “Islamic warriors” to fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s, supporting the Taliban in order to create “strategic depth” in Afghanistan (citing the threat of a hostile India on the eastern border), and using some of these elements to bleed India in the disputed region of Kashmir.

This will be a big blow to Pakistan’s

A victim’s funeral

aspirations to hosting the next World Cup in 2011.

I was shocked to hear top Lahore police officers saying that there was no security lapse. In fact, it could have been avoided with proper security measures.

One must see the incident within the context of the political and bureaucratic changes that took place over the last week.

Lahore’s top police officers were transferred and new people were brought in, mainly to suppress the planned pro-democracy “long march” by lawyers, due to begin on March 12.

Additionally, there has been resistance by Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) supporters to the toppling of the provincial government in Punjab.

Lahore’s top police officer, a loyalist of the People’s Party Pakistan (PPP), was just transferred to Lahore from Quetta, Baluchistan. His main priority was to target the lawyers and other political activists demanding an end to dictatorial measures.

A day before the incident, in a special meeting, the Punjab governor, police officers and top bureaucrats discussed how to stop the proposed lawyers’ march. According to media reports about this meeting, they decided on mass arrests.

In those same newspapers there was no hint of any discussion about security for the Sri Lanka team. They were too busy planning to stop opposition demonstrations and transferring their loyalists to key posts.

Since the Supreme Court decision against Sharif brothers from the PML-N and imposition of rule by the governor in Punjab a week ago, the media has been full of such reports.

I know the place where the attack occurred very well. From the footage, it seems that the terrorists were running freely and firing.

Just a few policemen on the Liberty roundabout would have noticed the presence of these terrorists. The security measures for the team were routine: a police van in front of the team’s bus, another in back and an ambulance. That was it.

Even the Punjab governor would have had more security. In that situation, the whole area is cordoned off.

One private channel journalist who watched the firing reported that the terrorists first attacked the police from the front. They even approached the injured police officer and showered him with more bullets.

According to the journalist, the team was saved by the quick action of the bus driver, not by the police. Had the driver proceeded to the cricket stadium, the terrorists would have inflicted more damage.

Instead he went in another direction, minimising the danger.

It seems clear that a serious security lapse occurred. The police were too busy with other things. The present Punjab government must accept the responsibility of the security lapse.

The horrific attack in Lahore on the Sri Lankan cricket team has shocked and saddened people here, already reeling from the suicide and other attacks that have become the norm.

Our condolences go to the families of those killed and our sympathies are with the Sri Lanka cricket team.

Ultimately, those who suffer the most after such incidents are ordinary people Pakistan, regardless of religion.

• Abridged from an article first published by Green Left Weekly
www.greenleft.org.au/2009/786/40462

SRI LANKA

Thousands of Tamils face death

By ROBIN SIVAPALAN

The Sri Lankan Army onslaught against the Tamils continues unabated with the indiscriminate shelling of civilians, including in the government declared safe zones. Human Rights Watch, in a report released on 20 February, estimated that 2,000 civilians had been killed and 5,000 injured since the rapid escalation of the war from the 10 December last year.

The Tamil Tigers have been driven back to a small pocket of land around 50 square kilometres. Anyone attempting to flee risks being shot by the Tigers, who are holding out for an international intervention that would allow them to keep control of some territory and population. The only such intervention on the cards is a US “humanitarian” deployment, perhaps backed up by India, with the Obama administration maintaining the stance of support for the elimination of Tigers making clearly minimal noises about human rights.

Some 37,000 northern Tamils who managed to escape are being forcibly detained in camps by the army, under terrible conditions with totally inadequate medical provision. People are being “disappeared”. In the Tiger controlled area, some 150,000 civilians are beginning to die of starvation and disease.

There doesn’t seem any immediate hope. President Rajapakse’s party was boosted by provincial elections in February, which he managed to turn

into a referendum on the war. All the major opposition parties are supporting the war and have lost out to the ruling coalition. Only in the areas of the Tamil plantation workers, the most oppressed workers in the country, did the government lose seats; most of the 60,000 voters deemed ineligible for lack of ID and papers were among these workers.

The political climate in Sri Lanka continues to degenerate everywhere. Media workers face some of the worst repression meted out anywhere in the world. The authorities have recently seized on a dispute between rival (right-wing) student groups to shut down the Kelaniya university, arresting students and lecturers (all now released or bailed). The university of Colombo denied permission for a debate on the capitalist crisis and the prospects of socialism in the 21st century that would have included the general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, who are among the only consistent socialist opponents of the Tigers.

Across Europe, Canada, the U.S., Australia, and Tamil Nadu in south India, the Tamil diaspora has been thoroughly mobilised in solidarity with their people. Most of the activities outside south Asia are being organised by agents and supporters of the Tigers. The ban on the Tigers in all these countries precludes thoroughly open support at the moment, though after the 80,000 strong London Tamil demonstration on 31 January the closing rally (down to a few thousand by the end) saluted Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader, several times. The demands across the world are

to stop the genocide and recognise the right of self-determination through a political process negotiated with the Tigers.

The political strategy of organisations like the British Tamil Forum (BTF) is to hegemonise political representation of the Tamil diaspora (which they have more or less done here) and to lobby government on the Tigers’ behalf, though under proscription conditions they focus mainly on human rights and self-determination issues. In this regard they have developed an increasingly effective communalist machine. In my area, in north-west London, the Labour Party has responded to this machine with lip service and attendance at big public meetings and pickets. Many of the leading Tamil community figures have found political homes wherever they can, in the Lib Dem and Tory parties. A similar pattern of cross-party communal politicking exists in France.

There were no Sinhala speakers at the big demonstration. One consistent fighter for Tamil rights, who is of mixed ethnicity and Tamil-speaking, a member of the Socialist Party here, had his place on the platform rescinded.

The BTF – and the Tigers – are bourgeois nationalists. They have no interest in working-class unity between Tamil and Sinhala workers. They talk up the inability of the two peoples to live together, denying many ordinary Tamils’ ability to distinguish between the Sri Lankan state and Sinhala people as a whole. In Paris, Socialist Equality Party activists have been threatened for

handing out leaflets.

The BTF have championed US attorney Bob Fine’s crusade to impeach three leading figures in the Sri Lankan state who are US citizens for genocidal war crimes. On one level this is a “genocide”, and for sure this war has the overwhelming support of the Sinhala working-class, educated in Sinhala chauvinism.

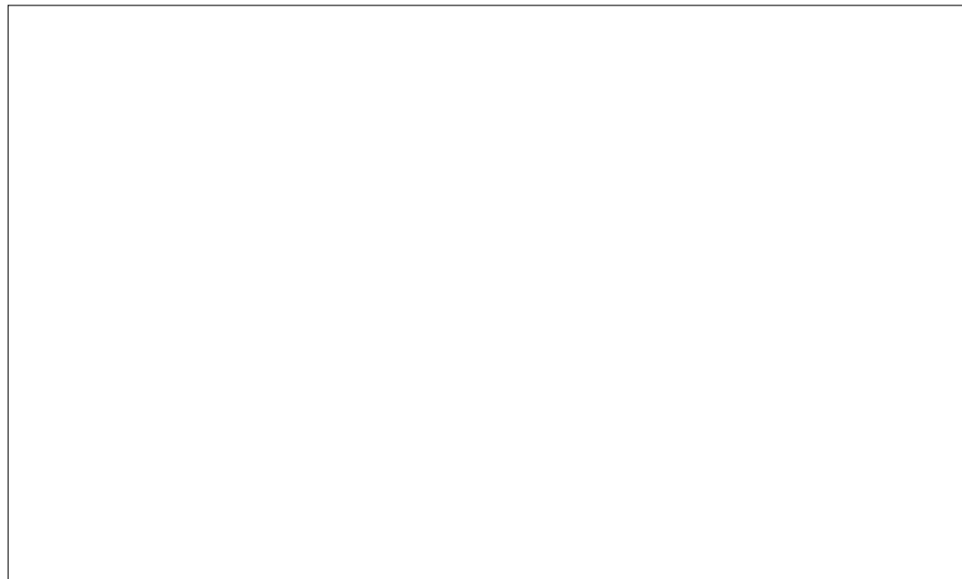
As a socialist, I think we should see that the Tamils have been rendered a separate people by the actions of the Sri Lankan state over decades and have the right to self-determination. But we can oppose the regime of the Tigers, their cult of martyr bombers, their political alliances, their record of repression of Tamils, and their coercive organisation across the world, even while recognising their defeat is also in an immediate sense a defeat of all Tamil people.

The first question for socialists outside of Sri Lanka is whether they intend to make solidarity with the Tamil people and the Sinhala working-class. Without our politics and solidarity, which has historically had a strong influence in Sri Lanka, it is difficult to see a way of stopping this terrible genocide and degeneration of the whole social fabric of Sri Lanka. What goes on in London, with a Tamil population of perhaps 250,000, is an extension of the conflict in Sri Lanka, yet there were perhaps no more than 30 non-Tamils on the huge London demonstration.

International solidarity, with an appeal for class unity and the defence of Tamil rights, is needed urgently.

IRAQ

Obama sets plans for Iraq pull-out



Obama in talks with Iraq Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki

BY RHODRI EVANS

On 27 February new US president Barack Obama announced his detailed plans for Iraq.

Small reductions in US troop levels have already started. After them the US military presence will remain large — 120,000-plus — until after the Iraqi elections scheduled for December 2009.

Then faster withdrawal is planned, and “combat” operations are due to end by 31 August 2010.

Obama envisages “35-50,000 US troops” remaining after that. The deal which the Iraqi government pushed the Bush administration into signing at the end of 2008 commits the USA to remov-

ing all its troops by the end of 2011, but Obama is signalling that he wants to finesse that.

If the Iraqi state continues to consolidate, Obama has little choice about the broad shape of the scenario. As if to confirm that, his Republican opponent in the presidential election, John McCain, a vehement “hawk” on Iraq, has endorsed Obama’s plan.

Three huge problems obtrude.

First: the consolidation of the Iraqi state over the last year or so, though real, is precarious. It is not a consolidation based on democratic reconciliation, but one based on war-weariness and the building-up of the Iraqi army. Arab-Kurdish conflicts over Kirkuk could unravel it. The world economic crisis and the slump in oil prices could under-

mine it.

Second: the “hardening” of the Iraqi army creates an option which US strategists have toyed with for some time — at a convenient moment, to unleash a “deniable” coup which will replace unsatisfactory elected Iraqi government by the rule of Iraqi generals well trained by the USA.

Third: the current Iraqi government was elected — but largely by a communal headcount. It is scarcely less threatening to the Iraqi labour movement than an outright military regime would be.

It keeps Saddam’s labour laws, and Decree 8750 from 2005, which authorises the government to seize union funds whenever it likes.

Just recently the government has demanded that the leadership of the Iraqi Teachers’ Union hand over the keys to its headquarters along with membership and other records.

The Government wants to force elections on the union, and has told the current union leaders that they must not stand, on pain of prison terms of up to five years.

Support from labour movements worldwide is still needed for the Iraqi labour movement and its rights, and for the cause of democratic and secular self-determination for Iraq.

The international labour conference in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, due to open on 13 March, could be an important focus for developing that support. Ruth Cashman, a delegate to the Erbil conference from No Sweat and Iraq Union Solidarity in Britain, will be reporting back from it at the 21 March Workers’ Liberty day school.

SUDAN

No tears for Bashir

BY CATHY NUGENT

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague has issued a warrant to arrest the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir. He has been indicted for war crimes, but not for genocide.

For sure, behind the legal process lie the political interests of the big western powers. After effectively tolerating Bashir for many years, they now want to see the back of him. But it does not at all follow that socialists should oppose these moves (whether the ICC succeeds in arresting Bashir or not).

Bashir is responsible for brutal, sometimes “genocidal” war, against many groups in Sudan — Arab, African, Christians, religious minorities, trade unionists, anyone who does back his regime.

For too long this killing, in Darfur in particular, where ethnic war began in 2003, has been viewed in the west in apolitical terms — “stop the killing.” The ICC indictment has the benefit of placing political responsibility exactly where it belongs — at the door of a brutal military-Islamist regime.

The fact that the African Union (AU), the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and China have all backed Sudan’s call for the ICC prosecution to be dropped, the fact that officials argue that it smacks of “white man’s justice,” will perhaps lead various groups on the left to defend Bashir to one degree or another. That would be shameful.

Of course if the indictment helps the displaced and terrorised people of Sudan to organise an opposition, that is all that matters. It could be that the west sees and backs an opposition from within the military elite. That will not help the people of Sudan. It could be that Bashir will use the indictment to scupper the ongoing so-called “peace process” in Darfur.

For our part all we can do, as far as we can, is use the indictment as an opportunity to make the public discussion about Sudan more political and to advocate solidarity with the people who have suffered at the hands of Bashir, in Sudan and as refugees outside of Sudan.

Capitalist crisis, workers’ response

AWL trade union and youth dayschool

Saturday 21 March 11am-5pm

School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1H

As capitalism’s crisis spreads and deepens, the bosses are seeking to make the working class bear the costs. Come and discuss why this crisis is happening, what it means for workers and the oppressed getting organised to fight back - and the possibilities for socialism.

Opening plenary: how can the working class respond to the capitalists’ crisis?

Workshops on: Why capitalism creates crises; the fight against unemployment and for jobs for all; Crisis and climate change; Migrant workers organising; Class struggle in Iraq; How US workers fought back in the 1930s; Student struggles across Europe; Women’s liberation in the crisis; Building rank-and-file movements

Followed by a social with bands Revolutionary Discipline and the Ruby Kid.

For more information go to www.workersliberty.org/21march09

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

JAPAN

Thousands of workers have rallied in Tokyo demanding job security and wage rises.

Japan’s economy is in its worst condition for three decades, with several large firms announcing job losses. The rally, organised by the Japanese equivalent of the TUC, represents a markedly different approach to that taken by many union leaders in the UK (such as those of the GMB and USDAW) who have meekly accepted job losses and have reduced

the union’s role to that of mitigating the impact of forced redundancies.

Banners on the Japanese rally included slogans such as “never let workers get fired”.

PALESTINE

Nearly 80,000 Palestinian public sector workers are facing delays in their salary due to Israel’s refusal to allow cash transfers into Gaza.

The leader of the Public Employees’ Union blamed “Israeli obstacles”

imposed on banks for the delays in payment. This struggle emphasises the predicament of public sectors workers in Palestine — faced on the one hand with the brutality of Israeli occupation and on the other with a fiercely anti-worker Hamas government which attempted to smash a recent teachers’ strike.

JAMAICA

Energy workers at Jamaica’s Rockfort and Bogue power plants have taken unofficial industrial action, provoking

a warning from the Jamaica Public Service Company (which runs the plants) to its customers that they may experience disruption to their electricity supply.

Management personnel may be drafted in to work on the shop floor in order to maintain a basic level of service.

The action follows a breakdown in negotiations between management and unions representing JPSC workers over bosses’ failure to pay overtime payments owing from a 2003 industrial tribunal ruling.

AUSTRALIA'S BUSHFIRE TRAGEDY

Act to reverse climate change now

RIKI LANE REPORTS FROM MELBOURNE

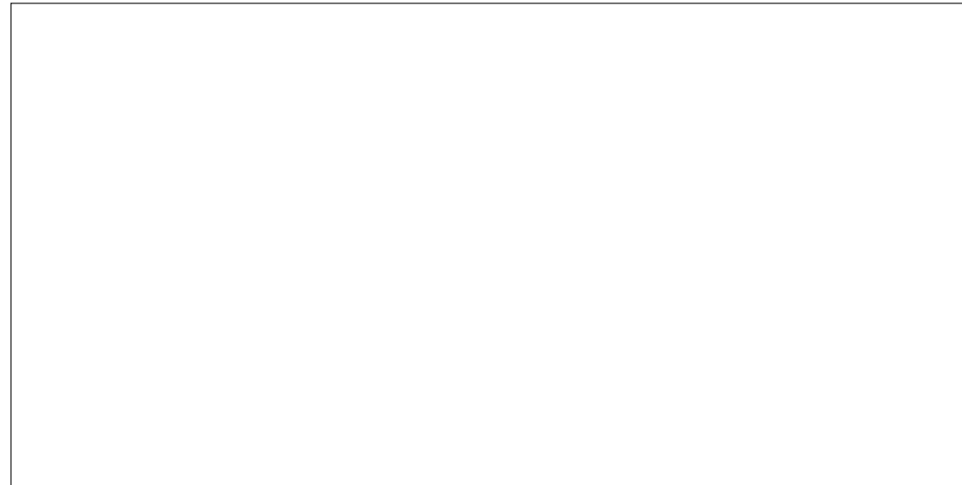
"Black Saturday", 7 February 2009, was Australia's greatest fire disaster. Unstoppable fires at over 1200C, driven by winds of up to 100 km/h on a 46°C day, wiped small communities off the map. At least 210 people died. 2000 houses were burned down, another 2000 made uninhabitable, 7000 people made homeless.

In the immediate aftermath, a tremendous outpouring of sympathy, donations and assistance overtook business-as-usual capitalism. Shops, vets, pharmacists etc. that luckily escaped the fires in the affected areas didn't charge people for their goods and services. Relief agencies and local councils were overwhelmed by donated goods, services and people's labour.

Bushfires are nothing new in the south eastern state of Victoria — nowhere on the planet is more prone to loss of life through wildfire. Many people in the hinterland of Melbourne (population 3.8 million) live close to the "bush" — grasslands and heavily forested parks and plantations. The vegetation, especially the highly flammable eucalypts, has a life cycle adapted to fire. Controlled patchwork burning was widely practiced by indigenous peoples prior to the European invasion, but is more difficult with capitalist agricultural and industrial use of the land. Hilly terrain, changeable gusty winds, days of extreme heat, and wide variation in annual rainfall mean that enormous conflagrations have been recorded every 20-40 years since European colonisation.

The most deadly were 6 February 1851 — "Black Thursday", when a quarter of the State (5 million hectares) burnt; 13 January 1939 — "Black Friday", 2 million hectares burnt and 71 died; and 16 February 1983 — "Ash Wednesday", 350,000 hectares burnt and 75 died.

Then and in this tragedy, the fires moved extremely quickly and resemble the "firestorms" of the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One



fire researcher estimated the total energy released on "Black Saturday" as equivalent to 660 Hiroshima bombs.

However, the fire weather conditions were the worst seen since European colonisation and there are strong indications that climate change is making these extreme weather events more frequent. While other parts of Australia are flooded, Victoria is gripped by a decade long drought.

January saw a dribble of rain — 0.8 mm against an average of 44 mm, while February has seen little more. The week before the fire saw an unprecedented heatwave in Melbourne — three consecutive days of 43°, 44° and 45° C, completely drying out the State. The 46° C on 7 February was the hottest temperature ever recorded for Melbourne. Climate scientists predicted these high temperatures over a decade ago, and that such extreme weather events may occur every 5-10 years instead of 20-40 years previously.

This "drought" may be our new climate. "El Nino" and "La Nina", variations in the sea water temperature in the Pacific Ocean, once had a strong correlation with Victorian rainfall. But that link appears to have weakened, so the rain buckets down in Queensland, Sydney has average rainfall, while Melbourne is parched.

The outpouring of sympathy and solidarity is inspiring and points to how a socialist economy of "from each accord-

ing to their ability, to each according to their needs" could function. Over time this became less viable, as people have to survive in a capitalist economy. My partner, who works for one of the affected councils, volunteered for shifts as manager of a relief centre — during work time and on her own time. They soon had trouble getting enough volunteers to run the centre, as the pressures of the normal workload and family responsibilities take their toll.

Other aspects of the response are less inspiring. There is understandable anger towards arsonists who may have deliberately lit fires that caused dozens of deaths. Some media — eg Murdoch's tabloids — tried to whip up a lynch mob atmosphere. Calls were made for anti-terror laws to apply to arsonists.

Connections with climate change had some reportage in the "serious" media, but little in the tabloid press. Instead fingers were pointed at Green policies, opposed to cattle grazing in parks and tree clearing on private property, and allegedly opposing controlled burning off in forests.

One tabloid commentator said that lynchings should be directed at Green politicians, not arsonists! These are red herrings — cattle grazing minimally reduces fire loads; clearing vegetation has some impact on survivability, but only at the margin; and the Greens support controlled burns. However, the prolonged drought means there are fewer

days when controlled burns are safe.

National and State Labor governments have committed to rebuild the communities, but avoid asking whether climate change makes some districts too unsafe for residents. The State government has brought forward new rules about house construction in bushfire zones and has called a Royal Commission into the fires with broad terms of reference.

One issue is the three separate fire fighting bodies — paid staff in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade for the cities; paid State government staff for parks and government land; mostly volunteers in the Country Fire Authority for private rural land. The Fire Fighters' Union says many of their members were sitting in their fire stations during the fire and not being called in when they volunteered for unpaid shifts.

Another issue is the policy of advising people to make a fire plan and "leave early if you are going to leave; or stay and fight the fire". Many well prepared and experienced people died defending their homes.

While the policy has been effective for years, it breaks down under the extreme conditions which create a firestorm. As these conditions are now much more likely, different policies are needed.

While warnings issued before the fires said "tomorrow will have the worst fire conditions the State has ever seen", there was no established policy for a higher level of warning to deal with these unprecedented conditions. A system for mass recorded message phone calls to people in areas of risk has been trialed, but bureaucratic and technical obstacles stopped it being implemented.

Socialists are inspired by the self organisation and disregard for capitalist normality that came through in the crisis. Governments need to better resource fire fighting and controlled burning groups and organise their cooperation more effectively. Stronger building codes, revised policies on when to leave, better notification systems are all needed.

For socialists our focus is clear — tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the only long term answer to increased bushfire risk.

A council relief centre worker's blog

TUESDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2009

Last night — not many evacuees stay overnight, but they have horrific stories. A grandmother from Darwin whose daughter and three grandchildren died at Kinglake trying to escape, people who have lost their home and are just waiting to hear what's happened to their loved ones.

People drive into the centre with great urgency wanting to donate. A bloke drove up fast at midnight and got out of his ute really aggro. He had an esky full of drinks "for the kids", bars and can openers. He was also pretty full and stank of alcohol. I thought he was going to biff me he was so aggro but later after we unloaded his truck he started crying - he had grown up in the area and had lost at least 15-16 people. He wanted to be part of the reconstruction and help build the roads. We had been briefed earlier - none of the recon-

struction will happen until after the forensics. 3am, organising lunch packs for the 40 cops doing victim identification at 7.30am; 4am, a water main burst outside the centre; 6am, the media converged.

There are post-it notes everywhere — most disturbing was "mum and dad" looking for their three kids. I was impressed that most of the donations were good or new stuff and very little junk. Donated food can be a real hassle though. I was warning the kitchen volunteer that a tray of meat she had already reheated overnight would have to go. When the health officer arrived at 6am I brought him in and he told them it would have to go. One kitchen volunteer was furious at me and snarled abuse.

THURSDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2009

Last night we only had four evacuees staying. One was an elderly woman hoping that people she knows will still be alive. By now we know if they haven't registered they are dead.

She was concerned about going back because she would be living with her son and daughter-in-law. Another elderly woman who had two daughters and families in Kinglake saw the Red Cross nurse who discovered she had a very full colostomy bag. One daughter and family were dead, the other daughter only found out about the colostomy bag at the Relief centre. It had been in place 2 years but she had kept it secret.

At the many union picket lines I have been on and several overnight for days, such as the 1998 MUA dispute, you have people who just know everything that is going on. This is a lot larger and more disorganised because of the mag-

nitude although it improves every day.

They rang me for another shift today. I have not returned the call. Tomorrow I might suggest we bring in non-Council people. Council has provided an enormous number of staff. I am not sure how this is going to go in the long term.

SUNDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2009

Newspaper articles... that arsonists are the new paedophiles, in terms of demonisation.

Alongside that is thinking that while arsonists will always exist, these are very particular conditions relating to global warming or climate change. It hasn't rained for over two months: everything is just waiting to burn. The emissions trading targets the Feds are trying to get through will have to change. Maybe this catastrophe means they will.

Three events that made the IRA

"Ireland occupies a position among the nations of the earth unique... in the possession of what is known as a physical force party — a party, that is to say, whose members are united upon no one point, and agreed upon no single principle, except the use of physical force as the sole means of settling the dispute between the people of this country and the governing power of Great Britain..."

James Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, July 1899.

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

The Real IRA and the Continuity IRA are groups of ex-Provisional-IRA Republicans who disagree with the Provisionals' turn in the mid-90s to exclusively parliamentary-political activity. They include some of the key founders of the movement, such as Ruarai O'Braidaigh, who split with the Adams-McGuinness faction in 1986 when the Provisionals decided to take any seats they might win in Dail Eireann, thus breaking with a six-decades-long tradition of boycotting the "Partitionist" parliament in Dublin.

The intention of those who shot dead two British soldiers on 7 March and one Police Service of Northern Ireland cop on 9 March is to destabilise the far from rock-solid power-sharing system in the Six Counties, which took a decade after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (1998) to "embed" itself. They have already scored a political "hit" by forcing Adams and McGuinness (who is deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland) to declare themselves on the side of the state and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (now a strictly inter-communal, Catholic-Protestant, police force) against their former comrades.

McGuinness declared the die-hards to be "traitors to the entire island of Ireland. They have betrayed the political desires, hopes and aspirations of all of the people who live on this island. They don't deserve to be supported by anyone".

All this is an implied condemnation of everything the Provisional IRA did after 1973, when the Sunningdale Agreement was signed, giving everything to the Northern Ireland Catholics that the Good Friday Agreement gives, and in a more flexible form.

That there is widespread antipathy within the Catholic nationalist population to what the Continuity IRA and Real IRA are trying to do to Northern Ireland, and no appetite for a return to war, is widely attested. That could quickly change if the Real IRA trigger Protestant sectarian attacks on Catholics, which is one of the things they are trying to do.

The Real IRA has already been responsible for the single most bloody deed of the Republicans in the whole "Long War" — the Omagh bombs in August 1998.

In fact the bombing unintentionally rendered great service to the "peace process". The horror engendered by Omagh rallied Catholics even more behind those who wanted the war ended for good. The Real IRA engendered an environment very un conducive to their attempt to resume the war.

The Real IRA and the Adams-McGuinness Sinn Fein (incorporating the Provisional IRA) are now, so to speak, dancing around each other in patterns set in modern Irish history, patterns that have been repeated over and over again for nine decades: the former physical-force Republicans now in office confront former comrades who refuse to make peace and enter the "corridors of power" with them and who think them traitors and turncoats in a long line of traitors and turncoats.

Bloody repression of the dissenters by, or with the connivance of, those who have abandoned the armed struggle has again and again followed. That is what Adams and McGuinness seem to have committed themselves to now.

There is, however, a very great difference between this and the past confrontations between ex-physical-force former Republicans and irreconcilables. They were all conflicts within the 26 Counties. This one is in the Six Counties — where the balancing between the two communities and the interaction of the Real IRA and the Protestant paramilitarists makes the situation more unstable than the South has ever been.

The "peace" which has reigned in the Six Counties since the ceasefire of August 1994 — despite a brief IRA resumption of war on Britain in 1995-7, in which a number of large bombs were exploded — has brought great benefits to the peoples of Northern Ireland. It has not changed the basic reality out of which the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA emerge.

Three events shaped the mind of 20th century Irish republicanism, creating an outlook in which belief in political miracles occupies a central place. The first was the Easter Rising in 1916.

Ninety-three years ago, "in the springtime of the year 1916", Connolly, Pearse, Mellows, Clarke, McDonagh, MacDermott, Markievicz, De Valera and their friends were feverishly working towards what they hoped would be a rising throughout most of Catholic Ireland. As it turned out, there would be a rising only in Dublin, and a few sparks struck in Galway and Cork.

They had planned a simultaneous rising in a number of centres throughout Ireland. The rising was to have been launched under cover of "manoeuvres" by the legal nationalist militia, the Irish Volunteers, which had been established during the Home Rule crisis on the eve of World War One. At the last moment the official head of the Volunteers, Professor Eoin MacNeill, called off the manoeuvres by putting advertisements in the Easter Sunday papers.

Connolly and the others contemplated the collapse and ruin of all their plans. Connolly believed that European peace was imminent between powers that had been locked in blood-drenched stalemate for 20 months. If he and his friends failed to act, Ireland would miss the chance of winning belligerent status and thus (so Connolly believed) representation at the expected peace conference; they faced the prospect of being rounded up, disarmed and imprisoned without having struck a blow.

Their choice was to act dramatically, with little hope of the immediate success they had hoped for, or else to let themselves be joined to the already large company of self-disgracing comic-opera revolutionary buffoons populating Irish history — to people like William Smith O'Brien MP, the man who led a ragged band around the starving countryside in 1848, as the Famine was drawing to an end, and felt obliged to first ask the permission of a landlord before he would order the cutting down of trees to build a barricade!

James Connolly, the no-nonsense working-class revolutionary, had written about such things with great bitterness and scorn in his book *Labour in Irish History* (published in book form in 1910). There, he told the bitter tale of botched risings and missed chances that had succeeded each other like endless days of mourning and depression in Irish history. Connolly's bitterness attested to his determination to do better himself if the chance came. Seeing the chance going, Connolly, Pearse, and their friends acted to make the best of a bad situation.

And so they turned out in Dublin on Easter Monday, 1300 or 1400 of them against the might of the British Empire, in the Empire's second city — most of whose people, even those who wanted Irish Home Rule, supported the Empire and its war with Germany and therefore considered the insurgents traitors. Patrick Pearse read the declaration of the Irish Republic from the steps of the General Post Office, which they made their headquarters, to an uncomprehending crowd of casual spectators.

When the week-long battle that followed was over, and the Volunteers and their Citizen Army comrades were being led away under armed guard, some, including Connolly, to be shot after summary courts martial and others to be jailed and interned, crowds of Dubliners spat at them.

Thus Irish Republicanism seized centre-stage in modern Irish history with a great and revolutionary deed, startling alike in its heroic audacity and in its disregard for democracy in form or substance. For the elected leaders of the Irish were the Home Rule and Unionist MPs; the traditional leaders, the priests of the various persuasions. The insurgents had no mandate, not even the shadow of one, for what they did. The Rising was part of the process by way of which they won a democratic mandate, in the election of late 1918.

Connolly could not even have counted on the bulk of the members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, of which he was acting general secretary. He did not count on it. Of all people, Connolly knew how useful a general strike would be to "paralyse the arm of militarism". If he did not try to call the workers of Dublin into action on the side of the insurgents, it was because he knew he could not.

The rising was an act entirely in the tradition of mid-19th century European revolutionism — of 1830 and 1848. In one of the articles Connolly wrote on the eve of the rising,

James Connolly

"Peace walls" still criss-cross Belfast, a maze of small but high "Berlin walls" designed to give Protestant and Catholic areas protection from each other. There are now about sixty of them, more than during the Provisionals' war. They symbolise the political system in Belfast, which is an intricately structured edifice of entrenched and bureaucratic Catholic-Protestant sectarianism.

Partition remains what is has been for nine decades, highly artificial. That is one of the key reasons why opposition to Partition makes imperative sense to those who express that opposition in doctrinaire and intransigent traditional Republicanism.

What follows is an attempt to sketch an overview of the political-ideological lineaments and history of Republicanism in 20th and early 21st century Ireland, and to explain how the physical-force-on-principle trend which the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA embody emerged and became a constant element in Irish politics.

In 1916 the Republic was declared on the steps of Dublin's General Post Office

on the techniques of insurrection, he analysed the Moscow rising of December 1905 — but that only pointed up the difference. Moscow came out of a mass movement; Easter 1916 presaged and prepared the way for the subsequent mass movement of nationalist revolt, a movement that might never have come, or might have come not so strongly, if the British had not tried to impose conscription on Ireland in 1918.

The declaration of the Republic appealed to the living in the name of the dead: "In the name of God and of the dead generations..." The minority acted in the name of the nation and called on the nation to follow, hoping to spark a national movement. In signing the surrender, Connolly was careful to sign only for Dublin and not to speak for the rest of the country. Plainly even then his hopes had not died. Yet the leaders of the rising cannot have hoped, even in the best case, that their actions would arouse anything but implacable hostility from the Northern Ireland Unionists.

VICTORY IN DEFEAT

The 1916 rising is one of the great examples in history of success coming soon on the heels of what looked like absolute failure. The defeated insurgents were spat at by the people they considered theirs after the rising; but a little over a year later most of them came home from internment camp and prison to a welcome for heroes. Two and a half years after the rising, Sinn Fein won 73 out of 105 seats (for 48 per cent of the votes cast: they won many seats without a contest) in the 1918 general election, standing for a Republic and advocating the immediate setting up of an Irish parliament by the elected Irish MPs.

In January 1919 they did that. Two and a half years of often savage war later, Britain was forced to treat with Sinn Fein, offering most of Catholic Ireland Dominion status — substantial independence, the same as Canada and Australia had — within the British Empire.

If Sinn Fein failed to get all they wanted — an independent republic outside the British Empire, and a united Ireland in which the one million people in north-east Ireland who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom would accept the majority rule of Catholic and mainly agrarian Ireland — that could be put down to a betrayal of the spirit of "1916". If there had been more of intransigence, outright refusal to compromise, then... Thus reasoned the minority who rejected the Treaty with Britain.

In its strange and dramatic contradictions, in the sudden reversals of fortune, in the confused and unexpected roles some of its participants played, 1916 inevitably generated confusion and mystification. Its power over the mind and imagination of subsequent generations comes not only from its heroism, or from the attractiveness and fascination of some of its leaders, but from its subsequent success.

The minority acted, outraging most of the nationalist people as well as Irish unionists north and south. They were loathed until the leaders were killed, and then came the magical transformation — the resurrection. Soon there was enough of a victory to vindicate the minority, and retrospectively vindicate the insurgent tradition, the "little risings" of the 19th century. The retrospective weaving of poetic myth around the events and the idea of the blood sacrifice that redeemed Ireland, drawing much of its power from Christian myth, drawing too on the writings of Pearse and McDonagh, and given its shape by "the great myth-maker", Yeats — all of that, saturating the popular culture of Catholic Ireland, became a great political force. Yeats wrote the most powerful version of the myth of a blood sacrifice:

*"O words are lightly spoken,"
Said Pearse to Connolly,
"Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree;
Or maybe but a wind that blows
Across the bitter sea."*

*"It needs to be but watered,"
James Connolly replied,
"To make the green come out again
And spread on every side,
And shake the blossom from the bud
To be the garden's pride."
"But where can we draw water,"
Said Pearse to Connolly,
"When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree."*

The minority acted, and won; the gun bestowed a power, magnified wonderfully, on the minority and their cause: and thus ever after you have a model of minority revolutionary action. In that "miraculous" experience you have the reason behind much of the unreason of modern republicanism. History is a miracle-play! The republicans expect a miracle to overwhelm the unfavourable hard facts in the Six Counties.

Sensible people do not believe in miracles. When something looks like a miracle, we probe to see what really happened and why.

For example, such seemingly miraculous things as the overnight eruption into a general strike of millions of workers who but yesterday were passive and indifferent — France, 1968, is one of the best examples — have for Marxists no mystery: they are rooted in the fact that normally there is a contradiction between the consciousness of working-class people and their real situation and interests. That is what can trigger seemingly miraculous change.

In post-1916 Ireland the cause of the insurgents prospered quickly because of a number of material factors: there was nothing inevitable about it. We know from what he wrote on the eve of the Rising that one of Connolly's chief spurs to action was his fear of a quick negotiated peace. If that had happened; if, later, the British had not tried to impose conscription on Ireland; if events had not continued to discredit and pulverise the Home Rule party and its entire philosophy of Irish progress by way of agreement with the British state — then "1916" would have been no success.

In Northern Ireland there has been no shortage of republican heroism or of epic events with the power to overwhelm the sympathetic or even hostile imagination — the 1981 hunger strikes, for example, when ten men starved themselves to death. There has been no magical transformation — because the material conditions rule it out.

CIVIL WAR

The second event that shaped 20th century Republicanism was the civil war. The Treaty was imposed on Collins and Griffith by the credible British threat of "immediate and terrible war". The British had contingency plans for internment camps in Ireland in which large parts of the whole population would be imprisoned, as Boer civilians were during the Boer war, to cut off support from the IRA.

After Sinn Fein split over the Treaty, the Republicans lost out in the political electioneering and manoeuvring. The bourgeoisie, the men who in the Dublin Chamber of Commerce had passed a resolution after the 1916 rising denouncing it as "Larkinism run amok", the big farmers in the east who had recently engaged in a large-scale social war with their labourers — all flocked behind the Collins-Griffith faction of Sinn Fein, the new party of order. So did the Catholic Church, which did much to line up people behind the Free Staters.

Fundamentally, however, what the "Free Staters" had going for them was the lack of any viable "Republican" alternative to compromise with Britain, and the fact that most people could not see the differences between Collins and De Valera as worth fighting about. Many saw that Collins was right that he had, indeed, won "the freedom to

win freedom" — to gradually expand the Irish state's real independence.

Against that, there was the mysticism of Catholic nationalists — honourable, conscientious people like Cathal Brugha, who had sworn an oath to maintain the Republic and could not now swear the required allegiance to the King of England. At the base, among Republicans, there was the inchoate and dimly felt millenarianism of large numbers of people, especially in the West and perhaps especially among youth, for whom "the Republic" represented the drive for a great social transformation — for what Connolly had called the Workers' Republic. How widespread this was is now almost forgotten.

But in all the labour and small-farmer struggles during the war of independence, the IRA had acted as a force defending the status quo and defending and securing private property on the land and elsewhere. It was a national, and not a 'sectional' movement. And before and during the civil war, the IRA leadership attempted to act as if they could — like the "men of 1916" — ignore elections, majorities, in short, politics. They acted as a separate military power in the state; they fought a civil war without any coherent alternative to the status quo.

They could not force a better deal than the Treaty out of the still very mighty British Empire. They had no policy for overcoming the division of the country. Implicitly (and some of them, explicitly) they accepted that the North could not be "forced" and that there should be no attempt to force it. The North, amazing as it may seem, had little part in the considerations of Dail Eireann on the Treaty in December 1921 and January 1922. The division of Ireland was a fact, and discussion focused on things like the Oath of Allegiance. On Northern Ireland, the Republicans of that time stood on the opposite pole to the Republicans today (and since the late 1930s).

The IRA drifted into a civil war thinking that the gun and intransigence were enough. Born at that point was what might be called "Carbonari Republicanism", after an early 19th-century underground revolutionary sect — archaic, sterile, conspiratorial republicanism. In its "revolutionary" period, it had no political programme to match its revolutionary aspirations; when it moved into government, as strands of it repeatedly would, it adopted a straightforward conservative bourgeois political programme, as we have seen Adams and McGuinness do with the Provisional IRA.

An attempt by the imprisoned republican Liam Mellows to restate Connolly in explicitly left-wing-populist nationalist terms — the republicans needed the "men of no property" — had been drowned in blood: Mellows was shot out of hand in December 1922.

The writer's sympathies are with the republicans, with the young lads and young women who would not accept compromise with imperialist iniquity or accept less than the radical transformation of life "the Republic" represented to them; with those who would not break their oath and their pledge, or break faith with Connolly and Pearse and those who had died in the fight — and with Liam Mellows, who told Dail Eireann in the debate on the Treaty that Collins and Griffith were opting for the "fleshpots of Empire", turning their backs on the Indians and the other oppressed peoples struggling for freedom against the British Empire. For socialists, those are our people, even when we disagree with them, or would have advocated a different course to theirs.

But the greatest tragedy of the civil war was that the republican side caught up into itself and into its notions of action — not politics, not working-class action, but the gun, in the process of becoming a political fetish — a large part of the revolutionary energy of plebeian Ireland. For decades Carbonari republicanism would act as a lightning conductor, as one of Ireland's safety valves.

With its social base among small farmers, and rural and small-town labourers, the republican movement was separated from the organised labour movement in Catholic Ireland not so much by ideals as by method. Republicanism took shape as an "outsider" revolutionary movement. It defined itself as revolutionary by its commitment to minority action, to armed struggle on principle and as soon as possible. It saw military action as something sufficient to itself, dependent for success more on military logistics than ripe social conditions. After 1922 Republicanism was cut off from and abjured political action on principle, resolutely boycotting every parliament in the British Isles, Dublin, Belfast, or Westminster.

It was an archaic revolutionary movement, a throwback to mid-19th century movements in Europe, a hybrid, with (in practice if not in theory) many points in common with a militant anarchism. Social questions would be of interest to republicans — some of them — only as a means of gaining support for the nationalist armed struggle. It was an upside-down view of the world, in an archaic, land-that-time-forgot revolutionary movement on the fringes of Europe. Frederick Engels had described one of their 19th century ancestors, the terrorist sect of "Invincibles", as Bakuninists.

The stagnation in Ireland, the situation created for revolutionary politics by the split in the working class and by Partition, and, as we will see, the collapse of the Communist International, would combine to keep the physical force revolutionaries in business. The IRA would become Ireland's substitute for a "revolutionary left" of the modern, 20th century, sort — for one based on the work-

Continued on page 12

ing class, using politics and trade unionism normally, treating questions of the state and armed force rationally rather than making a fetish of any particular form of action, organisation or struggle.

CONNOLLY'S SOCIALIST REPUBLICANISM

The third crucial development, allowing Carbonari republicanism to survive and helping to shape and perpetuate it, was the fate of revolutionary working-class socialism in the world and in Ireland — first, the dissipation of Connolly's political tradition, and then the degeneration of the communist movement into Stalinism.

Connolly had followed the tactics advocated by Marx, and later to be advocated by the Communist International, on the proper relationship of socialists to "revolutionary nationalists" — act together, organise and propagandise separately. But politically Connolly was swallowed up by his bourgeois and petty-bourgeois allies; despite the wide sentiment for "Connolly's Workers' Republic" that existed, socialism was not an independent force in the years after 1916.

Connolly coined the ambivalent slogan that would serve populist republicanism: "the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour; the cause of labour is the cause of Ireland". He did not understand it as either a merging of the working-class interest into a multi-class national entity, or, as populist republicans do, the enlistment of labour and social issues as a means of gaining support for the national struggle. He saw the national question and the social question as flowing together, and national liberation as the victory of the working class.

"In the evolution of civilisation the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must perforce keep pace with the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation and... the shifting of economic and political forces which accompanies the development of the system of capitalist society leads inevitably to the increasing conservatism of the non-working-class elements and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class". He wrote that in 1910, in *Labour in Irish History*, and though he came to be caught up in the purely national struggle in 1916 there is no reason to think that Connolly changed his mind on what, for socialists, the national struggle was about.

The flaw in Connolly's design for 1916, as a working-class activity, was twofold. Any possibility of a national movement and a socialist working-class movement flowing together and "reconstructing the nation under its own leadership", as Trotsky put it in his theory of "permanent revolution" and as Connolly formulated it above (and elsewhere), was ruled out by the split in the Irish working class, and by the relative weakness of the Catholic working class vis-a-vis the rest of Catholic Ireland, which was, essentially, a peasant country. The "national question", as defined in most of Ireland, cut off the majority of the working class, who saw themselves as British.

It was this division in the Irish working class, and in the unions, that paralysed the labour movement in the war of independence. It organised general strikes as part of the political-military struggle, but it left politics to the bourgeois factions, unionist and republican: otherwise, it would have split.

The second flaw in Connolly's plans, which shaped his posthumous fate in Catholic Ireland, was his failure to build an educated, clear and coherent revolutionary socialist organisation, able to pursue consistent goals in changing circumstances. Connolly left a great vacuum. To discuss why would take us too far afield here. The consequence was that after 1916 the labour movement was a captive of nationalist forces.

"Connollyism" was reduced to a vague aspiration, his hard Marxist ideas immediately subjected to working over and political mastication by "left-wing" priests and others to assimilate them to Catholic Nationalist Ireland. Connolly's "Workers' Republic" was blurred into and merged with vague notions of a return to an (essentially mythical) ancient Celtic Irish communism. The widespread popularity of such ideas helped the labour movement grow — the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union experienced a phenomenal expansion in the period between 1916 and 1922 — but it had little other effect.

During the war of independence, talk of a Workers' Republic merged with Catholic mysticism and vague "back to the socialist clan system" millenarianism to provide a plebeian aureole for the republican struggle against Britain. Connolly's legacy dissolved into a vaguely socialist and populist wing of nationalism.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND

The forces of revolutionary socialism had to recompose themselves, and this was attempted as the war of independence was ending by the creation of a Communist Party, linked to the Communist International.

Tiny and led by very young people, among them James Connolly's 20 year old son Roddy, it had little

weight, and politically it let itself become a satellite of the physical-force republicans in the civil war.

After 1923, it regained the founder of the mass Irish workers' movement, Jim Larkin, who came back from jail in the USA, and led the breakaway from the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, the Workers' Union of Ireland. (Both ITGWU and WUI are now merged into SIPTU).

In the late 1920s, after Jim Larkin drifted away from the Communist International, there was no Communist Party. The movement was recommenced by young militants trained for years at the "Lenin School" — i.e., the Stalin school — in Moscow, Betty Sinclair, Sean Murray, Brian O'Neill, Michael McInerney and one or two others. When the Communist Party of Ireland was refounded in 1933, it was rigidly Stalinist.

The early Communist Party had been the real heir of Connolly. In the natural course of healthy political evolution it would have overcome its weaknesses and subsumed and appropriated the working-class revolutionary element trapped in republicanism, winning republican militants to a clear notion of the workers' republic — working class power — as the only republic that would not be a gommeen mockery of the struggle of struggles of the Irish people.

Thus it had been in 19th century Europe, when the primitive, politically incoherent, underground revolutionary sects had over time dissolved and merged into modern labour movements — in France, for example, the Blanquists did that. In Ireland, the old revolutionary insurrectionary sectism survived in the IRA, penned up in the social and political blind alleys of post-partition Ireland. It did so because the alternative, rational, revolutionary movement, the communists, collapsed into a variant of populist nationalism, and became only a tributary stream into republicanism.

THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

From 1923-4 the Communist International veered to the right. Its Fifth Congress — reflecting the interests or the perceptions of the ruling bureaucrats in the Soviet Union — began the process of substituting other politics for the working-class, communist politics of the first four congresses of the International.

The Stalinising communists began to advocate the creation of two-class "worker and peasant" parties, and — in practice — the subordinate alliance of the communists with the bourgeois nationalists in colonial or semi-colonial countries. In China this led the working-class communist movement into the bourgeois-nationalist organisation of Chiang Kai-Shek's Guomindang — and to a terrible massacre of Communist workers in 1927.

Everything which in 1916 and post-1916 Ireland had come about because Connolly was dead and because there was no communist party, that is, from confusion and working-class defeat, now was deliberately fostered as a matter of high Comintern policy, under the direction of the Executive of the Communist International. In Ireland, the tiny, fledgling Communist Party had already tended to become a tail of the physical-force republicans in the civil war, before such politics became official Communist International policy. By the time the original Communist Party of Ireland collapsed, and a replacement was organised around Jim Larkin and his union, official Communist International policy was pushing them towards being a mere left-wing tail of the republican nationalists, around whom was grouped much of the natural constituency of the communists in Catholic Ireland.

The early, Lenin-Trotsky, Communist International had produced a great flowering of revolutionary Marxism, a great clearing away of reformist encrustations, a sharpening of long blunted Marxist perspectives, and an ardent commitment to militancy on the national question, too. The documents embodying this work — Lenin's draft, amended by the Second World Congress, on the National and Colonial Question, for example — form part of the bedrock of modern Marxism.

Yet no major Communist International document analysed Ireland. The nearest approach was a couple of weighty pieces by young Roddy Connolly in the Communist International's magazine on the current situation in the light of history. By the tenth anniversary of the rising, Stalinist hacks were writing commentaries in which Irish history was current Communist International policy read backwards — and forwards.

In Ireland/Britain, as in for instance Croatia/Yugoslavia (the most powerful Balkan state), nationalism was utilised to make difficulties for important states that were enemies of the USSR. Catholic Ireland's nationalist tradition fitted well with Russian needs and the resultant Stalinist "line". It fitted, too, the scholasticism that replaced Marxism as living analysis in the Communist International. Marx had written about Ireland. So had Lenin. Neither, naturally, had an analysis of post-partition Ireland to offer. And it was a radically different Ireland. (See "Lenin on Ireland" in *Workers' Liberty* nos. 22 and 23).

The Border had become the focus of nationalist feeling

and anger. The North was now "Ireland unfree". For the post "Fifth World Congress" Irish communists, the task was first to "complete the bourgeois revolution" before then proceeding to socialist concerns, and for the Communists as for the least enlightened Catholic nationalists that came to be identified with unifying the island. On that basis the Communists, manipulatively, merged themselves politically with republicans moving left.

Abstract Republicanism, with its fetish of physical-force methods which to others were, or were not, a means to an end, could (and at various times did) assume virtually any social programme, from fascism to Stalinism.

The Stalinist strategy did not necessarily imply any commitment to militarism, still less any commitment to an attempt to conquer the Northern Ireland Protestants — even most of the republicans explicitly then repudiated that — but it shared the analytical, political and moral foundations of physical-force republicanism. It shared the common culture of bourgeois Catholic Ireland: that the main difficulty in achieving a united Ireland lay in British control or "occupation" of Ireland.

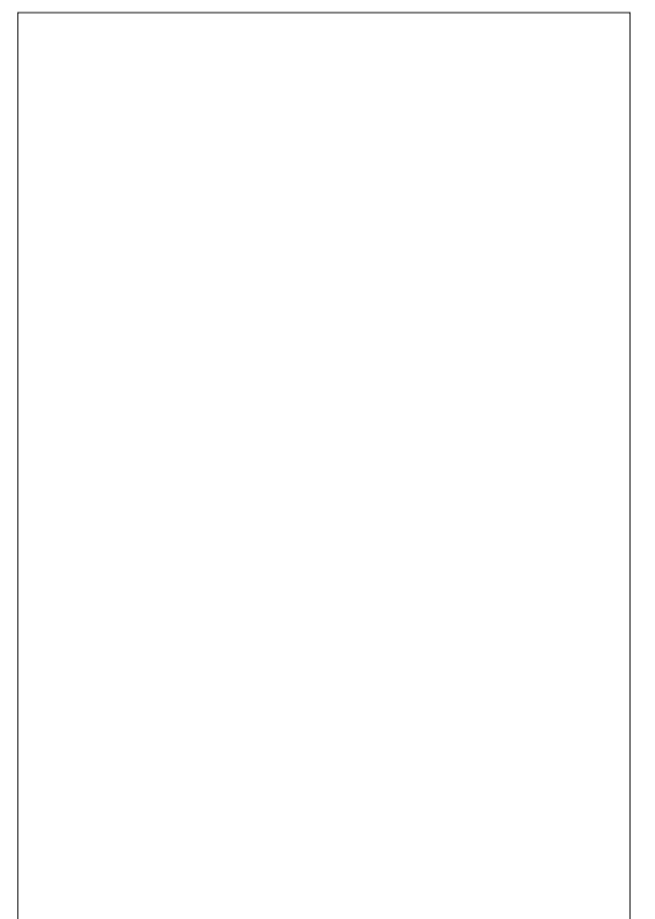
At its most benign, that culture looked to a British-Irish bourgeois deal over the heads of the Irish Protestant minority: this was most characteristically the approach of the De Valera wing of constitutional republicanism. A central difficulty for the left-wing and physical-force republicans was that, within the parameters of the common culture, there was no revolutionary alternative to De Valera's "reformist" approach, no more than there is now to Adams-McGuinness and the SDLP in the Six Counties.

Rational revolutionary politics could be developed only by stepping out of those parameters. The division in Ireland had nothing to do directly with the bourgeois revolution. Northern Ireland had long been the most bourgeois part of Ireland, as well as the most developed — it had had its "bourgeois revolution", as part of England's bourgeois revolution, in the 17th century. The 26 counties had had a thorough bourgeois revolution — that on the land organised by the British state after the 1880s; then the political revolution and independence in 1918-22 — and retained far fewer pre-capitalist trappings than Britain itself had. There was nothing pre-bourgeois about the split in the island. There was a split bourgeoisie and a split population following them before there was a divided island. The messy and untenable partition, the crime against the Irish Catholic people and particularly against those in Fermanagh and Tyrone kept against their will in the Northern state, was an Irish-bourgeois/capitalist-imperialist crime.

Another Irish-bourgeois/British-imperialist crime had been attempted before 1914 — the forcible putting under Dublin rule, against their will, of the Northern Ireland Protestant people, who thought of themselves as primarily British.

Before communists could accomplish anything, they had to come to terms with the facts of post-partition Ireland.

The sine qua non was to unite the working class on the island of Ireland, and in the two islands. Redress of the injustice to the Six Counties Catholics, defence of their rights — and defence of the rights of the Protestant minority on the island — were naturally part of that, but no more than part. It was necessary above all to argue with republican militants against their pseudo-anarchist



Proclamation of the Irish Republic

"White Dominions"; De Valera, in 1936-7, seized the chance of Britain's abdication crisis to effectively remove the monarchical element in the Free State constitution. The formal declaration of a Republic in 1949 would add nothing to this. In so far as the Free State was not "free", was unequal to Britain, that was because in a world dominated by bourgeois relations the small never can be the equal of the big. (Britain faces the same disadvantage now in relation to Europe).

The bourgeois physical-force-ists of 1919-21 had formed a government in 1922. They were opposed by a large part of Sinn Fein, an uneasy bloc of politicians and of militarists acting as a law unto themselves, who fought and lost a confused civil war, in 1922-3.

After the civil war, the rump Sinn Fein, led by Eamonn De Valera, refused to recognise the Dublin or Belfast parliaments or to take the seats they won in Dail Eireann. They retained the support of large parts of Ireland, particularly in the south and west, where in the civil war some districts had had to be conquered for the Dublin government by landing from the sea, as though they were foreign territory.

In late 1925 the IRA convention withdrew recognition from De Valera's so-called Republican Government (whose claims to be the legitimate government of all Ireland were based on the authority of the "second Dail"). It became a party-army in itself. In May 1926 De Valera founded Fianna Fail, taking most of the old anti-Treaty forces with him. Sinn Fein as a political organisation was reduced to a rump: it did not contest the 1927 election.

In August 1927 De Valera dropped abstention from politics, and Fianna Fail entered the Dublin parliament. Hard-line republicanism had lost its major force. Fianna Fail formed a government in January 1932 with parliamentary backing from the small Labour Party, and won a majority of its own at the end of the year. It brought in a weak version of Roosevelt's New Deal, and pushed the 26 Counties along the road it had travelled since 1922, towards effective independence.

Fianna Fail would become the major party of the Irish bourgeoisie, ruling for most of the next 60 years. They would judiciously murder republicans during World War Two. The traditional intransigent republican explanation — Fianna Fail betrayed — explains nothing.

A RECURRENT PATTERN

From republicanism as it came out of the civil war, you can see a pattern, often repeated, of three-way splitting — a recurrent tendency to flake apart into three main elements:

- core physical-force republicanism;
- bourgeois republicanism;
- and a communistic, socialistic, left-wing republicanism; but this was in fact a populism in which the working class was seen as the necessary "instrument" of nationalist victory, rather than "nationalist" issues being judged for how they contributed to working-class liberation.

The pattern would be repeated again and again in the 20th century, beginning with the Collins-Griffith, Cumann na nGaedheal, faction of Sinn Fein (1917-21). What the Adams faction of the Provisionals has done in the last 15 years is yet another example of the recurrent drift into mainstream bourgeois politics.

After De Valera's move into parliamentary politics, the rump IRA was essentially a pure nationalist movement, but it acted as a lightning conductor, deflecting social discontent from any effective action. It initiated agitation among small farmers against paying the annuities outstanding from the British-state-organised transfer of land, and took part in international Stalinist junketings such as those of the Anti-Imperialist Fronts and the Krestintern, the so-called Peasants' International.

Led by Maurice Twomey and Sean MacBride, it had perhaps fifteen or twenty thousand members. It suffered severe repression from about 1930 onwards. In 1931 it formed a political wing, Saor Eire (Free Ireland), which disbanded when the Catholic hierarchy denounced it as "communistic". This was the period when a Dublin mob attacked the premises of the reorganising communist movement in Dublin.

De Valera's victory in 1932 opened the jails. There was some revival of working-class confidence, and a big upsurge of republicanism. In fact, De Valera's victory cut the throat of Southern republicanism, but this would not be clear for some years,

Stalinist influence had grown among the republicans, swaying men like Frank Ryan and Peadar O'Donnell who were, however, first nationalists and then Stalinists.

If it were not for the prevailing pervasive Catholic-nationalist middle-class analysis of Ireland, which has always fed physical-force republicanism — sometimes feeding young men and women ideas and then jailing them from drawing logical physical-force conclusions from those ideas and from Irish history — the Stalinists' ideas of "completing the Irish bourgeois revolution" would never had had much of a hearing among serious people. In fact the Stalinist pseudo-Republican dogmas about the all-shaping need to "first complete the bour-

geois-democratic revolution" (unite the island) threw militants moving from nationalism back to nationalism, now conceived of as a higher world-historical cause. Irish nationalism blended into Stalinism's pseudo-Marxist imaginary map of history. Little bits of Lenin's casual journalism were misused to justify Catholic communalism. A peculiarly Irish hybrid was created, essentially Catholic-nationalist but with a republican rhetoric and a Stalinist tincture.

Desiring to turn sharply to populist and socialist agitation without abandoning the fetishistic military obsessions of the IRA, the "Republican Congress" left broke away in 1934, and formed an active bloc with the Communist Party of Ireland. This was a powerful and serious movement. Two hundred of its people volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War, and half of them died there.

Though the CPI was politically tied to Catholic nationalism, it could nonetheless talk to Northern Ireland Protestant workers. Nobody at that stage, not even the most Catholic and mystical right-wing Republican, dreamed of simply conquering the Protestant working class. The right had no policy for the Protestants, and the left a not-very-coherent policy of somehow uniting Ireland by first uniting the working class. In practice the Stalinist message in the North tended to be the left-wing one, "overthrow capitalism to unite Ireland" — effectively a reversal of the stages laid down in Stalinist theory. Although this begged the question of why socialism should be defined as a means to the greater end of nationalism, the CPI had some success with Protestant workers.

In 1934 the Communist Party and the Republican Congress brought a contingent of Shankill Road Protestants to the annual celebration around Wolfe Tone's grave in Kildare. As they marched behind a banner with the slogan "Break the Connection with Capitalism" (Tone had struck the keynote of Irish Republicanism with the words: "break the connection with England"), they were set upon by the right-wing rump Republicans!

This movement fell apart very quickly, in a dispute over whether to raise the Workers' Republic as the Congress slogan, or just "the Republic". The latter was scarcely distinguishable from Fianna Fail and was meant by its proponents to appeal to the Fianna Fail rank and file against De Valera. The Stalinists were the backbone of the "Republic" faction. Perhaps symbolically, James Connolly's children Rory and Nora were with the "Workers' Republic".

In 1934 the Republican Congress split, and the left, on whom there was some Trotskyist influence (certainly they had contact with Trotsky and with British-based Trotskyists like CLR James and, maybe, with the American Trotskyist Tom O'Flaherty) joined the Labour Party.

By this stage Fianna Fail had consolidated itself as the main Irish bourgeois party, sucking support away from both the old ruling party, now called Fine Gael, and the IRA. The republicans, and the Stalinists too, were "militant" satellites of Fianna Fail: all they could do was back it — especially after the ex-government organised a mass fascist-style movement, the so-called Blueshirts. In the mid 1930s, having defeated the Blueshirts, Fianna Fail turned on the republicans, and started a slow-build-up of the repression that was to crush them in World War Two.

An era of reaction and Catholic oppression descended on the South. The left populist republicans declined. Leaders like O'Donnell and Gilmore dropped into political inactivity by the late 1930s. Essentially they had had their thunder stolen by Fianna Fail: in so far as they had anything different to advocate, it was their Stalinist predilections and international affiliations. As war approached, those became more and more of a liability in an Ireland alienated from the British side in that war. By the time war came, populist republicanism had shrunk to virtually nothing. Tragically, no class-struggle-based revolutionary-socialist movement had taken its place: this left it the possibility of reviving.

The 26 Counties retained its neutrality — thus proving to anyone who needed proof that it was indeed independent of Britain — and the Communist Party, actively pro-German during the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939 to June 1941, echoed that. When the Nazis invaded Russia in June 1941, life became very difficult for the Communist Party of Ireland. A few of its members were interned alongside republicans.

In December 1941 the Communist Party of Ireland met in Belfast and dissolved as an all-Ireland body, setting up the Communist Party of Northern Ireland instead. The left populist republicanism of the 1930s now existed only as a literary ghost of itself, mainly through O'Donnell's writings. The CPNI grew into a strong force, fervently pro-war, effectively Unionist (and fingering Trotskyists to the police!) The Communist Party revived in the South after the war, and the two separate CPs were reunited in 1970.

After the 1934 split, the right-wing Republicans fared not much better than the left. Essentially apolitical, militant De Valera Fianna Failers with guns, they lacked a role. What should they do? Various plans were mooted, including an invasion of the North. They finally decided

Eamonn De Valera

positive fetish of physical force and their negative fetish against existing parliaments, and for politics centred on the development of the labour movement, not on nationalist myth.

In fact, however, from the fifth world congress of the Communist International, Irish communism was morally disarmed before Catholic nationalism. Its analysis of the situation was utterly false, marrying narrow nationalist and Catholic-nationalist concerns with mechanical Stalino-Menshevik dogmas about necessary "stages" of revolution (thus: the need for a "bourgeois revolution" — another bourgeois revolution! — in Ireland before anything socialist could be done) so as to elevate the "irredentist" concerns of Catholic nationalists above everything else. Irish working-class political independence was snuffed out by the development of Stalinism in the Communist International and in Ireland, and Carbonari Republicanism was reinforced. For instance, the Irish Stalinist parties — the Northern and Southern Stalinists divided in 1941 and did not reunite until 1970 — commemorated James Connolly's 100th anniversary in 1968 by publishing a small pamphlet of his military studies on the eve of 1916.

STALINIST CATHOLIC NATIONALISM

In this way, the most "revolutionary" politics in Ireland came to be symbiotic with old Catholic nationalism, and even Catholic communalism. Revolutionary working-class politics under Stalinists control came to be dressed up in Catholic-nationalist costume.

The political errors and weaknesses that in Connolly were episodic came to be systematised in a "communist"-republican hybrid. The result was an inchoate and unstable nationalist populism which repeatedly span off or reinforced new physical-force strands because the core axioms of the physical-force faction were never questioned, and the "left" alternative could never be effective when measured against those axioms.

Physical force against the North was abjured by all republicans until the late 1930s — apart from a few token actions against customs posts on the border during the coronation of King George VI — but, left or right, the populist analysis, the merging of working-class politics into populism, of the working class into the (Catholic) nation, until the "completion of the bourgeois revolution", or "reunification", was a common culture.

Some of the republican programme was impossible. No force on earth could convince the Northern Ireland Protestants to become Irish nationalists, hustle them reluctantly under Dublin rule, or make capitalist Ireland anything other than a small, weak unit in a vicious capitalist world. Such parts of the republican programme as were feasible were carried through in large part — but by mainstream bourgeois republicans who in time would turn sharply against the physical-force republicans.

A bourgeois Catholic Ireland developed in which — especially after the Free State Land Act of 1923; but, essentially, long before that — working peasants and labour-exploiting bourgeois farmers owned the land. That peasant and small-farmer ownership was, essentially, the work of the Tory-Unionist party, carrying through the "bourgeois revolution in Ireland" from above. The Statute of Westminster, in 1931, recognised the effective independence of Ireland and the other Commonwealth

to issue an ultimatum to Britain to vacate the Six Counties and to declare war on Britain if the ultimatum was rejected. The “war” they unleashed in 1939 consisted of a few bombs in British cities.

THE RIGHT WING IRA

This group, led by Sean Russell at this stage, entered into a formal alliance with Nazi Germany.

Britain’s enemy was Ireland’s friend. Britain’s difficulty was Ireland’s opportunity. In principle, other things being equal, a nationalist movement would have the right to play one imperialism off against another. Even so, the “foreign policy” of the IRA was a rare example of the obtuseness nationalist blinkers can impose. The idea that the victory of Nazi imperialism could help free Ireland, or that an Irish republic set up under Nazi patronage would be a step forward, was tenable only for blockheads and mystics. If the Nazis had invaded Ireland — they had contingency plans for it — they might have had the IRA collaborating against Unionists, in a pattern similar to that in Belgium and Yugoslavia.

Heavily repressed North and South, in fact the IRA counted for nothing. Its leader, Sean Russell, an honourable, essentially apolitical, traditional nationalist, died on board a Nazi submarine off Ireland’s coast. Frank Ryan, a central leader of left republicanism all through the 1930s, and a hard-core Stalinist among republicans, was captured fighting in Spain for the Republic and spent much of the war representing all the republican factions as a guest of Hitler’s government! He died, peacefully, in Dresden in 1944.

The IRA was not dead, because Catholic Ireland’s sense of itself was still outraged by the partition, because Northern Ireland Catholics were confined to second-class citizenship in the Six Counties, because the 26 County state stifled as an agrarian backwater in the late 40s and 50s, and above all because there was no effective working-class revolutionary organisation to draw to itself the sort of social discontent that fed into the IRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein.

Reorganised after the war, the IRA slowly revived. It was still physical-force-ist and anti-parliamentarian in principle, and very right-wing; indeed, it had a quasi-fascist element influenced by a Catholic movement called Maria Duce, which propagated all the quack right-wing Catholic nonsense about “Jewish” international finance being the source of the world’s ills.

Like an early 19th century insurrectionary movement, the IRA’s and Sinn Fein’s goal was to build up arms and recruits until it was strong enough to relaunch a campaign against Britain. It raided police barracks occasionally for guns.

This time, it decided not on a bombing campaign in Britain, as in 1939, but on a war in Northern Ireland — “British-occupied Ireland”. Knowing that action in the cities would stoke up Catholic-Protestant antagonism, it decided to confine its “campaign” to attacks on customs posts and police barracks in the mainly Catholic territory along the Border. This was the work of depoliticised right-wing Catholic republicans, some of them, to repeat, not far from fascism.

A splinter group launched the first attack, and then the main campaign began in December 1956. It spluttered rather than exploded. A small rash of attacks dwindled soon to an occasional attack. Some hundreds of young men were interned, North and South of the border. It was Fianna Fail, “the Republican Party”, that introduced internment in the South in 1957. The Border campaign was abandoned formally in March 1962, having died long before.

CLANN NA POBLACHTA

After they gave up the gun and the bomb, the leaders of the mid-1930s IRA formed their own political organisation in the mid-1940s. Its leader was Sean MacBride.

Winning ten seats in the 1948 election, this Clann na Poblachta joined a coalition government with the then two Irish Labour Parties and... with Fine Gael, the fascist Blueshirt party of the 1930s!

The pattern Connolly outlined thus reasserted itself, with the open emergence of the physical-force men of the 1930s, including some from 1939, as a Fianna-Fail-type ordinary bourgeois party. They travelled in the wake of the men of 1922 (Fianna Fail), who went the same way in the late 1920s.

Clann na Poblachta grew quickly, feeding on disillusion with Fianna Fail which, in power since 1932, had grown somewhat corrupt and, as we have seen, had savagely repressed republicans during the war. It benefited from the vacuum in labour politics, the Labour Party then being split into two small groups.

Sean MacBride became foreign minister. He offered to take the 26 Counties into NATO in return for a united Ireland. The coalition government then took these 26 Counties out of the Commonwealth and declared a

Republic that made no difference to anything — except that it erected additional barriers between the 26 Counties and the Six Counties.

The great success of this government was Dr Noel Browne, a Clann na Poblachta minister of health who campaigned successfully to eradicate tuberculosis, one of Ireland’s endemic diseases and a great killer.

The test for the government came when Browne tried to bring in a rudimentary health service, following the lead of the Labour government in Britain, and came up against the opposition of the arrogant Catholic bishops who had over 25 years of independence grown accustomed to telling governments what to do. When Browne refused to be told, he was destroyed: abandoned by his comrades, and most implacably by the recent ex-republicans, he was forced to resign.

After the 1951 election, Clann na Poblachta suffered a quick and catastrophic decline, its support flowing back to Fianna Fail. Like Fianna Fail’s, its leaders, once out of “revolutionary” physical-force costume and in mainstream politics, had shown themselves to be timid bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians, time-serving, and subservient to the bishops and priests.

THE BIRTH OF THE PROVOS

The physical force republicans of 1956-62 went through almost exactly the same evolution as MacBride and his friends. Defeated, they decided that they needed a social dimension to gain support.

Quickly, they fell under the influence of Stalinists peddling a diluted variant of the nationalist populism of the 1930s: “republicans need social policies to build a base”. They turned to politics, took up social agitation, and moved towards abandoning the characteristic dogmas of physical-force republicanism which forbade entry into the Westminster, Dublin, or Belfast parliaments.

They shed the organisation that became the Provisional IRA (December 1969 and January 1970) and later (1977) what became the INLA and the IRSP, and evolved into a “left” constitutional party. They differed from their predecessors in adopting many of the trappings of a Stalinist party and in accepting subsidies from Moscow. When the USSR collapsed, they split, and their spin-off, the Democratic Left, led by Proinsias De Rossa, who was interned in the 1950s, was in the Dublin government until it merged into the Labour Party in 1999.

The Provisionals emerged in 1969-70, triggered by the eruption in the North, as a recoil against the moves by the old movement away from the shibboleths of physical force on principle and boycott of parliaments.

In March 1971, this group of “Carbonari Republicans”, committed on principle to physical force and boycott of parliaments, launched all-out guerilla war to forcibly unify Ireland. They brought to the project political blindness, fetish-mongering, and their belief in political miracles of the sort that followed 1916. They acted to liberate a “British-occupied Ireland” that existed more in their imagination than in the reality of Northern Ireland, where the “British occupation forces” that counted were the Protestant-Unionist Irish majority there.

Basing themselves on the Northern Catholic minority — who had been roused up and made ready to back them by agitation for Catholic equality and civil rights in the Six Counties state — they made war on the “Crown forces” and on Northern Ireland Protestant society. In 1956 the IRA had tried to avoid stirring up Catholic-Protestant antagonism. Now they acted as if deliberately to rouse it to delirium pitch. And rouse it they did.

This was a strange, and to most observers startling, development. By the mid-1960s Carbonari republicanism had seemed to be dying. Increasingly Stalinist populist republicans, looking back to the Republican Congress of the 1930s, had taken over the IRA. They turned away from militarism to social agitation, though some of them had the intention of returning to militarism once they had built support.

In the Six Counties they agitated for civil rights among Catholics suffering job discrimination, gerrymandered local government, and unfair treatment in provision of social housing. Modelling themselves on the US civil rights movement, they were encouraged by the British Labour government’s unprecedented “interference” in the internal affairs of the Six Counties, which until 1972 had its own Protestant-supremacist Belfast government. A Protestant backlash followed.

In August 1969 British troops took control when serious Catholic-Protestant fighting broke out, first in Derry and then in Belfast. The demobilised “left-wing” IRA counted for little in all this. During the Northern fighting in August 1969 the leaders told the “Army Council” that they had lent the organisation’s remaining guns to the Free Wales Army!

The republican backlash that followed shaped events in Northern Ireland more decisively than the Protestant backlash that triggered it. Old “Carbonari”, men of the 1956 campaign like O’Connell, O’Brady, MacStiofain, came out of retirement. The IRA and Sinn Fein split in December 1969 and January 1970. Serious academic stu-

Liam Mellows

dents of such movements like, for example, J Bowyer Bell, dismissed the “Provisionals” as neanderthals. Nevertheless, they grew very quickly in a Northern Ireland where Catholic youth had few jobs and the best prospect was to emigrate. They grew in an atmosphere saturated with nationalist tradition conveyed in song and story and historical mythology and nourished by living grievances, among the people who had lost out most in the crude partition settlement of fifty years before.

The Provisionals launched a military campaign in March 1971. Internment — exclusively against Catholics, though there were also Protestant paramilitary groups — threw mass Catholic support behind them. By March 1972 Britain felt obliged to scrap Protestant Home Rule in Belfast. For 26 years after that, all attempts to replace it by Catholic-Protestant power-sharing failed. The most serious attempt was destroyed in May 1974 by a tremendous Protestant general strike.

In the course of their long war, remarkable things happened to the initially pure physical-force, “politics-is-a-snare” Provisionals. From being explicitly right-wing Catholic traditionalists, they moved in the 1970s and 80s to something very like the populist left-wing republicanism from which they had recoiled in the 1960s and early 70s, shooting some of the populists in transit.

They moved away from the religious fetish of militarism, of the purifying and redeeming power of blood. Having established, by a 23-year war, that war could not succeed, they declared a ceasefire in August 1994, and negotiated the Good Friday Agreement by early 1998.

These changes reflected a radical shift in republicanism, from a movement thinly scattered across the whole island to one concentrated in the Northern Ireland Catholic ghettos and Border areas. From that shift also came the Provisionals’ scarcely-disguised communalist character. They had been locked into a war waged by a minority of the Northern Catholic minority. They were and are the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* of Carbonari republicanism — its furthest point of travel away from the republicanism of Wolfe Tone and James Connolly.

The Provisional IRA’s war had been rooted in and explained in terms of the middle-class Catholic nationalist account of Northern Ireland, as “British-occupied Ireland”. That is the poisoned root of everything that followed.

Setting out to fight the British Crown forces “occupying” the Six Counties, the Provisional IRA found itself confronting and targeting the real “occupation forces”, the Irish minority. In the early 70s, it bombed the centres of Irish towns and blew up and shot Irish people in the RUC and UDR. These were “traitors”, “collaborators”, “Orange supremacists”, but Irish people nonetheless, and representatives of an Irish minority entitled to have its rights treated with respect by honest Republicans in the tradition of Wolfe Tone and James Connolly.

Over time Six-Counties people inevitably came to the fore of the Provisionals’ leadership, and they, moving towards bourgeois realpolitik, knew that their enemy was fundamentally the Northern Irish majority, the Irish Unionists. In 1981 the Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein had dropped their old talk of a federal Ireland. In other words, they moved explicitly to leave themselves even in remote theory no possible relationship to the Irish minority except to demand of them that they surrender unconditionally and agree to be submerged in an Ireland based on what was then plainly a Catholic confessional state. (It is now less so, after spectacular shifts in the 26 counties away from brutally explicit Catholic rule).

The targeting of the Irish minority was there from the beginning behind the ideological talk about fighting the crown forces and driving the British out, but it became more and more explicit and clear-cut as the war and the



McGuinness on the far right, in his full-on IRA days

years dragged on. It reached its obscene paroxysm in the years before the ceasefire, when sentence of death was pronounced against even those who did odd repair jobs in police stations — and carried out too. Now the would-be successors to the Provos have justified the shooting of two men delivering pizzas to the Army on the grounds that they were “collaborators”.

All this urgently pointed to a mystery at the heart of what the Provisional IRA were doing. Though they called themselves republicans who followed Tone’s goal of uniting all the people of Ireland and the 1916 Declaration’s intent to “treat all the children of the nation” equally, and insisted that the problem was “British occupation” of Six Counties of Ireland, it became unmistakably plain from what they did that, in practice if not in theory, they saw the problem not primarily as a matter of British occupation — not, that is, unless the “Brits” in question were the million Irish Brits.

Republican theology stopped the Provisionals making such an idea explicit. The British-Irish “left”, paradoxically, was less restrained — from Michael Farrell’s early 1970s theorising about the Irish Protestants in the light of the experience of Algeria (from one million French were driven out in 1962-3) to INLA’s unashamed attack on Protestants picked at random as Protestants, paralleling the activities of Loyalist murder gangs who did not invoke Tone or Pearse and Connolly, still less Lenin or Marx.

Denying in theory the idea that the Irish-British were the problem, the Provisionals recognised it in bloody practice. The nonsensically inadequate explanation that the Protestant-Unionists were all traitors, collaborators, anti-nationalists came in time to amount to a “republican” version of the idea that there were two Irish nations, or peoples. The Protestants were a bad, non-legitimate, Irish nation; and so the Provisionals, in effect a private army whose war was backed by perhaps a third of the Six-Counties Catholics, could maim and kill as many of the one million Irish Unionists as whim, exigency and military or sectarian logic suggested to them. The “left-wing” INLA could go into a Pentecostal church in Dalkey and open fire with a machine gun on the worshippers; the Provisional IRA could blow up an 11 November commemoration-day Protestant service in Enniskillen (1987).

Backed only by a minority of the six county Catholic minority, acting as if to drive the history-gouged ditch between the Protestants and Catholics deeper and bloodier, yet claiming that their supreme goal was a united Ireland... did they think they could simply overwhelm the Protestants? Surely not.

THE PROVOS GO CONSTITUTIONAL

By the mid 1990s, after all that had happened in the previous 30 years, it was impossible to pretend that the problem was only or mainly a matter of “British-occupied Ireland”. The keystone of the Provisionals’ entire political strategy was still the idea that the Six Counties was “British-occupied Ireland”, but now they understood it to mean that Britain was to blame for not “persuading” the one million Irish Protestants into a united Ireland.

These “Irish nationalists” and “Irish republicans” self-righteously denounced Britain because Britain would not force one million Irish (or Irish-British) people into an independent Irish Republic for them!

The Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein came to look to not an intra-Irish but a British-imposed settlement. They killed Irish-Unionist people in order to compel the British government to impose a settlement on those Irish Unionists.

The great self-hypnotising lie — British-occupied Ireland — had been twisted in the course of the war into the demand for the demonised British not to get out until they had compelled one million Irish people to do what the Provisional IRA want.

Despite the ideologising, the appeals to history, and the

appeals to republican ideals and aspirations, the Provisionals did not believe in an Irish solution. They believed in a British solution to the problem of relations between the two people on the island. The logic of reality had forced the Provisional IRA not only to accept that the root problem was not “British occupied Ireland” but to look to the British military occupying forces to “solve” the real problem, the fact that one million Irish people would fight, guns in hand, against submitting to the Provisionals, and if necessary will carve out their own “self-determination” against Catholic Ireland. The Provisionals had blundered and stumbled on to the ground of traditional Unionism! That is what the talk of the British becoming “persuaders” of the Protestants really meant.

Thus, the Provisional Carbonari-republicans, having donned much of the old clothing of Stalino-populist republicanism, reduced the whole tradition to bloody nonsense. They have become an utterly decadent sect of washed-out republicans concerned not with Wolfe Tone’s goal of uniting the Irish people but with uniting the territory regardless of the people. Their final phase before their move into mainstream bourgeois politics was a pledge to go on bombing and killing — mainly Irish people — until they got the British solution they favour, until they got Britain — the great Satan of Irish history — to compel the Irish minority to “unite.”

Yet that approach was not really new. The demand that the British compel the Protestant-Unionist Irish minority to submit to the Irish Catholic-Nationalist majority is a very old one. It sustained the Home Rule Party in its long tail-to-dog relationship to the Liberal Party in the quarter century before the First World War.

Both Irish peoples were allied to a “great” British party, the Protestant-Unionists to the Tories and the Catholic-Nationalists to the Liberals. Each looked to its ally to gain it complete victory — the Unionists to the Tories to stop Home Rule for any part of Ireland by killing it with coercion and by such “kindness” as distributing the land to the tenants; the Catholic-Nationalists to the Liberals to bestow Home Rule and enforce it on the Irish minority. Corrupted and demoralised by their British alliance, neither side looked to an intra-Irish solution.

In the event, the Tories proved better allies than the Liberals, and a solution was imposed by a British cabinet in which the leaders of the pre-World War One Unionist rebellion against the Liberal government sat as powerful members. Seemingly very favourable to the northern Unionists, the settlement was in fact very short-sighted, because it included so large a Catholic-Nationalist minority in the Northern Ireland state as to make it unviable.

There was no democratic — that is, no republican — case for the attitude to the Protestants of the Provisionals in the last stage of their military campaign. The only case was a Catholic-chauvinist one. If Wolfe Tone’s republicanism started with the call to end sectionalism, the nadir of Carbonari republicanism was reached in the Provisionals’ use of republican catchcries in the pursuit of sectionalism and sectarianism.

A million or so of Ireland’s people — natives of the island of Ireland, and descendants of people who have lived in Ireland for hundreds of years — want British in “occupation” because they consider themselves British. Those million are not loosely sprinkled amongst the Catholic majority population of the island, but the compact majority in north-east Ulster.

Their rights cannot include the right to veto the rights of the Irish majority? No, but there is no democratic — that is, honest republican — or socialist case to be made that the rights of the Irish majority includes the right to the territory where they do not have majority support, that is, to oppress the people of another identity living there.

These accumulating political and social absurdities combined with the impossibility of military victory to change the Provisional IRA. They moved in the 1980s

towards using politics to supplement small-scale war. Thus they coined the slogan, “A ballot paper in one hand, and an Armalite [rifle] in the other” to sum up a two-track approach.

Tentatively they moved away from war, declaring a unilateral ceasefire in August 1994. They resumed attacks in Britain a year later, but their war ended finally in a 1997 ceasefire. They negotiated the Good Friday Agreement, accepting the need for Protestant consent to political change, and agreeing to work a power-sharing Six Counties system with the Protestant Unionists.

It took a decade to get the present Paisleyite-Sinn Fein tandem administration.

At the same time a Council of Ireland was set up, giving an all-Ireland dimension. The pre-slump economic boom in the South seemed likely to knit together North and South economically to an unprecedented degree. After much to-ing and fro-ing, the Provisional IRA first disarmed and then — more or less — disbanded its structures, merging in fact with Sinn Fein.

What the Provisionals did from the mid-1990s amounted to a damning condemnation of everything they had done from 1973 onwards. Everything that the Provisional IRA accepted in the Good Friday Agreement had been there, in a more flexible system, in the Sunningdale Agreement of November 1973, under which for five months (January to May 1974) a power-sharing government existed in Belfast.

It took a two-decade war to transform the Provisional IRA into constitutional nationalist. The splinters from the Provisionals in the 80s and 90s, the “Real” and “Continuity” IRAs, stood and stand on the old Provisional IRA ground, adopting the attitude to the Adams-McGuinness organisation that the Provisionals in the late 60s and early 70s took to the populist-Stalinist “Official” IRA and Sinn Fein. They have the politics, and the contradictions, of the Provisionals in the 1970s.

The Six Counties, where the Catholic minority is in fact the majority in not much less than half the territory, is not a sane or legitimate arrangement of Irish affairs. From this fact the new IRAs draw their political strength. By the underlying facts also — the fact of the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland — they are forced into the position of reactionary utopian nationalists, devotees of a nation that does not exist as they define it.

The appeal to the mystical unity of Ireland, the irrational conception of the sacred unity of the island. The nation is defined as the island — not as people, but as geography and a mystified and myth-ridden history.

About this attitude Connolly long ago said all that needs to be said: “Ireland as distinct from her people is nothing to me”.

The acceptance by many on the left for many years of the activities of the Provisional IRA as a progressive, or possibly progressive, response to the oppressive conditions under which many Six Counties Catholics suffer, meant allowing myth to eclipse politics.

Not to ask what, if anything, the activities of the Provisional IRA had, and those of the “Real” and “Continuity” IRAs have now, to do with the ideals of either Wolfe Tone or with the republican socialism of Connolly; not to measure what they actually did against historic Irish republican ideals; not to ask yourself whether the shards and fragments of “Tone republicanism” or “Connolly republicanism” the Provisionals deployed and their would-be successors now deploy were or are being abused — that is to refuse to think about the issues.

In fact, many left wingers simply bowed down before a fetish: the Provos had guns, the Provos fought, therefore they were revolutionaries against the establishment — therefore they were to be supported. Some of the most fervid of the Provophiles in Britain showed utter indifference to what happened to ordinary Irish people. They submitted themselves to massive depoliticisation on the Irish question. They let the fact of the Provo war run like a tank through their minds, churning to mud political ideals, socialist goals, Marxist assessments, and even elementary class criteria.

They dispensed with almost every single tool of Marxist, or socialist, or plain rational analysis — that is with every means available to us, as socialists, Marxists, workers, Wolfe Tone republicans, or plain human beings, for making sense of the world. Violence took on a mystical significance and assumed an all-transforming quality. Many left-wingers, especially in Britain, became vicarious Carbonari republicans.

Faced with the outright bourgeois Sinn Fein/IRA of the last decade, none of them, as far as I know, has ever drawn up a balance sheet of their time as cheerleaders for “the IRA”. They were what might be called “Fifth Comintern Congress Trotskyists”! Trotsky was not.

The “Fifth Comintern Congress Trotskyists” face reality blindfolded by ideology. Marxist socialists and republicans in Tone’s and Connolly’s tradition look reality straight in the face. That is the only way to change it for the better, not to let it dominate you and impose its own age-old patterns on you even while you struggle against it.

FEMINISM

Gender, race and class

By CATHY NUGENT

Around 300 people attended Gender, Race and Class, a feminist activist conference on Saturday 14 February. The conference was the product of months of planning, with the main initiators (Feminist Fightback) and the broader organising group contacting, discussing with and inviting different organisations and individuals who we thought would share political ideas in common: left, socialist, anarchist and anti-capitalist.

This was no easy task but the positive outcome was very much evident on the day — 15 lively workshops, the majority resolving to take forward collaborative political activity on reproductive rights, campaigning against benefit cuts, relating to the recent wave of construction strikes; writing up a workshop about how to make unions fight for women workers, direct action against the further criminalisation of sex workers, producing an “alternative budget” for women, making solidarity with Bangladeshi textile workers and more.

The decision to build collaborative political activity across a relatively broad political feminist spectrum was deliberate. There are two positive reasons for doing this apart from the most obvious — that it makes for more, and more lively campaigning.

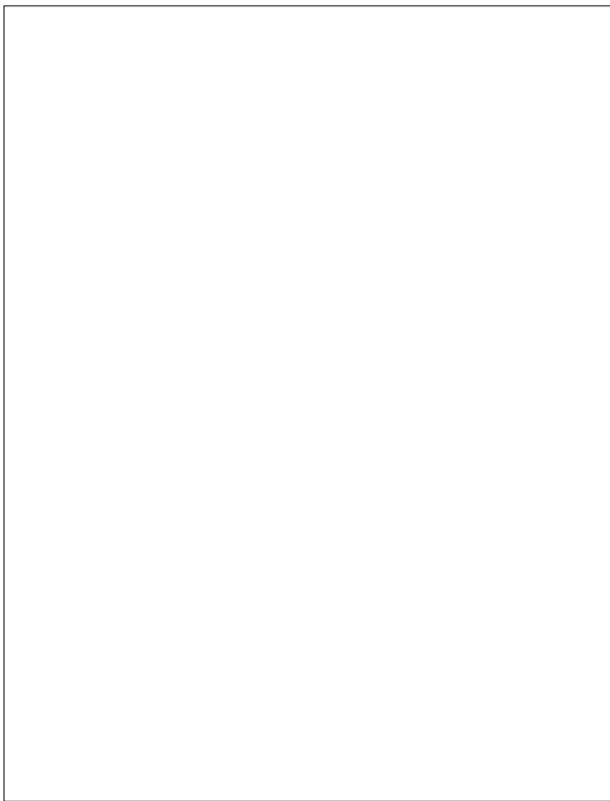
First, while there is a general interest in gender, class and race issues among anti-capitalist activists, there is a need to discuss through these ideas and how they interconnect in an open and democratic way. Socialists cannot meet and talk to anarchists and vice versa if we stay in our separate campaigns and organisations cursing each other for “sectarianism”. The political differences we have can only be debated and discussed if we are working together and... debating and discussing.

Equally, many feminists who have less clear ideological commitments want to hear others with clear convictions and are bored of attending feminist events chock full of fluffy, apolitical, lifestyleism.

Second there is a need to create and develop a strong feminist political stream that stands apart from the current feminist mainstream. From the *Guardian* women’s page, to “activist” groups like the London Feminist Network, mainstream feminism today is a noxious blend of liberal and radical feminism.

For instance many of these kinds of feminists support the government’s proposals on sex work because they see sex workers as “victims” rather than human beings who can and do self-organise. The government meanwhile tries to play a feminist card, repressing the sex industry (or rather driving it underground); they want to increase their own coercive power and they think repression makes good politics.

That a new stream of anti-capitalist and socialist feminism is developing, basing itself on a political critique of liberal-radical feminism, is a very good thing. It has



Dressed to the nines, Feminist Fightback took action with Labour Behind the Label on Saturday 7 March. In London Fashion Week we wanted to highlight exploitation by Prada. Two of Prada’s suppliers have been guilty of suppressing workers’ rights in Turkey. On the same day Feminist Fightback joined the anti-capitalist contingent on the Million Women Rise March in London.

• More: www.labourbehindthelabel.org

the potential to grow alongside the general rise of feminist activism. Marxist socialists need to get properly and sympathetically involved. To help us we have a rich Marxist tradition. We also the best critiques from the socialist feminism of the 70s and 80s, which attempted (not always successfully) to found an integrated revolutionary theory and strategy for fighting women’s oppression.

40 copies of *Solidarity* were sold, there was a lot of interest in the socialist feminist discussion meeting on Sylvia Pankhurst, and 15 people signed up to find out more about the AWL.

- Detailed workshop reports: anticapitalistfeminists.co.uk
- Events and campaigns: www.feministfightback.org.uk

WELFARE REFORM

“Bankers” occupy the DWP

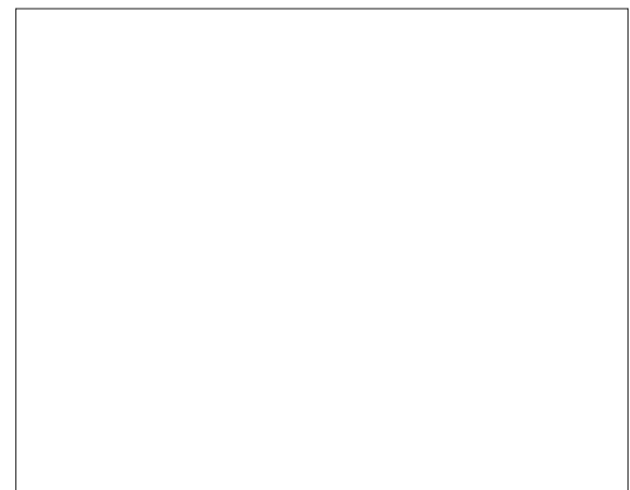
Twenty-five activists dressed as bankers staged an occupation at the Department for Work and Pensions on Monday 9 March.

Taking over the lobby of the Department for Work and Pensions’ Adelphi House they leafleted staff throughout the building. Carrying banners saying “Target the rich not the poor” and “Stop the Welfare Abolition Bill”, sat in front of the entry barriers and refused to leave.

The aim of the protest was to highlight that fact the Welfare Reform Bill was designed by bankers, penalises the poor, and abolishes income support for single parents and incapacity benefit.

The Bill which will have its third reading on 17 March includes proposals to:

- End income support for single parents and incapacity benefit for disabled people
 - Introduce a compulsory work for benefits system in a US-style workfare scheme
 - Privatise more of the work of Jobcentre Plus to companies which will be paid more the less benefits they award.
 - Share claimants’ information with the police
- Anne-Marie O’Reilly, an activist with Feminist Fightback and London Coalition Against Poverty, said: “Everyone knows that the Government’s Welfare Abolition Bill was designed by ex-banker David Freud. Even if it weren’t for the banks’ track records, the fact that he has recently defected to the Tories should make it clear this Bill need to be thrown out.”
- More: www.lcap.org.uk



WORKERS’ LIBERTY FUND DRIVE

Thanks are due to the following people in the last month, for helping towards our £18,000 target: Dave B for an increased standing order and donation of £300, Dave F for the £30 donation, Stan and Joe for donations of £100 each, and Gemma for £40. Our total for this month stands at £810.

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 £7,919

STUDENTS

First demo since 2006

By DANIEL RANDALL

Around 700 or 800 students marched through London on 25 February on a national demonstration against fees and marketisation organised by Education Not for Sale in alliance with other socialists, anti-capitalists and free education campaigners, as well as a number of student unions and the NUS Women’s, LGBT and Black Students’ Campaigns.

The relatively small turn-out was reflective of the fact that the demonstrators came mainly from universities where the left has a strong base, and not from the majority of universities and colleges. There were decent turn outs from a number of universities, but only a small number. This is an indictment of NUS and the majority of student union leaderships, who refused to have anything to do with the demo and in fact no doubt worked against it.

However the fact that the demonstration took place was progress. There has not been a national student demo since 2006; without this initiative, that three year gap could have lengthened to four years, five years or

even longer. (It was also the first time that a national free education demo has been organised independently of NUS since the Campaign for Free Education demos of the late 1990s.) We have learnt important lessons which can put into practice next time.

ENS held a fringe meeting at the end of the demonstration, attended by about 40 activists including participants in a number of the Gaza occupations. It discussed the possibility of organising direct action over fees, something which is certainly necessary to win and seems much more viable in the wake of the Gaza movement; and also the idea of left-led student unions founding a new organising centre independent of the NUS structures.

It is an idea that clearly needs to be discussed further; a 7 March meeting initiated by ENS already began exploring the issues, and a meeting scheduled for 18 April in London will also need to look at how the politics of rank-and-file direct action anti-capitalism can be turned from an activist minority into the guiding principle of a national student union movement.

- For further information on the development of these discussions, check www.free-education.org.uk

FILM

Spanish holidays and dialectics

DANIEL RANDALL REVIEWS WOODY ALLEN'S
VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA.

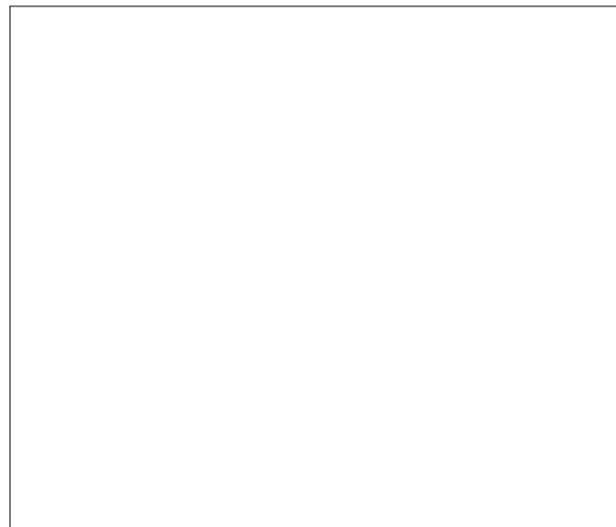
Perhaps Woody Allen is just a dirty old man. His relationship with, and marriage to, his adoptive stepdaughter is well publicised. And recent films, such as 2005's *Match Point*, have centred not so much around the philosophical conflicts and neuroses of his earlier works as on his latest muse Scarlett Johansson's cleavage.

After a series of damp-squib releases set in London, Allen has moved onto Barcelona — and taken a great deal of controversy with him. The involvement of the Catalan tourism authorities in funding *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* sparked a debate around whether the film was anything more than a combination of Allen's lustful yearnings after young, beautiful women and a glorified advert for Catalan holidays.

As the latter (the advert), the film is a triumph. Barcelona looks beautiful, and Allen seems to have a better connection to it than he did to London, where he struggled to get beyond hackneyed, big-red-buses-and-the-river-Thames cinematography.

As for the former (Allen's dirty-old-man syndrome), if a ruthlessly self-deprecating and hilarious spoof on-set diary Allen wrote for the *Guardian* is anything to go by, he is perfectly aware of these implications and is happier joking about them than trying to refute them. It should be noted, though, that this hardly neutralises their sexist potential — and nor does the fact that Barcelona itself, as much as, if not more than the three female protagonists, is rendered as the subject of sexual gaze and an object of lust. However, these factors at the very least suggest that there's a little more to the film than an abuse of his directorial power to make Scarlett Johansson and Penelope Cruz kiss each other.

In terms of its substantive content, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* is a great deal less heavyweight than its philosophising voice-over wants us to believe. But taken within the context of Allen's oeuvre, its examination of the frictions and tensions generated by conflicting conceptions of romantic love provide a worthwhile addition to a body of work that one might reasonably assess, per-



haps albeit only in a crude sense, as dialectical.

Allen is an admirer of Sergei Eisenstein, whose essay *A Dialectical Approach to Film Form* explored the possibility of using various cinematic techniques to place the tension of opposites and conflicts between opposing forces at the heart of a film. Eisenstein, of course, intended the techniques to be applied to order to allow a more effective exposition of class struggle, but Allen has used them to great effect down the years to consider a range of more abstract philosophical conflicts and struggles; tragedy and comedy, for example, or the conflict between Judaism as religious dogma and Jewishness as a more ambiguous cultural space.

Vicky Cristina Barcelona doesn't even approach the profundity of a film like *Annie Hall* or *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, but its sumptuous locations and cinematography (if nothing else) make it the most eminently watchable of Allen's films for a decade. And its attempt, however lightweight, to place at its centre an animating conflict between opposing forces helps raise it above the level of mere misogynistic gazing.

Woody Allen may be an old dog (and one who appears to know it), but there is apparently life in him yet.

THEATRE

Art, the grind, and the tutor

MOLLY BURKE-KIRWIN REVIEWS THE PITMEN
PAINTERS BY LEE HALL (LYTTLETON NATIONAL
THEATRE)

Lee Hall's play has orbited the country with great acclaim following its initial run last year at the National. Hall, is most famous for writing the popular *Billy Elliot*. The *Pitmen Painters* another political fable of our times, although this time, it is true events which have inspired Hall's work.

The *Pitmen Painters* were a group of Ashington miners who in the 1930s organised their own "Art Appreciation Class". The class did not appreciate the slides their hired tutor had brought and instead agreed to paint pictures themselves in order to learn about art generally. Lino cuts led to oil paintings. The painters became famous and held exhibitions of their work. One, Oliver Kilbourn, was offered the patronage of a local wealthy landowner.

The painters were applauded for their primitive techniques and subject matter — mining and scenes of their everyday lives. However the artists were heavily influenced by sophisticated artists such as Henry Moore. By the Second World War the Pitmen were beginning to be less fashionable, but they continued to paint.

Although the art is interesting (an exhibition of their

work is also on display), the play throws up vivid political debates. Oliver (played by the excellent Chris Connel) has to decide whether to accept a rich woman's financial support and escape the everyday danger of the pit or to remain true to his working class values and his comrades. This dilemma is skilfully explored and discussed throughout the piece.

The painting seems to be the men's only escape from the relentless grind of everyday employment. In their paintings they find a place they can work for themselves.

Another issue that is explored is the upper class tutor's attitude to his students. Although he seems sympathetic, his romantic view of their way of life is exemplified in the scene in which he asks Oliver to pose for him in picturesque pit clothes which he would have never worn underground.

Despite this being a play of serious issues, I was frequently erupting with mirth. The actors' comic timing are consistently good throughout, with even the minor characters sustaining their roles magnificently. This is a (literally) hilarious, thoughtful, challenging and wonderful experience which I would recommend to anyone remotely interested in the pitmen's struggle to expand their horizons whilst remaining true to their class.

It ends ironically with the pitmen welcoming the nationalisation of the coal industry as if it were the beginning of socialism... We know the story ends differently.

BOOK

The invisible people of fashion

Having enjoyed London Fashion Week, Molly Thomas looked again at *The Fashion Conspiracy*, by Nicholas Coleridge

Let me get this straight, I like labels. Designer ones. I like fashion and I'd like to be someone who wears clothes with designer labels on them. Therefore, my critique of *The Fashion Conspiracy* is not entirely impartial. However, the book is based on an interesting point. They may be lovely clothes with lovely labels on them but where do they come from?

The author attempts to trace the journey of the clothes from idea to product to possession. It shows how something that starts off as a whim of a major designer is manufactured (possibly with blood, sweat and tears in a sweatshop) and ends up on you. Or whatever celebrity is the "clothes-horse" of the moment.

It shows how the product price is inflated beyond belief and how billions of dollars are spent on advertising without showing where the product came from. For example, the book kicks off with a story about a sweatshop where the writer sees a girl feeding some fabric through a sewing machine. Later, the writer sees a billboard with a model wearing a jumpsuit which is of the same fabric. This sets in motion a thought trial of following the life cycle of clothes.

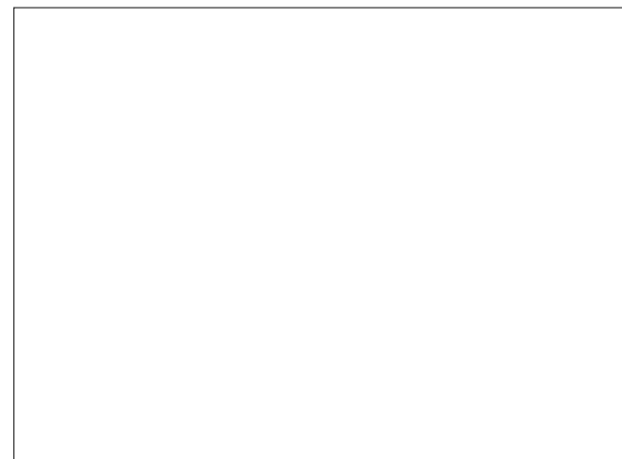
The book paints a sad picture. The stark difference between those at the top and those at the bottom. Those carrying the bag and those making it. Those with money to burn and those who'd endure burns to get money. Those with and those without. One story that sticks out from the book is that of a laundromat in the UAE where clothes are worn once, sent there and never picked up. The value of the clothes there could make a huge difference to many lives of people the bottom; but will it ever?

The book contrasts high-flying stories of beautiful, exclusive and world-reknowned people with anecdotes of poor, industrious people just trying to make a living.

This book was written in the late 1980s but it is intriguing to see how many of the main players in the fashion world are alive and prominent today and how many are not. The label Ungaro, described as one of the top five, has faded into obscurity and many other lesser labels have emerged. The book mentions a market monopoly that the top designers have and how impossible it is to break through. It describes young designers who toil away at a major label and then try to start their own label but don't have the necessary resources to launch it.

One of the themes of this book is the invisible people. The people who piece together your bag/dress/shoes. The people who may get paid very low wages. The people who may have to work under bad conditions. The people who will get either nothing or a very small part of the profits of your bag/dress/shoes.

- Protest at Prada, page 16



Fashion: pretty and deadly

CONSTRUCTION STRIKES

Nationalist strike — an inconvenient truth

MARK SANDELL TAKES ISSUE WITH OUR
COVERAGE

Solidarity's approach to the recent construction strikes was very poor. While they were a national news issue and a major focus for everyone interested in how the British working class respond to the crisis, we wobbled and ended up downplaying the massive threat of nationalism to our class. We did not heed Trotsky's advice in the Transitional Programme

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be."

The key reason these strikes spread was because they touched a nationalist nerve that is plain to see in any workplace. No active Marxist should be shocked that injustice focused on nationalism can mobilise workers in a way that other issues have failed to do. Marxists do not idealise workers. We think the working class is an international class that has the capacity to tear down capitalism and create a classless society. But we don't think workers are generally socialist, or more anti-nationalist, or generally better people than non-workers. In fact the idea that we are a slave class, whose ideas are dominated by the ruling ideas of our age, like nationalism, is central to our understanding of the state of our movement.

During the recent disputes we bent over backwards to justify, explain away or ignore the depths of the nationalism involved. Our editorial said: "It is an eruption of class struggle that may be the harbinger of many such struggles. Other workers will, indeed, learn from this example to act and to defy the anti-union laws."

To what extent the dispute focused on breaking the anti-union laws and fighting the bosses' crisis is crucial here. It seems to me that the key issue that made this dis-

pute happen was nationalism. That's why this contracting-out and this new contract were fought when others have not been.

It is also why this dispute spread, while others have not. Those who want to downplay the nationalist demands have said the media or the bosses have played up the "British jobs for British workers" stuff. Perhaps, but it was central, for the very good reason, that it was the key idea that made the strike spread.

Our article went on to say:

"But some will also be mis-educated into picking up the worker-dividing demand: 'British jobs for British workers.'" It seemed clear to me that it was this slogan was the reason the strike spread.

The article went on to sort-of accept this not very convenient truth:

"If the British 'Labour' prime minister raises the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers', as he has done, it is not surprising that workers pick up on it".

So it's not the nationalism of the brave workers that's to blame? Still the article is silent on the crap soft-peddalling of nationalism by most levels of both unions involved in the dispute.

After the Lindsey deal our leaflet hailed a "substantial industrial victory" in probably the AWL's most glowing assessment of any dispute in recent history. Was it that good? Did it deal with subcontracting? Or any other major issue? No, but it got some more British jobs. The claim that no Italians lost work is impossible for us to check and a claim made by the company did not expose the nationalism of the dispute from the picket lines through the reps right up to the union leaders. After the event in the face of a blatant *Daily Star* stunt we had to attack Simpson, but only then.

It should not be hard for us to understand Janus-faced union leaders. From the very start of the dispute it was obvious how the union leaders and even rank-and-file leaders would play the strike. It is patronising in the extreme to think that trade unionists can't work out a line of spin that can seem to play it by the book while having an obvious content that will be understood by others.

Of course none but the stupidest union spokesperson called for sacking foreign workers (I did hear one GMB official call for exactly that on Radio 4) and of course union leaders, who spend their lives asking lawyers what they can do, are not going to demand something they know to be illegal. The call for British workers not to be discriminated against has obvious subtext that you can only ignore if you want to delude yourself.

In championing the Lindsey deal the Socialist Party quoted the BBC as "understanding no Italian workers would be sacked" without explaining that Italian firms are not legally allowed to "sack" permanent staff (getting round the law by giving people endless unpaid holidays). So no Italian firm would be stupid enough to say it was going to sack permanent staff. Of course there

was no mention of the crippling levels of youth unemployment in Southern Italy.

The union leaders knew what they were doing, however. The Unite chief negotiator, Bernard McAuley, said: "We've made sure that no Italians have been made redundant, we've got jobs for 102 British people and we've also made sure that Fabio Capello stays as England manager. We want integration now, not segregation." He was championing his belief that the deal would mean 102 new jobs for British workers only.

And what happened about organising the Italian workers?

The ramifications of "British jobs for British workers" hegemonising the battle for jobs are massive, especially in the current British workforce. It will derail every fight in every workplace; it will make the vital workers' unity across Europe even less likely than it was. It is a massive problem for basic trade unionism let alone socialism.

Anti-Europe little-Englandism is a very powerful in the UK and this strike has strengthened it. I think nationalism is perhaps the biggest ideological enemy of our class. I can hear readers saying "we know all that!" — so why downplay it, half excuse it, or even joke that the construction workers were only taking the piss out of Brown's slogan of "British jobs for British workers"? Why not condemn and protest at union leaders who help to support or even whip up this poison?

The left has a nasty history of downplaying or ignoring the real politics that blight our class. Instead of facing up to the problem too often we try to ignore or explain away backward ideas. It's what the Stalinist CP did, and I have witnessed SP paper sellers laughing at racist jokes "to stay in with the lads" on a picket line. Taking the SP's word on this dispute given their tradition of "turning a blind eye" and workerism was a mistake.

We do of course denounce the *Daily Star*, Gordon Brown, and once he has made himself a blatant nationalist even Derek Simpson, but at the time we baulked at criticising the role of the unions, the reps, and the backward ideas of the workforce.

In this period of low class struggle some in the AWL may fetishise "workers" as angels with dirty faces. In the context of declining unions some of us may become the first line of defence of the unions, leaders included. The slogan of some could be "my union right or wrong."

Yes, contracting out is an outrage, and has long been so. Yes, the recession has increased the need to defend jobs, but this dispute was focused on the idea and not just the slogan of "British jobs for British workers" - that is also why it spread. Even Derek Simpson understands that much. I hope I am wrong, but it seems clear to me that the lesson most workers will take from the dispute and its result will not be the one the AWL and left groups would like it to be, but will instead be the poisoned logic of nationalism.

†• The politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

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- Can the labour movement be transformed?

- Imperialism, national and war
- Marxism and oppression
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WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

EUROPEAN ELECTION

“No 2 EU” is not an adequate platform

BY COLIN FOSTER

“Trade Unionists Against the EU Constitution” is planning to run lists in the 4 June election for the European Parliament, and on 4 March won the support of the Executive of the rail union RMT for that.

Should socialists like AWL who believe that New Labour has stifled working-class political representation, and who argue for unions to back independent working-class challenges in elections, back this initiative?

Not on present lines. Politically, the lists do not even pretend to speak up for the working class against the capitalist class. They confine themselves to anti-EUism. Organisationally, they look like not a genuinely union-based enterprise, but a venture by the raddled old Communist Party of Britain and *Morning Star*, and groups which they influence, for which they have managed to win some backing from the RMT leadership.

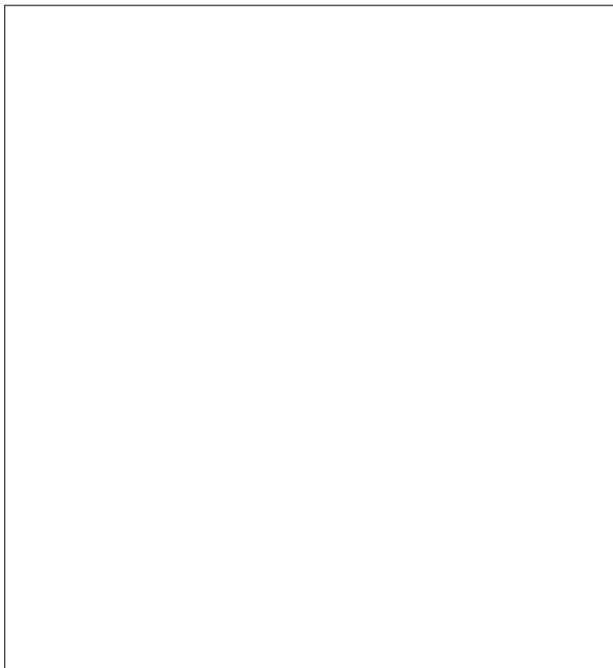
Genuinely union-based? This is an initiative from the RMT, perhaps the most militant and politically active union in Britain...

It was not initiated by RMT. A circular letter to Trades Council secretaries from “Trade Unionists Against the EU Constitution” dated 24 February announced it as a cut-and-dried decision, complete with ballot-paper description, “No2EU, Yes to Democracy” and political platform. The RMT Executive did not back it until later (4 March).

Speaking up for the working class? The platform may not be perfect, but surely it takes up key issues like jobs, privatisation, the banks, the anti-union laws...

No. The platform opposes “EU directives that privatise our public services”, but says nothing about the made-in-Britain privatisation of rail and Royal Mail, or the made-in-Britain creeping privatisation of the NHS and schools.

It says nothing about jobs or the banks or any other economic issue, other than the bland phrase “defend



“Defending the developing ‘British’ manufacturing” is a nationalist dead-end programme. Our alternative to both national and international capital is international working class organisation and unity

and develop British manufacturing”! Nothing about the anti-union laws or housing. It opposes “EU militarism”, but not sending more British troops to Afghanistan.

It’s all just anti-EU stuff, not very different from what UKIP or BNP would say on the EU except that it doesn’t explicitly say “Britain out of the EU”, and with a “soul-saving” phrase about “no to racism and fascism”.

Solidarity and Workers’ Liberty advocate workers’ unity and social “levelling-up” across Europe as the answer to the EU, not an “anti-EU” stance. But you have to accept that RMT is anti-EU...

Even those union activists who are anti-EU mostly won’t want an election effort which is *exclusively* anti-EU, and has *nothing* to say about any social or political evil which is the fault of the British government and the British bosses rather than “Brussels”.

For all its faults, the “No2EU” slate represents workers breaking with New Labour, so should be supported...

The RMT leadership is evidently making little effort to involve RMT activists in the campaign. In financial terms, the £45,000 the RMT Exec voted to contribute from union funds will cover little of the cost of a Euro-election challenge, about £1 million even for the scrappiest “paper” campaign. The centre of gravity of this effort lies elsewhere.

RMT activists seeking to attend the meeting on 14 March to “proceed with” the “No2EU” project have had RMT HQ tell them they can’t attend and even refuse to tell them where the meeting is!

What rank-and-file discussion we know of has been critical of the “No2EU” slate.

At the RMT London Transport Regional Council on Thursday 26 February, Janine Booth, Regional Council secretary, called for an electoral initiative based on class rather than narrowly anti-EU politics.

Jared Wood (Socialist Party) also found the narrow anti-EU focus not ideal, but supported the project as it stood because it was “workers breaking with Labour”. Unjum Mirza (SWP) thought that the project was too narrow as it stood. The discussion ended with Regional RMT Exec member Oliver New promising to argue on the Executive for broader working-class content to the electoral initiative.

Midlands Region RMT passed a motion on 9 March stating: “We believe that for such a slate to make a positive contribution to renewing working-class political representation, it must be based on class politics, not on narrow anti-EUism. We therefore call on the organisers of the ‘No2EU’ slate to reopen the question of the title and platform of the slate, and allow for a democratic discussion at rank and file level in the union on that question”.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/no2eu

SCOTTISH LABOUR REPRESENTATION

Never mind the quality — feel the width

BY DALE STREET

That just about sums up much of the sentiments expressed at the Saturday 28 February inaugural meeting of the Scottish Labour Representation, which also doubled up as the formal launch of the Scottish People’s Charter.

The Scottish People’s Charter (SPC) is the Scottish version of the People’s Charter (PC), currently being touted round sections of the trade union movement as the policy statement which should be adopted in response to the current economic crisis.

Curiously, the only specifically Scottish element in the SPC, apart from its name, is the call for 250,000 new publicly owned homes to be built in Scotland over the next five years. The PC itself calls for three million new homes, presumably for Britain as whole.

Otherwise, the SPC is only a trimmed down version of the original PC. And some of the more specific demands contained in the PC have disappeared in the process of editing. Gone, for example, are the calls for a cut in hours to fight unemployment, and for increasing the national minimum wage to half median earnings.

But the SPC, which appears to be the fruits of a joint effort by the Scottish Labour Left “Campaign for Socialism” and the “*Morning Star* Campaigns Committee” in Scotland, was certainly not up for amendment at the meeting.

Using a line already employed in other such meet-

ings, Labour Left MP John McDonnell spoke dismissively of there always being “some tosser who wants to be the first to move an amendment.”

The SWP contingent at the meeting certainly saw no need to amend the SPC anyway. They thought that the SPC was “brilliant” — the ultimate accolade in the SWP dictionary of grovelling and obsequiousness.

What was needed now, they argued, was to link up the SPC with other equally broad campaigns, such as the Stop the War Coalition and Unite Against Fascism — not so much a coalition of the willing as a bonding of the bland.

Socialist Appeal, by contrast, were argumentative. True, all the changes in the Labour Party over the past two decades have not led them to change their timeless perspectives one iota. But they were certainly in a more combative mood than the SWP.

Who had drawn up the PC, they wanted to know. How long had the meeting lasted at which it had been agreed upon. Why wasn’t it a Workers Charter, or a Socialist Charter? Why didn’t it incorporate the old Labour Party Clause Four?

The most disappointing element in the meeting was McDonnell’s argument that the LRC had “moved beyond” representation, and that the question now at stake was that of “resistance”.

The question of working-class political representation, he stated rather than argued, was off the agenda “between now and the next (general) election.” By which he clearly meant: between now and *after* the next general election.

In that sense, the LRC’s enthusiasm for the PC and the SPC constitutes a political regression.

On paper at least, the LRC was committed at the time of its creation to grappling with the question of how the working class could secure the political representation which the Labour Party was no longer providing.

But now it now seems to see its role as collecting signatures for a pretty bland PC — or an even blander, SPC.

This is not an example of Hegelian transcendence, of “moving beyond” the profanities of working-class political representation to the higher spiritual level of petitioning. It is a political retreat.

It is certainly true that the Left should work together wherever it can do so, whatever its differences on other issues. It is also true that a serious campaign around even limited demands can play an infinitely greater educational role than an endless succession of meetings.

But even allowing for such qualifications, neither the PC nor the SPC provide much of a basis for a fight-back, especially given that their role appears to be that of a petition rather than any kind of programme of action. Nor does the “take or leave it” attitude with which they are being presented help inspire any confidence in them.

And it certainly makes no sense to counterpose “resistance” to political argument and campaigning aimed at advancing the cause of independent working-class political representation.

WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

NORTHERN IRELAND

IRA diehards attempt new offensive

BY JOHN O'MAHONY

The killing of two soldiers and one policeman in Northern Ireland by the "Real IRA" and the "Continuity IRA", both of which are splinters from the Adams-McGuinness republicans, sharply raises the level of challenge to the status quo by the fringe republican groups who have rejected the move into mainstream bourgeois politics which the Adams-McGuinness republicans took a decade ago.

There have been many incidents involving these groups in recent years, but the three killings amount to a qualitative escalation.

As we go to press on 11 March, peace rallies called by the Irish TUC are scheduled for many places in Ireland, north and south.

Will the outcry the killings have provoked will stifle those who want to resume the IRA's war?

When the "Real IRA" killed 29 people — one of them a woman pregnant with twins — in Omagh in August 1998, soon after the power sharing Good Friday Agreement was signed, the backlash against them forced them out of action for a number of years. Inadvertently the "Real IRA" helped those working to call off the IRA war.

What the two splinter IRA groups are trying to do now is clear. They want to provoke the British government and the Northern Ireland police force (no longer the Protestant sectarian RUC but the Catholic-Protestant Police Service of Northern Ireland) into overreacting, in a way that will alienate Catholics and thus undermine the "peace process".

They also hope to trigger Protestant paramilitary forces into indiscriminate attacks on Catholics, thus polarising the communities and creating conditions in which they can grow and expand as the Provos did at the beginning of the 70s.

They are intent on resuming the war which the Adam-McGuinness IRA has abandoned.

All reports tell of mass opposition to a return to war. But that may not be decisive.

Already there are Unionist voices calling for severe repression. Those who do not want to "play into the hands of" the militarist republicans may not be able to control events.

Where communities are polarised as in Northern Ireland, the extremes on both sides can determine what happens, sparking off each other and each other's activities, feeding each other by



Killings threaten status quo

way of the response what they do creates in the "other camp".

At the start, in the early 90s, of the conflict that would tear Yugoslavia bloodily to pieces, opinion polls showed a sizeable majority in favour of continuing the multi-national federation. This was rational and sensible. It was the first choice of a majority when it still seemed that there were choices to be made. But reason and sense did not set the pace and control events.

The militarists did. The militarists of one community would attack, thus rousing their mirror image in the other community to counter action. Back and forth, tit-for-tat, it would go in an escalating whirligig of violence and the fear of violence.

The Protestant-Unionist forces in the power-sharing arrangement are the most unstable and fissiparous of the two sides in that partnership. They stand on political ground that may shift under their feet.

If only a few communalist fuckwits on the Protestant side to do the sort of things that the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA are doing, that will vastly raise communalist tensions and thus increase the likelihood of Catholic counter-attacks.

This is an attempt by militarist republicans to wage war on the Adams-McGuinness Sinn Fein as well as on the peace process. They hope to stimulate those in that organisation who are not quite contented with Sinn Fein being a party of government. Here they have so far had an important success.

Continued on page 5

Stop the Royal Mail sell-off!

BY GERRY BATES

The Postal Services Bill, under which the New Labour government plans to sell off 30% of Royal Mail, was brought to the House of Lords for its second reading on 10 March.

The legislation should come to the House of Commons within the next two or three months. The Government seems intent on ramming through the privatisation by using Tory support for it to overwhelm a probably sizeable rebellion by Labour MPs.

Although New Labour, like all other capitalist governments, has suddenly been convinced of the need for public ownership of banks in order to save the economic system from disaster, it is still a devout privatiser for public utilities and services. The full-strength market-worship of a few years ago has been discredited; but whatever modified doctrine the capitalist governments are fumbling towards, on present indications it will include spraying a blast of market competition at workers and users in all the public services.

With neo-liberalism discredited, this is an issue on which the Government can be defeated. Postal workers have huge industrial power. Mail volumes are declining, but only very slowly, and a postal strike still has a big and rapid impact on the capitalist economy.

Moreover, the CWU already has — and CWU leaders are publicly recalling the fact — an agreed policy to ballot members on disaffiliation should privatisation of Royal Mail take place. A ballot would probably go for disaffiliation. If, as is the case under the structural changes that Blair and Brown have imposed on the Labour Party, the CWU's affiliation gives it the "privilege" of pumping money into New Labour funds in return for literally nothing — not even the right to submit a motion to Labour Party annual conference — then that "affiliation" has little more than the name in common with the old union-Labour link.

Disaffiliation will cost an already cash-strapped Labour Party £1 million a year.

In 1996, when the Tories tried to privatise the post, the CWU drove them back by a public campaign which saw postal workers out leafletting and collecting signatures on every high street. A similar campaign now would get similar public support and could build up the momentum for industrial action against privatisation.

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