

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

**FIGHT PUBLIC  
SECTOR  
CUTS!**  
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How  
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**EVERYONE'S TALKING  
ABOUT LEFT UNITY!**

PAGES 14 & 15

## CONSTRUCTION BOSSES OUT TO BUST UNIONS VICTORY TO THE SOLIDARITY STRIKES!



Lindsey  
workers —  
locked out for  
defending jobs  
and their union

BY MARTIN THOMAS

**S**olidarity strikes have spread across Britain to beat the union-busting attempted by oil multinational Total and its contractors on their construction site at the Lindsey Oil Refinery site in Lincolnshire.

Many thousands of workers have struck over a principle, though the immediate bread-and-butter issue concerns just 51 workers. Such solidarity is the muscle-fibre of all working-class strength and dignity. That is why the Tories made it illegal in the 1980s, and why New Labour has kept the Tory laws.

But the engineering construction workers' solidarity has been so powerful that, so far, neither the bosses nor the Government have talked about using the law against the strikes.

With solidarity and organisation, workers are strong. In engineering construction, as in any other

industry, the bosses are paralysed if the whole workforce sticks together. If workers limit ourselves to action by individual groups about their particular group interests, the bosses are always likely to be able to bring in other workers to undercut each group. With solidarity, they can't do that.

Solidarity is also the key to progress on all the broader concerns of the working class and of every group battling for liberation. Green politics started with building workers in the 1970s taking industrial action in solidarity with local communities, with students, with feminists. Once the practice and the effectiveness of solidarity is established, it is a principle that can change the world.

The law never suppressed illegal strikes, or solidarity, completely. But the solidarity strike wave that started on 19 June is bigger than anything similar seen for many years. Victory for it can establish a precedent and a principle important enough to reshape all prospects of the labour movement.

On 19 June, all the construction workers at the Lindsey site were locked out. With the support of the refinery owner, Total, two contractors, Jacobs and Shaws, sacked all their workers, a total of 647. Other contractors' employees were locked out but not sent letters of dismissal.

Total bosses announced that the site would be shut for a while, and that workers who wanted to be re-employed when it restarted should apply by 5pm on Monday 22nd. They refused to meet union officials and the government conciliation service ACAS on 19 June.

On Monday 22 June, workers staged a mass burning of their dismissal notices outside the site. A BBC reporter said: "I asked [workers] if they were really prepared to put their principles before their job. The answer was always a resounding yes".

**Turn to pages 6 & 7**

## ENVIRONMENT

# Activists spark fight on wind turbine closure

BY PATRICK ROLFE

**T**hree activists from Workers' Climate Action and the AWL visited the Isle of Wight on 15-18 June because we had heard that the Vestas plant there — the only wind turbine blade factory in Britain — faces closure.

After four days' work, we have a meeting set up, sponsored by Cowes Trades Council, to launch a campaign against the closure. We will be going back to the Isle of Wight, with other activists we hope, to build for that meeting in the week leading up to 3 July.

Our first contact was with officers of Cowes Trades Council. They, in turn, put us in touch with Geoff Lumley, the only Labour councillor on the island, and through him we met local environmental activists.

There are only 15 members of the union, Unite, at Vestas, out of nearly 600 workers, and the union is not recognised. However, we went to the factory at shift changes, talked to workers, and made contacts.

Our hope is that with the weight of the national environmental movement behind them, and with an energetic local campaign, the workers at Vestas can gain the confidence to take radical action to save both their jobs and one of the most important industries in the UK.

The planned closure is further proof that the capitalist system is not fundamentally interested in making the necessary industrial changes to stop climate change. Vestas is content to continue to make huge profits (£350 million in 2008). It plans to move blade production to the USA, where there is more money to be made from government subsidies and a bigger market for wind turbines.

It is up to workers in the industry, with environmental and socialist activists, to ensure that the sustainable industries survive and expand, and that they are run for the benefit of all, not for the profit of the few.

The embryonic campaign around the closure of Vestas provides an opportunity to show that climate change is a class issue, that workers' self-organisation and participation can and must focus on securing a stable ecology.

**Public meeting:  
Save Vestas!  
Friday 3 July, 7pm  
Riverside Centre,  
Newport, Isle of Wight**

Anyone who would like to be involved in building the campaign against the Vestas closure can get in touch via [pat.rolfe64@googlemail.com](mailto:pat.rolfe64@googlemail.com), or [www.workersclimateaction.co.uk](http://www.workersclimateaction.co.uk)

## LONDON POSTAL WORKERS STRIKE

# More action needed

An activist from the CWU union spoke to Colin Foster about the issues in the post following the London and Edinburgh strikes over job cuts on 19 June

**T**here's no decision yet made about the next lot of action, but there will have to be further action, because Royal Mail have not moved.

The problem is, these are local fights over a national issue, arising from the poor deal made after the dispute in 2007. That deal gave Royal Mail bosses a national commitment to "flexibility", which has allowed them to do things they could never have done office by office.

There have been some mail centres closed. It has been difficult to mobilise over that, because the workers in mail centres being closed start looking for their individual redundancy terms, and the workers in other mail centres are not affected.

Changes in conditions have been much more severe in delivery. There is relentless speed-up. A delivery span used to be delivering two bags of mail in two hours. Now it is delivering five or six bags in three and a half hours. The bosses are still pushing for longer delivery spans, and they are bringing more and more part-timers.

To be honest, it can be difficult to mobilise members, because they still feel sold out from two years ago. You say we need a fight, and they say "what? With this leadership?"

The 2007 deal also left the issue of pen-

sions not sorted out at all. The final-salary pension has gone for new starters, and workers have to work to 65 — and the delivery job is now so arduous that a lot of people just can't do that — and still the scheme is not balanced financially. I think the union's answer should be simple: the Government should put the money in to fund the scheme, and we should demand the reversal of the pension cutbacks already made.

There's a problem in elements of the CWU leadership of illusions in the Labour leadership. Mandelson caught them by surprise by going forward with the part-privatisation of Royal Mail.

You have two factions in the leadership, both of them wrong in my view. I don't align with either camp: I take the issues as they come. Billy Hayes (the general secretary) is very much for affiliation to the Labour Party, but he sees political campaigning in terms of talks behind the scenes and lobbying MPs.

Dave Ward (deputy general secretary postal) is basically for disaffiliation of the union from the Labour Party, though he seems to have decided that this is not the best time to come forward on it. His approach is a sort of non-political syndicalism, and some of the people behind him are worse.

And, as in all other unions, the bureaucracy has an enormous weight in shaping how campaigns and policies actually turn out.

So the campaign against Royal Mail privatisation has been weaker than it should have been. It looks as if the part-privatisation could be abandoned now, but if so, it's not really because of our

campaign, but because Gordon Brown reckons that he has just too many other political problems.

Could Dave Ward's talk of "a joint Royal Mail/CWU vision of modernisation" and "a sustainable business model for Royal Mail that could survive a change of government" lead to the union backing a modified part-privatisation plan on the grounds that it is better to seal a deal like that now than stand out and see a Tory government push through full privatisation? I don't know. Until the crunch comes, it is very hard to see how it will all go.

But we should remember one thing. I think public ownership is very important. But if part-privatisation is abandoned, it doesn't mean that our problems are solved. Royal Mail bosses will go on running the post as a business rather than a public service until we stop them.

• *The London Divisional Council of the CWU (a stronghold of support for Dave Ward) has followed up the 19 June strike by announcing: "We in London will give them [the Government] till the end of this month [June] to force Royal Mail to agree a National Agreement or we will start to ballot London members on whether they fund the Labour Party. We know this will bring us at risk of discipline from the National Union..."*

*Another CWU activist told Solidarity: "I'm not sure this means a lot, rather than posing. The London Divisional Council has a political fund, but it doesn't pay any affiliation money to the Labour Party — that is done by the national union, or by branches — so this is not a disaffiliation measure".*

## AUSTRALIA

# "When injustice becomes law, resistance is duty"

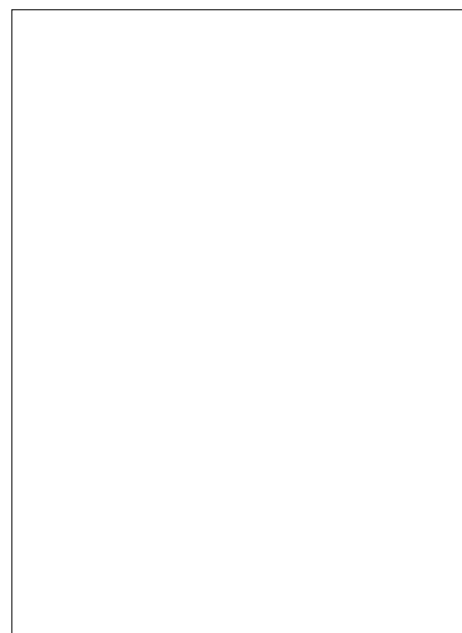
BY RHODRI EVANS

**A**rk Tribe, a building worker in South Australia, faces six months' jail for refusing to meet a special police force set up for the construction industry and give investigators names of other union members involved in getting up a petition on his site about health and safety concerns.

Hundreds of trade unionists demonstrated when Tribe was last brought to court on 9 June. The hearing was then adjourned to 11 August, and there are likely to be further legal stages after that.

Under a special industrial relations law passed by the conservative coalition government of John Howard (1996-2007), unionists can be jailed or fined for as little as insisting on right to silence in face of the special police force set up for the industry by the law, the ABCC.

In November 2008, charges were dropped in a similar case against a construction union official in Victoria, Noel Washington. In early 2008, 107 individual workers who struck on the Perth to Mandurah railway construction site in 2005 after a workmate was sacked for



raising health and safety issues were fined \$3250 each (plus a "suspended" fine of a further \$6000 if they took more industrial action before June 2008).

According to Bob Carnegie of Workers' Liberty Australia: "There's stronger support on the Ark Tribe case

than with Noel Washington, and it could come to national strike action on this".

Alongside Ark Tribe's individual case is running a political battle over the laws. Kevin Rudd's Labor administration took office in December 2007 with a promise to repeal Howard's laws. The Fair Work Act, a replacement for Howard's general legislation, WorkChoices, takes effect from 1 July, but unions are dissatisfied. Legislation to replace the specific construction-industry law was introduced into Parliament on 18 June, but is even less adequate.

Jeff Lawrence, secretary of the ACTU (Australian TUC), said: "The new Building Industry Inspectorate and accompanying legislation will retain much of the coercive powers... Workers who are not accused of any wrongdoing [would] still face a jail sentence of up to six months if they fail to attend an interview or answer the questions of the inspectorate".

At the ACTU three-yearly congress on 2-6 June, Labor deputy leader Julia Gillard was heckled so much that she had to stop speaking, and the unions have promised to pursue the issue at the Australian Labor Party's two-yearly congress opening on 30 July.

## PUBLIC SPENDING

# Cuts battles will shape an epoch to come

If the Government puts out £1100 billion in cash, credit, and guarantees to the banks, as it has done, then someone is going to foot the bill. On current plans, both Tory and New Labour, it is public services and public service workers.

A lot of the £1100 billion has been guarantees given on the principle that, if the guarantees are in place, they will never be called on. But a lot is actual loans or actual cash, to buy shares in the banks.

The *Financial Times* summarises the results: "[Government] borrowing is set to rise to £175 billion a year, or 12.5% of national income... Public debt is set to hit £1000 billion next year, and public spending [has seen] an unplanned surge resulting from the recession, increased debt interest and social security spending...

"Unless people are willing to pay £5 in future for every £4 they currently pay in taxes... some parts of public spending will have to give".

"Have to" only given some assumptions. If the whole financial system were nationalised (instead of just the loss-making banks) and run as a public service (instead of being left to the bankers to run as seems most profitable to them), a great deal of the debt drain would be abolished.

Comprehensive bringing-back into public ownership of public services themselves would yield large revenues, by cutting off the huge amounts currently paid to PFI and contractors. Just abolishing the Trident replacement would save £20 billion over coming years.

Under the Tory government of the 1980s, taxes for the well-off were cut drastically, while taxes for the worse-off actually rose, because of VAT and similar. New Labour has mostly maintained that policy, its recent increase in the top tax rate being only a small exception.

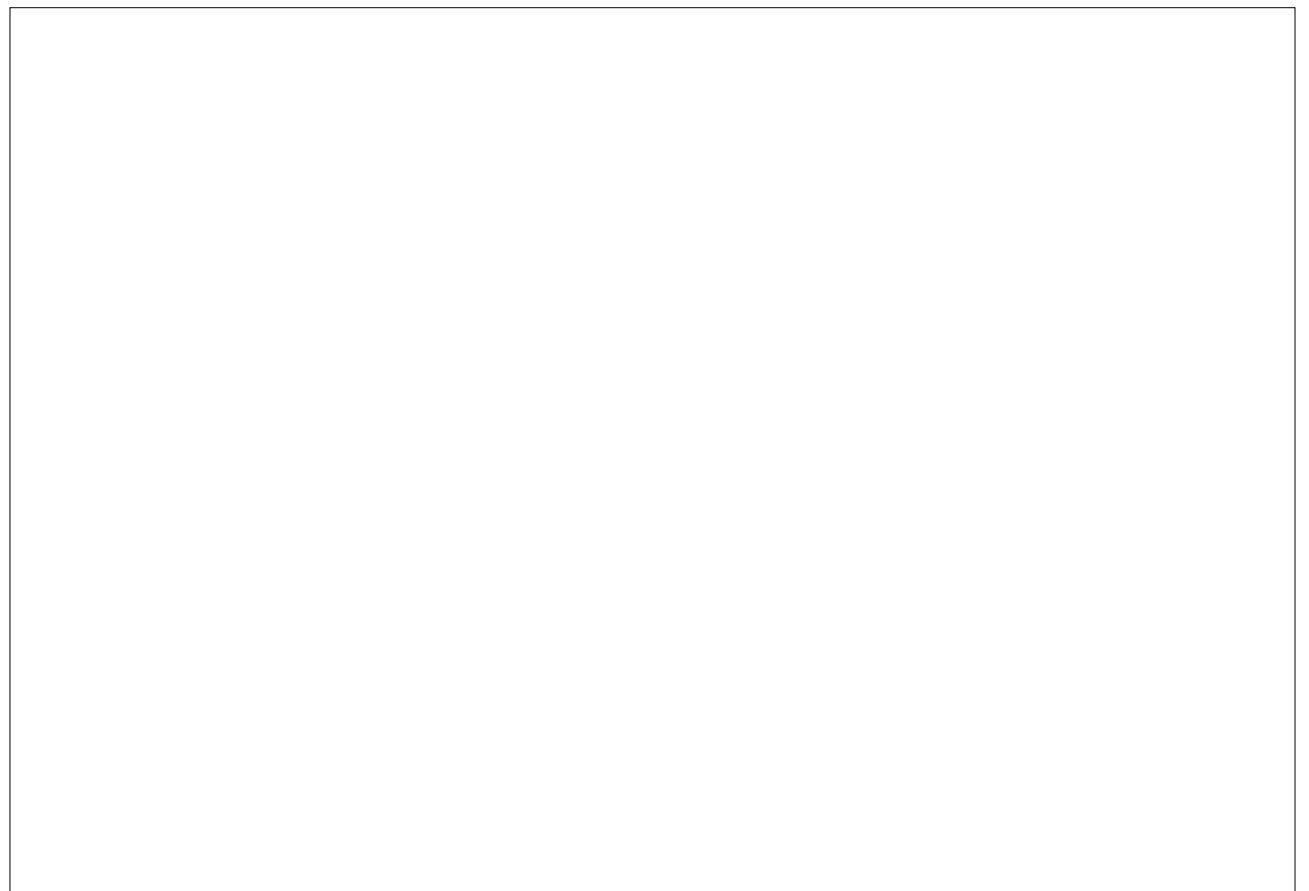
The Tory tax cuts of the 1980s and early 1990s saved the top ten per cent about £14 billion a year on today's prices. Together with that went big rises in pre-tax incomes of the well-off — all those bankers' bonuses and spiralling top-boss salaries — raising the top ten per cent's slice of national income from 21 to 27% and almost exactly reversing the redistribution from the wealthy to the rest achieved between 1938 and 1949.

Reversals can in turn be reversed. Take six per cent of national income off the wealthy — which only means reducing them to their relative status of 1979 — and you have something of the order of the entire education budget.

No-one "has to" cut public spending unless the incomes of the rich are sacrosanct.

Read the latest economic snapshot from the Office of National Statistics: "Compensation of employees at current prices fell by 1.1 per cent in the first quarter of 2009... Total gross operating surplus of corporations is now 3.2 per cent higher than a year ago". Some bosses are doing badly, but not all.

To get hold of what now goes to the luxuries of the rich and turn it to public services would probably require drastic measures: comprehensive nationalisations with limited compensation, workers' control. But we only "have to" accept the alternative — public service cuts — if we leave government in the hands of those who reckon the luxuries of the rich to



**Construction workers' strike: a combative labour movement can push the bosses back**

be sacrosanct, and do not fight instead for a workers' government.

As it is, Tory Shadow Chancellor George Osborne is already boasting to his friends: "After three months in power we will be the most unpopular government since the war". The Tories' plan, if they win the election, as they probably will, is to cut deeply and fast, to ride out the storm while they are still fresh from an election victory, and hope that by the next general election the economy will have improved enough for them to ease off a bit and tell voters that it was a matter of "no gain without pain".

Despite Gordon Brown's talk of "Labour investment" versus "Tory cuts", New Labour has already published projections for cuts if they stay in office. Alistair Darling refuses to give details, conveniently pleading that economic conditions are too unstable for that. According to the *Financial Times*, top Tories see Brown as "taking the electorate for fools" and can't understand why he doesn't, more plausibly, present the election choice as "between limited Labour cuts and... savage Tory cuts".

Cuts are coming. They have already started seriously in local government. They can be resisted, if the labour movement is rallied to fight for an alternative.

The problem is, the unions are sleepwalking. Leaders of Unison, the biggest public services union, scarcely mentioned the looming cuts at its conference on 14-19 June.

But these cuts are likely to hit in many ways.

- Welfare payments will be further reduced.
- Services will be lost.
- Jobs will be lost.
- Public service workers' wages, conditions, and pensions will be lost.

The majority of workers across the economy have

suffered cuts in wage rates, paid hours, or benefits, in recent months. Most of those who have kept their wages, paid hours, and benefits will be in the public services, where agreements on these things tend to be more rigid. The Government will be out to "level down" public service workers to match the losses in the private sector. The Tories have already promised they will rip up the deals on pensions for public service workers.

Union organisation will be a target, too. CBI boss John Cridland has been rejoicing that "the UK's flexible labour market" is helping bosses through the crisis. To make public-services workers "flexible" the Government will want to weaken unions there.

The bosses want to come out of the crisis with profits renewed, with a few casualties in their own ranks, to be sure, but with a clear road to capitalist expansion ahead of them, on the back of a battered, scared, desperately insecure working class, a working class in which the word "solidarity" has become too risky even to speak.

The alternative is for the labour movement to draw on the strengths of solidarity, as the engineering construction workers have shown them in their wave of strikes; to go on the offensive against a capitalist class which is, despite all its tough words, shaken, divided, and uncertain; to impose "the political economy of the working class".

In France, the right-wing president Nicolas Sarkozy is now promising that: "I will not have a policy of austerity". That does not mean he will keep that promise. It means that the French labour movement has pushed him onto the back foot. A combative, militant labour movement can push the bosses back.

The coming battles will shape a whole epoch to come.

## ESOL

# A fight for jobs and principle

By an ESOL trainee teacher

**F**riday 12 June saw hundreds of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students, staff and supporters march in East London in protest at major cuts to ESOL announced at Tower Hamlets College.

The (overwhelmingly female) student protesters led chants on megaphones, carried placards with their own powerful slogans, and spoke eloquently and emphatically to the national press about what ESOL means to them.

Key messages were the need for English to allow them to support their children's learning, so they can be a part of their communities and so they can work.

These women have developed not only language skills, but increased confidence, self-esteem and above all a critical engagement with the world around them. And it is this which underlies this fight. The fight is for jobs, for student places, but also for the principle of education itself.

The march followed a week of action since the cuts were announced on 5 June, including an unofficial walkout on 8 June, a lobby of the principal on 9 June, protests at the college's awards ceremony and joint UCU and Unison union meetings on 12 June proposing a vote of no confidence in newly-appointed Principal Michael Farley.

The document Michael Farley circulated to college staff on Friday 5 June laid out proposed cuts of £2 million, which will see 50% of all ESOL courses offered by Tower Hamlets College cut from September. The document, ironically titled 'Securing the Future' detailed the loss of over 1,500 ESOL places alongside 60 job losses. There is now a one month 'consultation period' on the document. Those who are going to be dismissed will be told on 10 July, just before the end of the college term. Teaching staff, support staff and learning centre staff will all be affected.

The ESOL classes most affected by the cuts will be at entry levels, those in the college's community outreach centres, those not expressly for work. They therefore affect the most vulnerable and historically excluded students.

The attack is gendered as well as racist. The vast majority of those attending courses are women. Some are recently arrived in the country, others have been here many years but never had the opportunity to attend a course before.

On Wednesday 1 July, 5-7pm, at Lifra Hall, Halley St, E14, there will be a public meeting, called by UCU and students at Tower Hamlets College and by the National Union of Teachers at St Paul's Way Community School (also in the borough), where there are similar cuts proposed — ESOL by 50%, Bengali by 50% and Special Educational Needs support by 50%.

For more information on the struggle, go to <http://defendjobsandeducation.posterous.com> or see <http://www.uculeft.devisland.net/tower-hamlets-college-dispute.html>

# A partial win at SOAS

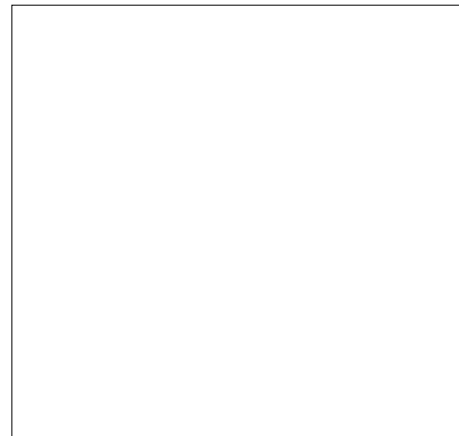
**T**he admin offices of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London were occupied from Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 June, in response to an immigration raid on SOAS cleaners.

The raid was organised by ISS, the contractor for SOAS, and several cleaners were deported.

The occupation ended with concessions from the SOAS administration. SOAS agreed to write to the Home Secretary asking for leave to remain for the cleaners not deported; to "discuss the possibility of" bringing cleaning in-house; to "acknowledge" UCU (lecturers' union) policy of non-cooperation with immigration raids; and not to take action against the occupiers ([tinyurl.com/mtf6cz](http://tinyurl.com/mtf6cz)).

Some of the occupiers, while finding the occupation "inspiring", "encouraging", and welcome as an "action of solidarity with a much longer and harder struggle that the cleaners at SOAS have had to fight", have "concerns raised about the levels of transparency and participatory procedures in the negotiations". Excerpts from their statement:

**There was never a decision made at the**



**occupation about who would negotiate on its behalf. This role was taken by the Student Union representatives, in particular the outgoing Student Union president.**

At the first meeting with the directorate the occupation's demands were not presented... As the negotiations continued the demands — which were collectively agreed and changed in a series of meetings — were progressively watered down...

The cleaners themselves were not involved in the decision making process of the occupation. While it may have

been difficult to make the occupation a "safe" place for the remaining workers to visit, the occupiers could and should have made a more concerted effort to inform, talk to and take direction from the workers directly affected by the raid...

Whatever gains were made during the occupation were made by taking direct action against the SOAS management. Many demands — including bringing all contract staff in house, keeping immigration officers from entering campus under any circumstances, the reinstatement of Jose Stalin Bermudez [SOAS Unison branch chair: [tinyurl.com/mswz4u](http://tinyurl.com/mswz4u)] and even an apology for their role in the raids — were not met...

The power the occupiers held was not utilized to its full potential, perhaps due to the lack of democratic process within both occupation meetings and the manner in which negotiations were being carried out...

Practical victories are urgently needed and these will only be achieved through a realistic understanding that management, the police and the government are not on our side... In future we should be more confident about what can be achieved when we stand together.

## Barnet: a battle lost but who's winning the war?

By Joan Trevor

**D**espite a lively campaign against the plans, Barnet's Conservative Cabinet voted on 8 June to axe the borough's sheltered housing wardens.

They will be replaced with 'floating support' — a much reduced number of wardens operating out of a handful of local 'hubs'. In theory the floating supporters will also serve elderly residents not in sheltered housing schemes. Since the budget for all of this has been cut from £1.4 million to £950,000 it's clear that services to elderly people in the borough have been reduced.

Cuts like these are happening around the country; it's a shame that there has been no national debate on it. Belatedly the government has announced its unease at steps like this, but it is their removal of ring-fencing around sheltered housing funding in the Supporting People budgets that has allowed councils to raid the sheltered housing piggy bank. In Barnet the campaign has moved into another phase, with a legal challenge by some of the sheltered housing residents.

We are building up a good network of campaigners in Barnet, and getting experience at using the limited channels for protest available.

On 6 July we will be protesting outside the Cabinet meeting again, this time over the council's 'Future Shape' plan. This initially aimed at outsourcing council service delivery wholesale, but over time they have realised that it will not be as simple as the dogma suggests. For one thing, there is not always a provider that wants to provide what they need, by law, to provide. The market is failing them!

They have deliberately not consulted council unions or residents about their plans, even though we are the people who know best what services we need and how best to deliver them.

The council had a rethink about outsourcing the running of cemeteries and crematoria after a challenge from the council unions.

Council unions and the trades council are mobilising council workers for 6 July, but also workers in the PCT, Jobcentres, Middlesex University, etc, who are all expected to come under an eventual pan public service umbrella. Barnet Community Campaign, which organised the protests against the warden cuts, is campaigning among Barnet residents. Our slogan is 'Shaping our own future'.

## SERCO guards attack hunger strikers

**"On 17 June we, the detainees in the Family Unit (Crane) at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, were attacked at around 2 pm by SERCO officers from Immigration. [SERCO is the contractor that runs Yarl's Wood].**

**This is due to the fact that we decided to do a hunger protest, which is peaceful.**

**Our children are sick. There are a lot of people here that are sick. There is a woman with epilepsy who is not been taken care of properly.**

**On 17 June we are all sitting in the corridor when suddenly we saw lots of hefty men coming towards us. They pounced on the men they found in the corridor, who were pinned to the floor and injured. The children were screaming. The SERCO men stepped on some children, and some women were taken away naked.**

**Officers were recording the incident on a camcorder. Please come to our aid and rescue us".**

## Justice for the SOAS 9!

**T**wo weeks after nine cleaners at SOAS were taken into detention, campaigners are calling for action for justice for the SOAS 9.

They are also appealing for solidarity with detainees in Yarl's Wood detention centre who are on hunger strike for demand including freeing children who are detained, adequate access to health care, quality food and real privacy.

- Day of action, 27 June: info on [www.caic.org.uk](http://www.caic.org.uk) and [freesoascleaners.blogspot.com](http://freesoascleaners.blogspot.com).
- Send messages of solidarity for the hunger strikers to: [londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com](mailto:londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com)
- Contact SERCO (who run Yarl's Wood) and demand that the strikers' demands are met — 01344 386300, [homeaffairs@serco.com](mailto:homeaffairs@serco.com)
- Contact Yarl's Wood and demand that the strikers demands are met: duty manager, 01234 821517; switchboard, 01234 821000; health "care", 01234 821147
- Demand exceptional leave to remain for the SOAS 9: <http://freesoascleaners.blogspot.com/2009/06/send-this-letter-to-home-office-now.html>
- If you can donate towards credit for detainees' mobiles or travel costs for solidarity visits, email [londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com](mailto:londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com).
- Read the story of a detainee involved in the hunger strike: <http://londonmigrantworkers.wordpress.com/>

• Alberto Durango, a Unite member and key supporter of the Willis cleaners and many other struggles is, as *Solidarity* goes to print, appealing against his sacking by cleaning contractor Lancaster. He worked for Lancaster at Schroeder's bank, leading a successful campaign for the London Living Wage. The sacking followed a failed attempt by the company last month by the company to have him deported. Alberto has not had the support from Unite that he should have had.

## INSIDE THE UNIONS

# Blue skies, zero wages?

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

**W**hoever it was that said capitalism has reached the limits of ‘innovation’ should be asked to think again. We can be sure that in an effort to reduce the impact of the economic crisis on their own pockets, the capitalist classes and their teams of blue-sky thinkers will be cooking up ways to make workers pay for their excesses.

If proof be needed, just take a look at British Airways.

BA Chief Exec Willie Walsh is urging the airlines’ 30,000 workers to take a whole month’s pay ‘holiday’. In return for not being able to feed themselves, BA workers can play a part in their employers’ “survival” strategy. Willie, not one to make his workforce suffer alone, has agreed to forgo his salary for July – a measly £60,000.

Let’s be fair to BA for a moment and look at their plan: workers can either opt to lose an entire month’s wages in one swoop or spread the loss over a period of between three to six months. In return, they’ll help the company save £26 million in 2009 and hopefully secure jobs. BA is in a very competitive marketplace, with increased fuel costs and low-budget rivals slashing prices. They have to do something, don’t they? The pilots union is urging its members to accept a deal that will see the loss in pay off-set by share offers. So this all looks fair and square, doesn’t it? Actually, no.

There’s more than one thing wrong with this offer, the most obvious being the staggering differentials in pay. Willie Walsh has enough stashed away from his £60,000 per month salary. Airline pilots, who earn in the region of £100,000 per year, can probably muster through. But workers on between £15,000 (which is what BA call-centre staff earn at the top end) and £20,000 cannot coast through a lean four weeks.

Even if the bulk of BA workers are offered and accept a similar share off-setting deal to the pilots, they are unlikely to get their money back. In the year to March 2009, BA investors made minus 32.6p per share (yes, that’s a negative number).

BALPA, the pilots’ unions, are recommending a phoney deal – a pay cut, in fact – to a relatively privileged section of the workforce. In doing so, they risk undermining other unions efforts to resist the deal. The GMB union which claims that “most members” will “consider” the offer. Hardly fighting talk.

If trade unions are to successfully resist the drive to cut wages and jobs, union leaders need to stop hypothecating about what members think and offer a strategy. The struggles at the Visteon plant and the recent action by engineering construction workers in the energy industry suggest what form that strategy should take.

## A living wage for cleaners!



**O**n Wednesday 17 June, tube cleaners and supporters, including Feminist Fightback, Campaign Against Immigration Controls, and MPs John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn, demonstrated outside City Hall to demand that London Mayor Boris Johnson keep his promise of a living wage for all tube cleaners.

Johnson has been in the press with the publishing of the study he commissioned into an amnesty for migrant workers. Yet his real approach to migrant labour can be found in how he has dealt with the tube cleaners’ campaign: promise a living wage, fail to deliver and preside over cleaning contractors who targeted union reps with immigration checks to break the RMT’s organisation. His idea of an amnesty would deny even those who met its hurdles access to the public services their taxes pay for, and would further delegitimise the thousands who wouldn’t meet its strict criteria.

### Tube strike hits hard

**T**he two days of strike action on the London Underground over pay, job cuts and management bullying, 9-11 June, were a big success, with management unable to get services running until well into the morning, and then only token shuttles for PR reasons.

The day we started striking, RMT and management reached a deal at ACAS, only for management to “get a phone call” and pull it. The “deal” may not even have been that great, but management showed their true colours: claiming to want a deal then backing out when one was on the cards.

Perhaps management hoped that ASLEF, another union which organises some drivers on the Tube, could deliver them a service through its disgraceful letter to members telling them to break the strike. Sadly for LUL, not all ASLEF members do as their leaders tell them: many respected picket lines and helped keep the action strong.

Pickets were in most cases well-organised and lively. There was some scabbing, as there almost always is, but we cannot let a handful of people who cannot see past their next pay packet drag the rest of us down.

Talks seem to slow down to a snail’s

pace when industrial action is finished and no further action yet called. Giving time for talks before naming any more action can’t go on indefinitely. Management need to know that Tube and TfL workers are ready and willing to take action again.

• More:

[www.workersliberty.org/twblog](http://www.workersliberty.org/twblog)

### School occupation sees off bailiffs

**T**he parents and activists who have been occupying the roof of Lewisham Bridge primary school for nine weeks to prevent its closure were told the bailiffs would arrive to evict them at 10.30am on Wednesday 24 June.

However, they had other plans.

The morning saw a big police presence at the school, including a helicopter buzzing overhead for intimidation. But the hundred people who gathered to resist the eviction mean the police and bailiffs were unable to act.

The bailiffs entered the school, but made no attempt to gain access to the roof. The police left around 12.30pm, with most of the bailiffs leaving shortly afterwards. Result: the occupation continues!

• Solidarity/fundraising barbecue for

the occupation. 7pm, Friday 26 June at Lewisham Bridge school, a few minutes from Lewisham rail station. Donations to take part. 07946 541 331 or [handsoflewishambridge@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:handsoflewishambridge@yahoo.co.uk).

### Parents fight primary school cuts

**B**rook Primary School, in Hackney, East London, which serves one of the country’s most deprived areas, and whose kids have a variety of needs, faces a cut of £75,000.

This will hit staffing, with Numeracy and Reading Recovery teaching provision in the firing line.

As the cuts were explained to a meeting of the Parents, Carers and Staff Association last week, parents refused to discuss how the school should implement the cuts, and instead declared their intention to fight them.

A meeting this evening decided to launch a campaign called ABC — Against Brook Cuts. Parents plan to write to MPs and councillors, to march to the Learning Trust’s offices, and to work with the teachers’ and support staff’s trade unions. We have been inspired by campaigns such as that waged by Lewisham Bridge parents, and are determined to fight and win.

## Democracy still the key in Unison

BY A CONFERENCE DELEGATE

**I**n his speech to this year’s conference of the public services union Unison, in Brighton in mid-June, general secretary Dave Prentis called on the “Labour Link” section of the union to stop funding constituency development plans, and to work only with Labour MPs who abide by the union’s values and objectives.

He also called on them to campaign to ensure that the manifesto the Labour Party draws up for the next general election does not continue privatisation.

The conference gave him a standing ovation, reflecting the anger delegates feel about the Labour Party. But in Unison all activity regarding the affiliation to the Labour Party is the exclusive business of the “Labour Link” — a small minority within the union. Unless, of course, your name is Dave Prentis.

The wording of the demands was deliberately vague — focussing on union values rather than policy of the union. Holding “Labour Link” to the commitments will be difficult without winning more accountability in the wider union.

On the fringe there were lively left meetings, including an upbeat and well

attended one called by Workers’ Liberty.

The lessons for the left, we believe, is the need to organise in a meaningful way between conferences. Workers Liberty continues to emphasise a campaign for greater democracy in the union — not just supporting campaigns against the witch hunting of the left, but also seeing the larger picture of a union where members are disenfranchised at all levels by unelected bureaucrats.

The defeat of some proposed rule amendments at the conference brought chagrin and surprise to the leadership, but the only way to improve democracy in the union as a whole is to build an active rank and file based in the union branches.

The amendments were scanty on detail, and in practice would have resulted in fewer decisions being made by conferences and more by unaccountable committees coerced by unelected bureaucrats.

The left also defeated a proposal to change the existing policy that states that fascists and white supremacists can be expelled from the union to a rule that would allow expulsion of anyone who campaigns politically in groups that contradict the aims and values of the union

Such a wide ranging rule could be used against socialists within the union and even, potentially, against anyone involved in any party standing against the Labour Party!

The vast majority of the motions debated were however entirely uncontroversial. There were daily confrontations with the Standing Orders Committee, who continued to rule out of order motions from the left on what appeared to be an arbitrary basis.

The left did not succeed on having motions debated — expect where the leadership chose to support them, notably on Palestine, where in our view the dominant “left” position was not really left at all.

The only motion debated on Palestine reinforced the existing policy to maintain an “economic, cultural, and sporting boycott” of Israel and called on the union to “review” its relationship with the Israeli trade union union movement, the Histadrut, on grounds of the Histadrut’s failure to condemn Israeli attacks on Gaza over the last year.

We argued against this, and in favour of positive solidarity with the Palestinians and dialogue with progressive groups and trade unions in Israel.



## LINDSEY LOCK-OUT

# Victory to the solidarity strikes!

## FROM FRONT PAGE

On 23 June, Total bosses said that they would now take part in talks. They also claimed that they would have “sufficient workforce” to reopen the site, maybe from 28 June, but they did not explain how they would get that without conceding the workers’ demands.

Engineering construction has a high proportion of specialist skilled workers. That makes it harder for bosses to get the same degree of control as they have gained in other industries since the wholesale union-bashing of the 1980s.

There is an effective and detailed national union agreement. Back in January/February, when there was an earlier wave of strikes in the industry, the bosses’ newspaper the *Financial Times* reported “industry insiders” as saying that the bosses’ chief grievance was “the high level of unofficial walk-outs in the engineering construction sector”.

It quoted Miles Templeman, director-general of the Institute of Directors:

## Why are environmental activists supporting workers at oil refineries?

**BOB SUTTON OF WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION EXPLAINS**

**The lock-out is nothing more than a bosses’ attempt to remind us who runs the industry, who is in charge. It is direct retaliation for the action taken by workers in January/February this year.**

The message is clear, the bosses are trying to break the power of workers in the energy industry to organise.

The bosses’ logic of exploiting and degrading workers is exactly the same as the logic that drives them to trash the planet. We cannot accept this system where people’s work and natural resources are wasted for the benefit of a few.

Workers’ Climate Action supports this militant action by workers in defence of their conditions. We have been down to Didcot power station, where the contractors walked out and many have travelled north to join the Lindsey picket lines. We also responded to the call by the Campaign Against Immigration Controls to hold a protest at the UK head office of Total in Watford.

“We’re very concerned that if illegal strikes are not challenged, vital infrastructure projects like Crossrail and the next stream of nuclear power stations will be threatened” (6 February 2009). In other words, that the profits of contractors on those projects will be threatened.

The immediate background at Lindsey was redundancy notices being given to 51 workers employed by Shaws. Bosses said their particular subcontract was ending; but it is a long-standing union demand in the industry that workers on a site be able to “follow the work” to subsequent phases of a project.

New workers with similar skills were simultaneously being hired by another subcontractor, RBC, and overtime was being worked on the site. According to the GMB union, site manager Richard Rowlands said that he wanted to be rid of “an unruly workforce who had taken part in unofficial disputes and wouldn’t work weekends”.

The whole site walked out on 11 June, including RBC workers. Their demands: withdraw all redundancies, stop all overtime, share out the work remaining on the project. Other sites across the country struck in solidarity. Then the bosses raised the stakes with the mass sacking on 19 June.

Bringing in scab non-union labour is harder for bosses in engineering construction than in other industries. Was Total planning that? Is it still planning it? Or will it retreat now and try that next time round? Solidarity action is the way to defeat all such moves.

The GMB called a solidarity rally at Lindsey on 23 June and has announced a hardship fund to help the strikers. Some construction workers are unhappy with the response of the other main union in the industry, Unite, saying that Unite’s national official for the industry, Tom Hardacre, tried to stop the solidarity strikes.

From a national stewards’ meeting on 5 June, GMB and Unite are already committed to a national ballot for industrial action across the industry over the renewal of the national union agreement for the industry. The union demands: a pay rise (the bosses are offering a freeze), better auditing of contractors, more job security.

GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said on 23 June that the ballot would start within the next week or so, though the GMB office had earlier told *Solidarity* that the ballot might not start until late July (indicating a mid-August ballot result), because a legal ballot requires the unions to have an accurate list of who is being balloted and exactly where they are working, a difficult task in an industry where contracts may last only months. The employers’ association has sent a circular to all the employers urging them: “Don’t give names and address of your workforce to full-time officers of the unions or shop stewards... don’t allow full-time officers access to your workforce”.

Despite the unions’ legal difficulties, there is a great deal more they could do to back the workers — organising rallies like the 23 June one, publicising clear and worker-unifying demands, building solidarity with the engineering construction workers among other sections of the working class.

Working-class history shows again and again that if union power is broken in the best-placed sections of the working class — as it was among miners, printworkers, and dockers under the Tories in the 1980s — then the worst-placed sections of the working class suffer too, and probably even more, as solidarity is damaged and the “markers” which can pull up their pay and conditions are destroyed.

The January-February strikes in engineering construction became notorious for the slogan “British Jobs For British Workers”, initially displayed by many

strikers on placards.

The underlying issue there was the replacement of workers employed by Shaws at Lindsey by a non-union contractor from Italy, IREM, under conditions where the union could not check that IREM was keeping to the union agreement. Many workers — and, notoriously, Unite joint general secretary Derek Simpson, doing a “photo-opportunity” for the *Daily Star* — voiced the issue in nationalist terms.

A few “British Jobs For British Workers” placards are still there at the current rallies and picket lines, but they are now outnumbered by “No to job losses, share out the work”, “Sack the bosses, not the workers”, “Trade union jobs and pay for all workers”, and even “Workers of the world, unite”.

There are surely still arguments to be had about nationalism, but they should not deter us from supporting and learning from the tremendous wave of solidarity strikes.

**Frank Miller reports from Lindsey (23 June):** Building from a slow start at 6.30, the picket swelled to over 1500 by 8.30.

The workers’ dramatic burning of their dismissal letters (22 June) was matched today by a further defiant gesture as they moved off in an impromptu march along the road outside the. The police, present in only small numbers, had no choice but to fall back.

At the mass meeting, most workers seemed certain that they would all be reinstated, as Total is losing too much money on the delays and stoppages on the construction site.

Apparently escalating the action to winning the support of tanker drivers has been discussed. The isolation of the refinery and the limited road access would mean that it would take a major police operation of the kind seen in the 1984-5 miners’ strike to effectively frustrate a picket of the size seen today. The

# Protest at Total HQ

The Campaign Against Immigration Controls organised a picket in support of the engineering construction workers on 21 June at Total HQ in Watford.

Activists from London joined members of the Watford Trades Council, and we had messages of support from others.

We had placards demanding reinstatement, against union busting, for freedom of movement and equal rights for all. Our chants included: “the Lindsey workers are right to strike, all workers unite and fight”, “Total, hear us say: Reinstatement from today / Union busting, no way”, “Sack the bosses, not the workers”, “Reinstate the Lindsey strikers — jobs for all!”.

Lots of bus and car drivers sounded their horns to support us. Most workers and school students passing by took leaflets.

refinery supplies a large chunk of the north east of England and Yorkshire, so the effect would be quickly seen at the petrol pumps.

I saw at least one trades council banner, at least two FBU branches, flags from Unison and others — one Union Jack and two “British Jobs For British Workers” placards, both from the Daily Star, but union flags and banners dominated.

The strength of the rank and file and their local strike committee is intact from February, and clearly any deal will have to go to a mass meeting.

If Total and the contractors prove stubborn, then a broader appeal for solidarity is likely, calling for supporters to picket Total garages and offices and for further and bigger demonstrations at the site itself.

**Pete Radcliff reports from Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, Notts (21 June):** 80 or so workers on the picket line. No full time officials — Unite officials widely disliked, especially by Unite members. GMB seen as better. Some workers had joined the union just this week, it appears.

No “British jobs for British workers”, as far as I could see. They agreed to meet up again on the picket line on 22 June and review progress.

**Elaine Jones reports from Stanlow oil refinery, Cheshire (24 June):** About 400 workers were at a mass meeting outside the refinery today. They voted to stay out in solidarity with the Lindsey workers and meet again on Friday.

Anthony Fields, Unite rep, and Gerry Hughes, GMB rep, said that workers were angry about the mass sackings at Lindsey. “There are people involved in this dispute who until a few weeks ago would have not have dreamed of this sort of action”.

The striking workers are employed for maintenance, rather than building new plant. Their current policy is to

help fix it if there is an emergency in the refinery, but if they are out for any time it will affect production in the refinery.

There were no placards or banners. The union reps said that as far as they were concerned, the dispute is not about nationalist or racist goals, but union agreements. However, they said, there is a variety of views in the workforce, including workers who would agree with some BNP-type ideas.

**Tony Byrne reports from Staythorpe Power Station (23 June):** At 7.30 there were about 250 workers on the picket line with numbers still growing, people coming to express solidarity with those contractors at Staythorpe who were sacked by Alstom (the principal contractor) two days ago for taking unofficial strike action in support Lindsey workers.

The picketers took to the road and effectively blocked the two entrances to the site.

Most of those picketing had been at Lindsey the day before. One of them said that Matt Wrack gave a much better speech than any of the leaders from Unite and GMB but there was a feeling that GMB are doing better than Unite.

This dispute has been going for some time now, and the official leadership has been uninspiring. Even the announcement that the dispute is going to be made official didn’t seem to enthuse people that much today. The workforce is militant and they show each other solidarity. I can understand rank and file leaders feeling worried about their job security but maybe the fantastic solidarity that has been demonstrated in the industry will give them the courage to come forward.

A few workers were using the phrase “British workers first” as a reason to get rid of some Polish workers on the site. There were no BJFBW placards or chants but if somebody doesn’t offer these workers a socialist lead then this sentiment will grow.

## WORKERS AND THE CRISIS

# Can you have more? Of course you can!

By TOM UNTERRAINER

**I**ndustrial action over pay by the National Union of Teachers was one of the first casualties of the economic crisis. After winning a concrete mandate for action in a ballot, the union took a single day of action to demand the government meet a pay claim. When the union came to ballot for a second time, the turnout was lower and the majority in favour of action was paper thin. The dispute was called off.

According to reports from activists, union members were expressing “reservations” — even embarrassment — about demanding higher salaries when so many others were having their pay cut and jobs threatened. Similar stories and are emerging from other sections of the working class from people who have relative job security and relatively “good” salaries — on the London Underground for example.

Such sentiments are easily seized upon by the bosses, the capitalist press and government to dampen the prospect of a workers’ fight back over pay. We need to arm against the idea that wanting more pay is “shameful” in times of economic crisis. The money is there to pay us. We need the money. We can defend our jobs and our standard of living.

### THE ARGUMENTS

#### 1. “Other workers are losing jobs ... we should just be glad to have one”

Even in the most “secure” sectors of the workforce — the public and essential services, those with strong trade union representation — jobs are under threat. Local governments are faced with significantly reduced budgets. The bosses want to squeeze the maximum “efficiency” (to boost profits or make savings) out of workers. Even in secure jobs moves will be made to intensify our work, to get more out of us for the same money.

Workers who are losing their jobs are not some “alien tribe” from people in work. The jobless and those under threat of losing their jobs are the partners and dependents of other workers. When they lose their jobs, they rely on the income of those in work. If this income is already inadequate, if it’s been devalued during previous years of growth, then it needs to be increased.

#### 2. “There’s no money to pay higher wages”

Really? No money? The government can find billions of pounds at the drop of a hat to bail out the British arm of the international banking system. They can afford to approve a gigantic salary (up to £15 million) to the new boss of RBS the bank the state mostly owns. But it cannot act to ensure workers in the private and public industries get a fair wage?

The bosses too can find the cash if needs be. London Underground bosses claim that a pay rise is unaffordable but at the same time fares have been increased and passenger numbers are on

the rise. The company is still making a substantial turnover. Enough, in fact, to plough money into sorting out disastrous privatisation schemes.

#### 3. “We’re already well-paid”

Not compared to our bosses, managers, government bureaucrats and the ministers who are urging wage restraint. In some parts of the country, London especially, the overall cost of living is still increasing. The economic crisis has not alleviated the stresses and strains of making ends meet, of getting by, for those workers who were struggling during the boom period.

#### 4. “It’s the wrong thing to do ... irresponsible ... unpopular”

Is it really wrong for workers and their trade unions to continue the class struggle in times of economic crisis? Is it irresponsible of us to do more than wage defensive battles? How will the bosses see us if we sit on our hands? As in the right? As responsible?

No. They’ll see the working class and its organisations as weak.

And if they view us in this way, they’re unlikely to magically grant pay rises or other increased benefits or keep us in work. More likely, they’ll continue to attack wages and conditions in the expectation that nobody will put up a fight. We need to keep up the fight on our own terms if we are to secure bigger gains in the future.

#### 5. “Prices are falling, deflation is a risk”

This is not universally true. Prices on things like flat-screen televisions, consumer electronics and other luxuries are falling. The essentials of everyday life are not falling in price. Food prices are still up 6.2% year-on-year according to the British Retail Consortium.

The pound is weak, making the cost of importing goods, services and materials more expensive. This added cost will soon find its way to the supermarket shelves and utility bills. House prices are falling, but this does not benefit those low-paid workers who pay already have a massive mortgage. As house prices continue to fall, workers who felt compelled to buy a home due to lack of social housing and exorbitant rental costs, falling into negative equity. More of repossessions could follow.

For these reasons alone, the trade unions should be putting the issue of pay back on the agenda. This should not be done within the same parameters used during the period of massive inflation, as with the clumsy approach of Unison who filed a claim for inflation-related wage increases just as inflation was edging towards 0%.

The labour movement needs to launch its own investigation into the real cost of living in the crisis, expose the cant about falling prices and make it clear to members that a sectional fight over wages can and should be generalised into other struggles. These battles are not about narrow self-interest, but are connected wider issues in the working class and with the battles to come.

# For a secular democracy

FROM BACK PAGE

With Ahmadinejad as their Presidential candidate in 2005, the hardliners sought to mobilise the poor of the towns and countryside — the people who had been affected by years of neo-liberalism. However, Ahmadinejad was not able to deal with Iran's economic problems. Both inflation and unemployment have increased dramatically. Unemployment is particularly high among the young and among female graduates.

The people around Ahmadinejad built a new configuration of extreme Islamism around the Revolutionary Guards, the Baseej militia, Parliamentary deputies and theocratic institutions. It has the backing of the most conservative clergy, some of whom think any parliamentary democracy is “un-Islamic”. They created a new authoritarian environment, bolstered by the perceived external threat of the US under George Bush.

Despite the Iranian leaders’ protestations, Iran is now less threatened by the USA, and there is impetus for detente. But the centre does not want to move. To do so would risk unsettling their own power base and their regional political ambitions in Iraq and through allies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon.

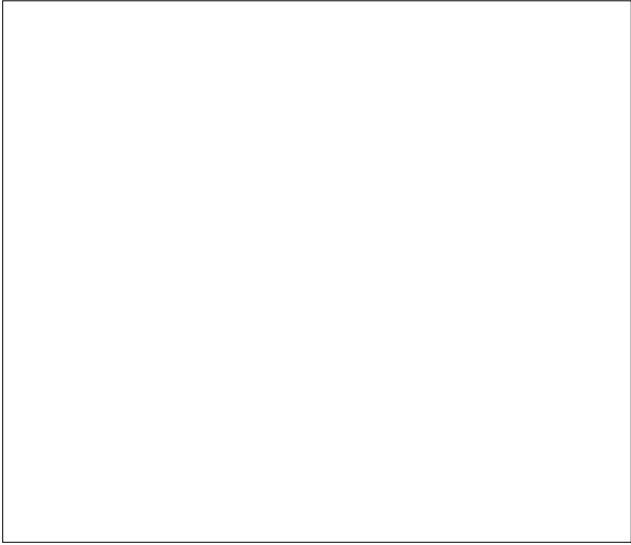
Khamenei’s backing of Ahmadinejad is about preserving his power base. But, and this is a real threat now, he may feel he has to resort to stronger forces (crucially the Revolutionary Guard) to hold onto power. Martial law and the closing down of all democratic channels must now be a real danger. Will Khamenei be able to put down the reform-minded clerics or the capitalist and middle classes within Iran who want economic development? That remains to be seen.

With so many people arrested, will Rafsanjani and Mousavi manage to establish a new religious-political coalition? That also remains to be seen.

The protests also arise from the deep social changes which have been taking place Iran and the rise of political and “cultural” groups — not least the persecuted trade union movement — with different areas of concern from the demand for gender equality in the women's movement to people wanting freedom to produce rock music.

Whatever happens the work of those groups who want to steer an independent line — of those who oppose the whole system, consistent democrats, and socialists — is extremely important.

Both Mousavi and Rafsanjani are disgusting pig who



Khodro car workers organised a slow down

want to line their own pockets and boost their own power. Ahmadinejad too, even if he has some solid support among some sections of workers, is no friend of the workers. This is a regime which has systematically suppressed the trade unions.

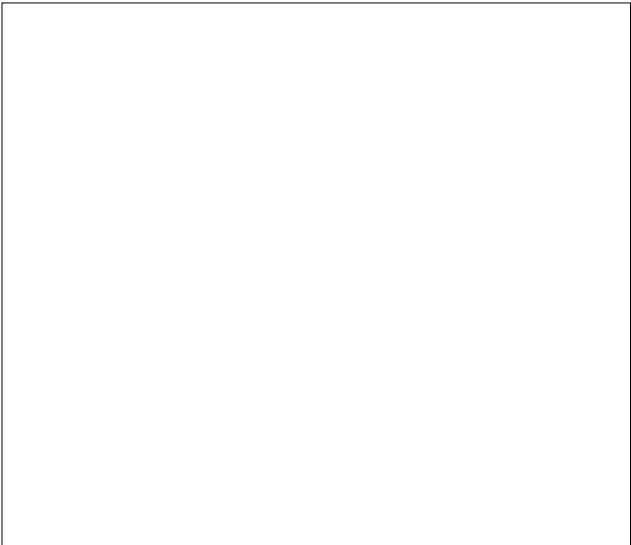
On the other hand it is clear from their determination to fight that the protestors understand that the election and its result is secondary. They need to fight for more, for full democratic and human rights.

The people of Iran have a right to clean, free elections, to choose a democratic assembly with the right not just to operate within the country’s political system but to remake it — a Constituent Assembly.

On Thursday 18 June we learned that the workers had begun, tentatively, to enter the struggle as an organised force — the Khodro car factory workers were organising a slow down. Even as the movement now subsides and is intimidated by the threats of repression, this shows the Iranian regime has been threatened. The basis of its power has been fundamentally questioned.

What the Iranian regime fears most is what we advocate. That the workers, students, women and oppressed national minority activists will link up and begin to reshape society.

On 26 June there will be a Global Solidarity Action Day to demand union rights for Iranian workers. At the



Doctors and nurses also struck

end of last year the dictatorship arrested and jailed many union leaders. There was a simultaneous crack-down on Kurdish political activists. Mansour Osanloo, leader of Tehran's bus workers’ syndicate, is still in jail. He was sentenced to five years in July 2007. Whatever happens in the next days, socialists in the west should put a greater effort into building solidarity with the Iranian workers and socialists.

**We say:**

- **Down with the clerical-fascist regime;**
- **For a democratic secular republic;**
- **Neither Mousavi nor Ahmadinejad, but a democratically elected assembly to decide a constitution for Iran;**
- **Support the struggles of students and women for human rights;**
- **Rights for the oppressed national minorities;**
- **Workers’ rights: the right to organise, to strike, to speak. Free the jailed trade unionists!**
- **For independent workers’ organisation and politics in Iran**

## The regime against the people

By VICKI MORRIS

Iran’s population is about 70 million. The population doubled between 1975 and 2000; about half the population is aged under 25 and two-thirds under 30. This helps to explain why a large mass of the population is at odds with the theocratic regime’s severe restrictions on people living normal lives.

Iranians are not against having a good time, but Iran is a socially conservative country, disapproving of homosexuality, female sexuality, etc. And, this can’t change while, for example, gay people are persecuted by the state, with homosexuality punishable by death, and young women are obliged to wear modest dress in public — with laws like this, even the most liberal person can get sucked into making judgments about what is “good” or “bad” hijab.

In many ways, Iran is a very modern country. The education system, particularly for maths, sciences and technical subjects is good; engineer is a respected status. But there is a “brain drain” of graduates from Iran, especially as it is hard to get a good job, or any job at all. Many young women go to university (over half of graduates are now women, although only about 10% of the workforce is female).

There are surreal cultural contradictions: if you watch Iranian state television you will see state-of-the-art graphics, techno music, and so on. At the same time the

content is sanctimonious, boring and morally repressed. Young people, as we have seen in the current protests, are switched on to social networking media, etc. They have to be if they are to enjoy any kind of youth culture.

There is a large output of films and pop music for Iranian young people created outside Iran, in Los Angeles (dubbed Tehrangeles, where perhaps one million Iranians or second-generation Iranians live), or in Dubai. The regime does not, normally, stop people visiting these places. In a way they are a safety valve for the regime, where the middle class can go to let off steam and consume.

During the Iran-Iraq war, 1980-88, there were big advances in medical techniques. Iran has great dentists and great reconstructive and cosmetic surgeons. It is quite routine for young middle class Iranians, men as well as women, to have nose-jobs. They sit in cafés with plasters on their noses after they have had it done, like it was a status symbol.

At election times, the candidates appeal to the youth. They have lively campaigns. Young women in “bad hijab” – with scarves falling off the back of their head revealing bouffant hair, and wearing stacks of make-up — are encouraged to get involved. You could see them in footage about the election campaign, carrying around posters of one of the candidates, the relatively “liberal” cleric Karroubi, an old man with a beard and a turban.

Almost as an antidote to the dourness of the regime’s culture, which glorifies Islamic and Iranian national

martyrdom, and the dourness of its underlying Shia religious culture, which emphasises mourning, the young people are showy and overly hedonistic. They have every excuse!

Iran also has many socio-economic problems, some of them half-concealed, such as a high rate of heroin addiction. Possibly 1 in 20 people are users. High unemployment, perhaps as much as 20%; GDP has risen lately but is lower than it was in the 1970s. Rampant, unplanned urbanisation, with now more than 70% of the population living in cities; capital city Tehran’s population has grown from about two million just before the 1979 revolution to 10 million today: it is a teeming, polluted, stressful place to live or work.

Even young people who are rebellious now can get worn down or preoccupied with the task of simply living in a country where it is very stressful to live: tackling the bureaucracy, negotiating the horrendous traffic just to get from A to B, finding a job, earning enough to survive, finding a home, coping with family life, and so on.

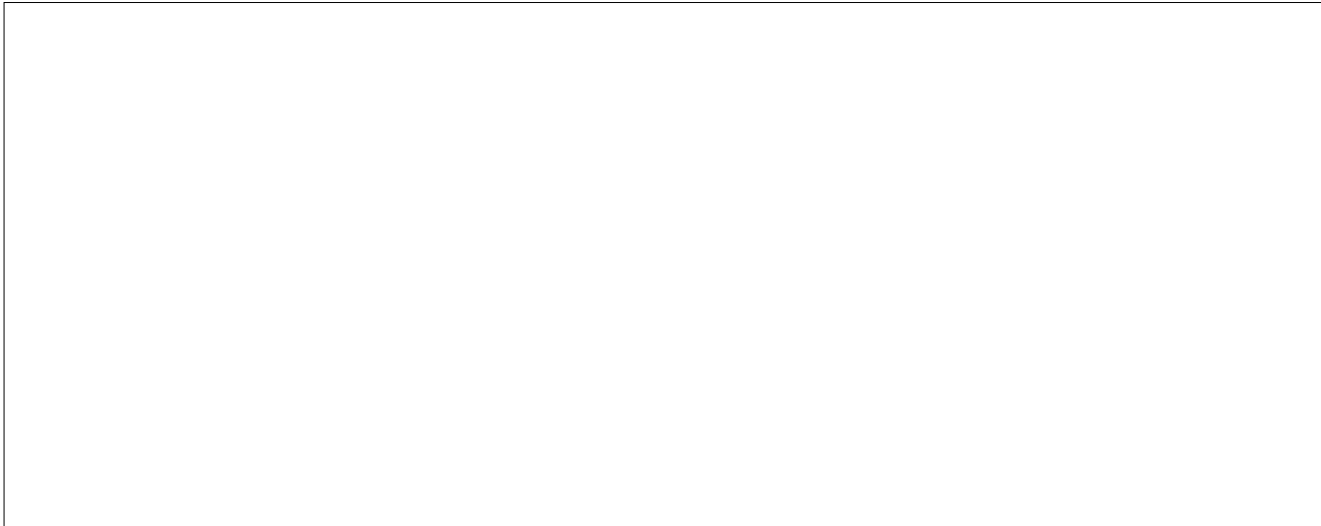
Given the prevailing social conditions there will be enough people replenish the ruling elite and to populate the militias like the Baseej. You simply need to be poor to find a job like that appealing, and Iran does have many poor and desperate people.

Those who can get out are the lucky few. Those who have to stay have many battles on their hands.



# ocratic Iran!

## Who is Ahmadinejad?



Students at Tehran university were locked in. Forced to make their protest through the bars

## Bus workers speak out

**I**t is clear to all that the demands of the majority of Iranian society go far beyond economic demands. During the past few years, we have emphasized that so long as the principle of freedom of organisation and choice is not realized, any talk of social freedom and economic rights is more of a joke as opposed to reality.

On the basis of this reality, the Vahed Bus Workers Syndicate supports those who are giving their all to build a free and independent civil institution. We condemn any kind of suppression and intimidation.

In order to recognize economic and social rights in Iran, Friday 26 June has been declared an international day of support for imprisoned workers and trade unions in Iran. We are calling on everyone to consider this day to be more than a defence of economic rights. Let's transform this day into a commemoration of human rights in Iran, and ask our fellow workers around the world to take actions in defence of the pummeled rights of the majority of Iranians.

For the Expansion of Justice and Freedom!

*The Vahed Bus Workers Syndicate (Tehran) June 2009*

## Khamenei blames “Zionists”

**K**hamenei spent a lot of his speech on Friday 19 June attacking those he sees as Iran's historical and current enemies. Iranian Islamist populism has always relied on evoking external threats and whipping up nationalism. The speech was also strategy for strengthening the internal crackdown — attacking America, the UK, the UN, and trying to link those powers to the opposition movement in Iran.

The anti-western discourse of Khamenei's speech wrapped up religious piety with tirades against “materialism” (his fear for the youth) unspecified “enemies”, specified plotting enemies (critics of the electoral “process” in Iran), the media — and above all the “dirty” Zionists, who “control the media”.

That the world's media are controlled by Zionists (meaning here Jews) is a typical anti-semitic conspiracy theories. The Iranian regime's attachment of the label “Zionist” to anything they don't like gives the lie to apologist claims that its attacks on “Zionism” are just legitimate criticism of Israeli policy.

Khamenei also took the opportunity to have a go at the “Zionist agents” of the US, agents of “Zionist capitalists”. They, he claimed, started the rioting in the streets.

## Being at odds with the USA does not make Ahmadinejad a friend of the workers

BY STELLA WEBSTER

**I**t is fortunate for the Iranian regime that it has a loyal network of supporters outside its borders, prepared to defend it against the “terrorists” as the Iranian opposition are now known. Some of the most outspoken defenders are not, as one might expect, brother clerics but... people on the “liberal” and “socialist” left.

The *Morning Star* was ready to quote approvingly the words of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, quick to welcome Ahmadinejad's re-election. According to Chavez it was a win “for all people in the world and free nations against global arrogance.”

However, the *Morning Star* is under other pressures too. It felt a need to be evasive, or in its own words, “dialectical”. “Labour movement activists in Britain have to take a more dialectical approach than simply standing four-square with the theocratic regime or its imperialist adversaries.”

George Galloway was deliberately credulous. Yes, the Iranian elections were not only free and fair but much more democratic than UK elections!

“More than 85 per cent of the electors turned out to vote — compared with 35 per cent in our own elections recently. That's nearly 40million Xs on ballot papers.

“This massive exercise took place without trouble of

any kind — the polling stations were kept open longer than required to facilitate the huge lines of people outside. “ And so he went on, and on, and on...

Seamus Milne, writing in the *Guardian* on 18 June, was both credulous and confused.

Milne equates the movement against Ahmadinejad with the “supporters of Winston Churchill” after the Second World War, opposing the introduction of the welfare state under Clement Attlee. Similarly, he says, the Iranian opposition ignore the wishes of the masses of Iran and are irrational in their belief that the election is fixed.

Milne choses to echo the words of the Supreme Leader: “It is hard to believe that rigging alone could account for the 11 million-vote gap between the main contenders.” Only hard to believe it you badly want to defend the Iranian regime, perhaps.

Milne admonishes the western media for failing to acknowledge “the other Ahmadinejad”, the one “who is seen to stand up for the country's independence, expose elite corruption on TV and use Iran's oil wealth to boost the incomes of the poor majority...” Milne's spin is that Mousavi stands for the market forces ravaging the lives of the Iranian people and Ahmadinejad stands for a welfare state (like Clement Attlee perhaps?)

The facts are so much more complicated than this. Ahmadinejad does not stand against “market free-

doms”. It's just that he would like to see a particular layer in the capitalist class (one which he can “network” with) enriched. The government's handing out of subsidies has been partial, ideologically driven and not systematic. It has been more about ensuring social stability than social justice. Ahmadinejad is no friend of the workers, especially of those workers who want to organise trade unions. They have been locked up and persecuted.

For Milne — and he is right enough on this — the split in the regime is about differences over how to respond to Obama and new diplomatic overtures from Washington. For Milne, behind the diplomacy lies a ratcheting up of conflict in the Middle East and a recasting of “occupation”. Above all, Milne's assessment satisfies his need to put the boot into “imperialism” — as there can be nothing in the world worse than US influence, and anyone at odds with the USA must be at least relatively good.

It means preposterously boosting Ahmadinejad. How can such a toxic point of view possibly help us make solidarity with the people who are now getting beaten in Iranian jails, and now being hauled before special courts to be tried as traitors of to the Islamic Republic?

IRAN 1979

# How the clerics took power

BY PAUL HAMPTON

**T**he old regime in Iran, the dictatorship of the Shah, had been installed in a military coup in 1953. Fuelled by oil reserves and repression, the Shah backed state-sponsored industrial development and land reform.

In 1962 industrial workers made about just over 20% of the total workforce. By 1977, 33% of the workforce was in industry and over 50% of the economically active population (of nearly nine million) were waged workers.

The Shah's rule was marked by the savage methods of SAVAK, the secret police. Torture and state-sponsored murder were widespread. No opposition, neither a bourgeois parliament nor trade unions were allowed – only the Shah's National Resurgence Party. The Shah's policies drove peasants off the land into urban slums, squeezed the middle-class bazaar and challenged the entrenched clergy.

The 1953 coup ended efforts at unionisation and a 1959 labour law proscribed workers' self-organisation.

In the mid-1970s, the economy began to falter. Members of all classes began to challenge the Shah.

The Shah faced an array of opponents. Firstly, the working class a third of which was concentrated in large plants and a few major cities, notably in Tehran. But workers were politically atomised, lacking representation, and able to organise only secretly in individual workplaces.

Secondly the national minorities. Kurds, Azeris, Arabs, Baluchis, Qashquaia and Turkmans constituted at least a third of the population of Iran and were denied their national, language and cultural rights.

Thirdly, the minority Sunni Muslims, as well as Jews, Zoroastrians and Bahais, who suffered religious oppression.

Fourthly, there were also sections of the bourgeoisie, middle class students and intellectuals opposed to the regime. Some took part in left-wing guerrilla movements from the 1960s.

Finally, the most visible group opposing the Shah were the mullahs and the bazaar. Both the clergy and the bazaar had lost out as capitalism developed. The Shah's land reform had reduced the mosques' revenue and educational reforms had weakened their influence at schools.

The figurehead and driving force of the mullahs was Ayatollah Khomeini. Expelled by the Shah in 1963, Khomeini spent most of the next fifteen years in Najaf in Iraq, developing his ideas on theocratic rule. It was his forces that led the movement to overthrow the Shah and ultimately replaced him.

In June 1977 police were sent in to clear slums in south Tehran. Thousands of the urban poor clashed with the police for weeks, eventually staging the first successful mass protest against the Shah since the 1950s.

Intellectual and religious opposition became more assertive. Religious demonstrations started in the holy city of Qom in December 1977. After demonstrators were killed, Khomeini called for 40 days of mourning, to be followed by another demonstration. These religious-inspired protests, mobilising the petty bourgeois from the bazaar and the lumpenproletariat, continued through spring and summer 1978.

In summer 1978 the industrial working class intervened – although at this stage mainly for its own economic interests rather than for wider social and political goals.

The religious mobilisations and the industrial struggles began to shake the regime. The Shah ordered troops to attack a demonstration in Tehran on 8 September 1978, known as "Black Friday", when thousands were killed.

The response of workers was to take industrial action, both for their own immediate interests but also for social and political demands. "[On 9 September] about 700 workers at the Tehran oil refinery struck not, as previously, just for higher wages, but as a protest against the imposition of martial law and the massacre at Jaleh Square. Two days later, on 11 September, the strike had spread to the oil refineries of Isfahan, Abadan, Tabriz and Shiraz..." (Nima).

In October, strikes spread further. The most important were those in the oil industry, which were organised by militant strike committees. Their political demands, formulated on 29 October, included the abolition of martial

**Khomeini disguised his programme for a theocratic state beneath vague, liberal-sounding phrases.**

law, freedom for political prisoners, and the dissolution of SAVAK.

The Shah responded by sending in the army. But the workers did not give up. On 4 December 1978 they began an all out strike, bringing production to an absolute stop.

The Shah left Iran on 16 January 1979, never to return.

Although it was the power of the working class that brought the Shah to his knees, it was not working-class organisations that led the overall opposition movement. As Bayat put it: "While the workers indeed controlled all revolutionary activities within the workplaces, they did not and could not exert their leadership upon the mass movement as a whole. This leadership was with someone else: Khomeini and the leadership associated with him."

"No other opposition organisation could muster a network of 180,000 members with 90,000 cadres (mullahs), some 50 leaders (ayatollahs), 5,000 'officers' (middle clergy), 11,000 theological students and a whole mass of ordinary members such as Islamic teachers, preachers, prayer guides and procession organisers" (Nima).

Khomeini had already appointed the Islamic Revolutionary Council in exile. He returned to Iran on 1 February 1979, greeted by millions at the airport. On 5 February he appointed Bazargan as his provisional prime minister.

An insurrection on 9-11 February 1979 brought the end of the prime minister left behind by the Shah.

As the old state began to crumble, workers set up shuras (councils) in workplaces. These shuras took many forms – in Tehran alone there were as many as a thousand – and in the first months of 1979 they thrived.

In the period from February to August 1979, workers "waged a struggle independent from, and at times directly against, the [clerical] leaders of the revolution" (Bayat).

**B**ut immediately after the insurrection of 9-11 February oil strike leaders were arrested by the new regime and charged as counter-revolutionaries. Three days after the insurrection Khomeini ordered all strikers to return to work "in the name of the revolution".

On 18 February the Islamic Republic Party was formed to spearhead Khomeini's supporters in official politics. Militias and other storm troopers such as the Hezbollahi (Party of Allah) were organised to attack opponents in the streets and in workplaces.

Speaking in Qom on 1 March 1979, Khomeini said: "Democracy is another word for the usurpation of God's authority to rule... What the nation wants is an Islamic republic; not just a republic, not a democratic republic, not a democratic Islamic republic. Do not use the term 'democratic'. That is the Western style."

From March 1979 Khomeini made attack after attack on women's rights, enforcing the veil, banning mixed education, changing family law.

On 31 March the Minister of Labour announced that the government "believes that workers can defend their interests only through a healthy Syndicate; therefore the ministry will support such organisations and intends to dissolve any other forms of organisation which are wasteful."

On 30-31 March the government held a referendum, with the question: Yes or No to an Islamic Republic. The voting slips were red for No and green for Yes.

Members of local Komitehs handed voters their preferred voting slip and stamped their identity cards.

The regime nationalised 483 factories, 14 private banks and all insurance companies in June 1979. It took control of 70% of the private sector, paying compensation to foreign and domestic capitalists. The Islamic Mustazafin Foundation took over the assets of the Shah's family Pahlavi Foundation, which included 20% of the assets of all private companies. State managers were appointed to impose government policy. In May 1979 the government introduced the Law of Special Force to prevent shuras intervening "in the affairs of the managements and of the appointments" of government-nominated managers.

On 6 May Khomeini ordered the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, the Pasdaran. On 22 June a demonstration at Tehran University demanding a popularly elected assembly was broken up by the Hezbollahi. The government decided that an Assembly of Experts would draft the new constitution.

On 7 August 1979 the government enforced a two-month old press law, with the Pasdaran occupying the offices of the liberal daily paper, Ayandegan. Later that month the government banned 41 opposition papers and took over two large publishing houses.

The first widespread wave of outright suppression against the shuras was launched in August. According to Bayat, "many independent shura activists were arrested and a number of them executed."

Khomeini's forces also attacked the left. Khomeini made his attitude clear in a speech on 19 August in Qom: "We made a mistake. If we had banned all these parties and fronts, broken all their pens, set up gallows in the main squares and cut down all these corrupt people and plotters, we would not be facing all these problems."

When Iraq attacked Iran in late September 1980, the result was "an hysterical chauvinist wave which rapidly engulfed the country, including the working class and most of the left". The Pasdaran were trebled and new organisations such as the Basij corps were set up. By June 1981 the last traces of independence by the shuras were stamped out.

The Khomeini regime was a form of "reactionary anti-imperialism", opposed to the domination of foreign capital but utterly hostile to the Iranian working class. It is not an abuse of language to describe it as a form of clerical fascism, given its destruction of the labour movement.

Khomeini disguised his programme for a theocratic state beneath vague, liberal-sounding phrases. As Nima put it, Khomeini's "rhetorical allusions to freedom were unfortunately misunderstood by many within the anti-Shah opposition, including many on the left."

The left failed to prepare the Iranian working class and warn of what to expect. Instead the left used spurious analogies to incorporate Khomeini's movement within a mechanical parody of "permanent revolution", which was far from Trotsky's original theory.

The forerunners of the AWL, like most of the left, underestimated the nature of Khomeini's ideas and his movement. For example, we wrote:

"The role played by Muslim clerics in the opposition movement does not mean that it is reactionary... It means no more than that the mosques have been the only possible meeting places for the opposition..." (11 November 1978).

About the closest we came to warning of the impending catastrophe was an article which said: "We can predict a clash between Khomeini and the workers. British socialists must be ready to give every support we can to the Iranian workers" (24 February 1979). The only organisation which had a third camp line of "down with the Shah, down with the mullahs" was (ironically) the Spartacist League, who warned in advance of the consequences of theocratic rule for the emerging workers' movement, the left, women and national minorities.

Although we opposed the exclusion of the Spartacists from meetings and demonstrations on Iran by the SWP and the "Mandelite" IMG (the other most visible left group at the time), we did not spell out clearly the dangers of Khomeini coming to power. We should learn the lessons!

• This article is abridged from *Workers' Liberty* 3/5, "Iran: revolution and counter-revolution 1978-9", [www.workersliberty.org/wl3-5](http://www.workersliberty.org/wl3-5).

BOOK

# Why society needs equality

Matt Cooper reviews Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*

**T**he *Spirit Level* created a considerable stir when it was published earlier this year. Its central proposition is that societies characterised by economic inequality are bad for everyone, not just the poorest. It is written by epidemiologists — scientists concerned with the statistical understanding of disease — and is a readable indictment of the health and social effects of the unequal distribution of wealth.

The authors' focus is on affluent societies which produce enough for all, but distribute the social product unequally. They find not only that the poorest in each society suffer more from social problems such as poor health, violent crime and educational failure than others, but also that *everyone* in the more unequal societies suffers. In highly unequal societies not just the poorest have shorter life expectancy, but also *all* social strata, when compared to more equal societies.

The book's depiction of the *effects* of inequality on society is its strongest aspect. The statistics show only that inequality and social/health problems are correlated (a change in one is associated with a change in the other with no implications about causes). But the authors show that inequality (not just poverty) *leads to* poor health, violent crime and so on. Uncovering such mechanisms is a hard task, but the authors marshal a huge range of psychological and sociological data to show how inequality leads to societies riddled with fear of failure, anxiety, lack of trust and low self esteem.

For many years both analysts and governments from the social democratic centre-left have targeted the symptoms of inequality rather than the causes. For example, Robert Putman in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000) wraps up issues of inequality with a declining sense of community. He argues for rebuilding communities by investing in "social capital", encouraging people to be more involved with local education and services and more engaged in local politics for example.

*The Spirit Level* shows that inequality undermines such any sense of community; it is a labour of Sisyphus to attempt to counter such things without tackling



**Inequality harms even the better-off. The cause, capitalism itself, must be tackled.**

inequality. This has clear implications for the communitarian attempts of New Labour to create "social inclusion", while doing little to attack underlying inequality — a strategy central to the Blair project. As Blair stated in 2001, "... justice for me is concentrated on lifting incomes of those that don't have a decent income. It's not a burning ambition for me to make sure that David Beckham earns less money". The strength of this book is

that it shows that greater equality is necessary for creating a better society.

*The Spirit Level* shows why Blair is wrong. Neuroscientific, evolutionary psychological and anthropological data all converge on the idea that people do not thrive on competition, but on co-operation. There is a hormonal and neurological basis to human solidarity. Although the authors make no such connection, they support the idea that human behaviour evolved in primitive communist hunter-gather human societies, and that co-operation is central to what Marx called humanity's "species-being".

If its treatment of inequality as the cause of other social problems that is this book's strength, it is also its greatest weakness. While it is quite reasonable to see inequality standing in a causal relationship to social problems, it is quite another to see social inequality as an isolated and independent factor that can be dealt with by itself.

The book is based on an empirical survey of market economies, and thus tends to hold up the more egalitarian of those (Japan and the Scandinavian countries) as models. The concept of class is largely absent from the analysis, and the private ownership of industry appears only very late in the analysis and is neither theorised nor explored.

The third section of the book, which attempts to point the way forward to a better society, is therefore the weakest section. The proposals are for partnership between trade unions and management (as in Sweden or Japan), and more employee ownership. The agency of social change identified is the "third sector" of charities, community organisations and NGOs.

This book is worth reading for its unflinching exposure of the effects of inequality, but you may wish to draw your own conclusions about how to win equality.

BOOK

# How not to reinvent the wheel

Martin Donohue recommends *The Troublemaker's Handbook* by Labor Notes

**F**ounded in the USA in 1979, Labor Notes is rank and file union organising project and best known for its monthly newsletter. It also organises conferences attracting over 1000 rank and file union stewards, and published pamphlets and books.

The continued survival and success of such a democratic, living and vibrant project in the belly of the world capitalism holds up an unflattering mirror to our experience in the UK. Since the demise of the excellent *Trade Union News* we have had nothing remotely similar.

*The Troublemaker's Handbook* (TH) is simply essential. Every union rep and activist should have a copy of this book, and it is invaluable as an exciting and involving primer for younger socialists with less experience of unions.

The TH contains page after page of first hand accounts of genuinely organising in the workplace. "Organising" or the "organising agenda" has replaced partnership as the buzzword/cliché within the union movement. But organising means all things to all people. This book serves as a welcome reminder of what organising should mean. Organising is not something

that needs to be done for us by "professionals". It is the means by which the rank and file can struggle to win back power in the workplace.

Chapters include: shop floor and creative tactics, reforming your branch, and bringing immigrants into the movement. There is a wealth of bitterly won first hand experience here. Don't reinvent the wheel! Read it, and give yourself and your union brothers and sisters a head start over management. So much of rank and file union wisdom is oral, and often lost to the wind. This book provides an invaluable service to the movement in capturing and collecting this information and presenting it in an inspiring way.

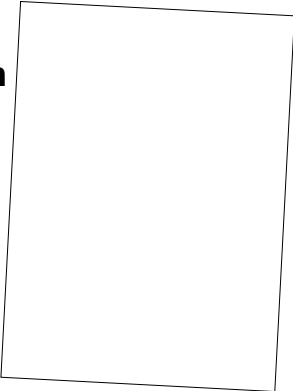
Hopefully by now you've already decided to buy the TH (or better, to get your union branch to buy a few copies), so I can safely add a word of warning. This is a book written from the American experience, so there are differences of terminology and more. For example some locals (branches) in the States have tens of thousands of members, so sections on running your "local" read a little different from one written here. This should not detract from the book, but highlights the lack of a similar book made specific to UK realities.

• The Troublemaker's Handbook:  
www.labornotes.org, \$24 plus \$4.50 postage

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THOMAS PAINE

# “The most treasonable book”

In the first of two articles on Thomas Paine, Pat Yarker looks at the radical's life, times, and ideas. The second article will discuss playwright Trevor Griffiths' take on Paine and his ideas.

**B**orn in 1737 in Thetford, Norfolk, Thomas Paine was an important figure in the American and French Revolutions. A radical democratic republican, his writings helped fundamentally alter the language of political discourse and contributed to re-shaping the consciousness of an emerging working class.

Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense on Independence* (1776) helped fuel the decision of America's thirteen colonies to break from Britain. His *Rights of Man* (1791-92) developed concepts of human rights and representative government. In *The Age of Reason* (1793-5) he forensically scrutinised the Bible in order to root out superstition and, as he saw it, reconcile religion and science. And in *Agrarian Justice* (1797) he outlined elements of a welfare state funded by progressive taxation, something not realised until the mid-twentieth century.

Paine died two hundred years ago, on 8 June 1809. Little in the first half of his life suggested he would play a revolutionary role on two continents. The son of a Quaker corset-and stay-maker, he attended Thetford Grammar School before becoming apprenticed to his father at 13. He learned the trade but did not take to it, though it proved a useful fallback in his early adult life. Paine absconded from his apprenticeship several times before leaving home for good and working in a variety of jobs in London and on the south coast. An itinerant skilled artisan, he would have known poverty if not penury. He knew personal tragedy too: his wife of less than a year died in childbirth, along with their baby.

Paine always kept up his education. He read and attended lectures about astronomy, engineering, chemistry and physics. Discussion with those who advanced Newtonian science would have brought him into contact with progressive political ideas, perhaps developing an egalitarianism derived from his Quaker background. In Lewes, Sussex, a town with a republican heritage, he was active in the political clubs from 1768-1774.

## HIGHER WAGES

**D**uring these years Paine worked as an excise-man, and was chosen by his fellow-workers to draw up a petition to Parliament for higher wages.

Inflation dominated the British economy during Paine's lifetime. Wages could never keep pace with rising prices. Paine wrote a pamphlet arguing the excise-men's case. One of his arguments was that higher pay would prevent excise-men having to accept bribes in order to feed themselves and their families. Paine said that the rich might need to experience first-hand what it was to be poor in order fully to appreciate the force of his argument.

Thousands of excise-men backed Paine, and he spent a year lobbying MPs. But the petition failed, and he was sacked. In the meantime however Paine had met Benjamin Franklin, representative in London for the American colonies. Franklin advised him to ship for America, and gave him letters of introduction to relatives in Philadelphia. On the voyage out Paine nearly died of typhoid. Recovered, he would shortly prove to be the right man in the right place at just the right time.

Early in 1775 Paine was taken on as contributing editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. Uniquely, the magazine published a lot of original American content rather than re-printing mostly British material. Its pages were open to writing which could engage with the contemporary political situation from the colonists' perspective. Skilfully deploying articles written by himself and others which touched on the issues of the day, including that of independence, Paine turned the magazine into the most widely-sold periodical in America.

At this time those calling for the outright separation of America from Britain were a vanguard minority. Most colonists wanted reform of the relationship between the two countries. But violent conflict between British redcoats and armed colonists broke

out in spring 1775 at Concord and Lexington, and Paine became increasingly involved in pro-independence politics. To galvanise the majority into supporting a decisive break, Paine wrote *Common Sense*, published in January 1776, anonymously since every page was treason.

In *Common Sense* Paine attacked the policies of George III and castigated hereditary monarchy as an institution.

He predicted monarchist France would nevertheless support an American revolt against Britain, promoted the centralisation of powers in America to give effect to the people's will, and urged the new nation to become a place of refuge for all those seeking liberty. He sketched the likely economic and military power of an independent America and so offered a vision of what an independent America could be.

## COMMON SENSE

**T**he pamphlet was a sensation. It ran through twenty-five editions in the first year of publication, reaching far beyond an elite "political class".

Its arguments were posed in ordinary language and clearly sign-posted. They were presented directly, confidently, approachably and memorably. They were buttressed not by Latin quotations or references to authors only a few readers might know, but by Biblical quotations everyone would recognise and by analogies drawn from common life. Paine's matter-of-factness, restrained deployment of rhetorical devices, attention to practicalities and trick of building arguments from apparently self-evident truths all combined to validate what the title-page proclaimed. Here was *common sense*.

Paine's pamphlet met an historical moment. Resolve to break from Britain solidified and became general.

Paine would repeated the feat at the end of the same year as British forces gained the upper hand in the war. His very brief pamphlet simply entitled *The Crisis* begins with the words quoted at this year's AWL Conference: "These are the times that try men's souls." Paine goes on to articulate the reasons why America will win its war for independence. He speaks from his own experiences as a volunteer in the army. He presents the material factors favouring the American side. He avoids anything high-flown, and knows he does so: "I bring reason to your ears, and, in language as plain as A, B, C, hold up truth to your eyes."

General Washington ordered Paine's words read throughout the army before its fateful Christmas crossing of the Delaware to fight and win the Battle of Trenton. Morale rose. Desertion diminished. Recruitment began to recover. The rational and resolute style of Paine's writing had again helped advance the cause he wrote for.

## RIGHTS OF MAN

**P**aine's words would come to the aid of another revolution. In 1790 Edmund Burke published in England a long attack on the revolution in France.

He derided its elevation of individual rights, and defended hereditary monarchy and tradition. Burke had supported reconciliation with America, and Paine regarded him as a friend. But within three months, by early 1791, he had replied to Burke's book with the first part of *Rights of Man*.

Paine affirms that people have rights by dint of being human, and that civil rights spring from these fundamental "natural" (or in today's language, human) rights. For Paine natural rights include the rights of the mind — that is, freedom of thought, speech and religion. In Paine's language, individuals deposit some of their natural rights in society, which in turn helps individuals to exercise these rights when necessary. Natural rights which an individual cannot exercise by him or herself are exchanged for *civil* rights. From this follows an issue of political rights.

Paine contrasts France's newly-written *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens* with the British constitution. He ridicules the aristocratic ruling class in Britain and condemns the unjust and corrupt political system by which they retain power. The right to vote should not be conditional on the holding of property,

he says. He presents the American and French revolutions as harbingers of the political future. Those revolutions inaugurate new politics for new times, and require a new way of understanding the world.

The first part of *Rights of Man* was seditious. But the British government's initial response was low-key. They launched a dirty-tricks campaign which included commissioning a biographical hatchet-job on Paine. His "lowly" origins were used against him in print and in cartoons, displaying a profound class-hatred. Reactionary crowds burned him in effigy. However Paine's book galvanised the republican mood in what can be seen as a pre-revolutionary moment in British history.

Part two of *Rights of Man*, published early in 1792, took an overtly revolutionary stance in its condemnation of the hereditary system. Paine wrote: "All hereditary government is in its nature tyranny." In May the government took action against Paine's printers and moved to have him arrested. Lord Mornington, the Duke of Wellington's elder brother, wrote to the Home Secretary and fellow Old Etonian Lord Grenville that *Rights of Man* was: "by far the most treasonable book that ever went unpunished... so, pray, hang the fellow if you catch him."

Paine wasn't caught. He had crossed to France to take his seat as elected representative for Calais in the National Assembly. There he spoke against the execution of the deposed King, and soon found himself suspected of counter-revolutionary sympathies as the Terror took hold. He was arrested.

America's ambassador failed to clarify Paine's American citizenship, and he remained imprisoned and under threat of execution for a year. Either side of his imprisonment he wrote *The Age of Reason* and *Agrarian Justice* before returning to the USA in 1802.

## RECOGNITION

**B**ack in the USA Paine found himself hated rather than feted, mainly on account of his perceived atheism. In fact Paine was a deist, believing in god but not following any established religion.

He lived in obscurity and poor health near New York City, mainly on a small farm which had been granted him after the war of Independence. He was denied the vote in the state election in 1806 on the specious grounds that having served in the French Assembly he was not an American. As he lay dying, the local Quakers refused permission for his body to be buried in consecrated ground.

So Paine was interred on his own farm. A handful of mourners attended. These included a French woman and her two sons who lived with Paine, and two African-Americans who had walked twenty-five miles from New York to pay their respects. "Man has no property in man," Paine had written. Among the first to oppose in print American slavery, he had been a founder-member of that country's first anti-slavery society.

For two short but epoch-making periods Thomas Paine had articulated the new consciousness and practice which was moving to change history. This was not, yet, a socialist consciousness. Paine saw no fundamental antagonism between the interests of capital and of labour. He endorsed free markets. He did not write about the labour movement, nor develop a class analysis. Among his radical contemporaries, Thomas Spence was the more radical in demanding nationalisation of land, and Babeuf the more daring in trying to establish a society based on common ownership.

But Paine's writings remained required reading among nineteenth century radicals. They were reprinted by the Chartists even as that movement provided the collective experience which would point beyond Painite radicalism towards working-class political emancipation.

Paine lived as an internationalist and supported revolutionary demands for a more equal social order. Against the dominant ideology of his day he promoted mass political participation. He demonstrated by what he wrote, and by how he wrote it, that enfranchisement of ordinary people was overdue. Paine helped politicise this wide public by offering his writing not as instruction or exhortation, but as recognition of truth.

• [www.tompaine200.org.uk](http://www.tompaine200.org.uk)



## FASCISTS' "SUMMER FESTIVAL"

## 15 August: oppose the RWB!

BY CHARLIE SALMON

For the second year running anti-fascists from Nottingham, Derby and Amber Valley have called a national demonstration to oppose the British National Party's annual summer event, the "Red, White and Blue Festival" (RWB) in Derbyshire. Last years' demonstration attracted up to five hundred demonstrators and the support of local and national trade unions.

The RWB event will be the first major show of force for the fascists after the election of Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons to the European Parliament. The BNP invests a considerable amount of energy into building the RWB and we can expect to see in excess of the one thousand the BNP claimed attended last year.

Such gatherings are used to "educate" members and recruit new ones. The BNP will want to bring many hundreds of supporters closer to their politics over the weekend.

The RWB also has a considerable local impact. Although the BNP failed to win a Euro or county council seat in the East Midlands, their vote was high and in some areas almost certainly responsible for unseating many Labour councillors. Some of the BNP's most impressive votes were in the wards surrounding Codnor, where the RWB is to be held.

Many local people are sickened by the levels of support for the BNP and are determined to show their opposition. and there is a more important job at hand than just "opposing" this event — the labour movement and the left must organise to shut it down.

## Sheffield Emergency Meeting to Stop the BNP

Thursday 2 July 7 pm.

Victoria Hall, Chapel Walk, Sheffield

In the wake of the victory of Andrew Brons as MEP for Yorkshire we are organising against the racism of the BNP and their exploitation of the problems faced by working class communities in our city. Email [max.munday@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:max.munday@yahoo.co.uk)

One recurrent disagreement between liberal opponents of fascism and radicals and socialists revolves around the "legitimacy" of trying to stop BNP and other fascist events.

In the days after his victory Nick Griffin appeared on College Green in Westminster to talk to the press. As the press conference started, anti-fascists organised by the Socialist Workers Party's front group "Unite Against Fascism" attacked Griffin and his entourage with eggs and drove them from the Green.

Speaking on BBC 2's *Newsnight*, Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes condemned UAF for drawing attention to the BNP, as if his appearance on the television wasn't. Others criticised the "thuggish" behaviour and drew comparisons between the anti-fascists and fascists. They claimed that attempting to deny the "free speech" of fascists is a contradiction in terms. In contrast the *Sun* found the whole thing hilarious and posted a "pelt Griffin" game on their website.

Many on the left are confused about the politics of "no platform" — using direct action or legal proscription to prevent fascists gaining an audience. For anarchists in particular, "no platform" is the guiding principle of anti-fascism.

## WHY SHUT DOWN RWB?

**Socialists are militant defenders of free speech. We oppose legal restrictions that bar free expression and the exchange of ideas. At the same time we are not suicidal lemmings.**

Giving the BNP a platform to spread their ideas does not just cause "offence", although it surely does. It's not what BNP say that's dangerous but what flows from being allowed to say it — building organisational structures and dangerous actions.

Fascist organisations like the BNP pose an existential threat to socialists, the labour movement and to ethnic and sexual minority groups. Attacks on individual anti-fascists, the existence of the "Red Watch" website which prints photographs and the personal details of anti-fascists, and the racist violence that follows the BNP around demonstrate as much.

We defend free speech but there can be no "civil

peace" so long as fascists attempt to organise.

The demonstration against the RWB in 2008 was in some ways a success but was severely limited by a number of factors. We could not disrupt the festival, due to a lack of numbers and a lack of coordination on the day. Mobilising five hundred people from across the country to a small, rural location was a triumph in itself, but faced with heavy policing this number of people could not get close to the RWB itself. The demonstration did cause some major inconvenience to BNP members attempting to get to Codnor, and gave BNP leaders a bit of worry. And the demonstration attracted large numbers of local people, some of whom went on to form a local anti-fascist group.

There were political problems in the run-up to the RWB and on the day of the demonstration. The SWP/UAF refused point-blank to work with local campaigners to build the demonstration, calling a rally at a different time and attempting to split the march. Although the SWP/UAF gave apologies for not attending a recent planning meeting, it is almost certain the same pattern will be repeated.

What this means for the SWP's recent call for "left unity" is clear: "unity" on their terms, or no "unity" at all. Local campaigners will continue to encourage the SWP/UAF to be involved in the planning, but they are under no illusions.

We need to have a massive turnout of anti-fascists on 15 August. Larger sections of the labour movement will have to be mobilised and united under a coherent set of politics. This means activists raising the issue in local groups and trade union branches, winning support and funding, booking coaches.

Socialists also need to convince those who come on the demonstration and others who were revolted by the BNP's electoral gains that independent working class politics and working class anti-fascism are the only effective tools with which to combat fascism. We have a responsibility to explain the roots of fascism and organise political action to stem its growth.

• More info and leaflets: <http://nobnrfestival.wordpress.com> or email [nobnrfestival@riseup.net](mailto:nobnrfestival@riseup.net)

## BELFAST

## 100 migrants forced into hiding

BY JACK YATES

**More than one hundred Romanians have been forced from their Belfast homes and are in hiding under armed police protection after a series of coordinated racist attacks. These attacks, coming just weeks after a racist riot in Luton, demonstrate worsening threats of racist violence.**

The Romanian families had been living in a predominantly Loyalist area of the city, the working class "Village" community close to Queens University. Earlier this year Polish nationals were attacked in the same area and forced from their homes. It seems that a process of "ethnic cleansing" is underway.

The blame for these attacks, however, does not lie directly with traditional Loyalist activists or their paramilitary organisations. They claim not to have directed and have condemned the attacks. But decades of communal sectarianism and the historical links between Loyalist organisations and racism cannot be ignored, must have contributed to the levels of racism in Northern Ireland, Belfast in particular. The numerically significant Chinese population, along with other groups, have long been targets of racial hatred.

Those who coordinated the attacks appear to have links to fascist organisations, or are at least adopting fascist slogans and symbols for their own ends. A group calling itself "Loyalist Combat 18" ("18" standing for AH, the initials of Adolf Hitler) has claimed responsibility and according to the *Observer* on 21 June, has been coordinating attacks and sending threats via text messages.

**Being taken away to safety on a coach — forced out by racist thugs**

Combat 18 was formed in the early 1990s by members of the BNP's "security team" who left the party in opposition to its electoral focus. For a time C18 posed a significant threat to minority groups and the left, claiming responsibility for a series of brutal attacks. In recent years it has shrivelled after many members were arrested.

In Northern Ireland C18 members have worked to support Loyalist violence but their main public activity has been racist graffiti and attacks on the graves of Republicans. The ethnic cleansing of the "Village", assuming C18 are responsible, marks a significant and worrying departure from their previous patterns of organisation and action.

The rise of racist violence in Northern Ireland is linked to a number of things: the fallout of the economic crisis, rise in unemployment and changes in the established political parties. But there are other factors.

With Loyalist paramilitaries decommissioning their weapons and presumably downgrading their organisational activities, many hundreds of young people schooled in sectarian hatred — people who would have been recruited into paramilitary organisations — have nowhere to go. The British National Party, which has announced its desire to expand in Northern Ireland, could be a focus. The BNP has recently opened an office and "call-centre" in Northern Ireland. Just as in England, there will be a substantial cross-over between membership of C18 and groups like the BNP.

Anti-racist and community groups have demonstrated in Belfast against the attacks. Such a rally is a good starting point for what will have to be a consistent, mass campaign against both C18's violence and attempts by the BNP to gain a foothold. Such a campaign will have to coordinate self-defence and take direct action against the racist thugs — the police service has already shown itself incapable of responding effectively. But it will also have to debate political alternatives that can address both the worsening economic crisis and the sectarian legacy of Northern



## AFTER “No2EU”

## Is the People’s Charter the answer?

BY JOE FLYNN

**T**he groups involved in the “No2EU” coalition for the Euro-election — the RMT union leadership group around Bob Crow, the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*), the Socialist Party, and the Alliance for Green Socialism — are due to meet again before 28 June to discuss a “son of No2EU” project for the coming general election.

What may it look like? CPB secretary Robert Griffiths has written that for him the People’s Charter (PC) launched by the CPB last year is central to “realistic and non-sectarian” electoral initiative, so a meeting called on the People’s Charter in Lambeth Town Hall, London, on 16 June, with Crow and left Labour MP John McDonnell, may give the best clues we have so far.

50-odd people turned out for the meeting. The Socialist Party (SP) outnumbered the SWP considerably. To my knowledge only one person there was a member of the CPB. A couple of Greens were also present.

Ted Knight, in the chair, stated that the PC “is not a petition”, that it is something for “us all” to unite around.

Sara Tomlinson, an SWP member and local National Union of Teachers Activist, was the first speaker. She mainly spoke about NUT issues, but also used her speech to attack the “British Jobs for British Workers” slogan, saying Visteon was an example of a dispute where “only the [trade] union flag was flying”. She said nothing about No2EU.

She did talk about the left forming “a united pole of attraction”, and said it was good that a socialist, Kevin Courtney, is standing in an NUT election. Tomlinson didn’t say that she thought the “pole of attraction” needed to be openly socialist, and Kevin Courtney is not exactly promoting himself clearly as a socialist.

Crow talked about the PC being a way of “raising the level of people’s consciousness”, a tool for engaging people in discussion. He then said “some time down the road, a convention of some sort” could be held at national level.

But unless you pose the question of power to people, how is the PC going to be politically useful? How do people change the world through the PC? Logically, a government of some kind would have to enact its demands, and what sort of government is that?

If the PC is used as criterion for a sort of “kitemark” for approved “left” candidates — Labour, Green, SNP, Plaid, maybe independents — where does that get us?

Of course people’s consciousness is low, but the only way to change that is through being organised and socialist. One Labour Party member made a good point from the floor — why will members of organised left groups spend their time promoting it rather than their own programme? Well exactly, they won’t. If all I’m doing is trying to raise people’s consciousness in ones and twos or through small local meetings, I might as well do that with a real socialist programme.

John McDonnell said the real target of the PC, as far as he is concerned, is disgruntled Labourites. He was talking about using it to build a different pole of attraction... but in the Labour Party! He continued his recent rhetoric about Labour “change candidates” (getting

together a left slate of candidates within the general Labour election campaign), but also bizarrely seemed to suggest that soft-Blairite group Compass are moving left and “could be worked with”.

He said at one point that “Marx and Engels would be ashamed of it [the PC]”. So why is he involved in it? Because of the defeatism in most of our movement at the moment.

McDonnell repeatedly said we’ve moved “beyond” attempts to unify the left, “which always end with the ‘fun’ of expelling dissenters”, and counterposed solidarity in the workers’ movement with left unity.

It was all intensely frustrating. Despite the general agreement that, with the election of the BNP, we have an emergency on our hands, the only talk of standing local working-class candidates came from a CPB comrade from the floor — and of course his definition of a “working-class candidate” would not be ours.

It is worrying enough that Crow and McDonnell attempt to portray political defeats as potential victories, but worse is that people accept this so readily. I was not called to speak, but a Workers’ Power comrade who intervened stressing the need for a unified socialist pole of attraction was heckled quite aggressively, including by people who genuinely seemed to think “we’re doing that now!”

We should however continue to engage with PC events, making our points about the need for a *socialist* alliance and the political demand of a workers’ government.

• What’s wrong with the People’s Charter?  
www.workersliberty.org/node/12633

## Union leaders start to bark, but will they bite?

BY MARTIN THOMAS

**P**aul Kenny, general secretary of the GMB general union, used his speech to the GMB congress in Blackpool (15 June) to call for the Labour Party to select “fresh working-class candidates that people can relate to”.

“Now is the time to select and elect 40 to 50 fresh real people, real trade unionists, people who actually know how much a pint of milk costs, and what it is like to get on a bus, MPs driven by commitment rather than being worried about being driven by a chauffeur”.

As ever, the question is, what will Kenny do about it? The Labour Party leadership obviously wants to limit the number of new candidate selections forced by the expenses scandals. Will the GMB push for more selection contests? To be done democratically?

And will the GMB push for the new candidates?

Will the GMB push for the Labour Party to restore the right of unions and local Labour Parties to put political motions to Labour Party conference? And use that right aggressively?

Dave Prentis, general secretary of the public services union Unison, also used his speech at his union conference to lambast Labour. He declared that Labour MPs and candidates at the next election who backed further privatisation of public services should have funding withdrawn by Unison.

The intricacies of Unison’s constitution means that what the union’s political arm, the Labour Link, does cannot be directly debated by delegates on the floor of the union conference, so Prentis has pretty much a free hand in the precise meaning he gives to what his union website called “a barnstorming speech”. Will Unison use its weight at Labour conference this September / October to push for public services, or even to restore the right of unions and local Labour Parties to put political motions to the conference? That remains to be seen!

Union activists should demand the leaders give bite to their bark.

## No unity in Scotland

BY DALE STREET

**A**ccording to an Open Letter distributed in Glasgow by members of Solidarity (the 2006 breakaway from the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP)), which has also been posted on the Socialist Unity website:

“It is our understanding that a group of prominent Scottish trade unionists linked to none of the parties of the left in Scotland are in the formative stages of brokering left unity talks specifically on the issue of the Glasgow North East constituency [i.e. Michael Martin’s seat, where a by-election is due to be called].

“Our understanding is that during the next week [i.e. the week this issue of our paper goes to press] formal approaches will be made to trade unionists, left progressives, environmentalists, community activists, the SSP, the Socialist Labour Party [launched by Arthur Scargill in the 1990s] and Solidarity to see if a unity process is achievable.”

The nub of the letter is an appeal to the SSP to delay deciding whether or not to stand a candidate in that election until after left unity discussion.

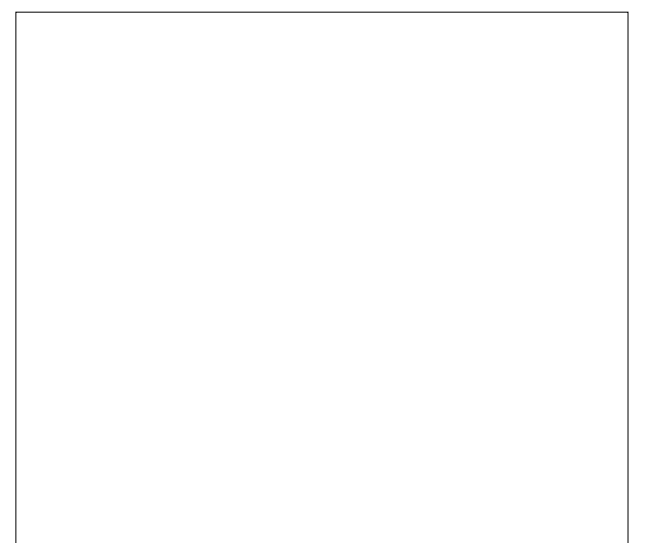
But the SSP was clearly unimpressed with the appeal. According to an article on its website:

“A well-attended meeting of SSP members last night [16 June] voted to stand a candidate in the forthcoming Glasgow North East by-election, triggered by the resignation of Michael Martin.”

The SSP meeting was wrong to take the decision to stand a candidate — not necessarily wrong in principle, but certainly wrong not to delay taking that decision.

“Left unity” — the expression used in the Solidarity Open Letter — is certainly not on the cards if the expression means an organisational re-unification of the SSP, the SWP and the Socialist Party. There can be no re-unification without a political accounting for the split of 2006.

But the Open Letter also highlights a development which did justify postponing a decision — the reference to a group of “prominent Scottish trade unionists” trying to broker talks so that there is a single left candidate in the by-election.



**What’s on offer? Something like No2EU, or something better?**

At the time of the SSP meeting, and even now there is still a lack of clarity about the extent to which this represents a significant development.

Which unions are involved? Do the trade unionists involved represent forces on the ground, or are they merely acting in a personal capacity? Is their initiative to be an open and democratic one, or a top-down one like the No2EU project?

Are other forces (i.e. beyond the organisations of the left) likely to get involved? What is the political basis of proposed single left-unity candidacy in the by-election? Can such a project have a meaningful political life outside of by-elections and elections? If so, what organisational form would it take, and, again, what would be its political platform?

The initiative from within the trade unions may prove to be a damp squib. Or significant. Right now, no-one knows; but the answer may be determined by whether socialists intervene. The decision by the SSP to rush ahead with standing a candidate allows it to be portrayed as a force for sectarianism.

## AWL APPEAL

# Build a Socialist Alliance to fight back!

The AWL has launched this appeal to socialist and working-class organisations and activists. So far the response from the SWP (Socialist Workers' Party) and SP (Socialist Party) at national level has been negative, but many individuals have signed it.

**I**n the 2009 Euro elections, the fascist British National Party increased its percentage of the vote and won two seats.

If UKIP leader Nigel Farage's claim that he reaped £2 million in expenses in his last term as a Euro MP is a model, that means millions extra for BNP funds. UKIP polled second with 16 percent. The right-wing nationalist English Democrats won mayor of Doncaster. The Conservatives are clearly heading for power.

After more than a decade of attacking working-class people, Labour's vote collapsed. And yet there was no substantial socialist election campaign to offer an alternative.

Racism and reaction are on the rise - as shown not just by the election results, but by incidents like the recent anti-Muslim rioting in Luton. All this must be serious cause for alarm.

In order to reach workers and young people angry about the crisis and the mainstream parties' pandering to the bankers and bosses, we need to build something like the Socialist Alliance — the coalition of the main activist-left groups and many unaffiliated socialists which in the 2001 general election stood candidates in 98 constituencies - as one step towards a new working-class political party.

Otherwise the right and far right will continue to gain from the anger and despair.

The left should unite in a Socialist Alliance to put forward working-class socialist answers to the crisis: jobs for all workers; open the books; nationalisation under workers' control of firms cutting jobs; full nationalisation and democratic control of the banks and finance system. We should fight for independent working-class representation in politics, and for a workers' government, based on the organisations of the labour movement.

We should unite in day-to-day action in support of struggles like Visteon; the schools actions in Glasgow, London and Barrow; and the Tube battle over jobs, pay and union rights; and to organise the left and the rank and file in the workers' movement.

The working class needs to reject and fight nationalism and racism. Workers can only deal with the crisis by organising together across ethnic backgrounds, across differences of origin and across borders. The crisis is creating huge pressures towards protectionism and the raising of economic barriers between countries. We need a united socialist voice for working-class solidarity and unity across Europe, to take on the bosses and level up towards decent jobs, services and rights for all — fighting for a Workers' Europe.

#### We the undersigned:

- Call on the activist left groups, including the SWP, Socialist Party, and Scottish Socialist Party, to meet to discuss setting up a new Socialist Alliance;

- Pledge to support efforts to create local Socialist Alliances.

- Add your support to this appeal by emailing [unity.2009@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:unity.2009@yahoo.co.uk). Download a copy of the text (as pdf) to circulate hand-to-hand from [www.workersliberty.org/newsocialistalliance](http://www.workersliberty.org/newsocialistalliance).

## Progress in Newcastle

**I**n Newcastle we have a Tyneside Socialist Forum which has existed for a long time — before the Socialist Alliance.

It was relaunched last year. Along with AWL members it includes independent socialists, left anarchists, ex-CPers and some people from FRFL. It meets regularly and has political discussions, it could be the springboard for greater left unity.

Our next meeting will be discussing precisely that. The SWP have said they will come to the meeting, which is good. The Socialist Party haven't said they won't... at least not yet.

It would be good if the group could initiate its own campaigns or back others - e.g. there is a pretty good campaign started up in Newcastle on the Welfare Reform Bill. We don't have to agree on everything all at once (or even at all!) In time we could think about, or some of us could think about standing candidates in elections. First we have to get the group functioning on a broader basis.

Ed Whitby

## SWP presents its left unity initiative

**T**he SWP has held meetings about its "left unity initiative" on the fringe of the Unison union conference and in Sheffield and other cities.

Ed Whitby reports from the meetings in Middlesbrough and Gateshead: "The SWP have little to say, but these two meetings were useful for us in opening up the discussion and for showing to the SWP periphery that we are serious about working with them even when we are very, very critical of them ideologically. And that we have concrete ideas for united activity when they just say 'unity' and UAF and demos".

At the Unison conference fringe, Charlie Kimber was the SWP speaker. When challenged about whom the left unity initiative was aimed at, and asked why SWP has not responded to AWL's reply saying "yes, let's discuss unity", his basic response (repeated in more vitriolic terms from the floor) was "It's not just about left groups sitting in a room together — we have to reach out". Sheer demagoguery! He did, however, when pushed, say "a reply will be sent".

He argued that Respect failed because not enough "Labourites" came on board, with an implication of this meaning Labour MPs. (The SWP defended the Respect venture down the line, by the way.)

The SWP's basic tack seems to be: We want a united front with "serious forces", not with "little sectarian groups". How to get it? Hmmm, not sure, but UAF is brilliant, isn't it? Meanwhile, join the SWP.

In Sheffield, so Daniel Randall reports: "Chris Harman said nothing concrete in his introduction about how the 'left pole of attraction'/'broad socialist alternative'/'united left' might actually be built. He posed the need to 'break with New Labour' as an almost mystical concept — a higher state of political

being that, once attained, would unlock a universe of possibility.

"Unbelievably, he claimed that the reason previous 'left unity initiatives' had failed (he listed the SLP, the Socialist Alliance, Respect and No2EU) was because they were all initiated at periods when there was still too high a degree of Labourite consciousness within the British working-class for them to have an impact. The European election results have changed all of that, apparently, so now's the time to have another tilt. In his summing up, he pointedly ignored all suggestions that it was actually the politics of these initiatives that were problematic, not merely their unfortunate timing.

"The whole scheme was finally laid bare when Harman, in one of his closing remarks, said 'if you could get Alice Mahon, Bob Crow, Arthur Scargill, Mark Serwotka, and Clare Short to get together, and maybe persuade Tony Benn, then you've got the basis for a campaign that could become a real pole of attraction.'

"When called to speak, I first welcomed the SWP's turn back to calling for a 'socialist alternative' but suggested that there should be some accounting for the perspectives they've been pursuing for the past five years. I also asked why prominent SWP trade unionists, such as the CWU's Jane Loftus, are still voting with sell-out bureaucracies to prevent the unions from meaningfully attacking Brown and perhaps actually precipitating the 'break with New Labour' that Harman fetters so much. I also suggested some concrete, practical struggles around which the revolutionary left could unite immediately, including within working-class anti-fascist campaigns".

- [www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=18114](http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=18114)

## The Socialist Party responds

By ROSALIND ROBSON

**A**t the Left Unity Liaison Committee meeting on 13 June, the Socialist Party said that it is not interested in a new Socialist Alliance for now.

Instead, it hopes to continue its "No2EU" alliance with RMT general secretary Bob Crow, the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*), and the Alliance for Green Socialism, into some "son of No2EU" coalition for the general election.

The Socialist Party has also responded to the SWP's call for unity, by rehashing an argument the SP had inside the Socialist Alliance which led to it leaving the alliance in December 2001. Its argument about the SWP is apt: "[in the past] you have taken a sectarian 'rule or ruin' approach — your own party's narrow organisational dominance has been put before the interests of the workers' movement."

Butt the SP is not being completely honest. It never fought the SWP inside the Socialist Alliance, and it left the Socialist Alliance in good part because its own organisational interests were threatened by the SWP's presence (a case of "this town ain't big enough for the both of us").

To be sure, the SP are right to be suspicious about the SWP's new ploy. As they say, the SWP sent their appeal to prominent members of the SP individually, but have not approached the SP as such for proper talks.

The SP is not a little miffed by the SWP's failure to acknowledge the "No2 EU" Euro-election project. (In our view, there is not a lot to acknowledge: the project had an anti-European, rather than socialist political platform, and got a very poor vote despite its political weakness).

The SP chooses *not* to criticise the Respect project politically. It limits itself to condemnation of the SWP's splitting with Respect.

# For a secular democratic Iran

BY CATHY NUGENT

**T**he demonstrations that took place in Tehran and other Iranian cities after the announcement of Iran's Presidential election results on Friday 12 June were, up until Friday 19 June, growing bigger every day. We have seen the birth of a new political movement in Iran.

The movement is politically inchoate and lined up behind the "reformist" wing of the Islamist regime. But the movement is much more than the aspirations of its awful leaders. There has been in Iran for some years some grass-roots organisation — in the Universities, among the women's groups and "civic organisations". Those groups did, it seems, use the elections as a "political space", going beyond casting their votes for particular politicians. That too contributed to the mood and the mass mobilisation.

Here were people struggling for political space, after years of being trapped in a world of fear, where everything from a struggle for rights at work to the right to show affection has been monitored and censored.

On Friday 19 June Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who for now has control over crucial sources of state power in Iran, made it clear that he backed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad 100%. He admonished the former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as the "power" behind opposition candidate Mousavi. He condemned in anti-semitic language outside interference from the "Zionist" US and UK governments. He condemned the idea of a "colour revolution" (a movement for democracy as seen in Georgia and Ukraine) as alien to the Iranian system. He ordered the demonstrations stop. It was all a signal for a crackdown.

The day after Khamenei's speech, protests in Tehran went ahead. Ten people were reported to be shot dead by the Baseej (auxiliary volunteer militia linked to the Revolutionary Guard). It could be many more. The murder of one young woman, Neda Soffani, was broadcast on YouTube. She has become a "martyr", her death, a symbol of the regime's oppression.

At the time of writing (24 June) maybe 500 people have been arrested. All of the "reformists" apart from the most senior leaders have been arrested. Many students have been arrested. Exams have been cancelled, the universities shut down. Special courts are being set up. Thousands of police are on the streets of Tehran. We have just heard of new clashes between protestors and police in Tehran. Mousavi has called for a general strike (including the closing of shops). There are reports that this call has been heeded in the Kurdish areas of Iran.

Even before a UK academic study catalogued widespread fraud in the election (e.g. in two provinces there was more than a 100% turnout), the demonstrators knew they were right to be disgusted by the result. Not only were the votes so obviously miscounted; many candidates were barred from standing by the Supreme Leader.

This anger will not dissipate. Mousavi knows it, so he continues to call for the cancellation of the election. Khamenei and the Guardian Council which backs him know it. They have absolutely ruled out any cancellation of the election. The stand-off continues.

## BACKGROUND

**T**he protests arose from the combination of two things.

1. A split within the clerical hierarchy about the

direction Iran's economy and society should take and its relationship to the world. The so-called "reformists" have been a feature of the regime since the reconstruction that took place at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

2. An outpouring of long-pent-up-grievances, a reflection of social change and a gap between the aspirations of an educated and urban population and the Islamist populism of the clergy which has held Iran together.

The Shi'a clerical hierarchy who are not part of the political class in Tehran, are based in Qom. Each member of the hierarchy is a "power" in his own right, collecting taxes from his followers. Khamenei has reportedly far fewer supporters among the hierarchy than his predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini. So there is a complex power struggle going on, which extends beyond the clash between the "reformists" in the political hierarchy, those who want a "loosening" of the system, while still retaining its basic Islamist character, and the "hardliners" around Khamenei who want something closer to Khomeinist clerical-fascist rule.

Rafsanjani is head of the Qom "Assembly of Experts" and he has been trying to get support among the clerics. What does Rafsanjani want apart from more power for himself?

Rafsanjani is (probably) the richest man in Iran. He has interests in the oil industry and a huge financial empire. As President between 1989 to 1997 he oversaw the reconstruction of post-war Iran, backed up by neo-liberal policies of privatisation and foreign investment. That led to a decrease in state subsidies and rising unemployment. Under his rule there was also a licensing of limited social secularisation and liberalisation. After a time Rafsanjani's pragmatic rule went out of favour.

*Continued on page 8*

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