

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

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# NO PUBLIC SERVICE CUTS

# Tax the rich!



**BY ELAINE JONES, VICE-PRESIDENT, WIRRAL TUC**

**T**he competition between the Tories and New Labour over who will be the most "responsible" at making cuts in public services and public pay if elected at the next general election has become an unedifying and foul spectacle. Here we have politicians trying to "prove" themselves on who will be the most adept at cutting the wages of low-paid workers, slashing benefits and further privatising vital services.

The Tories promise big cuts. Labour says it will save money by "improving efficiency" (cuts and privatisation), but will protect vital frontline services. David Cameron says he will not return to 1980s-style Thatcherite cuts.

But the Tories have also said they are prepared to become the most unpopular government since the war. And why would we trust, let alone want, New Labour to make "kinder cuts"?

Both parties want to make working class people pay for the economic crisis. Whichever party forms the next government, and the odds are it will be a Tory government, public sector pensions and pay will be a major target. Local government services will be further attacked, poverty-level unemployment benefits will be cut further.



*Continued on page 2*

# Tensions grow within Labour

BY MARTIN THOMAS

As the Labour Party approaches its Annual conference (Brighton, from 27 September), tensions within the party are increasing.

Whether they will find expression on conference floor is another thing. Successive restructurings have turned the "conference" into a glorified photo-opportunity. The "Partnership in Power" rule changes of 1997 was followed in 2007 by the banning of current political motions from trade unions and local Labour Parties in favour of "issues" to be safely remitted to the National Policy Forum.

Even the Labour Party conference was usually lively, conferences coming just before General Elections were usually muted, with the leadership telling everyone to shelve their differences for fear of losing the election.

However, with Labour steadily heading for a wipe-out in the general election due before June 2010, morale at the top of New Labour is low, and dissent is bubbling on all sides.

From the "Blairite" wing of New Labour — reputed to be more right-wing than Brown, though the real political differences are obscure — Charles Clarke came out just before conference with a call for Gordon Brown to resign, claiming that otherwise Labour would be in opposition for "ten or fifteen years".

The Trade Union Liaison Organisation (TULO), the body organising the unions affiliated to the Labour Party, has called for the 2007 ban on motions to be reversed. Since the unions still have 50% of the votes at conference, and the ban is due to be reviewed this year, that should settle the matter. The unions can just vote it through. If the union leaders have the will, that is.

However, as we understand it, the National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting on Tuesday 23 September was deadlocked on the issue. It has been remitted to an emergency NEC meeting on Saturday 26th.

Insiders say that Gordon Brown said he was willing to concede one small democratic reform — either restoration of motions, or direct election of constituency delegates to the National Policy Forum by Labour Party members rather than indirect election from constituency delegates at conference — but not two.

The best guess is that the "review" of the ban on motions will be adjourned to 2010 conference, and that the unions will go along with that. Whether 2010 conference will be an easier ride for Brown's successor, however, remains to be seen.

Left-wing voices within the Labour Party remain feeble. The Labour Representation Committee, the major such voice, has its annual conference coming up on 14 November.

• LRC conference:  
1-r-c.org.uk/events/detail/  
lrc-conference-agm

## ANTI-FASCISM

# Fascists routed in Harrow

Martin Donohue was at the counter-demonstration against the English Defence League in Harrow.

Friday 9 September was the date, chosen for maximum offence. On this day, a Friday in Ramadan, the English Defence League and "Stop the Islamisation of Europe" decided to stage a fascist-style provocation, a so called "9/11 remembrance", outside the newly built Harrow Central Mosque.

However the big talk beforehand evaporated on the day as 2000 counter protesters flooded the streets around the mosque, while only a few dozen EDL supporters sheltered behind police shields.

From midday the crowd had grown and mid-afternoon saw many local youth from schools and colleges join the hundreds of mainly young Muslims already gathered outside the mosque. Local antifascists including Unite Against Fascism supporters were present as well.

There had been a mobilisation from the UAF national office which swelled the numbers. At this stage it wasn't clear how many the EDL would mobilise and it is a credit to all those present that they were there and prepared to stand together against the expected attack.

The numbers continued to grow

throughout the day and then at about 5pm there was a rush across first a car park and then over a bridge as EDL hooligans were spotted.

Of course the police performed their traditional role of protecting the racists using their batons to beat back the youth. A bit later, a lone EDL person was chased behind police lines outside the Civic Centre.

These few minutes from eight hours of protest were all the media required to fill the news bulletins and papers. Not just to the *Daily Mail* but also to the BBC, an attempted pogrom is "free speech", while attempts at self defence are rampages and riots.

It was a great day and one that should send an important message to all the far right. It's been a long time since the far right has attempted to stage such a demonstration in a multicultural area in London. That it was such a humiliating failure is good news for not just the Muslim community but for all minorities and for the whole working class.

However there were mistakes made and lessons to be learned.

It was shameful to see so little sign of any labour movement mobilisation. Three or four Unite flags, not branch banners, were the only union banners among the whole crowd.

I find it difficult to express how shocking that is. Twenty years ago you would-

n't have been able to move for union banners, and the message to Muslim youth would have been loud and unmistakable. The labour movement and socialists would have been obvious potential allies, and a pole of attraction, in the fight against racism and anti-Muslim prejudice.

North West London Workers' Liberty produced and handed out a leaflet which allowed us to engage many of the crowd in discussion.

There was a generally good reaction once you got past unfamiliarity with basic socialist ideas. The idea that the fight against racism and fascism is one that must be won within the white working class went down particularly well.

So where to go from here? Locally the momentum from this victory should be used to create a borough-wide campaign against racism and fascism. Given the history and politics of UAF (basing itself on apolitical campaigning) it would be a mistake to allow UAF to present itself as a credible organisation to fill this role.

A broad, democratic community-based campaign which takes working class concerns seriously and aims to do rooted work across the estates of Harrow is what is needed. Stalls in shopping centres and UAF leaflets that "reveal" that the BNP is racist are not the answer.

## Tax the rich!

From front page

The Tories and New Labour represent the interests of the bosses. When capitalism goes into crisis they give billions of public money to the banks; they want to keep the wheels of capitalist exploitation well-oiled.

Then when everything seems to be returning to "normal" for the rich, back come their million pound bonuses. But for workers, the jobless, the sick, everything is going to get a lot worse.

The trade union movement and local community campaigners need to prepare to fight the cuts. We cannot rely on the leaders of unions to fight the cuts. We need to do it. We need to set up public sector alliances which can develop links between union activists and campaigners. We need to reinvigorate trades councils and local launch anti cuts campaigns when local authorities make cuts.

Above all we need to counter the arguments which say the only "reasonable" thing to do is make cuts. Doesn't matter whether it is big cuts, smaller cuts, "kinder cuts" — all cuts must be stopped!

To their cuts we counterpose:

- Tax the rich and business to finance public services.
- Save money by reversing privatisation and contracting out!
- Put public services under the control of workers and service-users, not businessmen and bureaucrats.
- Sack the fat cat public sector bosses and give ordinary workers decent wages and pensions.
- Scrap nuclear weapons and cut back military spending.

The welfare state, local services, decent pay and pensions were won by workers taking militant action. We need to prepare to take such action in to defend and extend public services.

## SOCIAL HOUSING

# Tory rent rise and sell-off plan

BY JIM FRASER

After years of New Labour government, it is easy to forget how bad the Tories are. Now the *Daily Mirror* has reminded us by exposing their plans for a savage onslaught on social housing.

At a secret meeting of senior Tories — including David Cameron's adviser on housing Owen Inskip and Boris Johnson's deputy Simon Milton — social housing was described as "a dead end", and the Tories declared their intention of raising council rents to market levels. As market rents are between £150 and £650 per week — with many areas, such as inner London, at the top end of this range — this means colossal increases in council and housing association rents.

The meeting also apparently discussed "eliminating" housing benefit, abolishing secure tenancies, making tenants pay for repairs and "driving out council tenants from Tory controlled areas." In other words, a vast version of Shirley Porter's infamous "social engineering" at Westminster Council in the 1980s.

Property companies and estate agents can expect to make a killing, but it will mean appalling suffering for millions of people. The interplay of market forces means that soaring rents will also drive up house prices for "first time buyers" on a corresponding scale, pricing them completely out of the housing market.

What will be the fate of the millions of workers whose income is below market rent levels, and the huge and ever-grow-

ing number increasingly dependent on housing benefit precisely because of high rent increases?

As long ago as 1997 some Tories were talking about getting rid of council housing in its entirety, and during the 2005 general election some Tory candidates talked, in a strangely vague and evasive way, of giving non-tenants the right to buy council property. Could they now want property companies and estate agents to buy occupied council property direct from Tory-controlled local authorities? Could it mean local authorities being compelled by law (and in the case of many Labour authorities against their will) to sell off (at bargain basement prices) occupied council properties to estate agents who can then increase rents to the full market level?

With the abolition of secure tenancies it will be much easier to evict those who cannot afford to pay the swinging rent increases. This is a recipe for massive numbers of people being made homeless. James Murray, a Labour councillor in Islington, stated "The Tories just don't care about social housing, and the goal of their plans is to eliminate social tenancies altogether."

The labour movement and the tenants movement must unite and fight, and we must put housing at the centre of the agenda at the next general election, precisely to warn and to mobilise against these Tory plans. We must remember, whatever our criticisms of the Blair and Brown governments, the Tories are far, far worse. We have been warned.

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE

# Solidarity, not boycotts!

**O**n Thursday 17 September the TUC congress voted for a motion from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) for a boycott of Israeli goods. The vote does not commit unions to any real action, and anyway was neutralised by the TUC General Council putting a statement through the congress which defined a much more limited policy. But the TUC vote will boost the “boycott Israel” mood in the labour movement and the left.

We believe this is a step backwards for the labour movement and for the cause of solidarity with the Palestinians. Rather than boycott, we advocate maximum links by the British labour movement with the many grass-roots groups and movements in Israel that support Palestinian rights or can feasibly be swung to support Palestinian rights, as well as with labour, secular and democratic Palestinian movements.

Many labour movement activists — including many who are not fanatically hostile to everything Israeli — have been swung to supporting a boycott by the desire to “do something” against arrogant, callous Israeli governments uninterested in peace and casual about their slaughter of Palestinians in such actions as Israel’s January 2009 offensive in Gaza.

A quiet choice not to buy Israeli fruit in the supermarket seems to them practical, possibly effective, and anyway a non-violent and dignified form of protest.

That is straightforward. But the counter-arguments are equally straightforward.

The bottom-line argument is that if a boycott gains real momentum, then — whatever the intentions of many of the trade unionists now voting for boycotts — it cannot fail to become a movement to target, shun, and penalise conspicuous Israel-linked people and pro-Israelis in Britain, i.e. Jews.

It cannot fail to boost the occasional pickets now mounted by anti-Israel enthusiasts against Marks and Spencer shops. The “official” reason for these pickets is links between Marks and Spencer bosses and Israel. In fact what singles out Marks and Spencer among High Street chains is that it is the one well known to have been founded by Jewish businessmen.

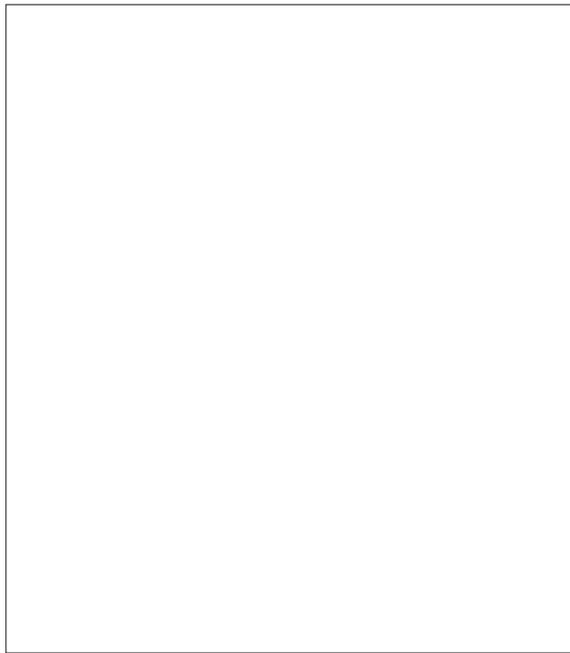
It cannot fail to revive the mood on university campuses which for many years, from the mid-1980s, led to student unions banning student Jewish societies on the grounds that they would not forswear all links with Israel.

It cannot fail to encourage a revival of the sort of action which started the boycott bandwagon rolling in Britain — the decision in 2002 by a British academic to sack two Israeli academics from journals which she edited, solely on the grounds that they were Israeli. One of the Israeli academics sacked was Miriam Shlesinger, former chair of the Israeli branch of Amnesty International, a living disproof of the idea that all Israeli Jews are little Benjamin Netanyahus or Ariel Sharons.

Wouldn’t the effective pressure for concessions which a boycott would apply to the Israeli government compensate for such side-effects, and make them secondary? No. The Arab states — all of them most of the time, and most of them all of the time — have been boycotting Israel since 1948, and that hasn’t helped.

Even if a consumer boycott became strong — in practice it will be token, even if it gathers enough force to produce a large anti-Jewish “spillover” — it is much more likely to strengthen chauvinist “fortress” attitudes in Israel than peace sentiments. Israeli Jews are likely to react in a prickly fashion to censorious measures from the Europe in which six million of their parents and grandparents were killed, and from the Britain which tried to block Jewish flight to Palestine while the Holocaust was being prepared and carried through.

Unions can achieve much by positive solidarity. Between its 2008 and 2009 conferences, the rail union RMT was the one union in Britain with a positive policy of solidarity, not boycott. It did more to help the Palestinians than the boycottist unions. It hosted a visit by Israeli army refuser Tamar Katz (the more fervent boycotters would boycott even Tamar), and organised a demonstration to protest at Israeli Railways’ discrim-



**Peace group Gush Shalom organises protests against Israeli military actions, such as this one against the 2006 war in Lebanon. The British labour movement should support and advertise their activities**

ination against Arab workers.

Trade unionists should seek to help Arab and Jewish workers inside Israel organise and unite, to show them solidarity, to develop links with their union movement, the Histadrut, and through those links to encourage support for Palestinian rights. The FBU motion, by contrast, called for a “review” of British unions’ links with the Histadrut.

Boycott campaigners are clear that for them the “review” proposal is useful only as the thin end of a wedge to get links with the Histadrut broken off. As the boycott campaign has rolled on — the university lecturers’ union AUT in 2005, then Unison, TGWU-Unite, PCS, and RMT in more recent years — the campaigners have become bolder about trying to break links between organised British workers and organised Israeli workers.

In some unions, such as Unison, boycott motions have also included a call for a “cultural” boycott. The best answer to this was given by the Palestinian academic Edward Said: “I believe it is our duty as Palestinian and yes, even Arab intellectuals to engage Israeli academic and intellectual audiences by lecturing at Israeli centres, openly, courageously, uncompromisingly. What have years of refusing to deal with Israel done for us? Nothing at all, except to weaken us and weaken our perception of our opponent” (*Al-Ahram weekly* 378, 21-27 May 1998).

Films indicting Israeli government misdeeds in the Occupied Territories have been banned in Europe under this “cultural boycott”. For example a French film festival barred Simone Bitton from taking part in a workshop; Bitton, an Israeli citizen but long settled in France, had produced *Mur* in protest against the Separation Wall (*Challenge*, January 2007).

The women’s organisation Sindyantha supports Arab workers in Galilee and Palestinian growers and producers from the Occupied Territories. It wants trade unions to help its work by promoting their products. How would boycotting them help?

## THE APARTHEID ANALOGY

**B**oycotters usually point to the boycott of the apartheid regime in South Africa run by the African National Congress (ANC) and its supporters from 1961 as a model.

But apartheid South Africa was a system where a white minority caste lorded it over a legally-suppressed black majority. The boycott was a gesture of solidarity with the majority, who supported it. The big

majority in Israel — including the majority of those who back Palestinian rights — do not want a boycott.

The Arab minority in Israel suffers disadvantages, as minorities do in many capitalist states, but does not face apartheid. The essential problem is that of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and blockading of Gaza, its denial of the Palestinians’ right to have a state of their own.

The analogy with South Africa is false, and slides over into a false blanket condemnation of all Israeli Jews as exploiters.

Moreover, the gesture of boycotting South African goods, even if socialists had no special reason to denounce it, was not all decisive in bringing down apartheid. The revolt of the black working class in South Africa was decisive there.

The “cultural” bit of the South African boycott was a hindrance. It helped the ANC and its allies in their initial denunciation of the new multi-racial trade unions of the 1980s as “yellow unions” (because, in contrast to the ANC-run “trade union federation” which existed only in exile, they negotiated with the employers and the government) and their attempt to block direct links between British unions and those multi-racial unions (“breaches of the boycott”).

The TUC and most, maybe all, trade unions support, as does *Solidarity*, a “two states” settlement: the demand that Israel withdraw from the Occupied Territories and allow the Palestinians to exercise their right to form a sovereign, independent state of their own, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel.

Most, though not all, of the activists who have pushed the boycott since about 2002 do not support “two states”. They believe that Israel must be wiped off the map, and the Israeli Jews — as many of them as survive the conquest of their state — must be forced to live as a minority in an Arab-majority state.

They would say (and, often, sincerely believe) that the Jews in that Arab-majority state should have democratic rights. But not the right to have their own nation-state! Never that!

In practice such a Jewish minority could be prevented from exercising self-determination only by depriving them of many other democratic rights. And we can gauge how thought-through the support for Jewish rights of the advocates of “one Palestine, from the river to the sea” is by observing their uncritical support for Hamas. Sometimes the “one Palestine” advocates talk of a “democratic, secular state”, but Hamas rule “from the river to the sea” would certainly not be secular or democratic.

The boycott proposal, by presenting the Israeli Jews as a “bad people”, an illegitimate nation, a community to be shunned in a blanket fashion, functions as the thin end of the wedge for the idea that the Israeli Jews have no right of national self-determination, and that the Jews across the world who feel instinctive (though often critical) solidarity with Israel should be denounced as “Zionists”. The term “Zionist” in this context bears the same emotional charge as “fascist” or “racist”.

The TUC General Council statement overrode the FBU motion’s demand for a consumer boycott of all Israeli goods, substituting a consumer boycott of goods from the settlements in Occupied Territories. Mick Shaw from the FBU had said: “It’s not just an issue of a boycott of goods produced in illegal settlements. Firstly, we think that impractical. These goods do not come with a label which says ‘these goods are produced on an illegal settlement’.” True. The more limited boycott is impractical, and in fact has gained currency only as a “first step towards” comprehensive boycott. But neither the TUC leaders’ move to reduce it all to vague but safe impracticality, nor “Zionist”-baiting, is an answer.

What we need, and what would best help the Palestinians, is a different sort of campaign. One which makes the unions’ two-states policy an active guide to solidarity — on the lines tentatively started by RMT in 2008-9, but then withdrawn from — rather than an abstract preamble to motions which go on to recommend nothing but vague lobbying of the Government and individual consumer choices. And one which decisively rejects the “Zionist”-baiters.

ENGINEERING  
CONSTRUCTION

## ORGANISING IN THE IT INDUSTRY

# Fujitsu ballot on pay, jobs, pensions

IAN ALLINSON, CHAIR, UNITE  
FUJITSU UK COMBINE COMMITTEE,  
SPOKE TO SOLIDARITY

**U**NITE and PCS are about to start a statutory ballot on jobs, pay and pensions. The anti-union laws make organising a ballot really difficult, especially when members are scattered across so many sites, but in the meantime, many more staff have joined the unions.

The company cancelled the pay rises due in April this year, then went on to announce it had made record profits – just a couple of weeks before the pay rises should have taken effect.

In May, the company announced that it intended to dismiss the 4000 staff in the main “final salary” (defined benefit) pension scheme, and re-employ them on new contracts with far worse pensions. We estimate this would be equivalent to a pay cut of about 20% for most of us.

Though the attack on pensions doesn't directly affect most PCS members, who are in a different pension scheme, they knew that if the company closed the main scheme, others would follow. It later emerged that since 2007 the company has had a strategy (never communicated to staff) to exit all its “defined benefit” pensions schemes.

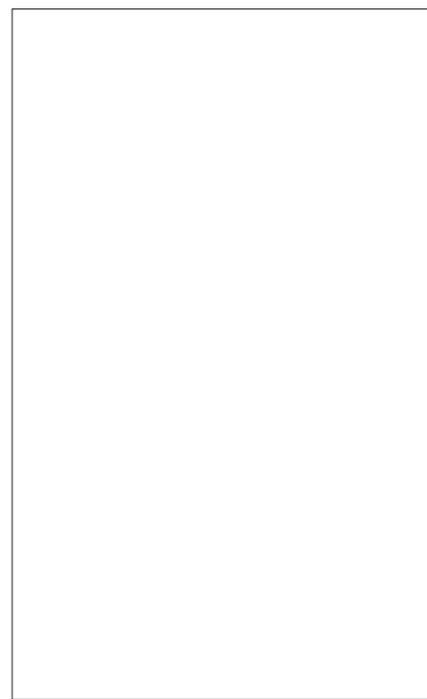
UNITE and PCS launched a joint campaign on pay and pensions, and members across the UK voted overwhelmingly for strike action in consultative ballots.

Then in September, the company put about 6000 of us at risk of redundancy, proposing to cut 1200 jobs. They timed the announcement for the day the UNITE consultative ballot closed. We think they hoped to overshadow the result and scare people into submission on pay and pensions. In reality people saw right through it.

Fujitsu is a giant multinational, based in Japan. We work for a subsidiary called Fujitsu Services, which employs about 12,500 people in the UK. The bulk of the company was ICL until 2002. We design, build, operate and support IT systems, mainly for government departments and big companies. Jobs include engineers, call centre agents, support, development, testing, design, sales and admin functions. As much of the work comes from outsourcing contracts, “TUPE” transfers of groups of staff between companies is common as contracts are won and lost, so some people have changed employers several times while doing the same job.

At the moment, UNITE members in Fujitsu are scattered in nearly 200 different branches across the country, though there are a few with significant numbers of members. Workplace organisation tends to be disconnected from the branches, which are the structures closest to the members which actually have their own funds.

UNITE has union recognition in some parts of the company, including Manchester where I work. PCS has recognition in other areas where civil service jobs have been privatised. Most



of the company doesn't yet have union recognition, though both UNITE and PCS have managed to extend their areas a bit in recent years.

There are over 900 staff in the Manchester bargaining unit, either based at the main Manchester site or home-based and living in the region. We have a team of about 30 workplace, safety, learning, equality and environmental reps, all elected at general members' meetings. All the reps meet once a month, and the different groups meet as needed – for example the workplace reps meet weekly.

Where we don't yet have recognition, members still elect reps and we have local contacts. It's harder for them to operate, but we've now got over 40 UNITE reps and contacts on other sites. We have still got a long way to go – there are about 200 sites in the UK!

We've had local strikes in Manchester before (in 2003 and 2006-7) but we've never had a national one. In the local disputes, we could take decisions at members' meetings, but you can't do that in a national dispute. We decided to set up a national “combine committee”, elected directly by the members on a regional basis. This is helping us coordinate the campaign, as well as making sure that there's proper accountability.

There are other strong union groups in the IT industry, but they are based on groups that have TUPE-transferred in from employers in other industries. As far as I know we are unique in being a union built by “natives”. Part of the reason for this is the ICL legacy.

ICL unionised in the 1970s, when it was a major computer manufacturer. Through the 1980s the company changed almost beyond recognition, abandoning manufacturing completely. Job losses took a terrible toll on union organisation. In the late 1980s the company derecognised unions nationally and at most of the major sites. Manchester was the only non-manufacturing site to retain recognition (by voting to strike). The other sites that kept

recognition were manufacturing and repair sites which were sold off and later closed.

By the early 1990s Manchester was a shrinking island of union organisation – at one point we were down to two reps for a site of over 1200 people.

We have built up the union organisation by issue-based campaigning. The (largely paper) union recognition gave us some facilities to do this. Through much of the 1990s we didn't win a lot, but people valued the fact that the union kept them informed whereas the company kept them in the dark, the fact that the union would publicly express how they felt about the issues that concerned them, and the fact that we campaigned where we could. This was enough to build up membership and involvement. Though growth has been a long and patient process, it has always relied on reacting quickly when things happen. If people see no opposition straight away when something bad happens, they start to accept defeat. We haven't always been good at organising systematically, but we have been good at seizing opportunities when they arise.

The use of email newsletters and company works councils helped us build up our visibility and networks nationally, as well as helping us retain members we recruited in workplaces where there was little or no organisation.

In recent years, our campaign around job losses in 2002 and our successful local strikes in 2003 and 2006-7 have been key turning points in strengthening our position. The current campaign could mean a real breakthrough – a national dispute establishing effective national organisation. UNITE membership across Fujitsu has already gone up more than 30% this year and new members are joining every day.

Governments and employers have no clear strategy for getting out of the current recession, other than to make working people pay. As a result they are being extremely aggressive, but aggression isn't the same thing as strength. The Visteon workers were fighting in the most difficult situation – when their employer was bust. But their audacious action forced Ford to intervene and won important concessions. They did more and threatened more than management had bargained for. A number of other recent victories follow a similar pattern – Linamar in Swansea, Bristol bins and the unofficial construction strikes. Aggression can turn into retreat when met with determined resistance.

The Vestas fight shows what an impact even a tiny number of people can have if they are prepared to put up a real fight and appeal for support. It is an absolute tragedy that the failure to unionise the plant in preceding years meant the fight started so late, with so few people and in such difficult circumstances. Though they haven't kept the plant open, they have pushed the issue of green jobs up the political agenda and the trade union agenda more than years of conference resolutions could.

If you don't fight, you are bound to lose. If you fight, you may win.

## More can be won

BY ELAINE JONES AND VICKI MORRIS

**T**he threat of strike action by engineering construction workers in GMB and Unite unions has won an improved offer on pay and conditions from employers. Workers had been balloted at seven major sites.

The new offer is for a two-year pay deal of 2% in 2010 and an inflation-linked rise in 2011 with a minimum of 1%. It also offers better auditing of employers' compliance, a process to develop a skills register and database of construction workers. Initially the employers had said no pay rise was possible in the current economic climate.

A meeting of GMB and Unite shop stewards decided on 17 September to recommend the new offer and approve the proposed new National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI). Unite will now hold a consultative ballot of its members in construction.

Unite's assistant general secretary Les Bayliss said: “Following months of intense negotiations, the union is now in a position to recommend an offer...”

“With a significant number of new build projects on the horizon, the construction industry is hugely important...”

However, some union activists suspect loopholes in the new agreement. One particular concern is what will happen when workers are hired for the new nuclear power plants being built by French company E.ON.

Two successful waves of unofficial action by engineering construction workers in January-February and June this year arose from bosses using whole workforces shipped in from contractors elsewhere in Europe to undercut the union agreement.

Some activists, notably from the Lindsey Oil Refinery site at the centre of those strike waves, are recommending that the offer is turned down in favour of a fight for a tighter agreement.

NAECI has operated since 1981. If the new agreement is accepted it will run from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2011.

TOWER HAMLETS COLLEGE

# Still solid in week 5

BY ALICE ROBSON AND STUART JORDAN

**A**s teachers at Tower Hamlets College enter their fifth week of indefinite strike against cuts, their action remains strong.

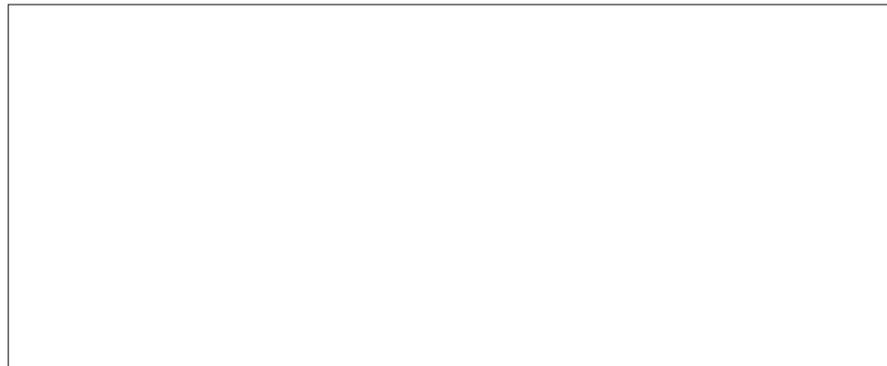
A mass meeting on Wednesday 16 September (day 16) saw the biggest turnout of the dispute: 166 members vote to continue the strike action, with 14 abstentions and no members voting against.

Management have been forced to concede some key concessions, including an offer which would allow the 13 sacked workers to go through an appeals process. This offer was flatly rejected. However, it is an admission by management that they have the money in the pot to pay for these workers. Negotiations with the principal continue and ACAS are getting involved.

A fighting spirit remains amongst those on strike, with picket lines lively and well-attended and a whole host of events scheduled for the next couple of weeks. "Farley's Rusks" catering (two striking teachers and a camping van!) have been delivering food to pickets, and there has been a lot of work done in leafleting and collecting in the community – accompanied by the UCU All-Stars (teachers' band). The strike fund stands at an impressive £25,000, testament to a well organised strike committee but also a new militant mood in our class.

It was hoped that Unison staff would join colleagues in UCU out on strike, but the ballot for Unison strike action was lost 13 to 12. There were problems with the balloting process: not everyone received their ballot paper.

The union tops have told the local branch that they will be unable to ballot again for another six weeks! Unison



claims to be a member-led union, but still strike ballots are controlled by unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats. They are no doubt blaming the postal workers for the balloting problems. But if they had released the ballot before the end of last term, then these problems would have been avoided.

Rank-and-file Unison members need to organise so we can hold the leadership to account. The witch-hunts of left activists in the union is a disgrace, but obstructing the attempts of members to take action is equal to siding with the bosses. Unison staff are joining UCU members on picket lines in their lunchtimes — an important show of solidarity after the disappointment of the ballot. This solidarity should spread and we should think up creative ways to get around the oppressive anti-union laws.

Throughout the dispute the principal, Michael Farley, has shown contempt for both staff and students. Without any teaching staff in the building, management have been trying to keep students busy with motivational speechifying. When this tactic seemed to be failing, Farley offered students a free lunch (including BLT sandwiches). This offer went down particularly badly with the 40% of students who are fasting for Ramadan!

Both striking workers and management are clear that this dispute is now much bigger than the 13 job losses. Fundamentally, it is a question of who controls the college – the staff and the community or management. At the end of last term, the college lecturers ran a work-to-rule with daily lunchtime union meetings. This posed a direct challenge to management and set the tone for the rest of the dispute. Staff are now formulating plans to set up structures so they have more control in the running of the college – this would constitute a real victory in the dispute. Hopefully the spirit of this strike will continue into these structures to ensure they are democratic and sensitive to the needs of the community.

When our schools and colleges are increasingly run by the likes of Reg Vardy (evangelical Christian care dealer) and Lord Harris (boss of Carpetright), victory at Tower Hamlets College is crucial for rallying other communities and education workers to take control.

**Visitors to picket lines are always warmly welcomed — every day from 7.30am at the Bethnal Green Centre, E2, Arbour Square, E1 and Poplar High St, E14. There are often additional tasks to be done: flyer-ing the community about events etc. Please go along.**

# Postal workers ballot for national strike on job cuts

BY A LONDON POSTAL WORKER

**T**he CWU union's ballot of postal workers on national strike action over job cuts started on 17 September, and will finish on 8 October.

We are expecting a very big yes vote in London. It could be closer nationally, but I'd still expect a yes majority.

During the campaign of local strikes, the union has been having reasonably regular national "briefing" meetings, every few weeks or so, with a couple of representatives from every branch round the country.

These are not decision-making meetings, but at the last one there was criticism of the union's slowness to move from local to national action, and of suggestions that local action might be stopped during the national ballot.

The leadership has moved on those points. Most postal workers in London will be striking on Wednesday 23 September, and again on Tuesday 29 September, in order to lobby Labour Party conference in Brighton.

The union's claim is:

- A new job security agreement... Sustainable full-time jobs, no compulsory redundancies..
- Higher pay, shorter working week, better attendance patterns...
- Workload based on fair and objective measurement... Staff and CWU having a genuine say over how the job should be done.

The union demands are not clear in detail. What worries me is that, assuming we get a yes vote in the national ballot, the union leadership could use to make a shoddy deal.

At the beginning of the strike action Royal Mail bosses may have thought they they could just face the union down without conceding anything. Despite all the intimidation, however, the strikes have been solid.

I think the bosses will probably be willing to do a shoddy deal where they promise no unilateral action in future on cutting jobs and increasing workload, and I fear the union leadership may be willing to settle for that. What the members want is the reversal of the unilateral action that has been taken already.

We've had 12 or 13 days of strike action in London now, which is more than in 2007 or in 1996. The members are solid. There are not many people saying that it is a lost cause; instead, they are fed up that the union has not moved more quickly to national action. There is a small minority ready to move on to all-out indefinite strike action.

# Eurostar cleaners face strike-break threat

BY ED MALTBY

**A** 48-hour strike by cleaners employed by the contractor Carlisle at the St Pancras Eurostar terminal started on 17 September.

Around 80 workers are employed by Carlisle at the terminal, most of whom are RMT members. They voted overwhelmingly to strike over low pay (Carlisle cleaners earn significantly less than the London Living Wage and received no pay rise in 2009); harassment and bullying at work by management; the victimisation of RMT rep Mohammed Yellow, who has been suspended without charge for 16 weeks; the introduction of a clocking-on machine that takes workers' fingerprints; and the threat of 14 compulsory redundancies.

The Eurostar cleaners at St. Pancras had been organised in the RMT since 2002, and had conducted a series of battles with the OCS cleaning contractor over the London Living Wage. However, when it looked like OCS were going to capitulate to the workers, Eurostar gave the cleaning contract to another firm, Carlisle, who had promised to use tough tactics to break the union. "Work has become harder since Carlisle took over", one cleaner explained to us, "they don't

value human beings, they don't value human rights". Bullying and intimidation of staff, many of whom do not speak English as a first language, has intensified. Carlisle bosses have planted stool pigeons to inform on the union; and management use the threat of compulsory redundancy to scare workers off from joining the union and to punish union activists. One worker told us, "they say, 'if you don't like these conditions, we'll put you on the list'".

The pace of work has intensified as well — there used to be 12 cleaners on the night shift, now 6 workers must do the same job. Workers frequently are denied lunch breaks, and on Sundays, just two cleaners are required to Hoover all 40 trains that arrive in the station. With the new clocking-on system that workers say they were duped into accepting, management deduct wages off workers who are late by just a couple of minutes.

Health and safety is also an issue — "we use hard chemicals, toilet cleaners, to clean tables", said one picketer, "we have to use just hand towels to handle these chemicals. The smell is very strong — many workers get sick with breathing difficulties from the fumes. Even security guards who are not handling the stuff directly complain." Management bully

workers who fall ill: "they say, if you're off sick four times in six months, you get laid off".

The picket was lively, joined by RMT members from other workplaces, representatives of cleaners on the London buses, and migrant worker activists. Workers' Liberty activists went through the station and explained to shopworkers and transport staff about the strike and distributed leaflets from the cleaners. We received a good response from many workers who seemed to have been unaware that the strike was happening: many reported the same grievances as the Eurostar cleaners.

Although Carlisle management had gone on record threatening to break the union and brought in agency workers to scab on the strike, workers were determined and defiant. Vowing to continue the battle for as long as it took, the union rep called on other workers and other unions to offer practical solidarity to the dispute:

"The slave trade is supposed to be over. We are fighting for human rights and real democracy. The bosses are using the credit crunch as a cover to save money by laying workers off and squeezing wages. Trade unions should put a stop to this and stand up for each other."

## “MAD CABBIE” PROTEST

# Psychiatry, prisons, and panic

BY STUART JORDAN

**T**he Unite and RMT unions led a go-slow of over 1000 black cabs in London on 10th September in protest at a “schizophrenic killer” being granted permission to sit “The Knowledge” exam and qualify for a black cab license.

The 38 year-old man strangled his wife in 2000 and was convicted of manslaughter. He was diagnosed with “paranoid schizophrenia” and served just over two years in a secure psychiatric unit before being released from section in 2005. Since this time he has been working for a minicab firm.

Clearly nobody wants to be killed in the back of a taxi, but what is the correct working-class socialist attitude to this demonstration?

For those patients that escape the secure unit and return to life in the community, the Ministry of Justice section remains along with surveillance and risk assessment. This cab driver moved through the system at incredible speed given the nature of his offence. Nevertheless, he would have been subject to the most intimate and thorough-going assessments before he was allowed anywhere near the public.

Given his diagnosis it is quite surprising that he is able to drive at all. Most people on anti-psychotic medication would be unfit to drive, as would people experiencing psychosis. The drugs make you drowsy and psychosis makes you see and hear things. If our paranoid schizophrenic is fit to drive, then it suggests he is neither experiencing symptoms nor taking medication. He could be on a very low dose of medication but it would still be very unusual for him to be granted a licence. It is more likely that he is one of the 20% of schizophrenics who “recover” without further episode.

But the trade union response has been to chime in with the tabloid hysteria and attempt to override TfL’s vetting processes. Bob Crow said “it defies belief that such an individual should be allowed out on the streets of London in a black cab”. Jim Kelly from Unite: “The Public Carriage Office must act now to protect the public and the reputation, quality and integrity of the world’s finest taxi drivers.” George Vice (RMT) threatened “If some action is not taken [by the PCO], I am sure the RMT will take it.”

Rethink, a service-user led charity, rightly commented that this response was in danger of becoming “a Salem witch-hunt”. The most important facts of the case are confidential, so the unions are acting purely out of common prejudices about “psycho axe murderers”. We often attempt to mobilise against the decisions of the bosses’ courts and tribunals and assert working-class justice. This was not one of those times.

Despite confidentiality, there is information that should have informed the politics of the trade union response.

The forensic psychiatric system is perhaps the most repressive and effective instrument of state control against violent offenders. The forced administration of tranquilising drugs, an indefinite period of imprisonment and intrusive surveillance are all part of the “treatment”. Unlike prisoners, the “patients” do not serve sentences. Freedom is achieved only by satisfying the unspoken criteria of the psychiatrist. If you play the game and pass the test, then the psychiatrist will apply to the Ministry of Justice for a change in section. The process is arduous and the bureaucracy and the drugs are designed to break any “non-compliance”.

The unions made a fairly offensive assumption that the man’s killing his wife was in some way connected with

his mental disorder. According to government figures you are much more likely to be killed by a member of your own family than by someone with a mental disorder. On average only 4 to 9% of murderers have mental disorders — people known to psychiatric services are actually under-represented in homicide statistics. Of that 4%, the majority killed somebody that they knew. However, 34% of all murdered women were killed by their “sane” partner or ex-partner. Whether this cab driver killed his wife because he was responding to command hallucinations is unknown. But it is unlikely that he poses a risk to strangers. Misogyny and monogamy are much bigger factors in wife-killing than psychosis.

The demonstration shows the degree to which psychiatry has retained its authority despite movements that have challenged its power. Psychiatry is far from being an exact science. The history of psychiatry reveals a bunch of quacks pushing whatever diagnostic tools and clinical interventions best serve the ruling class. Past psychiatric conditions included drapetomania (the condition that caused a black slave to run away from their white slave-master). Similarly, the opening of the asylums in the 60s revealed women who had been detained for decades for giving birth outside of marriage. “Treatment” once involved cutting random chunks out of the brain. In short, barbaric abuses of power without any scientific foundation.

Moderated by the successes of the antipsychiatry and survivor movements, that tradition still continues. Psychiatry is primarily a system of social control, using the blunt instruments of neuroleptic drugs and electroshock therapy to police society’s deviants. Whether or not such policing is desirable, we should be clear that psychiatry is not a science for “rebalancing chemical imbalances in the

brain”. This is just part of the mythology that secures the profession’s grip on power. This mythology is not even believed by the practitioners themselves who have long given up trying to find a biological cause for schizophrenia. However, the spectre of random chemicals setting off murderous impulses is enough to justify all sorts of authoritarian medical interventions.

As the power of the psychiatry was challenged with care in the community, the forensic psychiatric system began to grow. High and medium-secure forensic units are now home to record numbers, increasing 45% since 1996. Increasingly we are being policed on the basis of being mad, rather than bad. The expansion of psychiatry’s remit has also seen the medicalisation of increasing areas of human experience (ADHD, Personality Disorder etc.) These trends, along with escalating surveillance and the collection of biometric data, pose an enormous threat to the project for human liberty. This creeping authoritarianism is reinforced by the kind of anti-mad witch-hunts we see in the right-wing press — it has no place in our unions.

We should expect our unions to challenge the negative stereotyping of madness and to pose a challenge to the terrors and abuses of the psychiatric profession. We should have no illusions in the power of psychiatry to heal extreme mental distress. Rather we should hold it up to scientific scrutiny and see it as part of the broader power structures that oppress us. We should pose alternative human responses to mental disorder that seek to bridge the gap between madness and sanity, rather than reinforce alienation and stigma. We should fight for a world in which gender oppression is challenged at every turn, understanding that femicide and rape are part of a broader picture of social violence against women.

# Re-elect Mark Serwotka, but...

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

**A**s new elections approach for general secretary (GS) of the civil service union PCS, a number of branches have indicated that they will write to the current general secretary, Mark Serwotka, who is standing for re-election, calling on him to cut his wages and stand by his 2000 election commitment to live on a salary closer to that of the members.

We will support Mark Serwotka in the upcoming election, but activists and members have to be made aware of his track record: the 29,000 plus staff on the lowest possible redundancy terms, the true nature of the pension deal struck a few years ago, and his elevation into the top 5% of salary earners in the UK.

Such awareness is too a vital step towards a better union.

Currently only two candidates are contesting the election: Mark Serwotka and right winger Rob Bryson.

Rob Bryson has no track record of cam-

paigning or putting forward policies within the union. Yet when he stood for the post of Assistant General Secretary a few months ago, he came within a few hundred votes of winning.

His platform then was mainly that of red baiting and arguing that the Union was too political.

All serious activists should support Mark Serwotka in the coming contest. But what will he run on? He cannot point to anything he has done that has put an extra penny into any member’s pay packet. We are no closer to national pay, national conditions, guarantees on jobs and services than when he first was elected.

In terms of winning improvements, the key thing he can campaign on is the pension deal won a few years ago.

The Government had threatened to change the final salary scheme for civil servants and to change the pension retirement age from 60 to 65. Mark Serwotka “won” a reserved rights deal whereby existing civil servants at the time would keep the final salary scheme and pensions

at 60, but new entrants would be placed on a different scheme with a pension retirement age of 65.

The effects of that two-tier deal are still being played out. New entrants not only have a poorer pension scheme, but they are only entitled to the legal minimum if they are made redundant.

The union has admitted that at least 29,000 workers are on these minimal terms (though we think the true figure is higher).

Of course if the Tories are elected, nd maybe even if New Labour win, the pension deal will be under threat; if is highly likely that New Labour will revisit the pension deal in any case.

The initial offer from New Labour was that the pension changes would be come into force in 2011; under pressure they changed that to 2013. Staff who retire before the change over in 2013 would have been just as protected without the current deal. It is highly likely that the Tories will want changes in our pension schemes before 2013!

So the pension deal is not the achievement it is claimed to be. And when the fight against it being replaced by an even worse deal comes, it will be fought by a two-tier union. PCS will ask new entrants to fight for the reserved rights of older colleagues.

Despite Mark Serwotka’s 2000 election commitment, in 2009 he was paid a gross salary of £85,421, with pension contributions of £24,669; Additional Housing Cost Allowance of £1,347; additional Housing Cost Supplement of £449; and beneficial loan interest of £748 (source: the union’s annual return to the Certification Officer). According to the latest Union accounts available he gave back £4,000 to the fighting fund during the year. When first elected that figure was £12,000.

He has a total package of £108,634 (£112,634 before the fighting fund donation has been deducted). In 2000 the total package was £73,789. This in an “industry” in which 60% of full time permanent civil servants earn less than £25,000 (source: the PCS).

## TUC CONGRESS DELEGATE'S DIARY

# Sleep-walking through the crisis

BY PATRICK MURPHY, NUT  
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE (PC)

In his opening address on Monday 14 September, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber's theme was that workers and trade unions had had a "mixed year". We had lived under a Labour government which "we sometimes applauded and sometimes led us to distraction".

He made lots of very easy attacks on greedy city traders and socially irresponsible capitalists, apparently oblivious to the fact that for the last 12 years in power New Labour have slavishly created the conditions for these people to thrive.

They have even insisted that only these pirates know how best to run public services such as health and education. Driven to distraction? Better if Brendan were driven to resistance.

The extent to which the trade union bureaucracy is still wedded slavishly to New Labour became more obvious in the first debate, on defending the NHS. Every speaker used the US Republican attacks on the NHS as their backdrop. Speakers from Unison in particular were determined to put the most positive gloss on the government's record.

Before arguing for any improvements in funding or conditions of service they were sure to stress that the NHS of 2009 was a very different and much-improved institution to that of 1997 with "record levels of investment", etc.

Next came a debate on racism and the fight against the far right. You need to bear in mind that the word "debate" is used only loosely in the case of the TUC. There are very few votes against anything, motions are composited so that contradictory clauses are contained

within the same text, and most speeches just repeat or reinforce points made by previous speakers.

By far the best speech in this session was by Maria Exall of CWU who argued that telling workers to vote for anyone but the BNP was not an effective strategy for fighting fascism and racism. She cited the example of the Tory Mayor Boris Johnson, who is busily dismantling anti-racist and other equality initiatives in London.

The highlight of Monday was on the fringe. I went to a meeting on "Solidarity with Vestas" organised by RMT, CWU and PCS, with Mike Godley from Vestas on the platform as well as Bob Crow. The three unions are working on a trade

union campaign to respond to climate change and promote conversion plans, modelled on the Lucas Aerospace workers' plan from the 1970s, and will be inviting all unions to take part.

The lowest point also came on the fringe. A meeting organised by the Institute for Employment Rights on the subject "Politics Has Failed" was billed as an opportunity to debate political representation for unions.

We were subjected to at least nine platform speakers (I lost count), after which a much reduced meeting was told: "We at the IER don't have debate from the floor at our meetings. If you want to take part in the debate you need to join the IER".

The speakers arguments varied from Mark Serwotka's claim that PR would transform the landscape and create the opportunity to rebuild workers political representation to the continuing faith of Len McCluskey (Unite) in the fight to reclaim Labour. Mark is right that PR is the more democratic form of bourgeois rule but wrong, I think, that it contains the answer to the problem of creating a collective workers' voice in politics. It is at best a second or third order question. McCluskey and his like would carry a lot more weight if there was some evidence that their unions had used their huge influence and power to carry out any fight to reclaim Labour.

When, I wanted to ask, was the last time Unite or Unison had moved a motion on Labour's NEC or conference floor to repeal the anti-union laws? Maybe that's why they don't allow questions and debate from the floor.

Day Two (Tuesday 15 September) started with a debate on education and skills. The contribution to make mouths fall open came from Hank Roberts. Hank is a teacher who belongs to all three teacher unions as an expression of his belief that they should unite to create one union.

Here he was speaking as a ATL delegate, whistle-blower and reinstated school rep after an attempt to victimise him for revealing the obscene bonuses paid to his Headteacher. When he and the other union reps at his school in Brent were reinstated, it was revealed that the Head had been paid a staggering £400,000 in one year and that the senior management team had collected a

total of £1m.

The last time Gordon Brown spoke to Congress as prime minister, the response was distinctly frosty. This time, Brown received warm applause for such vapid promises as "a blacklist of unco-operative tax havens" and "an increase in the minimum wage every year". So "co-operative" tax havens are fine, then? His "well done" to "our armed forces" got big applause. Have our horizons really fallen so low?

Brown got a polite reception bordering on the positive, with a half-hearted attempt to generate a standing ovation which fell flat. When the speech began, the PCS delegation held up signs reading "No Cuts". But after a Q&A session in which Brown mainly avoided answering simple direct questions (why not give the minimum wage to apprentices, are you still committed to the same spending levels on state pupils as exist in private schools?) Brendan Barber bade him farewell with the following words: "Thank you Gordon. You have a fantastically big job to do and you will need all the support we can give you".

The President of my Union was sitting with a card with 284 votes on it. Three days into the Congress, it hadn't yet been used yet. You would be pressed to find a workplace or branch meeting with so little difference or dissent.

Ed Miliband, the Energy and Climate Change Secretary, livened the congress on Wednesday 16th, perhaps unintentionally.

At the back of the hall, unnoticed by most delegates, was a group of Vestas workers and RMT supporters holding aloft papers reading "Save Vestas". When Miliband mentioned that he could see them and began to address the Vestas issue, the hall erupted in applause for the workers and it took around three minutes before Miliband was able to resume. Most (but not all) of the hall stood to applaud. The strength of feeling was such that Miliband had to join the applause in an attempt to skilfully manage the situation.

He had no end of "sympathy" for the "tragedy" of the Vestas redundancies, but made absolutely no commitment to save the jobs. When pressed in a Q&A to nationalise Vestas, he replied that running wind turbine factories was not what governments did best. "It's not what we are good at", he said to the sound of a loud heckle from a Vestas worker: "You're not good at anything".

In the afternoon a motion moved by Brian Caton of POA and seconded by Bob Crow called for demonstrations and general strikes as part of a campaign to repeal the anti-union laws.

The PCS, who spoke against, were probably right though that trade union laws are generally broken in specific disputes about issues of immediate concern to members, rather in strikes about the laws per se. In any case, like most unions, they did not believe they could mobilise their members around general strike action against the anti-union laws.

It must be possible to construct a motion which make it more difficult for left unions to dodge the issue and might even be passed. The gist of it would be that in the event of any affiliate being threatened by the anti-union laws in the course of a dispute, the TUC will give its full support up at and including co-ordinated action.

## How not to save jobs

BY BOB SUTTON

At a Congress fringe meeting on job losses in the Vauxhall factories at Luton and Ellesmere Port, the speakers included Unite joint general secretaries Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley and Labour MPs Lindsay Hoyle and Andrew Millar.

Derek Simpson made the best speech. A world in which different governments compete to see which can give the largest amount of money to an international company to keep factories open is crazy and wrong. We need an international union to confront these businesses.

John Cooper, the deputy convenor of Ellesmere Port, said that concessions have been made to secure the future production of the Astra, but that workers have made it clear that they will not give up the pensions scheme. The buyer, Magna, has said it expects the pensions to go.

It was all downhill after that. Andrew Millar was feeble. Everyone has been working together: the management, Labour Party, and the union, all on the same side. Mandelson is fighting hard. There are sound business reasons to keep producing cars at Ellesmere Port. But it isn't looking good.

Lindsay Hoyle delivered a foul nationalistic rant. The problem is that British workers are easier to sack. The British Government should buy British cars just like the German Government buys German cars. In the row after the meeting, he insisted that the answer is to buy British.

Woodley was very angry and emotional. He is from Ellesmere Port. I don't question that his emotion is genuine. I do question his political strategy.

He "just can't understand" why a sound, long-established company could collapse. (The workings of international capitalism, perhaps?) £600 million isn't peanuts, you know, and that's what the government is offering. He went on to call German chancellor Angela Merkel "a smarmy cow". The Germans think they are being clever. But that they may be overstressing themselves. Half the money will go to Russia; and where will deals with Russia take them? Mandelson and Brown are working tirelessly to come to a deal. We are all working together.

Alliances with management; telling the workers to put their trust in Brown and Mandelson; focusing on getting the government to bribe businesses to stay in a particular country — all these demobilise any potential fight to defend jobs.

## CHINA

# 30 million jobless in China's cities

By CAMILA BASSI

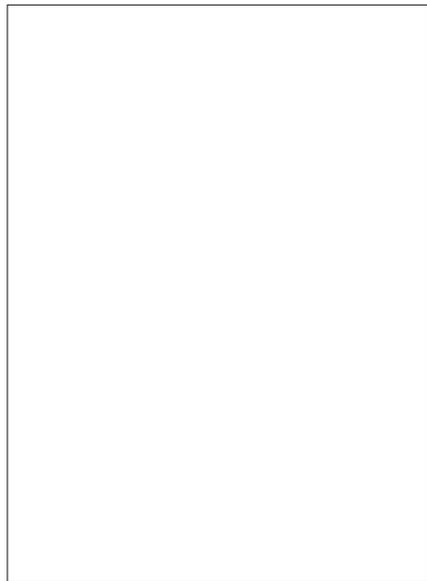
**T**he *Washington Post* reported in January this year that unemployment is the highest now since the CCP took power in 1949.

Government figures of urban joblessness stand at 18 million, and that is without counting joblessness among the 160 million urban-based migrant workers. The figures are most likely double this in the countryside.

"Mass incidents" (defined as a strike, demonstration, blockade, or another public unrest involving over one hundred people) were estimated at 127,467 in 2008 (a substantial increase on the last officially released figure of 87,000 in 2005). If the trend from the first three months of this year has continued (58,000 mass incidents) then class struggle in China is reaching a critical moment.

There are still a few people/groups on the left who claim that the Chinese state is in some way socialist — a "deformed workers' state". They effectively smear the name and cause of socialism and disrespect the brave struggles of ordinary Chinese workers and people striving for labour and democratic rights, struggles which have intensified since the economic reforms starting in the 1980s.

From 1979 an "opening and reform" headed by Deng Xiaoping saw the marrying of the rhetoric and bureaucracy of a Stalinist state with global capitalism. (In the 1980s this was marked by the Special Economic Zones set-up in coastal southern China). In Deng's words, "it doesn't



Chinese electronic workers on strike

matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice".

The contemporary period of opening and reform is, crudely put, more of a top-down economic, rather than a top-down political, shift. Under Deng's reign, the Chinese Communist Party's clampdown on the Democracy Wall movement (which, for many, was a way of coming to terms with the pain caused by the Cultural Revolution), and brutal suppression of the revolutionary uprising led by the Tiananmen Square movement in 1989, was a continued commitment to the iron

fist of the party alongside the party's embrace of profits. Profits generated by inviting global capital to exploit workers in China.

No matter what CCP leadership there has been, workers in China sell their labour power in exchange for a wage. Post-1949 they sold this commodity to the bureaucratic collectivist class of the Chinese state, but most recently to a distinct mix of global capital and various layers of this state (take, for example, the implicit fact that all businesses pay guanxi or "protection money" to the police).

**T**he Hong Kong based campaign for free trade unions in China, *China Labour Bulletin*, has recorded a significant upturn in workers struggles in the country since 2007, and on issues ranging from the difficulty and cost of obtaining medical treatment, rising prices, and the excessive income gap.

*China Labour Bulletin* describes the situation since 2007: "Workers took matters into their own hands. Bypassing the largely ineffectual official trade union, they used public protest as a means of forcing local governments to intercede on their behalf. And, in many cases, workers were successful.

Previously, disputes were mostly related to clear-cut violations of labour rights, such as the non-payment of wages, overtime and benefits, but in the last two years collective interest-based disputes have come to the fore, with workers seeking higher wages and better working conditions, and protesting at arbitrary

changes in their employment status and pay scales.

One of the major causes of discontent was, for example, attempts by managements to circumvent the new Labour Contract Law by forcing employees to relinquish long-term contracts and rejoin the company on short-term contracts or as temporary labour.

In China there is only one legal trade union — i.e. the one approved by the state — the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Increasingly workers are recognising the irrelevance of ACFTU, and the need for their own fighting, independent, democratically-accountable trade union bodies.

In April this year several hundred workers in Xi'an set up the Shaanxi Union Rights Defence Representative Congress to monitor the restructuring of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and report corruption and abuses of power.

In July and August this year *China Labour Bulletin* reported a wave of strikes relating to the ongoing privatisation of SOEs. These protests forced a delay in the privatisation of two iron and steel plants.

More recently, several thousand coalminers at Hunan went on strike in protest of management attempts to force workers to sign compensation agreements that took no account of the time they were employed there (many had been at the mines for nearly 30 years).

It is difficult to gauge class struggle in a country where the state so tightly controls information — but it is clear that it is on the rise.

## Defend Juan Carlos Piedra!

**A**nother migrant worker-militant has been forced out of their job at a cleaning company.

This time it is Juan Carlos Piedra, a Unite member who worked for O&G, the company which has the contract for cleaning at University College London. Aside from workplace activism, he is a leading organiser in the Movement of Ecuadorians in the UK.

Juan Carlos had actually been transferred to UCL after a disciplinary at another O&G site. Before working for the company, he had been victimised by Mitie, another contractor, as part of the Willis dispute last year.

He was told that his work was no problem; the only problem was his attitude, i.e. his union activity. Two days after being transferred to UCL he was called into a meeting and told that he had been seen at SOAS protesting against the immigration raid and at union protests. Then he was told "there is no job for you here" and was made redundant.

A protest called to demand reinstatement on Monday 21 September was well attended. Come to the next one at on 1 October at the UCL Main Quad (off Gower St, London WC1E 6BT)

## Calais camp bulldozered

From back page

*Dave Landau is an activist in the Campaign Against Immigration Control, No Borders and No One is Illegal.*

**I**attended the June No Borders camp on the edge of the "jungle". The people I met there were largely Afghan and Kurdish, fleeing persecution.

Big meetings were held in four or five languages, Farsi, Pashtun and Kurdish all being spoken, as well as several European languages.

As well as the main "jungle" camps, families were squatting in town. Members of the activists' camp went out to help resist an eviction at a squat inhabited by an Eritrean family at the time.

The first demand of the migrants at meetings was not to ease their destitution or to offer them temporary housing, but to get rid of borders immediately.

People aren't recognising the central role of the British government, in putting pressure on the French authorities and particularly the authorities at Calais to stop people from gathering there.

When people from the camps, two or three thousand in total, marched through Calais in June, they were met with applause from local people — the reaction may have been very different if the demonstration had taken place in Dover, which is symptomatic of the influence that Britain has had in the actions of the French authorities.

Alan Johnson is party to brutality and cruelty. To pretend that he in any way represents workers and the working-class movement is ridiculous.

*Statement from France's New Anticapitalist Party Tuesday 22 September 2009*

**T**his morning, in Calais, the prefect, under the orders of Eric Besson, Minister of Immigration and National Identity, has emptied the "jungle" at Calais of the migrants who found refuge there, having broken through the picket line of activists.

278 migrants have been arrested, including 132 minors who are going to be placed in detention centres.

Mr Besson wants to persuade us that the announcement of the evacuation has had a dissuasive effect on the migrants, many of whom would leave of their own accord.

Destroyed in Calais, the "jungle" will be reconstituted somewhere else as long as the French government will not handle in a satisfactory way applications for

asylum formulated by refugees who ran away from war, from persecutions, from poverty, in Afghanistan or Iraq, for example.

The NPA condemns violent and media-oriented operation which happened this morning in Calais.

After the sending of troops into Afghanistan, we have the sending of police against refugees. It is shameful.

The NPA wants the government to give the refugees the right of asylum, to stop pursuing the activists and the associations which help them, and to give what is necessary so that the refugees can live in a decent way.

- You can donate money to help buy new tents, supplies etc for displaced migrants. There is no NGO or governmental aid — only money raised by grassroots support groups.

- calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com

## ITALY

# Students join the fightback

BY HUGH EDWARDS

**T**he explosion of spontaneous protests by temporary teachers that swept across Italy at the beginning of September has continued following the opening of the school term on the 14th.

Now the extent of the drastic cuts in teachers, technical and admin staff etc. has become clear to those still fortunate to find themselves in a job. This year 65,000 jobs were scheduled to be cut. There are more cuts to come in 2010. Those affected are part of the 300,000-strong temporary workforce in education.

All types of public sector schools find themselves with a significant increase in class sizes and reduced teacher numbers. They also face major reorganisation, arbitrarily imposed by the head teachers — many prefer to call themselves “business managers” — on timetables, teaching loads, and material to be taught.

Many institutions find themselves unable to afford elementary amenities like new textbooks, dustbins, and even toilet rolls.

Parents are being asked to cough up

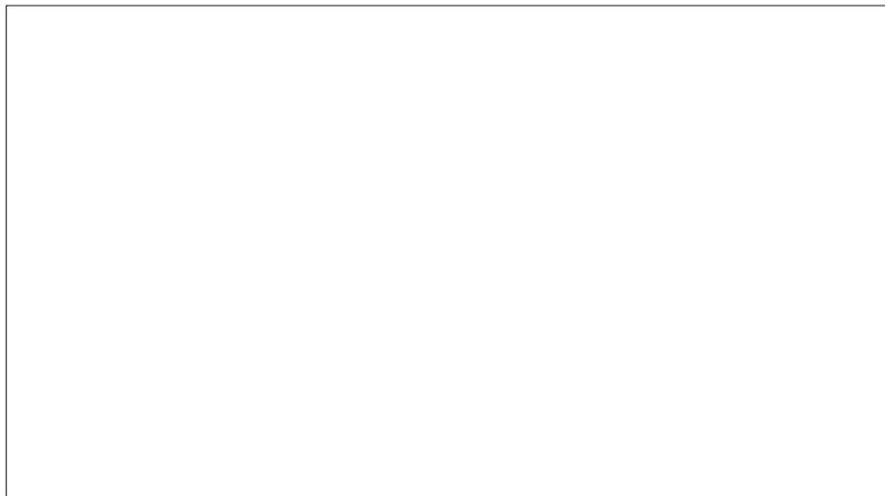
## A Workers' Plan for the Crisis

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for more things, as the public education system slowly begins to disintegrate.

No wonder hundreds of parents and teachers near Napoli gathered in an angry protest outside an army barracks where the dim-witted Minister of Education Mariastella Gelmini had, in secret, appeared to open an infant school. The crowd threatened to overwhelm the place and she was forced to ignominiously scarp through a side entrance.

No wonder some parents and teachers in the mountain schools of Alpine and Appenine Italy — there are 3,000 schools there with 50 and fewer pupils — are on strike, for the cuts and subsequent reorganisation means the life of the village will perish. For mountain-dwellers the school remains the centre of daily organisation for families.

And in Rome and in other universities we see the first restirring of the “onda” (wave) — last year's mass student movement that spearheaded nationwide protests against the same law whose effects we are now witnessing in schools, and which will soon take effect within the Universities.

The student collectives at La Sapienza, Torino, Foggia, Florence, Cagliari, Reggio Calabria, Bari and Catania issued a joint declaration of support for the teacher-led protests and called for the relaunching of the mass protests and struggle. The students of La Sapienza occupied the rooftops of the university in

what is hoped will be the first of many such actions. There is a mass national demonstration in Rome on 3 October.

But there is one important lesson the teachers can learn from the student actions of a year ago. Notwithstanding the enormity of that movement — which also embraced large sectors of the high-school sector — its leaders arrogantly believed they didn't need a strategy of fighting to bring the universities to a halt, that is an all-out student led strike. They called that “the tired old politics of the 20th century”!

Fatally, they permitted the life of the universities to continue relatively normally, the result of which permitted the university authorities to mouth opposition to the government reforms while at the same time working “responsibly” to undermine the dynamic of the whole movement. The vast majority of students, initially mobilised by the struggle, became increasingly inert and passive by a perspective of little else but marches and stunts. The present struggle cannot afford to make the same mistake.

Already Gelmini has offered, with the help of regional and local education bureaucracies and several conniving trade union officials from the main teachers unions, to make “concessions”, hoping to sow further divisions among teachers. Yet tens of thousands more face the axe in the period ahead.

The education workers outside the schools need to bring out in solidarity

their fellow workers and trade unionists inside the schools. On every protest, march and picket line the call must be “Unity of all school workers against the cuts, secure jobs for all, down with the Berlusconi government”!

**This is the right moment to add to the troubles of the degenerate Berlusconi and the gang of criminals around him in government.**

The sex scandals and his lying attempts to evade the perfectly justified demands of a part of the liberal bourgeois press — the “communist” press considers Berlusconi's womanising as of no important political interest — have increasingly engulfed Berlusconi in an ever-widening political crisis.

Within his own party Fini, Berlusconi's number two, and leader of the former Alleanze National as well as Speaker of the Parliament, is threatening to exploit the always-present divisions in a movement led by an unpredictable monomaniac. Could Berlusconi be unseated? Can Berlusconi keep the support of the Church, who backed him because of rhetoric about the sanctity of family and monogamy as well as support for their reactionary agenda and massive funding of private Catholic education. (That continues to do well.)

Now we see the spectacle of a prime minister driven by his serial lying into a major clash of his government with important sections of the Italian and international press, exposing Italy to even greater unpredictability and instability at a moment when the European Union is fraught with tension.

Up to now Berlusconi has been able to ride the crisis, even though his opinion poll ratings are dropping significantly. The abject failure of the radical left in the former Prodi government and its continuing inability to relate politically — not moralistically — to the present flow of events, has enabled Berlusconi to pose, like a pint-sized Mussolini, as the saviour of the nation with the same admixture of lying propaganda and racism dutifully administered to a deeply demoralised population by his own and the state's information machine.

It cannot last. Already the teachers' and other workers' struggles across Italy demonstrate that resistance is growing. It will continue to do so.

Can he go on?

## ISRAELI ARABS

# Temporary victory against discrimination

BY IRA BERKOVIC

**I**sraeli railway workers struck a blow against exploitation and discrimination when on 10 September a Tel Aviv Labour Court issued an interim injunction against the dismissal of Arab workers by Israel Railways.

The struggle began in March 2009 when the state-owned company introduced a policy stipulating that railroad crossing guards had to have a license to carry weapons, a move the company said was based on “practical and security considerations” even though the job of railroad guard has never entailed the carry-

ing of weaponry. Given that most people obtain such a license through military service (from which Israeli Arabs are exempt), the move would've resulted in the dismissal of 150 Arab workers. Although Arabs are 20% of Israel's population, they are only 5% of public sector workers. The move would also have excluded recent immigrants, disabled workers, and refusers from the post.

Even though an April court hearing suspended the application of the policy (and consequent dismissal of Arab workers), Israel Railways began recruiting new guards. The most recent injunction provides a guarantee that no workers can be dismissed under the new policy while

court proceedings are still ongoing. This latest development is not a final victory, but certainly buys the workers and their campaign time.

This is not the only instance of class struggle on the railways in Israel this year. In February, large sections of the national railway network were shut down after workers in Haifa launched wildcat strike action following the victimisation of union activists.

Sawt-el Amel (*The Labourer's Voice*), the campaign organisation that led the fightback by the Arab workers' dismissal, is just one of many organisations in Israel and Palestine organising workers to fightback against discrimination, low-

pay, militarism and racism. The existence of such organisations and struggles expose the falsity of much of the international left's crude picture of the region, in which all Israelis are bloodthirsty colonial-settler hawks and all Palestinians are “heroic” Hamas fighters.

Israeli and Palestinian society, like all societies across the world, are characterised by class division and class struggle. The job of the left and the labour movement across the world is to support workers — whether in Israel or the occupied territories — whenever they organise against their bosses.

• [www.laborers-voice.org](http://www.laborers-voice.org).

# We need a movement for working-class women

BY JORDAN SAVAGE

**O**n Saturday 12 September around 60 people (nearly all female) attended the student feminist group Mind The Gap's "activist day" at London's School of African and Oriental Studies. It was a day of contradictions.

The speech given by Judith Orr of the Socialist Workers Party — attacking the "glass ceiling" — set the tone for the open debate.

Orr began by identifying capitalism as the overarching reason for much of the inequality in our society; she said that the glass ceiling that women face in high-level business is "the work of capitalist bosses"... "the higher you go [in business] the less women there are". But she failed to draw out the flip side of this reality, the one which surely concerns socialist feminists: the fact that women are hugely over-represented in part-time work, low-paid jobs, particularly in the services industry, and unpaid work in the home.

When NUS Women's Officer Liv Bailey called for a round of applause for the few female university vice-chancellors in the UK, I challenged her.

She had identified the capitalist system as the main culprit in making women's social inequality endemic, and yet she wanted to hold up as heroes women in the very highest paid jobs, at the head of institutions like Cambridge University, which remain playgrounds for the rich, and reinforce divisive class structures every step of the way!

Bailey said that although she agreed with my sentiment, she felt that women should be fighting for whatever equality they could get in the existing system, separately from engaging in a socialist fight for equality in society as whole.

**L**ater, Orr agreed with Bailey's analysis, arguing for the separation of feminist work and labour movement and working class activism. This did not stop her from using socialist diction to enliven her speech.

She undermined herself in other ways: she spent a lot of her speech discussing sex work, and in particular pole-dancing and strip clubs, and the objectification of women.

She equated pole-dancing clubs near rugby clubs with student pole-dancing classes, thereby missing an important part of the debate.

She failed to identify the difference between the economic dependency of professional women in the sex-work industry and young women becoming involved in what Orr considers to be a degrading and objectifying pastime.

She argued that female students had the right to protest against pole-dancing clubs on or near their campuses because these are degrading to women; she did not say that most of the employees of such establishments

are women, that there are reasons why women are in these jobs, and that they should have the same industrial rights as workers in other jobs.

Despite decrying capitalism as the root of these ills and identifying the need for socialism to respond to them, there was nothing socialist in her feminist analysis. She sided entirely with the pricked moral sensibilities of female students and, in effect, against working-class women in the sex industries.

When pressed, every member of the opening panel identified themselves as holding socialist or otherwise revolutionary views. All of the speeches made some reference, usually coded, to capitalism as the major oppressive structure in our society.

The desire for radical social change was there, however, it has yet to be channelled into a coherent movement. Orr's example won't help.

There was nothing in Orr's speech, for example, to suggest that the single-issue campaigns (Rape Crisis, Abortion Rights, etc.) that the afternoon's workshops were given over to would not be sufficient in providing an anti-capitalist feminist solution to gender inequality.

**Rebecca Galbraith, of Feminist Fightback, speaking in another panel discussion, shared my opinion that the event suffered from an absence of political focus.**

She said: "The other people who spoke on my panel [on cross-campaigning] were absolutely right; we do need a black feminism, and a feminism that's aware of trans-gender issues, but we need to fight against the idea that these can be considered single-issues in the way that groups like Abortion Rights tell us they are".

Rebecca spoke about her involvement with the Campaign Against Immigration Controls, and the way that the insecurity of migrant workers is yet another factor that exacerbates the conditions in which many women are working.

She provided a clear explanation of how a politics of solidarity works, explaining that the exploitation of women is not something separate from the exploitation of migrant workers, black people or the working class; these struggles have all been generated by the divide-and rule attitude of the capitalist system, and by linking up these struggles rather than isolating them we can generate a real force for change.

The seeds of something better are there within Mind The Gap. But in order to become really useful in contemporary feminist politics it must work to extend its reach beyond its current nucleus at SOAS, and subject its politics to a systematic appraisal.

If it anti-capitalist sentiments are earnest, then the way forward is to link up with campaigns like Feminist Fightback as well as other anti-capitalist, socialist struggles, and join the fight in action as well as words.

# Fight to end unemployment

BY DANIEL RANDALL

**T**he Confederation of British Industry, the principal organisation of bosses in the UK, has added its voice to a growing clamour for the "cap" on top-up higher education fees to be raised, saying students should view higher fees as "inevitable". The CBI is also calling for the government to scrap its target of getting 50% of young people into higher education.

Wendy Piatt, the head of the Russell Group of the country's most "prestigious" universities (which will be first in line to raise fees) welcomed the CBI's "call for an exploration of new sources of funding."

With top-up fees for students in England currently £3,225 per year, students can expect to graduate from university with debts of anything up to £15,000 once basic living costs are taken into account. If the CBI gets its way, that figure could increase massively.

It would inevitably create a multi-tiered system within higher education in which elite universities charge astronomical fees and are therefore only available to the rich, and ex-polytechnics — mainly offering vocational and less academic degrees — charge lower fees. But even within the existing system, such universities are struggling to keep up; Leeds Metropolitan, formerly the only university that refused to charge the full £3,225 fee, recently increased its fees in line with the cap.

The fact that education sector and other bosses are calling for working-class

people to give them more money is hardly surprising. Unfortunately, equally unsurprising is the timid response from the National Union of Students, the organisation that might have been expected to defend students against the CBI, the Russell Group and their friends in government.

Instead, despite criticising the CBI's proposals, the NUS's only alternative is its own alternative "blueprint" for higher education funding. The NUS's proposal accepts the framework of education as a paid-for commodity and proposes instead to tinker around at the edges of the payment system. It effectively proposes a graduate tax, whereby students will pay fees after graduation at a rate means tested against their income. The "blueprint" expects that "a person earning £30,000 would be £37 better off" under its proposed system. Ridiculous logic!

The number of £30,000 jobs available to most students is hardly sky-high, and if £37 a month is all that's on the table we might as well just sign on and pocket £200 each month from Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA).

That's a position more and more young people are being forced into, as youth unemployment goes up and up. Of the 573,000 made jobless in the last year, nearly 200,000 were aged 18–24. In June 2009, there were more than 900,000 "NEETS", young people under the age of 25 who are not in employment, education or training — an increase of over 200,000 from February 2008. Around a third of all 16–17 year old school leavers are now unemployed, and the number of 18–24 year olds claiming JSA increased by a staggering 75%. The picture is likely to worsen next year, as the numbers seeking work is bolstered by 700,000 new graduates and school leavers.

**The situation for those who do manage to find work is hardly ideal. Almost 30% of young workers are employed in the service sector (with 21% in retail and wholesale).**

Young workers are overwhelmingly clustered in the sectors in which low pay, long hours and lack of job security are endemic. Young workers also continue to suffer discrimination as the minimum wage (which, even at its top rate, is nowhere near enough to live on) is tiered according to age, and a worker aged 21 could earn almost £1 per hour less than a worker aged 22 in the same job.

Young people who try and improve their prospects by entering further education and taking apprenticeships can also expect a future of low-pay and cuts. Apprenticeship programmes often see young people working full-time for several days each week (the others are spent in classes), and yet there is no legal requirement to pay them the minimum wage. Apprentices over the age of 19 are entitled to the minimum wage, but only once they have been on their apprenticeship scheme for more than a year.

These kinds of hyper exploitative schemes are increasingly being offered by further education colleges, as less "profitable" courses that do not directly

## Education Not for Sale conference

To fight against cuts and fees, for free education and for a democratic, campaigning student movement

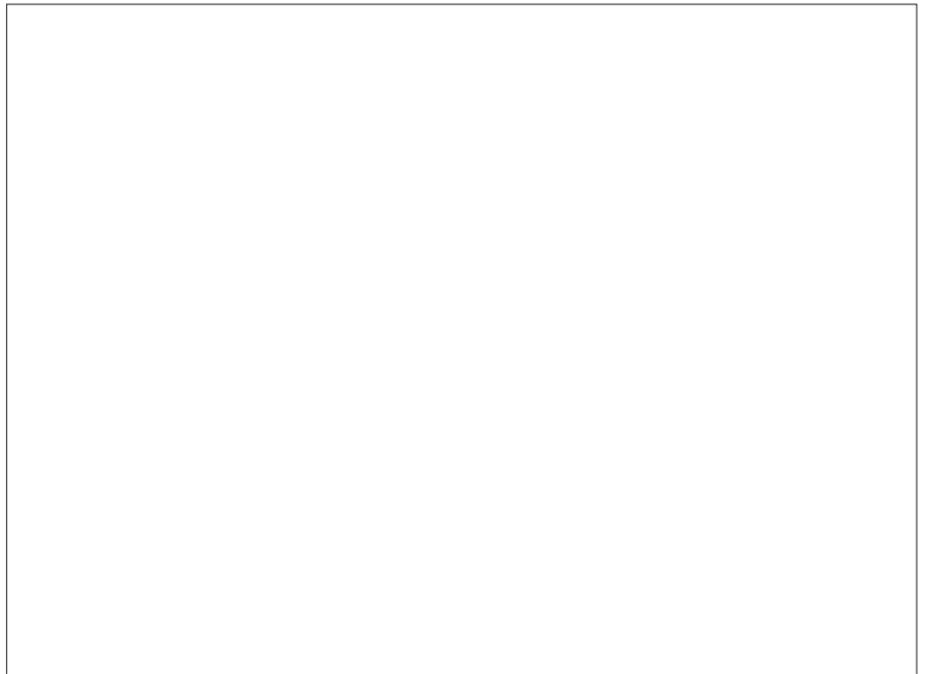
11am–6pm, Sunday 25 October (with a networking breakfast from 10am), London (venue tbc)

Sessions and caucuses will include:

- Direct action against cuts and fees
- NUS and alternatives: how do we win a fighting student movement?
- The student movement and the politics of liberation
- Young workers organising
- School and FE students
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# Low pay, debt and unemployment among young people



Fight for jobs and education for all!

serve the interests of business and employers are cut. At the time of writing, workers at Tower Hamlets College in East London are on indefinite strike against compulsory redundancies and the slashing of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses; students and workers across further education can expect more of the same as bosses attempt to cut costs and prioritise vocational, work-based courses.

As in higher education, the levels of funding available for students in further education are insultingly low. The heavily means tested "Education Maintenance Allowance" entitles students to a maximum of £30 per week, but only if their household income is less than £20,817 per year. A family in which two parents worked full time in jobs paying the minimum wage would have an income of

£23,836; clearly, the EMA excludes all but the very poorest from access.

The responses currently on offer from the student and trade union movements are woefully inadequate. NUS tells students to pin their hopes on restructuring the method of payment, and claims that fighting to abolish them (and restore grants) is a pipe dream. And, rather than organising workers to fight back against low pay and job cuts, most trade unions offer little more than a damage-limitation service.

Young workers and students need a movement prepared to challenge the way education and jobs are "rationed", available only to the well-off and/or the lucky. They need a labour movement which will fight to end low pay, student debt and unemployment. Timid and defensive struggles are not good enough.

## Don't be fooled by the Lib Dems!

By ED MALTBY

**The Liberal Democrats are preparing to ditch their policy of abolishing tuition fees. Nick Clegg told the first day of the Lib Dem conference in Bournemouth that, while he opposes tuition fees, it is necessary to be "realistic".**

"But I can make this pledge — at the next election we will have the best, most progressive package for students of any mainstream party."

Given that both the Labour government and the Tories are committed to a deregulated system of fees in higher education, that is not claiming very much!

Many students are attracted to the Lib Dems; in a number of cities, Cardiff, Cambridge and Sheffield, for instance, they have provided the party with its margins of victory. The reason is a more general disillusionment with Labour and the Tories, and the appeal of the Lib Dems' marginally more enlightened policies on issue like asylum and civil liberties. The question of fees has also played a role.

Now the Lib Dems are preparing to drop the policy, as part of their call, keeping up with the Tories and Labour, for "savage cuts" in public spending.

In fact, the Liberal Democrats have never backed "free education" — at various points they have proposed some variant of a graduate tax — and they have never supported a universal, living student grant.

In any case, there is a more general problem with the Lib Dems — they have always been a right-wing, capitalist party.

As part of the "savage cuts", their leadership is also advocating a freeze on public sector workers' pay, slashing public sector pensions, and means-testing child benefit. They advocate stronger anti-union laws, including powers for the government to ban strikes "against the national interest".

The record of Lib Dem councils across the country is exemplified by Leeds, where the Lib Dem-led coalition privatised the city airport and is currently seeking to push through cuts of up to a third in refuse workers' pay.

Even in today's heavily bureaucratized, right-wing Labour Party, there is still trade union and some left-wing support for free education. MPs like John McDonnell have a left-wing position on this and many other issues, from taxing the rich to trade union rights.

No such political layer exists in the Lib Dems. The standard bearer of the party's "left", Simon Hughes, boasted during the London mayoral election that if elected he would "sort out" the Tube union, the RMT.

No wonder David Cameron says that there is, on policy, only a cigarette paper between the two parties.

We have always and will continue to warn students against giving any support to or having any trust in capitalist parties like the Lib Dems. Only the labour movement can be a reliable ally in our struggle for free education.

### National Convention Against Tuition Fees: UCL Free Education Week 2009

On 21 November UCL (University College London) Students for Free Education will host a National Convention Against Tuition Fees, an all-day conference of action, discussion and entertainment for anyone who thinks higher education should be free for all. We are looking to call the conference in co-operation with all sections of the student movement willing to stand and fight, including sympathetic unions.

21 November also overlaps with the Global Week of Action for a "free and emancipating education" called by the International Students' Movement.

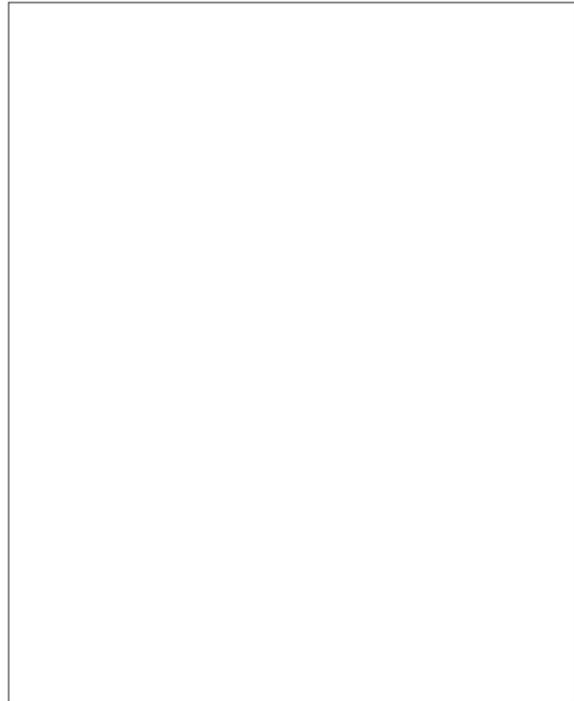
Expect big attendance, free food, comedy, music, high-profile speakers and bags of opportunity to contribute.

[ucl.free.education@gmail.com](mailto:ucl.free.education@gmail.com)

Facebook: "National Convention Against Tuition Fees"

TREVOR GRIFFITHS

# A share in revolutions



Griffiths: made Paine's story into a work of art

Pat Yarker surveys the work of the writer Trevor Griffiths, whose most recent play makes use of a fictionalised Thomas Paine to renew the call for "a revolution in the state of civilisation"; and (opposite article) Becky Crocker reviews the play.

**P**laywright and screen-writer Trevor Griffiths uses his art to intervene politically in the events of our time. Born in Manchester in 1935 of Irish and Welsh descent, Griffiths is perhaps best-known for writing the original screenplay for *Reds*, Warren Beattie's 1981 film about John Reed and the Bolshevik Revolution.

His politically-acute work has stretched over more than four decades. During this time he has been concerned not only to explore moments of history which he sees as especially significant for the working-class, but also to render these "usable". That is, to remind the class-audience about what happened and why, and to do so in ways which allow it to draw contemporary conclusions that will advance its interest.

Griffiths' early play *The Party* asked what form and direction the revolutionary party should take in the aftermath of the events of May 68. It did so by presenting on the main stage of the National Theatre a closely-argued debate between New Leftists and a Trotskyist (based, it is said, on Gerry Healy).

In *Occupations*, whose immediate context was the workers' takeover of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, Griffiths staged a clash between two versions of Marxist political action and motivation as embodied by Italian CP leader Antonio Gramsci and a representative figure from the pre-Stalinist Comintern. Commissioned to write one episode of the BBC's 1974 costume-drama series *Fall of Eagles* about the lead-up to World War One, Griffiths was able to unfold before millions at a time of major union militancy the events and arguments of the 1903 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party, which culminated in the Bolshevik/Menshevik split.

As Labourism ran into the sand in the later 1970s Griffiths wrote a TV series, *Bill Brand*, scrutinising the fate of a newly-elected left-leaning Labour MP. The series explored the relationship in the struggle for socialism between those inside Parliament and those outside it, and explored the limits imposed by social democracy.

## THATCHER AND AFTER

**A**s Thatcherism consolidated, Griffiths' 1981 screenplay *Country: A Tory Story* anatomised the ruthless manoeuvrings within the ruling class to ensure its continued hegemony despite the landslide Labour victory in 1945.

*Oi For England*, the following year, engaged with the rise of racism in riot-torn contemporary Britain, linking it explicitly to organised neo-fascist attempts to draw in rebellious white youth. In Reaganite America Griffiths wrote *Real Dreams*, examining the continuing potential of revolutionary hopes. As the Cold War drew towards its culmination, Griffiths' 1987 screenplay *Fatherland* used the thriller format to scrutinise capitalism's hollow claims to moral and political superiority, and the betrayals of Stalinism. In the 1990s Griffiths wrote scripts and screenplays about the first Gulf War, Nye Bevan, and the legacy of Thatcherism, and involved himself with community theatre-projects.

Some ventures, notably an early 1970s play about Tom Mann and the successful Liverpool Dock Strike of 1911, a film about the ANC, and a non-realist play set simultaneously in the aftermath of the General Strike and of the Miners' Strike of 1984/5, have never reached screen or stage.

*These Are The Times*, Griffiths' play (originally screenplay) about Thomas Paine, looked set to share a similar fate but a truncated and adapted version was broadcast on radio last summer, and the Globe Theatre in London is currently staging a revised version, now called *A New World*.

## MORE ART THAN BIOGRAPHY

**T**hese *Are The Times* opens with Paine's arrival in that *New World*, and uses Paine's life from that moment to examine how a revolution comes to be made, and how making one effects the lives of some of those involved.

Much more a work of art than a biography, Griffiths explores the complex interaction between individual and social context with an eye for ironies, but also with due weight given to triumph, honesty and integrity. Class-issues are foregrounded rather than veiled.

In the newly-victorious United States of America (a designation Paine coined) Paine is sidelined by the money-grubbing merchant-class for attempting to expose corruption. When he arrives in revolutionary France, tellingly unable to speak the language, Paine's interpreter explains to him and us the difference in class-composition between the bourgeois Jacobin and the worker-based Cordeliers Clubs. Political discourse is always shown to be rooted in class-positions, and a character's attitude to property, money and sexuality can be read as a marker of their politics.

Although his works sell by the hundreds of thousands, Paine never makes money from them. He gives his royalties from *Common Sense* to help clothe Washington's Army. While Burke receives in secret a vast pension from the Tories for selling-out his progressive principles and attacking the ideas of the French Revolution, Paine has *Rights of Man* published for sixpence to ensure the widest number may read it.

Griffiths makes Paine a man of courage, dedicated to telling the truth as he sees it despite potential disadvantage to himself. One character observes he has "a talent for saying the right thing at the wrong time". This combination of moral and political courage is a recurring feature of Griffiths' central male characters (and Griffiths' work is male-centred.)

His portrayal of Paine seems to me prevented from being sentimentally heroic partly because Paine is not the only one shown to live this way, partly because the adverse consequences of doing so are not sugared, and partly because it accords with the historical record. Paine did attempt, for example, to persuade the French National Assembly to exile rather than execute the deposed King Louis. In effect, he tries to hold back the approaching Terror. Doing so helped ensure he would fall under suspicion, be imprisoned and risk execution himself.

In America Paine's contribution to the struggle for independence was effaced and all-but-forgotten for decades. Griffiths has Paine scan a long wall in the White House hung with portraits of the Founding Fathers. His picture is not among them. The screenplay is an act of restoration, and a bulwark against contrived official forgetting.

## ENGAGEMENT

**G**riffiths frequently includes Paine's own words in the screenplay, and those of contemporaries preserved in the historical record. These mesh skilfully with the invented dialogue, closing the gap between Paine's times and our own even as the on-screen images declare the distance. Paine is and is not like us. The social forces shaping his era, and which Griffiths dramatises, remain recognisably those which shape ours.

The battles for democracy, and for equality of rights, are not yet fully won. Capital remains dominant. Our knowledge of the outcome of the events his characters experience enables Griffiths to set up resonant ironies or comment silently. Victorious, General Washington is shown sitting for his portrait draped in a Roman toga, the embodiment of political spin. Members of the new American ruling-class, accused by Paine of running the country as "a god-damn business", are visually linked to lavatories and to hogs. The desire to achieve a just and properly-ordered society is symbolised in the precision timepieces, compasses and orreries made by Paine's pro-independence friend Rittenhouse.

By using such visual symbols, and by returning to verbal motifs throughout the screenplay, Griffiths thickens the texture of the work. We are helped to believe in this world and its people, and to care about them. At the same time we are encouraged to think about what we are shown.

Griffiths uses a range of techniques to offset any tendency to become fully absorbed only in the narrative. Franklin addresses us directly at the outset, tutoring us in the material realities of colonial America and presenting the driving idea: "When the world changes, it's people do the changing, masses of 'em... it's not just a famous handful involved..." By dividing the (original) screenplay into two almost-equal halves and then setting up correspondences and contrasts across the divide, Griffiths prompts us make connections and so begin critically to assess what we are seeing and hearing.

The clash of ideas, values and political interests which the screenplay develops and explores is made available for our own intellectual as well as emotional engagement.

Griffiths also shapes our view of Paine by what he leaves out. For example, he ignores Paine's backing in the 1780s for the Bank of Pennsylvania, which would become the Bank of America. Griffiths chooses to focus on Paine's involvement in the revolutionary years in America and France, and on his commitment to republican, egalitarian and democratic principles.

His Paine is a character in a shaped work of art, whose truth overbears biographical fidelity, as was the case in Griffiths' earlier portrayal of Gramsci in *Occupations*. Griffiths justifies his approach in a foreword to that play, arguing he is trying in his dramatisation of historical characters to present the most characteristic and central features of a social crisis. His Gramsci or Paine, his Tom Mann or Nye Bevan, may not be faithful to all the known facts, but they are true to the essential meaning of these people in history.

## EXEMPLAR

**G**riffiths' formal skill and subtlety are always at the service of the dialectic in each piece of work, its developing argument. They help make this live in the memory, and resonate. They also add a vital extra dimension, that of tying the historical argument to our own time.

Griffiths' Thomas Paine might be dismissed because his politics are pre-socialist, or because the language of human rights he helped develop has been co-opted by liberals, or because President Obama reinforced his rhetoric on Inauguration Day with a little of Paine's own. I think Paine should be read as an exemplar of the kind of activity and attitude required of revolutionaries now. We need something of the same inventiveness, commitment, endurance and willingness to speak plainly from principled conviction in order to connect with the class whose interests we would further.

• *These Are The Times: A Life of Thomas Paine* by Trevor Griffiths; Spokesman Books £15

## BOOK

# An example to be proud of

Mike Fenwick reviews *Guilty and Proud of It: Poplar's Rebel Councillors and Guardians 1919-25* by Janine Booth (Merlin Press)

As all the main parties agree there is no alternative to cutting back services, Janine Booth's timely history of the struggle of Poplar's Labour Council reminds us there is and has always been an alternative — struggle. Poplar's revolt is generally known of on the left but speaking for myself I didn't have had a real understanding of the significance of the struggle until reading this book.

Janine is a long-standing member of the Alliance Workers Liberty and many of the themes she draws out will be familiar from her contributions to *Solidarity*: the focus on community based activity, the need for the labour movement to mobilise rather than merely act on behalf of workers, and the idea that socialist candidates must be rooted in the communities they represent. Poplar is presented as an exemplar of the successes those principles can lay the basis for.

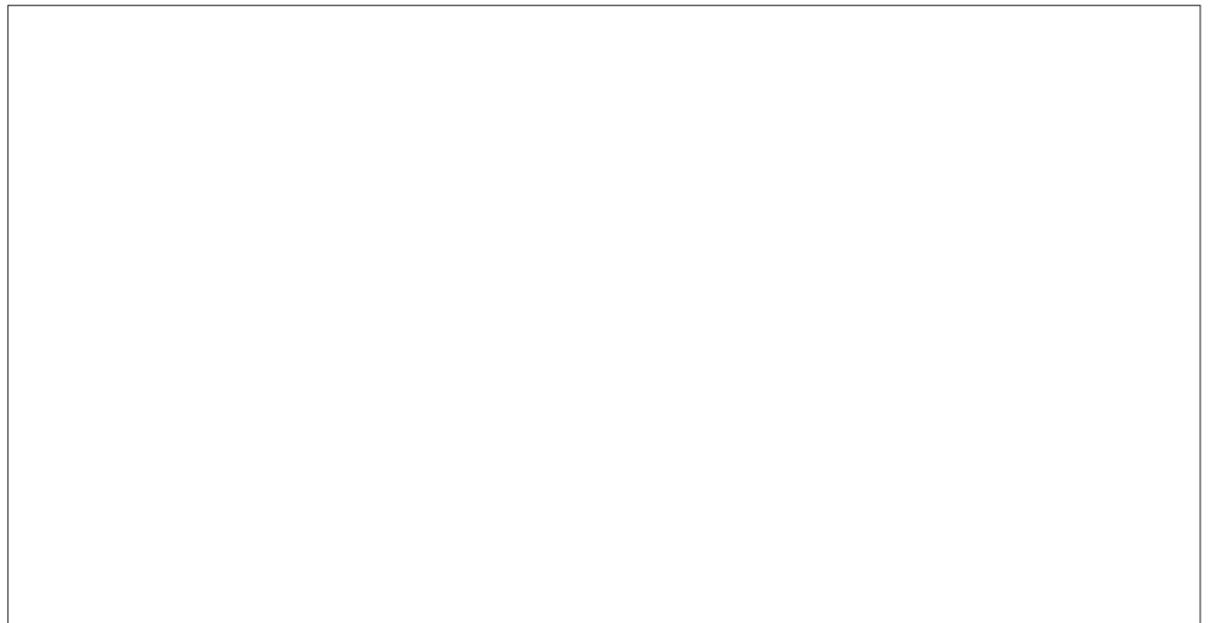
From winning a first majority of 39 out of 42 seats at the end of 1919, Poplar's Labour council quickly moved to improve the condition of the poorest in the community. This victory owed something to the expansion of the electoral franchise in 1918, but was built on local socialist campaigning and trade union struggles over the previous 30 years.

The councillors, men and women elected under the Labour banner were deeply rooted in their communities, local trade unions and workplaces (most importantly the local docks).

George Lansbury, the leading councillor in the group, summed up their approach: "The workers must be given tangible proof that Labour administration means something different from capitalist administration... this means diverting wealth from the wealthy ratepayers to the poor."

Lansbury already had a national profile thanks to his support for votes for women and his role as editor of the *Daily Herald*, a stridently socialist paper.

It wasn't until 1921 that their commitment to this basic principle would be tested. With rising unemployment and a pressing need to defend the jobless they refused to pay the council's contributions (precepts) to



Minnie Lansbury on her way to jail

London wide organisations. Thirty of the councillors were sent to jail for contempt of court when they refused to back down. After further protests they won the right to hold council meetings in Brixton Prison with the women councillors being brought from Holloway.

The extent of their victory and its enduring effect on the equalisation of rates is a legacy to be proud of. Janine also shows how the movement eventually declined and became vulnerable to government attack. There were weaknesses in Poplarism. The long delays in any other council following their example left them isolated. With the defeat of the General Strike in 1926, the whole movement went into retreat.

Janine spends some time examining how critics and commentators have presented the Poplar experience. If there is any fault in the book, it's in this section, as there is not room to develop that discussion further. But it is clear that we should not consider Poplar to

have been a one-off. It was exceptional only in that the Labour councillors remembered that they were "in power" to change the system not just to manage it in a different way.

As we try to formulate our response to imminent cuts, this book is an excellent starting point for discussion. It would be an exaggeration to suggest we could imitate the Poplar councillors example immediately, but we can start to look at the basis on which their victory was won.

That means the consistent building of community campaigns out of which local candidates, based on labour movement bodies can emerge to challenge the three main parties. In a few places Trades Councils taking a lead in anti-cuts campaigns may be able to head down that path.

The Poplar councillors were guilty of standing up for the movement and the class they belonged to, and we should be proud of their example.

## Life and times

Becky Crocker went to see an adaptation of Trevor Griffith's play about Thomas Paine. *A New World* is at the Globe Theatre until 9 October

Here is the life of a man who was actively involved in the American and French revolutions and wrote works that transformed political ideas and struggles. This production puts flesh on the subject by creating a likeable, cocksure and impatient Thomas Paine, who thrashes and strides around the theatre.

This production could well have been subtitled, "The Life and Times of..." as the physical space of the theatre is used effectively to recreate the buzz and bustle of a society bristling with political ideas. Actors move through the standing audience, making them part of busy street scenes, or an audience at political meetings. The huge cast forms a "chorus" who sing specially-composed "folk" songs, voicing the mood of the times: the Americans suffering under the British, baying for blood at Louis XVI's execution.

The Globe theatre, a non-elitist setting in Shakespeare's time, where audiences used to heckle and throw apple cores at performers, is fitting for a play about popular struggle.

Paine's own words are the star of the show. Voiced by Paine himself, or Benjamin Franklin the narrator, or nameless members of the cast, the words that created the mood for America's revolution still stir us today.

From *Common Sense* we hear:

*"The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age, O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind."*

We leave with some of the play's final words ringing in our ears:

*"The present state of civilization is as odious as it is unjust. It is absolutely the opposite of what it should be, and it is necessary that a revolution should be made in it. The contrast of affluence and wretchedness continually meeting and offending the eye, is like dead and living bodies chained together."*

Hauntingly resonant with us because over 200 intervening years have not realised Paine's basic radical democratic egalitarian vision.

The first half set in America works better than the second, almost like a complete play in itself. Paine is part of the action: invited by the Founding Fathers to help draft the constitution, fighting in the war of independence. It has political coherence too. Paine's radicalism starts off inspiring the revolution but in the end outstrips how far the revolution is prepared to go. Paine exposes a corrupt member of the government,

asking, "what is the use of the revolution if America becomes a company for the profit of the already-wealthy?" He warns that America will regret excluding slave emancipation from the constitution. He is a lone, principled and prescient voice when he leaves the US for France.

In France Paine is an outsider. He relies on Carnet for his introduction to the political scene and is separated by language. He is politically isolated. He insists on making a pacifist speech before Louis XVI's execution, and despairs about the "Terror" even before it has begun. Events in the second half are more of a whirlwind, mirroring Paine's confused political trajectory.

Just a word about the play's love interest and depiction of the women characters. In America, Paine falls in love with his landlady, a woman of traditional values but who has written an article on women's rights. It is a plausible and touching love story.

In the second half, a flirtation starts up with Carnet almost on their first encounter. And we sigh, "here we go again". It is regrettable that the play's only two female characters, although political in their own right, function primarily as love interest for Thomas Paine. At the end of the play Carnet gives up her political life to tend to an aging Paine on their ranch in America. Maybe this is just biographical fact, but it does not sit well with a play about Paine's radical vision. The women appeared to be presented as "political" only to make them more feisty and tempting.

## THE LEFT AND NATIONALISM

## Unravelling Scottish history

Elaine Jones reviews *The past, we inherit, the future we build*, an AWL pamphlet by Stan Croke and Martin Thomas

**T**his pamphlet explains how Scottish nationalism came into being, how it was shaped by economic and political developments and how it has, unfortunately, shaped the workers movement.

Most of the left in Scotland present a distorted view of Scottish history tailored to support arguments in favour of independence.

"The pro-independence Scottish left has gutted the history of post-Union Scotland of its real historical content and replaced it with a mixture of recycled leftovers of Jacobite anti-Union propaganda and contemporary 'anti-imperialist' verbiage." It serves as an ideological justification for incorporating the demand for Scottish independence into the socialist programme.

Stan Croke looks at the arguments the left uses with an overview of the articles on Scottish history found in the pages of the *Scottish Socialist Voice* (SSV), the paper of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). Examples:

"The vote (by the Scottish Parliament in favour of the Treaty of Union) was won through epic bribery, military threat and the pursuit of venal self-interest. (SSV 292)

"The 1707 Union created a democratic deficit that gave us a Thatcher government when we voted for a Labour one, crushed our industries, ruined our health, impoverished our citizens and saw our children slaughtered in one pointless unforgivable war after another." (SSV, 292).

Stan argues, "It is not class struggle — whether it be the consolidation of bourgeois rule in the eighteenth century, or the later rise of a mass workers' movement — but Scotland's subjugation into the Union which appears as the defining factor in post-1707 Scottish history [here]." Similarly, it is not working-class struggle but "a people-led transformation of our society" which is given the role of bringing about the future socialist republic. Socialists who base themselves on class-struggle Marxism need to confront this version of Scottish history.

The pamphlet reviews the actual history, starting with the 1707 Act of Union and the impact of slavery and Empire on the economy and politics of Scotland. It also outlines the development of the labour movement in Scotland.

Stan expands on this 1925 quote from Trotsky: "The most radical elements in the modern British labour movement are most often natives of Ireland or Scotland. ... Scotland entered on the capitalist path later than England: a sharper turn in the life of the masses of the people gave rise to a sharper political reaction." He explains how Scotland "entered on the capitalist path" not only later than England, but also much more rapidly. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards Scotland underwent in a matter of decades an economic transformation which, in England, had stretched over nearly two centuries.

Around the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries the rate of capitalist development in Scotland intensified still further. But by around 1850 Scotland had become more industrialised than the rest of Britain: over 43% of the Scottish workforce was employed in manufacturing, compared with 41% of the workforce in England.

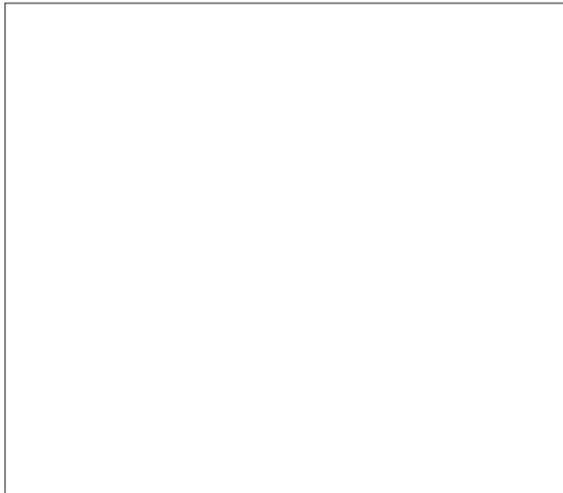
Stan tracks the development of the Scottish trade union movement from the strikes by coalminers in 1824-26 right through to the period of the "great unrest" in 1910-12.

He tries to give the whole picture, rather than selecting episodes in order to "prove" that the Scottish working class is more radical than the working class in the rest of the UK. An honest assessment has to take account of the ideological weakness of most of the leadership of both the Scottish TUC and Labour Party. That is all here.

Stan shows that the ILP "combined the political baggage which it had inherited second-hand from the Liberals, through the intermediary of the Scottish Labour Party, with the values of the respectable working class," and how that shaped the formation of the Labour Party.

He discusses several important themes.

- The ideas of Keir Hardie. For Hardie, socialism was "not a system of economics" but a system of moral values. And those values had to be exemplified by the elect-



### Red Clydeside. Wonderful struggles but not unique to Scotland

ed representatives of labour: as long as Hardie was leader, no Labour MP was allowed to enter the bar in the House of Commons.

- The influence of Marxism. ILPers criticised Marx for "emphasising the necessity of class war". Their conception of socialism as a moral crusade — the vanguard of which was not the organised working class but the respectable working man — was fundamentally at odds with the politics of class-struggle socialism.

As fellow-ILPer Bruce Glasier wrote of Hardie: "I doubt if he ever read Marx or any scientific exposition of socialist theory... So far as he was influenced towards socialism by the writings of others, it was, as he himself stated, by the Bible, the songs of Burns, the writings of Carlyle, Ruskin and Mill, and the democratic traditions in working-class homes in Scotland in his early days."

- The collapse of the Scottish TUC into the pro war camp in 1914 and the role of John Maclean, the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC) and the anti-parliamentarian Socialist Labour Party.

The CWC attracted delegates from around 30 Clydeside engineering works. It defined its relationship to the union bureaucracy as: "We will support the officials just so long as they represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them." The shop stewards who had been involved in the CWC also took the lead in the "40 Hours Strike" of January 1919. After police attacked a crowd of 35,000 in Glasgow's George Square on "Bloody Friday" (31 January), 10,000 troops arrived in Glasgow the following day to ensure that any further unrest could be physically crushed.

- And the rise of the influence of the Communist Party in the Scottish trade unions.

There is a tradition of militant working-class struggles in Scotland, and there were heroic battles. But they weren't unique to Scotland.

### HOME RULE

The pamphlet looks at the origins of the demand for Home Rule, showing how its popularity has been influenced by the class struggle.

Home Rule for Scotland was first advocated by the Liberal Party leader Gladstone in the 1870s. The history of the demand for Home Rule is a complicated one and definitely does not represent a demand made by an oppressed nation to free itself from English rule.

In the early 1900s No-Home Rule campaigning was conducted by the various bodies set up to promote the cause of labour representation — the Scottish United Trades Councils' Labour Party, the Scottish Workers Parliamentary Elections Committee, or the Scottish Workers Representation Committee. The Scottish TUC's adoption of a Home Rule motion by the STUC congress of 1914 marked the beginning of a decade-long upsurge of support for Home Rule in the labour movement in Scotland.

This wave of support for Home Rule reflected a continuing adherence by the labour movement in Scotland to political values inherited from Liberalism, and from the radical Liberals in particular.

Home Rule involved "matters of temperance, matters

of religious equality, and the great principles of moral and social advance."

But an upsurge in working class militancy in the 1920s saw support for Home Rule wane in the labour movement in Scotland. A sustained employers' offensive and a consequent collapse in trade union membership resulted in calls for a more integrated all-British labour movement. In the slump conditions of the 1920s it was employers, not the unions, who favoured devolved pay bargaining.

By the end of the 1920s nationalist sentiments were seen by the labour movement as a hostile force. They were no longer seen as expressions of the right of peoples to self determination. Instead, they were seen as paralleling the rise to power of extreme right-wing and fascist movements in continental Europe. Thereafter, Home Rule fell off the STUC agenda until the early 1930s.

The next growth in support for the demand came from the Communist Party. In the early 1930s Scottish CP leaders had talked of "the fascist demagoguery of the Scottish Nationalists" and "the potential basis of a fascist movement" which was provided by the Scottish nationalists. But once the CP had made the Kremlin-ordered turn to popular frontism (i.e. allying with non-working-class political forces), it backed Home Rule as a way of carrying out its 1937 congress decision to "get contact and influence among the middle classes."

The 1980s showed us another example of how political and industrial struggle have affected the use of the demand. For the first half of the 1980s the question of devolution was largely off the political agenda, pushed aside by the pro-democracy campaign in the Labour Party, the Falklands War, campaigns against Tory attacks on local government, and the miners' strike.

But in the latter half of the 1980s, particularly after the Tories' third election victory in 1987, the demand for legislative devolution rapidly resurfaced as a major issue in Scottish politics. The Tories lacked "a Scottish mandate", their policies took no account of Scotland's needs, and only a devolved assembly with legislative powers — argued pro-devolution enthusiasts — could provide protection from the Tories' "elective dictatorship".

But by this time a form of popular frontism had become an established way of life for the STUC.

For the Labour Party leadership, in Scotland as much as in Britain, the added attraction of demanding devolution was that it functioned as an alternative to organised defiance of the Tories, and as a supposed surrogate for a working-class mobilisation against not just Tory policies but also against the existence of the Tory government itself.

Home Rule for Scotland was not brought about by a self-confident labour movement. A Scottish Parliament was finally brought about by a labour movement in ideological and political disarray.

In conclusion, this pamphlet outlines the approach Marxists should take when understanding the development of ideas and class struggle. It also explains what we should say about nationalism.

"As a standard, Marxists strive to counter the diversion of plebeian discontent into nationalist narrowness by advocating consistent democracy, by fighting for full national rights, by working to clear all genuine grievances of a 'national' character out of the way so that workers can unite without rancour across national lines to combat the common capitalist enemy.

"In the case of Scotland, this means upholding the right of the Scottish people to self-determination and to separation if they wish it. But to uphold the right to separation is not necessarily to advocate it. In Scotland, Marxists can make themselves positive advocates of separation only by painting up the SNP's 'more competitive place to do business' model with supposed socialistic virtues, or by subscribing to the SSP's scheme that independence must mean, or will probably mean, independence in a crisis as a European fantasy-Cuba. In other words, they can do it only by feeding nationalist illusions."

Our aim is to unite the working class and the labour movement across national lines.

In order for that to happen the movement needs to know the truth.

- *The past, we inherit, the future we build*, £4 or £2 from PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.

Or [www.workersliberty.org/pamphlets#scot](http://www.workersliberty.org/pamphlets#scot)

VESTAS CAMPAIGN

# Sparking a struggle, seeing it through

On 20 September, two days before police finally broke the Newport factory blockade, some of the AWL activists who have been involved in the Vestas campaign talked over the experience.

**Martin Thomas:** The Vestas bosses announced that they were going to close the factory on 28 April. But there wasn't much campaign against the closure until three AWL members travelled to the Isle of Wight from 15 June.

There aren't many examples of a factory occupation being triggered by a small group of people coming and giving out leaflets and talking with the workers. What allowed it to happen, and what are the lessons?

**Dan Randall:** A fundamental one for me is to do with the AWL itself. It was the culmination of a number of years of work around such questions — the theoretical work on ecology we'd done, looking back at classical Marxist ideas about the metabolism between humanity and nature; the activist work around Climate Camp and helping build Workers' Climate Action; our general culture around producing workplace bulletins. That's what equipped Ed, Pat Rolfe, and Dan Rawnsley to go to the Isle of Wight and do what they did.

The SWP were sniffing around the factory before we were but gave up because they couldn't see quick results.

**Stuart Jordan:** The conditions were pretty ripe for an intervention. Vestas was one of the biggest private employers on the Isle of Wight, an area with very high unemployment. It was sacking 600 workers after treating them badly while they worked there.

**Ed Maltby:** Things depended on the qualities of the small group of workers inside the factory who first approached us. They had a particular mentality, a sort of militant sensibility. It hadn't come from previous trade union experience. It was more a "cultural" thing. Some of them had travelled widely. They'd read. One liked punk music. One was interested in permaculture.

**Bob Sutton:** We didn't start with a ready-made highly-developed ability to help workers organise — but we did know what doing that looked like. We had an idea in our heads of what we should be doing, and in the course of the struggle we've grown in our ability to make that idea a reality.

I've been very involved in the AWL's environmental work, but I'm not sure how critical that was. I'm not sure it would've been so different had we gone to a washing-machine factory.

**Vicki Morris:** Persistence was central. It's illustrated by the story of 6 July. Three weeks after starting the campaign, three days after the big meeting on the closure on 3 July, Ed had drawn a blank with all the workers who'd suggested at the meeting that they might be interested in talking further about resisting the closure. He decided to return home for a break.

As his train got in to Waterloo station, he finally got a

phone call from a worker interested in talking. So he turned round at Waterloo and went back to the Isle of Wight again.

That persistence makes you very tired sometimes, but you have to accept that class struggle has its own logic and rhythms and you've got to bend to them.

Persistence is also central to our attitude in the campaign as a whole. We're seeing it out to the end, seeing it through with the people who started it.

**Ed:** The fact that we "chose" Vestas was to do with our ecological ideas. While we were engaging with workers there, the work we'd done on seeing workers' control as central to an agency for solving ecological crisis allowed us to deal with issues that we encountered, such as the wastefulness of the company, like the fact that workers were more pissed off with the poor health and safety than they were with many other issues.

Because we were able to draw analogies between capitalist environmental degradation and capitalist-workplace degradation of workers' bodies, we were able to respond intelligently to a lot of the issues raised.

The experience at Vestas has allowed us to share with a lot of environmental activists some basic socialist ideas. We've given the notion of workers' struggle as an agency real grip.

**Bob:** We did punch above our weight. I suppose you could describe that as being a bit off-balance in terms of the resources we put into Vestas as against other campaigns.

Our ecological politics added a dimension to our solidarity, and provided quick answers in the conversation you have, when coming from outside the Isle of Wight,

Cross, Newport, on 20 July. They demanded that Vestas hand over the factories to the Government, and that the Government nationalise them and continue production.

Vestas refused to negotiate. Government minister Joan Ruddock met workers and the RMT union, which many workers had joined after the occupation started, on 6 August, but offered only warm words.

On 7 August Vestas finally got and enforced an eviction order against the workers. It sacked 11 of those who had occupied, thus depriving them of their redundancy money.

Since 7 August workers and supporters — local people, environmentalists, socialists from AWL and SWP — have maintained a 24-hour picket at the factory's front gate, and more recently also at the marine gate, the gate through which blades and other large items have to be moved in order to go on barges and be taken to Southampton.

On 22 September, large numbers of police finally steamed in to clear the marine gate and open the way for Vestas to remove blades which had been trapped in the factory since the occupation started.

Leon Trotsky on the rules for revolutionary socialists. "To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives..."  
*The Transitional Programme, 1938*

about "why do you see this as your problem?" The implications of climate change raise revolutionary politics very quickly.

Bringing in Ron Clark from the Visteon occupation to the meeting on 3 July was, I think, a key catalyst.

**Martin:** It shows the merits of being off-balance. If you try to do everything in a balanced way, you'll just give a few seconds' attention to every struggle. It's quite common with us, as with other socialist groups, that we'll go along to a campaign, give out a leaflet, sell a few papers, and come away again. We're a small organisation and our resources are spread thinly. Vestas shows what you can do if you put in more sustained effort.

But the story of what happened between 15 June and the occupation starting on 20 July isn't just the story of the AWL relating to the Vestas workers. It's also the story of how the initial group of workers who started discussing resistance to the closure, after 3 July, grew and began to change the thinking of a larger body of workers.

The end of the first phase of the campaign was the public meeting, sponsored by Cowes Trades Council and Workers' Climate Action, held on 3 July. What do we think about how that was organised and conducted?

**Stuart:** That meeting had to be "legitimate", with the look of a respectable labour movement affair. Unfortunately, that meant a lot of full-time officials who saw their job as talking down any prospect of struggle. But it was important that Cowes Trades Council was hosting the meeting, and Ron Clark was on the platform, and he had something different to say.

It's always a problem being pro-trade-union with non-union workers when you know how large the weight of conservative officials is in the unions today. But on the whole, I don't think the meeting played out badly.

**Bob:** The involvement of other people from Workers' Climate Action — people like Sam Wade from the IWW — was important in building that 3 July meeting.

**Ed:** In the course of the campaign, Patrick Rolfe and I have kept on repeating a quote from Lenin about the importance of finding the next link in the chain and grasping it. That was something we had to do at that meeting.

When workers started looking disgruntled and leaving in disgust after the speech from John Rowse, the Unite national trade group secretary, who told everyone Unite would help them sign on the dole, I remembered something Ron Clark had taught me earlier in the week about the importance of identifying potential leaders.

I ran around with my notebook making contacts, talking to workers about things that could be done next, like building up a telephone list and sounding out people on the shopfloor.

**Martin:** After the meeting, you had the period from 3 to 20 July, when the occupation started, and then the first phase of the occupation, to 24 July, when RMT full-time officials arrived.

The period 3–20 July was mostly about the initial group of workers who got in touch with Ed meeting collectively, talking to other workers, drawing new people in. On 20 July, someone snitched to the management. The workers had to move quicker than they would have done otherwise. They occupied on the evening of 20 July.

We were very much helpers at that stage, canvassing other trade unionists on the island for support, leaflet-

*Continues on page 16*

## How it happened

**G**eographically, Britain is specially well placed to use wind energy as a renewable, zero-emissions alternative to fossil fuels. On 15 July, Energy and Climate Change minister Ed Miliband published a White Paper about renewable energy which called for 7000 more wind turbines to be built.

Yet Britain's only wind-turbine blade factories are two, owned by the big Danish-based multinational Vestas, on the Isle of Wight. Or rather, were. After telling workers in 2008 that they would be re-equipping the factories for a more advanced production process in 2009, on 28 April Vestas bosses announced that they were ending production on the Isle of Wight, keeping only a research and development operation. 600 jobs would go.

The factories were not unionised: attempts to recruit workers into the Unite union had been repressed by management. But, after a campaign of leafleting and meetings, workers occupied the bigger factory, at St

Continued from page 15

ing on the streets, trying to brief workers on what's involved in organising an occupation.

On the morning of Tuesday 21 July, we were in front of the factory with lots of workers milling around. The workers were not there as a picket line. They had turned up to work as usual. Managers had told them to go home again, but they stayed around to see what was happening.

**Dan:** On 21 July, I think we were right to make a priority of getting a committee elected by the workers outside the gate. That was important in terms of the ownership of the dispute and making sure the dispute was led by the workers themselves.

**Martin:** Looking back on it, I think that on the evening of the 20th we should have spent more time talking among ourselves and working out what we needed to do in the next few days.

At the time I thought we would have Unite officials down within a day or so, trying to take over. I was keen to get a workers' committee elected because I figured the workers needed a collective way of asserting themselves and trying to retain control.

It hadn't crossed my mind that Unite wouldn't show up at all, and that RMT would arrive instead. What would we have done if the RMT hadn't turned up? I think we would've approached some other union — probably the local GMB branch — but in any case it was important that the workers were organised before full-time union officials came in.

Those first few days were tremendous. On the morning of Tuesday 21st the workers were concerned to see that no harm came to their workmates who were occupying, but mostly not at all sure what they might do about it or what might come out of it. By the evening of Wednesday 22nd, the workers at the gate were a collective force, determined to support the occupation and see the struggle through.

We started to have regular meetings run by the workers. But mostly they were just one person making a speech, reporting what was going on inside the occupation. There wasn't debate among the workers about strategies. We had the idea of extending the picket to other gates at the factory, but it was never openly debated in the meetings.

Should we have been pushier? We dealt with the issues by talking with workers individually and hoping that our arguments about opening out the meetings and extending the picket would reach a critical mass. We saw it as central to develop the workers' control of their own struggle, and we knew there was some apprehension among the workers about "outsiders". We didn't want to seize a megaphone and start preaching. Those were proper concerns, but maybe we acted too much as a "think tank" in that period, and should have been pushier.

**Ed:** It's clear we should have fought harder for sovereign meetings to be held. We tried, and I don't know what success we would've had if we'd tried harder. Maybe it had to take some time for that idea to percolate through a workforce with no experience of union meetings, let alone democratic and lively union meetings.

After the RMT full-time organisers arrived from RMT head office, they started organising worker-only meetings, distinct from the general meetings of everyone at the factory gate. At the time, I saw worker-only meetings as a good move, potentially better for the workers developing their own independent voice. In fact, however, the worker-only meetings were mainly briefings on legal matters from the RMT organisers, not debates among the workers on strategy.

**Bob:** The big lesson of this is that a politics of working-class self-emancipation involves giving people the skeletons and structures to organise themselves.

**Dan:** Bob is right, but I think we found it difficult to combine being the people who focused on tactics, strategy and information with making ourselves visible as an independent political element, with independent activity, that people might want to join. SWP full-timers were relentless about talking to people about joining the SWP; and Socialist Party organisers arrived and seized the megaphone to make long speeches about general anti-capitalism and their National Shop Stewards' Network; we downplayed that sort of thing in favour of trying to get conversations about what needed to be done next.

**Martin:** Lots of positive things happened between 20-24 July, but the workers' committee still wasn't functioning well at the point when the RMT arrived. It depended on a very small number of workers, so run off their feet with emergencies that they had little time to think, and they didn't organise meetings of all the workers where debate took place.

Bob Crow came to the factory gate on Thursday 23rd, and by Friday 24th the full-time officials from RMT head office were there.

**Ed:** The RMT was giving very useful support to radical, militant action. Even those workers who were in the occupation and initially reluctant to join the RMT after they came out now speak very positively of it. But the RMT was still basically functioning as a service provider, not an agency to help workers organise themselves. The RMT officials could've used the worker-only meetings to help the workers develop their own strategy, to take more conscious control of the dispute. They didn't. Then on 8 August, when we eventually marched into the grounds of the factory, beyond the security fence, the RMT officials soon told everyone to get out again.

**Dan:** I think there was also a problem about the activity outside, from 20 July to the eviction on 7 August, being run just as a support operation for the workers in occupation, "the boys on the balcony". Not enough was done to get Vestas workers who weren't in the occupation to take a bit of ownership over the dispute.

**Martin:** The paradox was that, when the RMT officials kept saying "the workers have to decide", that actually had an anti-democratic effect. Often the workers were not well-informed about what the RMT leaders were doing and thinking. It would have been better if the RMT had said to the workers: "this is what we think should happen", and had a debate about it. Promoting workers' control over their own disputes is not about standing back and saying "oh, we won't bother you". It's an active process.

We should've made much more of the general argument for strike committees. We have put a lot of effort into getting strike committees in disputes on the Tube, and fighting to get the RMT leadership to respect them. We have an amendment to the RMT's rules, to be debated at the upcoming conference, saying that every dispute should be run by a strike committee.

In the period when the RMT officials were on site and the occupation was in progress, from 24 July until the eviction on 7 August, a lot centred around the two court hearings, on 29 July and 4 August, where Vestas sought legal authority for the eviction.

One of the things we argued in that period was that we should plan in advance for eviction not being the

end of the dispute, but a signal to escalate the picket of the factory into a blockade.

On 9 August, two days after the eviction, there was a big meeting of workers and supporters at the Southern Vectis club in Newport. Mark Smith argued at that meeting for moving to a blockade. We argued for it. The SWP put all their emphasis on calling demonstrations on days of action - 12 August and 17 September - but didn't argue against a blockade.

So, a big meeting agreed to move to a blockade. But as it turned out, we didn't have the organisation to make it happen in the next few days. There were only a token few people at the back gate of the factory. Momentum started to ebb.

**Ed:** Should we have risked looking "pushy" and maybe putting some people off by fighting harder for the tactics and the strategy of blockading the factory? Maybe, but there are limits to what we could have achieved from a position of not having an AWL member inside the workforce.

Also, by that time some of us were very tired, and the most active workers were very tired too. The gulf between the campaign deciding something and it actually getting done was becoming deep. That was a big organisational flaw.

**Bob:** A new workers' committee was elected at that 9 August meeting, and one of its members was made responsible for organising the extension of picketing. But within two days he wasn't on the island - he was off for some days, speaking at meetings, without anyone being chosen to take over his organising job.

Throughout, both the SWP and the RMT "pillaged" key activists to do speaking tours and the like, which made it very difficult for the workers' committee to function.

**Vicki:** There was a certain inertia about the camp at the roundabout outside the factory's front gate by this point. People had settled in to organising the camp almost as an end in itself. It took an effort to re-focus on the industrial struggle that was still going on.

**Ed:** Although no-one at the 9 August meeting argued against blockading the factory — or against working to extend the blockade to the other factory, at Venture Quays in East Cowes, where activists occupied the roof from 4-14 August — I suspect that the extension of the picket from the roundabout was seen as something that was a bit ultra-left, a bit adventurous. We hadn't fully won a political argument with the workers about using their industrial muscle to build a blockade.

**Martin:** A lot of the workers were very impressed by the publicity they got. After all, most people never get on the front page of the papers at any point in their lives. They don't get Government ministers agreeing to meet them. They don't get front-bench politicians, like the Lib-Dem Simon Hughes, coming to offer them warm words.

**Ed:** A lot of the workers regarded themselves as protesting, rather than attempting to get the company in a headlock. And there was a line coming from the SWP leadership that the important thing was creating a noise, putting up a flag, creating a photo-opportunity as a focal point for a campaign of public meetings.

**Martin:** So, after the eviction on 7 August, we didn't move to an effective extension of the picketing. The action at the factory remained mostly confined to the camp on the roundabout, which wasn't blockading any

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## WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION CONFERENCE

Saturday 10 October, 11.45am– 6pm

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON, GOWER STREET, LONDON

Sessions will include:

- \* Plenary: building a class-struggle environmental movement after the experience of Vestas
- \* Introduction to and history of the climate movement
- \* Intro to trade unions/their role in fighting climate change
- \* What is class?
- \* Debate on coal
- \* Agitating at workplaces, engaging with workers
- \* Debate: nationalisation vs cooperatives
- + Structure and plans for WCA network

[workersclimateaction.info@gmail.com](mailto:workersclimateaction.info@gmail.com)

## The Great Climate Swoop

17–18 October 2009, Ratcliffe-on-Soar

2009 is just another year of climate talks, in which governments and corporations will continue business as usual and tell us how a load of corrupt (but profitable) trading is in fact a real attempt to save the world.

Meanwhile, CO<sub>2</sub> levels are rising 20,000 times faster than at any point in life's billion year history and coal is the biggest source of emissions. If we burn all the coal in the ground we're toast.

That's why on 17–18 October we're getting together to close one of the UK's biggest coal fired power stations, E.ON's Ratcliffe-on-Soar in Nottingham.

[www.climatecamp.org.uk/actions/climate-swoop-2009](http://www.climatecamp.org.uk/actions/climate-swoop-2009)

## THIRD CAMP POLITICS

# America, Iran and our solidarity

**B**arak Obama's decision to cancel US plans to build a missile defence base in the Czech Republic and Poland has raised again the issue of America's attitude to the Iranian regime. Part of the aim of the missile cancellation was to enlist Russia's co-operation in stopping Iran's nuclear programme.

After the June protests in Iran, members of the US Campaign for Peace and Democracy wrote about the America-Iran conflict and how the US left perceive it. What they say about the American left could also be said about the British left, who, on many issues, under the cover of opposing big power imperialism wind up backing the notion that "the enemy of my enemy [i.e. of the ruling class in Britain, or the US] is my friend". The Campaign for Peace and Democracy (which involves socialist activists) campaigns against militarism and US foreign policy while not subscribing to the "the enemy of my enemy..." view. The CPD's July statement provoked a debate with writers of left-wing journal *Monthly Review*, (which does take the view "the enemy of my enemy" view). The whole debate can be found at <http://www.cpdweb.org>. Extracts.

## Question and Answer on Iran

**There is a foolish argument in some sectors of the left that holds that any state that is opposed by the US government is therefore automatically playing a progressive, anti-imperialist role and should be supported.**

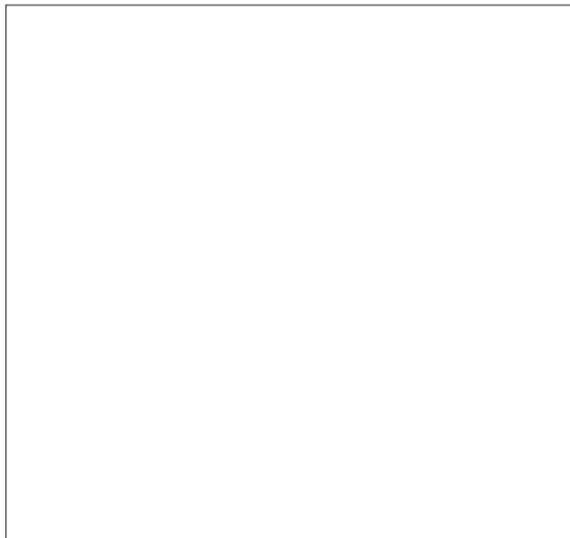
On these grounds, many such "leftists" have acted as apologists for murderous dictators like Milosevic and Saddam Hussein. The Campaign for Peace and Democracy has always argued that we can oppose US imperial policy without thereby having necessarily to back the states against which it is directed.

Ironically, despite their current rhetoric, some US neo-conservatives favoured an Ahmadinejad victory. They knew that on the main issues dividing the US and Iran — Tehran's pursuit of nuclear energy, its support for Hamas and Hezbollah, and its insistence on forcing Israel to withdraw completely from the Occupied Territories — Ahmadinejad's position was no different from that of Mousavi or that of Iranian public opinion. But Ahmadinejad, with his confrontational style and his outrageous "questioning" of the Holocaust, is a much easier leader to hate and fear; his continuing grip on power therefore serves the goals of neo-conservative hawks and Israeli hardliners. And they know that Iranian public opinion solidly supports the cause of Palestinian rights; and that Ahmadinejad's anti-Jewish rhetoric has harmed, not helped, the Palestinians.

Some of these "leftists" say that whatever Ahmadinejad's faults, the mass upsurge in Iran plays into the hands of US imperialism. On the contrary, a people's pro-democracy movement is the worst fear of the many authoritarian regimes on which Washington relies to maintain its hegemony; such as the rulers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan and elsewhere. And not just among US clients. It is significant that news of the demonstrations was heavily censored in China and Myanmar, and that the Russian government was one of the first to congratulate Ahmadinejad on his "victory."

As leftists we are very familiar with rightwing politicians disingenuously claiming to care about the poor and the working class. The Islamic Republic has long included a social welfare component to help it maintain support. Ahmadinejad has undertaken some populist programmes, utilising some of the revenues generated by the sharply higher price of oil. But, even ignoring the fact that basic democratic rights and women's rights are hardly the exclusive concern of the well-to-do, the Islamic Republic, and especially Ahmadinejad's presidency, have not been good for the workers and the poor of Iran.

Anyone purporting to support the working class has to back independent unions so that workers can defend their own interests both in the work place and in the society at large. However, Iran has still not ratified international labour conventions guaranteeing



**What attitude should socialists have to the "green movement" in Iran?**

freedom of association and collective bargaining and abolishing child labor, and unions in Iran have been subjected to horrendous repression...

What do we want the US government to do about the current situation in Iran?

There is a great deal that the Administration can do. Obama should promise that the US will never launch a military attack on Iran or support an Israeli attack. He should commit the United States not to support terrorism or sabotage operations in Iran, and immediately order the cessation of any such activities that may still be occurring. He should lift sanctions against Iran — certainly not as a reward to Ahmadinejad for stealing the election, but because the sanctions have a negative impact on the Iranian people and provide one of the main justifications for Ahmadinejad's iron rule. He should take major initiatives toward disarmament of US nuclear and conventional weapons, and he should withdraw all US troops from Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Pakistan. And he should work to promote a nuclear-free Middle East, which includes Israel.

By reducing these threats, Obama would thereby be removing one of the main rationalisations for Iranian repression (as well as for its nuclear program).

What should we do about the current situation in Iran?

We need to make it clear to the Iranian people that there is "another America", one that is independent of the government and opposed to its oppressive and anti-democratic foreign policy. Our support comes with no strings attached and no hidden agenda. Iranians should be made aware that it is American progressives — not the US government or the hypocrites of the right — who offer genuine solidarity...

Is it right to advocate a different form of government in Iran?

As leftists, the Campaign for Peace and Democracy supports radical change everywhere that people do not have full control over their political and economic lives. We advocate such change in the United States, in France, in Russia, in China. And we support it in Iran too. But we do not support the United States government — or Britain or Israel or any other country — imposing "regime change" outside its borders by force.

What was wrong with Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 was *not* that the regime of Saddam Hussein was overthrown — his was a hideous regime and anyone concerned with human decency wanted it ended — but that Bush asserted that the United States had the right to invade. Political change imposed by a foreign army, or brought about by the covert operations of foreign intelligence agencies, is unacceptable, and it is especially unacceptable when the foreign power concerned has a long history of interventions for its own sordid motives: to impose its domination, to control oil resources, to establish military bases.

But do we support the Iranian people if they act to end autocratic rule in Iran? Of course! This is a government that, in addition to its just-completed election fraud and vicious attacks on its own citizens, imprisons, tortures, publicly flogs and hangs political oppo-

nents, labour activists, gays, and "apostates", and still prescribes execution by stoning as the penalty for adultery... Workers have no right to strike. A woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's and women have limited rights to divorce and child custody. The regime imposes gender apartheid, segregating women in many public places. Veiling is compulsory and enforced by threats, fines and imprisonment. We should support Iranians' efforts to end these barbaric practices.

Stephen R. Shalom, Thomas Harrison, Joanne Landy and Jesse Lemisch, CPD (July 7, 2009)

## Riding the "Green Wave"

**There are many problems with the Campaign for Peace and Democracy's "Question and Answer" ... when stripped of its didactic format, this amounts to little more than an emotional plea to its target audience to surrender what remains of their leftist instincts (long under siege in the States, and shrinking rapidly), and join its authors for a ride on the "green wave" of yet another colour-coded campaign that fits well with one of their government's longest-running programmes of destabilisation and regime change.**

We believe that any "confusion" felt by the left and "American progressives" towards these events is a confusion that has been sown by our would-be instructors...

Consider first the CPD's selectivity... the CPD has yet to put up a Q&A related to or a statement announcing its solidarity with the mass demonstrations in Honduras after the June 27-28 military coup that overthrew the democratically elected president of the country, Manuel Zelaya. Neither has the CPD announced its solidarity with the 100 or more indigenous victims of a 5 June massacre by the government of Alan García in Peru... nor with the high numbers of civilian victims of the several-year-long US and NATO bombing campaigns over Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In each of these theatres and the many others that fall within the US sphere of influence and responsibility, the potential benefits of a sustained left-critique and consciousness-raising about US policy and its devastating impact on the lives of people are far greater than anything to be gained by urging "solidarity" with dissenters in a distant land where the US influence for constructive purposes is minimal, but its hostile and destructive interventionism has been and remains great.

Is it a mere coincidence that these neglected matters, all of which bear undeniably on the cause of peace and democracy, are also ones in which a thoughtful Q&A would inevitably challenge US policy action or inaction, whereas a focus on Iran at this moment fits instead the long-term US policy of demonisation, isolation, sanctions, destabilisation, and eventual regime change?...

By portraying the Islamic Republic as even more of an outlaw regime than it had been portrayed prior to 12 June, doesn't this intensive focus on discrediting the Iranian election feed nicely into the US-Israeli destabilisation and regime-change campaign? No matter how much the CPD protests otherwise, doesn't its call for "solidarity with the anti-Ahmadinejad movement" and its advocacy for "a different form of government in Iran" encourage leftists to pull down their natural defenses against US imperialism?

Much intelligent analysis has pointed to similarities between a strategy employed by the Mousavi camp in June 2009, and the strategy used in earlier campaigns of destabilisation against US targets for regime change that date back to the elections in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, and the Ukraine in 2004, to name three where it succeeded...

For progressive Americans who'd like to make it clear to the Iranian people that there is "another America" ... but whose memory of their own government's history has yet to be Twittered away, isn't the net effect of the CPD's activism to increase the likeli-

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thing.

That led to some loss of momentum. The day of action on 12 August was disappointing on the Isle of Wight. The main demonstration on that day, in East Cowes, was smaller than earlier ones, on 8 August or at the court hearings.

12 August was well supported elsewhere. Yet, as we kept saying at the time, a scattering of meetings, demonstrations, and stunts is good, but not a way to force concessions out of a hardline employer or a government.

On 14 August, workers got their redundancy money. It had been postponed from 31 July. Thanks to the occupation, all workers had got two and a half weeks' extra pay and some had extra redundancy money.

We said that the redundancy money could tip things one way or the other. People could see the payment as finishing the story. Or it could tip people into thinking that they now had nothing to lose and becoming more ready for radical action.

In fact, things tipped towards an ebb rather than a revival. Too much momentum had been lost for them to tip the other way.

Partly, that's to do with the general state of the labour movement. If there had been solidarity strikes, things would have been different. Even if there had been proper delegations of trade unionists visiting the picket line, rather than individual union reps or branch secretaries coming to give support or donations, that would've changed things.

In the event, the campaign relied heavily on an unstated idea that publicity alone would force Vestas and the government to move. No-one wanted to argue against the strategy of blocking the blades held in the factories. But a lot of workers said that Vestas was happy to let the blades sit there for many months, and wouldn't care about the value involved, £700,000. That has turned out to be untrue, but it was another way of saying: "I don't see the point of the blockade."

**Bob:** Again, it's the same question of the campaign not having clear forums where people can get an overview. Questions like this — blocking the blades, extending the action to Venture Quays — were dealt with in a way where people were licensed to go off and do things if they wanted to, rather than making clear collective decisions.

I remember getting conflicting reports about how much the blades were worth and whether Vestas was bothered about them at all. Most workers have no clear picture about the business decisions of their employer. The "open the books" line of argument should've been made much more central.

It remains clear that the industrial leverage in this dispute is the blockade of the marine gate. Our ability to sustain that remains to be seen. But in a crucial week, six workers were taken to the TUC Congress to conduct propaganda amongst the trade union bureaucracy instead. The different opinions and perspectives have never really been debated out.

The RMT officials never showed any interest in the blockade, and in the last couple of weeks, crucial for the blockade, there have been no RMT officials on the island. At a Campaign Against Climate Change meeting in London on 7 September, Bob Crow appealed for donations to the workers' fund as a way to help compensate the 11 occupiers whom Vestas sacked for the loss of their redundancy. He was implicitly saying that the use of the fund for campaigning was secondary and that he didn't see the RMT as using the blockade to push Vestas to reinstate the redundancy money.

**Vicki:** It's important now to mobilise enough people to go to the blockade so that when the crunch comes we make a good showing. The company might offer something — that's one scenario. Another scenario is that they'll come for the blades and get the police in to clear the marine gate. If it comes to that, we want 30-40 people there for that experience rather than a dozen.

**Martin:** I think winning reinstatement for the 11 is still possible. The blockade should be seen not as a gesture, but as a tactic with a particular aim in mind. It's important to have a realistic assessment of what can be won now, and what can't.

It's also important now to develop the next stage - rebuilding the labour movement on the Isle of Wight, especially through the Trades Councils, and organising a proper campaign for jobs.

Work on these practical things should start as soon as possible, so that the people who've stuck the Vestas dispute out to the end go on to the next stage with some energy, still fresh, rather than staying on this stage until they're so exhausted that they step back.

hood that the next president of Iran, some time in 2013 (if not sooner), will be a US-supported candidate — in the pattern of the "remarkable victory" of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro in 1990 that delivered a "devastating rebuke to the Sandinistas," as the *New York Times* editorialised, a "clear mandate for peace and democracy," in the first President Bush's words?...

Apart from these ongoing destabilisation campaigns, a series of reports since early July have described plans and training for possible future Israeli military attacks on Iran's nuclear programme...

We find it damning that, as these US and Israeli threats to attack Iran have escalated in June and especially in July, the US-based Campaign for Peace and Democracy — while remaining silent on this major threat to international peace and security posed by the United States and Israel, which if carried out would undoubtedly kill many more Iranian civilians than the Iranian government has killed since June 12 — initiated its campaign to delegitimise Iran's June 12 election as its cause celebre... and in effect laid down with the lions...

Considering events inside Iran from June 12 on, it wouldn't be surprising if the Iranian financiers of the Mousavi campaign had concluded that they could achieve their political objectives best, not at the ballot box in June 2009, and not by arguing their case before the rigid bodies of Iran's executive branch, but by tailoring their messages of dissent to foreign audiences, taking to the streets to provoke repressive responses by state authorities, with every action of the state serving to delegitimise it in the eyes of the West's metropolitan centres, whose recognition and validation the protesters have sought above all.

In short, the protests are certainly not entirely "homegrown" and have a pretty clear link both to direct destabilisation campaigns and to the massive destabilisations imposed upon this region of the world by the United States and its allies just this decade alone...

None of this is to deny the reality of a massive democratic surge inside Iran on a scale unseen since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979. But it is to question how well we understand the role of state-of-the-art communications technology in mobilising the demonstrators, and how truly "indigenous", autonomous, and independent they are from foreign meddling and influence, where foreign powers have invested considerable resources and know-how in these modern regime-change campaigns.

While we agree that Iran's political system has very serious defects, it towers above others in the Middle East that are US clients and recipients of US aid and protection. If Iran were a US client rather than a US target, its political system would be portrayed as a "fledgling democracy", imperfect but improving over time and with the promise of a democratic future.

The CPD asks whether Ahmadinejad is "good for world anti-imperialism."... This tendentious analysis misrepresents the real issues, and begs several questions. According to both the letter and the spirit of the UN Charter, a state that is on the imperial hit-list ought to be defended against aggression, and interference in its affairs is ruled out. Aggression and subversion should be strenuously opposed by the American left. It should not be suckered into such efforts even when the target is not playing a "progressive, anti-imperialist role."...

So, while Mahmoud Ahmadinejad might not be good for world anti-imperialism, his country is not just "opposed by the United States", it has been under serious US attack and faces a continuing threat of escalated violence. It should be first-order business of a left

and supposed campaign for peace as well as democracy to oppose this threat. But with Ahmadinejad a demonised target and Iran's allegedly sham election of June 12 utterly discredited, the CPD's willing participation in that whole process (in contrast to Honduras, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia) provides first-class service to the imperial powers.

*Edward S Herman and David Peterson, Monthly Review*

## Reply

**A**s any reader of our Q&A on Iran, past Campaign for Peace and Democracy statements, and the CPD Statement of Purpose can readily see, our views are diametrically opposed to those of the US government.

We called for an end to sanctions against Iran, and for a guarantee of no military intervention by the United States and no support for military intervention by Israel. We've condemned the hypocritical bullying of Iran to comply with the Nonproliferation Treaty — at the same time as we opposed the possession of nuclear weapons by all countries, the United States and Iran included.

Earlier this year we strongly denounced the Israeli attack on Gaza and demanded an end to US military aid to Israel... our entire outlook expresses a root-and-branch rejection of this country's bipartisan imperial foreign and military agenda.

The title of Herman and Peterson's critique is "Riding the Green Wave at the Campaign for Peace and Democracy and Beyond." The implication is that CPD endorses or politically supports Mousavi, whose campaign color was green. But while CPD extended its solidarity to the protesters in Iran, it was quite explicit in its criticisms of Mousavi.

Herman and Peterson make much of CPD's alleged "selectivity". Why, they wonder, did we issue a lengthy statement on Iran and not Honduras, Egypt, US elections, etc., etc.? This is actually a red herring. With its limited resources, CPD has often "selected" to mount campaigns directed against US imperial policy...

Behind all the stilted and pompous verbiage is a simple proposition: it is wrong to criticise ("demonize") any government that is a potential target of the United States. That is what the "principles" listed in their reply boil down to. And this is not a matter of emphasis or language, but a firm refusal to defend people who are victims of oppression so long as the oppressor is an enemy of the United States (or Israel).

For example, what if a movement arose in North Korea aimed at deposing its vile police state? Washington would like nothing better, right? Ergo, progressives could not support it, no matter how spontaneous and independent of CIA control (which Herman and Peterson would probably not believe anyway). The gulags, torture and mass famines under which the North Korean people suffer? Sorry, nothing to be done about them.

After all, "urging 'solidarity' with dissenters in a distant land where US influence for constructive purposes is minimal, but its hostile and destructive interventionism has been and remains great" would be a fatal distraction from the main priority — opposing US imperialism. What's worse, it would play right into Washington's hands.

Essentially, Herman and Peterson's position is a revival of Cold War thinking: there are two camps in the world and the left must choose the anti-US camp, no matter how bloodthirsty and authoritarian its leaders may be. At one time that camp was the Soviet bloc; today it is the "anti-imperialist" states of the developing world.

This position does not require actually embracing creatures like Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, Ahmadinejad, and company, but merely engaging in apologetics — making excuses for them. The tried and true technique employed by two-campers like Herman and Peterson has always been, whenever movements for democratic change emerged and then were crushed in the anti-American bloc, first, to allege CIA control, and then to change the subject as quickly as possible to the (very real) crimes of the United States and its clients.

Nothing could be more contrary to the historical traditions of the radical democratic left with which we identify — an internationalist left of generous sympathies, one that is always ready to extend solidarity to struggles for democracy and human dignity wherever they occur, that believes in the right of all people to control their governments and societies, even if they have the bad luck to live in a country that the US wishes to destabilise.

### Solidarity with Iranian workers!

Thursday 22 October, 4.30–6.30pm

Protest outside the Iranian Embassy, Princes Gate, London, SW7 1PT (nearest tube Knightsbridge)

- Demonstrate for the right to join and organise independent trade unions in Iran
- The International Labour Organisation should stop recognising Iranian government appointees and "workers' representatives"
- Free jailed trade unionists and all political prisoners
- Free Mansour Osanloo now!

SECOND WORLD WAR

# When Stalin invaded, September 1939

**M**any socialists today consider themselves to follow the ideas of Leon Trotsky — both a leader of the Russian workers' revolution of 1917, and the leader of the working-class resistance to the subsequent counter-revolution under Josef Stalin.

Among those "Trotskyists", the received wisdom is that in September 1939 Trotsky "defended" Stalin's USSR in its invasion of eastern Poland.

The article below, Trotsky's response to the invasion, shows that not to be true.

It is true that in the following months, along with further articles denouncing Stalin's invasion, and his further invasion of Finland in November 1939, Trotsky wrote polemics, in debate with his comrades which pointed the other way.

The reasons are complex, but in our view show that Trotsky's intricate formula of defining the USSR as a system which simultaneously was close to (or worse than) fascism in essential ways, and retained essential "conquests" from 1917, was falling apart under the pressure of events.\*

After Trotsky's death in 1940, some of his comrades stuck to his form of words, "degenerated workers' state" and found themselves forced to give it new content, siding with Stalin's USSR in a way that Trotsky had never done. Others stuck to his underlying line of thought, and found themselves rejecting his form of words in favour of recognising that the bureaucracy in the USSR had become a new imperialist ruling class.

On 1 September 1939 Hitler had invaded Poland from the west. The invasion came one week after the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact. According to a secret protocol in the pact the Soviet Union was to take the eastern part of Poland then mainly inhabited by Ukrainians. On 17 September the Red Army invaded. This was Trotsky's immediate response.

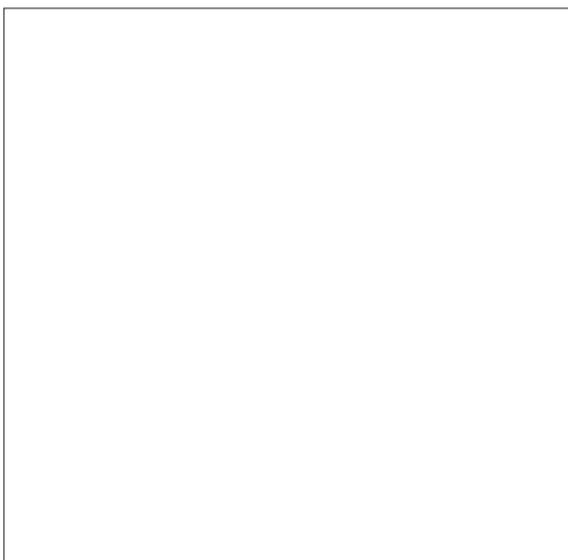
Trotsky had bitterly denounced the Hitler-Stalin pact. It was "a military alliance in the full sense of the word, for it serves the aims of aggressive imperialist war", wrote Trotsky on 2 September 1939. The German-Soviet pact "is a military alliance with a division of roles: Hitler conducts the military operations, Stalin acts as his quartermaster..."

Believing that Stalin's rule was too unstable for him to risk war, Trotsky did not expect the USSR invasion of eastern Poland. When it came, he responded in high indignation.

Elsewhere Trotsky conceded, "that in the occupied regions the Kremlin is proceeding to expropriate the large proprietors. But this is not a revolution accomplished by the masses, but an administrative reform, designed to extend the regime of the USSR into the new territories. Tomorrow" — in fact, simultaneously — "in the 'liberated' regions, the Kremlin will pitilessly crush the workers and peasants in order to bring them into subjection to the totalitarian bureaucracy"

18 September 1939

**War, like revolution, is distinguished by the fact that at a blow it destroys idiotic formulas and reveals the naked reality underneath. "Defense of**



**Russians gather loot after invading Poland**

**democracy" is an empty formula. The invasion of Poland is a bloody reality.**

Today it is clear that in the very same years in which the Comintern was bringing to a head its clamorous campaign for an alliance of the democracies against fascism, the Kremlin was preparing a military understanding with Hitler against the so-called democracies. Even complete idiots will have to understand now that the Moscow trials, with the aid of which the Bolshevik Old Guard was destroyed under the accusation of collaboration with the Nazis, were nothing but camouflage for the Stalinist alliance with Hitler. The secret is out. While the British and French missions were discussing with Voroshilov the problem of the most effective defense of Poland, the same Voroshilov, together with the representatives of the German general staff, was discussing the best manner in which to smash and divide Poland. The Kremlin not only deceived Chamberlain, Daladier, and Beck, but also, and systematically, the working classes of the Soviet Union and the entire world.

Some fatuous people and snobs accuse me of being impelled to make horrible predictions out of "hatred" of Stalin. As if serious people allow themselves to be swayed by their personal feelings in questions of historical importance! The inexorable facts prove that reality is more horrible than all the predictions that I made. In entering Polish territory, the Soviet armies knew beforehand at what point they would meet — and as allies, not as enemies — with the armies of Hitler. The operation was determined in its main points by the secret clauses of the German-Soviet pact; the general staffs of both countries were to be found in constant collaboration; the Stalinist invasion is nothing but a symmetrical supplement of the Hitlerite operations. Such are the facts.

Until very recently the Kremlin, trying to gain the friendship of Warsaw (in the given case, to deceive it), declared that the slogan of self-determination for Western Ukraine (Eastern Galicia [i.e. the Ukrainian areas in eastern Poland]) was criminal. The purges and executions in the Soviet Ukraine were provoked mainly by the fact that the Ukrainian revolutionists, against

the will of Moscow, aspired to the liberation of Galicia from Polish oppression. Now the Kremlin covers its intervention in Poland with a penitent concern for the "liberation" and "unification" of the Ukrainian and White Russian peoples. In reality, the Soviet Ukraine, more than any other part of the Soviet Union, is bound by the ferocious chains of the Moscow bureaucracy.

The aspirations of various sections of the Ukrainian nation for their liberation and independence are completely legitimate and have a very intense character. But these aspirations are directed also against the Kremlin. If the invasion gains its end, the Ukrainian people will find itself "unified", not in national liberty, but in bureaucratic enslavement.

Furthermore, not a single honest person will be found who will approve of the "emancipation" of eight million Ukrainians and White Russians, at the price of the enslavement of twenty-three million Poles! Even if the Kremlin eventually organized a plebiscite in occupied Galicia, on the Goebbels pattern, it would not fool a soul. For it is not a question of emancipating an oppressed people, but rather one of extending the territory where bureaucratic oppression and parasitism will be practiced.

The Hitlerite press gives absolute approval to the "unification" and "liberation" of the Ukrainians under the claws of the Kremlin. With this Hitler is accomplishing two tasks: first, drawing the Soviet Union into his military orbit; second, taking a further preparatory step on the road towards the solution of his program of a "Greater Ukraine". Hitler's policy is the following: the establishment of a definite order for his conquests, one after the other, and the creation by each new conquest of a new system of "friendships". At the present stage Hitler concedes the Greater Ukraine to his friend Stalin as a temporary deposit. In the following stage he will pose the question of who is the owner of this Ukraine: Stalin or he, Hitler.

There are people who dare to compare the Stalin-Hitler alliance with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. What a mockery! The Brest-Litovsk negotiations were carried out openly before all humanity. The Soviet revolution, at the end of 1917 and beginning of 1918, didn't have even a single battalion capable of carrying on the fight. Hohenzollern Germany attacked Russia, taking Soviet provinces and military supplies. The young government had no other physical possibility than to sign the peace treaty. This peace was openly defined by us as a capitulation of a disarmed revolution before a powerful enemy.

We did not worship the Hohenzollerns but rather denounced the Brest-Litovsk peace publicly as extortion and robbery. We did not deceive the workers and peasants. The present Stalin-Hitler pact was concluded despite the existence of an army of several millions, and the immediate task of the pact was to facilitate Hitler's smashing of Poland and its division between Berlin and Moscow. Where is the analogy?

The words of Molotov to the effect that the Red Army would cover itself with "glory" in Poland, are to the ineradicable shame of the Kremlin. The Red Army received the order to defeat in Poland those who had been defeated by Hitler. This is the shameful and criminal task that the Red Army was assigned by the jackals of the Kremlin.

## WHERE WE STAND

**T**oday one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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

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

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

**We stand for:**

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

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

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

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

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

## Vestas fight goes on after police raid

By ED MALTBY

Following the breaking-up of the blade blockade at the marine gate of the Vestas wind turbine blade factory at Newport, Isle of Wight, workers are debating how to take forward their campaign for green jobs.

At roughly 6.20 on the morning of Tuesday 22 September, a force of around 120 Hampshire police descended on the Isle of Wight and stormed the encampment which was being used by workers and supporters to block the movement of blades.

The Isle of Wight council came out in support of the Vestas management despite face-saving noises of sympathy for the workers they had previously made: they temporarily revoked the public right of way on the footpath running between the marine gate and the jetty where blades are loaded on barges to be taken up the River Medina and to Southampton. Police and Vestas security guards collaborated in setting up harris fencing and turning away commuters and local residents who tried to use the footpath.

Kelly Balchin, a worker from the offices at Venture Quays, said: "This is a very sad day, but we all knew it was likely to come eventually". Mark Smith, who was one of the workers occupying the Newport factory from 20 July to 7 August, added: "This is nothing to get demoralised about. What we have to look at now is how to take the campaign forward. Vestas may have taken the blades out but they are still in an awkward position, as they have other machinery they want to get out and they need to get test blades in. They will still need to hire security to guard that site and so on".

The idea that Workers' Liberty has been pushing for some time — that the Trades Councils on the Isle of Wight should get together and revive themselves from new trade-union activism generated by the Vestas campaign; that this body should get an office and run a militant campaign for jobs on the Island — seems to be gaining support.

Such a strategy for developing working-class organisation and capacity to take direct action on the Island stands in contrast to the approach of others on the left, particularly the SWP, which counterposes a "more political" strategy fixated on meetings, demonstrations, national "days of action" and so on.

Kelly Balchin stressed that the campaign needed to focus on pushing the council and the government to take their promises of "green jobs" seriously. Meetings are ongoing to regroup the Vestas workers and develop a strategy for the whole labour movement on the Island.

• More: [savevestas.wordpress.com](http://savevestas.wordpress.com)  
[www.workersliberty.org/vestas](http://www.workersliberty.org/vestas)

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Reviewing Vestas, p15-16

## Calais refugee camp bulldozered "The young were very frightened"

By JORDAN SAVAGE AND SACHA ISMAIL

**D**ozens of French riot police have invaded and destroyed the "jungle" migrant camps in Calais, using bulldozers and flame throwers, evicting thousands and arresting hundreds of people.

Nearly half of the 278 arrested are children and youth. Most of the ex-camp inmates are refugees from Afghanistan, with substantial groups from countries including Iraq and Somalia. They have been stuck in bureaucratic limbo and forced to live in appalling, insanitary, dangerous conditions.

They were in the "jungle" because in 2002 the French government closed the Red Cross camp at Sangatte, under pressure from the British government. Pressure from Britain seems to have been a key factor this time too: Home Secretary Alan Johnson has declared that he is "delighted" at the closure.

Both governments have used the excuse that the "jungle" was a base for people-traffickers.

That may be true, but the only answer to trafficking is freedom of movement and citizenship rights for all. Refugees arriving at the Channel will now be pushed into even more dangerous conditions.

Migrants' rights campaigners helped organise resistance to the demolition of the camp. Jordan Savage spoke to two activists.

*Lucy is an activist in the Calais Migrant Solidarity Campaign.*

**I** arrived at the camp at midnight (21 September). People were very frightened; they lit a fire to keep warm and try to raise people's spirits.

The CRS [French riot police] arrived at 7am.

They promised the clearance would be dignified, saying it was for the safety of the migrants because of people smuggling across the border in unsafe conditions. It wasn't dignified.

I was with a lot of very young Pashtuns who were very frightened. Activists formed a circle around them to protect them. The CRS broke through the lines, there were a lot of head wounds from shield blows.

Activists used a rope and a banner to try to form a protective ring around the young Pashtuns. One CRS had a knife. He cut through the rope and ran at them with a knife.

Three unaccompanied 12-year-old Afghans arrived in the camp last night. I do not know where they are now.

A lot of the Pashtuns have been released already. They have been given no money and have not even had their shoelaces returned. They are coming back into Calais already.

More people are coming into Calais all the time. Some new, some people who have already been released.

Activists are angry and want to act, but migrants are scared: many either resolving to seek asylum in France or to go into hiding.

It's a joke. Besson [Eric Besson, the French interior minister] has no policy, he has just gone in with the bulldozers.

This isn't over. There are demonstrations going on — in Brighton today, in Brussels on Friday. This didn't start overnight and it won't end overnight.

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