

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Volume 3 No 171 15 April 2010 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

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Lies about immigration only help the rich

**BY JILL MOUNTFORD,
WORKERS' LIBERTY CANDIDATE
IN PECKHAM AND
CAMBERWELL**

In autumn 2008, people alien in values and way of life to the great majority wrecked our economy.

They were the financiers, the bankers, the bosses, the capitalists, the profiteers, whose competitive scramble for profit caused the economic crisis of 2008.

Now they want us to pay through public service cuts and high unemployment for the huge bailout — £1100 billion in cash, loans, and guarantees, or £18,000 for every child, woman, and man in Britain — which the government had to do for the banks in 2008.

To smooth it through, they're trying to blame all the problems of joblessness and inadequate public services on... migrant workers!

This lying message, pushed relentlessly every day now by papers like the *Mail* and the *Express*, serves only to divide and divert the united working-class fightback we need for jobs and against the coming cuts.

Tory leader David Cameron has tried to win back BNP and UKIP voters by claiming he will cut immigration to 75,000 people a year. Instead of denouncing Cameron, Labour leaders mutter about how "strongly" they will control immigration. Such talk only strengthens the racists of the BNP and the demagogues of UKIP.

On 8 April, the *Mail*, the *Express*, and the *Sun* all recycled an old statistical forgery, first printed in the *Sun* in December 2008.

"1.7 million new jobs and 98% go to migrants", headlined the *Express*. "Labour's betrayal of British workers: nearly every one of the jobs created by Britain since 1997 has gone to a foreigner", screeched the *Mail*.

"Migrant workers take every new job", claimed the *Sun*.

Just think. Between 2000 and summer 2008, while immigration was relatively high, the jobless rate remained steady. Unemployment has risen since summer 2008 — *at a time when immigration was already falling.*

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**British-born and migrant workers
should unite against the cuts**

Bringing people back on a principled basis

JOHN McDONNELL MP SPOKE TO SOLIDARITY

To judge from the official manifesto, Labour appears to have learned some lessons about the last thirteen years. But not enough.

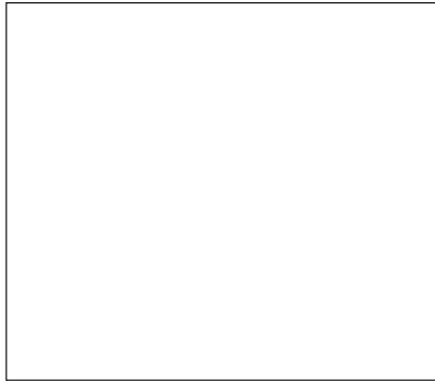
The manifesto fails to make a challenge to the financial system. It leaves the banks in private hands, free to start the casino economy again.

It maintains a taxation system that allows the rich to escape the cost of maintaining public services. It continues to allow privatisation of our public services.

We have seen a lot of anti-immigrant coverage in the press in recent days. I am fearful that comments by both Labour and Tories on immigration are playing into the hands of the BNP, and in that way will stir up problems in constituencies where the the BNP will increasingly be able to mobilise racist support.

In the our first fortnight of our campaign in Hayes and Harlington, we have had a warm response on the doorstep, on a personal basis, to the policies I have advocated over the last 13 years.

People express support for the positions I have taken against the wars, for



public services, and in support of trade union struggles in the area.

But we still need help in getting this vote mobilised and out on the day. People are cynical and sceptical about politics.

We need people on the ground to canvass and mobilise the vote. Our worry is a low turnout because of the general disillusionment.

With our campaign, we aim to bring people back into political activity on a principled basis.

• Contact: Hayes and Harlington Labour Party, 020 0010 8569

Tory "people power"?

BY PADDY DOLLARD

The ex-Etonian Tory leader David Cameron's promise to lead a people's revolution against bureaucracy and the state is funny. But only if you think the degradation of British politics into clownish demagoguery is a laughing matter.

Thatcher too, promised to "cut back the state" in 18 years of power did the very opposite. Cameron won't do any better. The most likely consequence will be to let people "start their own schools" — to allow middle class and religious groups to opt out and accelerate the decline of the existing national school system.

Cameron's talk of "the people" disguises the fact that "the people" is divided into antagonistic social classes. It disguises the fact that the Tories want to "free" only the upper and upper middle classes.

The Cameronian circus is only the most up-front part of the demagoguery that is engulfing Britain as the general election looms. The anti-immigration filth of the tabloid press is another part of it.

Against all this the Labour leaders don't dare speak out. When a legion of capitalist "businessmen" lined up with the Tories, the New Labour leaders did not dare to question their credentials as "experts" on the overall economy.

Even so, the Labour Party is in the election backed by the trade union movement. If they assert themselves, the trade unions can influence what a Brown government will do in the period ahead — if Labour won the election. The people's party, the Tories, on the other hand, are likely to outlaw public service strikes.

If the Tories win the election on 6 May it will be a bad day for the labour movement and a bad day for working-class people.

Immigration lies

From front page

Immigration has been lower since 2006, and emigration has increased since 2007.

Who caused the rise in unemployment since summer 2008? Not migrants, but ruthless cost-cutting bosses, and the crisis that they created.

The "statistics" compared the increase in the number of jobs with the number of migrants. Birth rates in Britain have been below an average of two children per woman, often well below, since 1973, so if there were no immigration the population of working age would be decreasing. Britain depends heavily for its supply of fresh young workers on immigrants - and the rest of us should thank them.

It would be no great surprise, and prove no injustice to British-born workers, if the ridiculous "statistics" of the *Mail*, the *Express*, and the *Sun*, could be twisted to prove that over 100% of the

new jobs had been "taken" by "foreigners".

For the *Mail*, "foreigner" is anyone not born in Britain. It doesn't matter if they have lived here most of their lives, made Britain their home, and contributed much to their community and workplaces.

Equally, for the *Mail*, someone born in Britain who has spent their whole life siphoning off wealth through exploitation and stashing it in offshore tax havens is "one of us".

And not so long ago the Tory papers were catering to Labour's timid little new taxes on the City would ruin us all by scaring off foreign "investors".

On 10 April, the *Mail* shouted: "Migrant City's cry for help", saying that schools and health services in Peterborough were under stress.

Because of inadequate funding? Because of semi-privatisation in the health service and the burden of PFI on

CATHOLIC CHURCH COVER-UP

Prosecute the Pope!

BY JOHN O'MAHONY

Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens are right. Of course, Pope Benedict should be prosecuted when he comes to Britain!

It is alleged that as a bishop he helped cover up for paedophile priests and shielded them from prosecution. If he is not guilty, then prosecution would clear his name of the stigma that will otherwise attach to it — that Benedict XVI is the pope of the paedophile priests!

If he is found guilty then he should be punished according to the law — as any citizen in any civilised country should and would be.

The Pope, the spiritual absolute monarch of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, is special? But why should he be above the law?

Benedict is indeed "special". He is at the top, and for decades was very near the top, of an authoritarian hierarchy which controlled vast numbers of paedophile priests and which, everywhere, covered up for them and let them continue as priests — paedophile priests who had access to children.

Benedict's share of the guilt for the decades of world-wide cover-up is enormous. "Getting" him for the few cases in which he can be proved to have been directly involved would be a bit like the big-time murdering Chicago gangster Al Capone being jailed for tax evasion (as he was). But that would be better than letting this old scoundrel remain impervious to the law of all civilised countries. Far better!

Why should the victims of paedophile priests be denied recourse to law against the head of the Catholic hierarchy? Because Benedict is a Head of State — of the Vatican State? But why, once he is outside his territory, should he be exempt from the laws of other states, whose citizens have been victims of paedophile priests under the hierarchic and authoritarian discipline of the church of which Benedict is now head? He shouldn't be.

It is plausibly argued by advocates of prosecution, that the Vatican State, a very small territory in the city of Rome, is not an internationally recognised sovereign state, and, therefore, that Benedict

does not really have the status of a head of state.

In any case, the central fact is that vast swathes of the Church hierarchy, parish priests, bishops, cardinals, and now, it seems, the Pope himself, were involved in various ways and degrees of covering up for paedophile priests and, many of them, in allowing known paedophiles to go on to fresh territories and fresh crops of young victims. The Head of the Church should be legally accountable for that.

As the seemingly endless exposures of paedophile priests and their protectors and abettors continues to reverberate like an earthquake, shaking the structures of the Catholic Church, buried layers of traditional Catholicism are being thrown up out of their too-shallow graves.

One prominent cardinal has asserted publicly that the exposure of priests is part of a "Jewish conspiracy" to destroy the Church. "The Jews" are really behind it all! Soon now another old reprobate in Cardinal Red will tell the credulous that "the Freemasons" are behind it — and probably "the Illuminati".

And the root cause of the foul crimes against children that everywhere went on behind the holy facade of the Catholic Church? The fact that the compulsory celibacy imposed on priests is an unnatural condition? That, perhaps, some men become priests because of the opportunities working within the church would give them?

Not at all, now speaks another Cardinal — it is the "sin of homosexuality" that is responsible! For priests who molest little girls too?

The hierarchs lash out, seeking any cause for the crimes of paedophile priests except that which demands of the church a reappraisal of the compulsory celibacy that has been in place — though often in fact flouted — for a thousand years as a means.

The Catholic hierarchy is incapable of comprehending the terrible consequences for so many children of what its priests have done, let alone of judging itself for its part in it. That is the fundamental reason why the full force of the law should step in when Benedict comes to Britain.

Yes, prosecute the Pope!

both schools and hospitals? Didn't the stress compel the *Mail* at least to say that both Tories and Labour should scrap their plans for public service budget cuts after the election?

No: in the *Mail's* twisted thinking, all the problems are just "another example of the way immigration issues have been brushed under the carpet". Immigration issues!

The *Mail* is so twisted that it can't even see that its headline of four days previous, intended as another "immigration" scare story, was an answer to the stuff about Peterborough. That headline was: "Revealed: hospital has staff from 70 countries".

The *Express* on 12 April: "Strangers in our own country: 'English' pupils are now the minority in 1500 schools throughout the UK".

A short answer to this is to read the publicity which the Greater London Authority is putting out, even now under Tory Boris Johnson as mayor, to boost London in advance of the Olympics.

It praises London's diversity. "More than 300 languages are spoken and one

in four Londoners was born outside the UK". The diversity is a good thing, it says. And it's right!

In Australia, a country with plenty of its own problems of racism but a less bigoted attitude to immigration (even among its Tories) than here, it is routine for a school to boost itself to prospective parents by boasting how multicultural it is, by saying for example that a majority or near-majority of its students were born overseas.

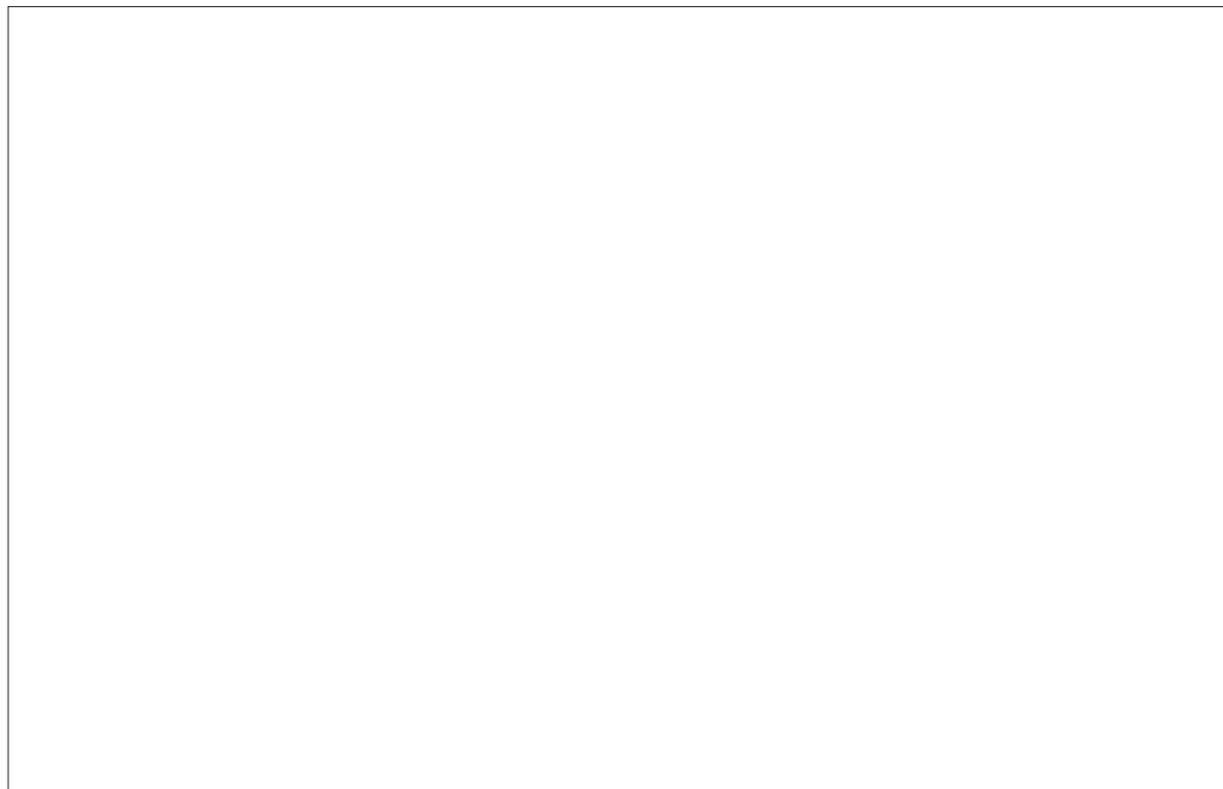
Diversity is good, not bad. It requires expansion of services, but brings with it the energy and creativity to provide that expansion - so long as it is not killed off by cuts of the sort that Cameron and Brown propose.

Let's unite working-class people, black and white, British-born and migrant, of all religions and none, against the true "aliens", the gougers and profiteers.

In the election period, the task of getting out that message falls to election campaigns like mine in Camberwell and Peckham, and to the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists. Join us in the campaigns.

NATIONAL INSURANCE FURORE

It nauseates Vince Cable? It should nauseate us!



“I just find it utterly nauseating all these chairmen and chief executives of FTSE companies being paid 100 times the pay of their average employees lecturing us on how we should run the country. I find it barefaced cheek”.

It should have been a Labour politician, or at least a union leader, saying that on the ballyhoo about the 130 bosses who have denounced Labour for planning an increase in National Insurance rates. In fact it was Lib-Dem spokesperson Vince Cable.

It's not that Cable, or the Lib-Dems, are anti-capitalist. Far from it. Under Nick Clegg, further from it than ever. Cable himself joins the Tories in denouncing Labour as being “in hock to militant unions”. (If only it were true!)

Rather, that Cable, having being among the top bosses himself — he used to be chief economist for Shell — feels comfortable and confident about rough-and-tumble banter with other top bosses who back the Lib-Dems' Tory rivals.

The Labour leaders were so terrified of seeming not “pro-business” enough that all they could do was hunker down, mutter to journalists “well, the Tories have scored a hit there”, and wait for the row to pass.

The top bosses are the people who brought us the economic meltdown of 2008 by their insane rat-race for profit. They are the people who award themselves huge bonuses even when the company isn't doing specially well, and who take huge pay-offs when they are sacked for incompetence.

It's not that the National Insurance rise is a

specially good idea. It would be better to get the money by a targeted tax on the ultra-wealthy instead.

It's not just that the outcry about National Insurance rise “costing jobs” is a fake, because many of those company bosses pay the majority of their workforce wages below £20,000 a year, at which level the National Insurance rise doesn't apply.

It's not even that some of the bosses could offset the entire cost of the National Insurance rise to their companies just by reducing their own personal salaries to something more like an ordinary income.

The greatest absurdity is the way the media have reported the bosses' outcry, as if it was similar to 130 top mathematicians condemning Gordon Brown's arithmetic, or 130 top doctors condemning his views on some disease — as if company bosses are the certified experts on how to run economic life.

Or, rather, since the media themselves are run by the same breed of bosses, the absurdity is that the media assumption was not challenged by Labour politicians or union leaders.

The bosses are experts, after a fashion, in how to run the economic life of a company in profit-grabbing competition with other companies. That is, in the way of running economic life which brought us the meltdown of 2008, and has brought us crises, inequalities, and exploitation throughout the history of capitalism.

Any policy to get rid of exploitation, inequality, and crises must start by rejecting the claim by the bosses to be authorities on how to run overall economic life.

Control should belong to the workers who produce the wealth, organised democratically, debating among ourselves democratically.

The unions should raise that demand, and press it on the Labour politicians.

Will you help the socialist alternative?

In the 2010 General Election the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will raise the banner of a socialist alternative — to give clear political answers to both the Tories and New Labour.

We will work for a Labour vote tied to a positive campaign against the cuts and privatisation agenda of Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

We are standing a candidate against Harriet Harman in Peckham and Camberwell, south London; Jill Mountford is standing for a workers' voice in Parliament.

Getting across our messages will take money, yet we have no rich donors or “captains of industry” to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this election year

CAN YOU HELP US?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college (contact our office for details);
- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to “AWL”, account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- Donate directly, online — go to www.workersliberty.org and press the donate button
- Send cheques made payable to “AWL” to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, or make a donation directly through internet banking with your bank, to directly with your bank (to “AWL”, account number as above);

* Contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

THANKS

In the last fortnight we have received £200 from a London AWL fundraising event and £560 from London AWL. Our grand total now stands at £7,963.50.

**POLICY FILE:
GREEN JOBS**

The New Labour government has promoted itself as a leading advocate of a new global agreement on controlling greenhouse gas emissions. Tory ranks are full of people who deny that global warming is even a problem, and they will apply pressure if the Tories win the general election.

But what New Labour has actually done is wretched. In 1997 the Labour Government set itself a 13-year target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 2010 to 20% below 1990 levels. In 2006 emissions were the highest they had been since 1997, only five per cent below 1990 levels, excluding international aviation and shipping, and probably higher including those factors.

Global warming will not be fixed unless we have governments willing to confront and take on the big capitalist corporations. The Tories certainly will not do that. The current Labour leadership will not do it either.

Capitalism, the rule of private profit, is by its very nature short-sighted and irresponsible, putting individual greed above social foresight. The labour movement must organise to take industry out of the hands of the profiteers!

We support the Campaign Against Climate Change's drive for "one million climate jobs", employed by a National Climate Service. We believe that demand must be linked with others.

- For a shorter working week.
- For workers' control of production; workers' plans are central to reducing carbon emissions at work and asserting workers' right to manage production in all areas of work.
- For cheap or free public transport; for integrated transport systems to provide a real alternative to the car.
- For public ownership and workers' control of the energy and transport industries.
- And taxing the rich to provide the resources.

NUT CONFERENCE

Unite unions to fight cuts

By PAT MURPHY (NUT NATIONAL EXECUTIVE, PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) conference in Liverpool at Easter was a fairly unified event, with the main focus on forthcoming struggles over SATs, workload, pensions and funding cuts.

In the case of national testing, the union is awaiting the result of a ballot of "leadership group" members in primary schools which could lead to a boycott of this year's SATs. The ballot is part of a joint campaign with the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and conference was addressed by Mick Brookes, their general secretary. He implored members of both unions to vote in the ballot, saying to those people who are fearful about voting that that is the very reason to vote "yes".

He also reiterated both unions' opposi-

tion to any new assessment that allows league tables to be formed. Children's authors Michael Rosen and Alan Gibbons both spoke passionately in support of the campaign and about encouraging reading for pleasure and the reading of whole texts. They both criticised the fact that some new schools are now built without a library, even though it is still a statutory requirement in new prisons.

On workload, conference unanimously passed a motion calling on the government to directly negotiate with unions, a moratorium on new initiatives, and an end to excessive assessments. We voted to publicise our campaign in preparation for a national ballot of action enabling members to work to contract. As a delegate from Brent said, "We need to stop asking for a 40-hour week and start taking a 40-hour week!"

Conference called for a defence of cur-

rent education funding and public services, and the retention of the teachers' pension arrangements secured in 2005. There was a widespread assumption that, particularly in the event of a Tory election victory, the pensions of public sector workers, including teachers, will be under attack. There were also calls for an increase in the state pension to the EU average.

Conference called on the TUC to coordinate industrial action in opposition to any programme of public spending cuts. It also congratulated RMT and Unite for their determination to protect their members, and called on the union to lobby the TUC to campaign on repealing anti-trade union laws. In a well-received address to delegates, Mark Serwotka argued that unions like PCS and NUT should start to prepare this campaign now.

Conference was to have been addressed by a speaker taking part in the British Airways dispute. However, she felt too intimidated by management, and her written statement was read out.

The most contentious debates related to how to fight the BNP and how to build greater involvement of young teachers in the union. A proposal from the Stoke-on-Trent branch calling for a state ban on BNP members being teachers, governors or members of education committees was debated but ran out of time before the vote. It seemed likely that it would have been defeated.

A motion arguing that the NUT Young Teachers' Conference should be allowed to submit a policy motion to NUT annual conference was fully debated and, to my surprise at least, was defeated narrowly on a card vote.

Unite teachers and students!

By JOE FLYNN

Superficially there seems nothing wrong with the call by the conference of the NASUWT (the second-biggest teaching union) for industrial action against the extension of pupil power without consultation.

Like all trade unionists I don't think management should bring in any new policy without consultation. But over an Easter weekend when NUT conference tried to prepare for the coming avalanche of attacks on the public sector, we

were treated to the spectacle of our "sister" union grabbing the headlines by launching an extraordinary attack on Student Voice.

For those unaware, Student Voice is one of the few progressive school policies New Labour has introduced. In line with the UN charter on children's rights, schools have been encouraged to allow students to express their views on the running of schools.

I actually think this falls well short of what is required, as the quality of it varies wildly from school to school.

For NASUWT to claim pupils have too much power is counterproductive, at a time when teachers should be building solidarity with students against attacks on educational provision.

Australian teachers to boycott SATS-type tests

By RHODRI EVANS

Australian state school teachers will ban SATS-type tests due to take place on 11 to 13 May.

The federal state school teachers' union, the Australian Education Union, voted on 12 April that it would block the tests "until the federal government stops the results being used to publicly brand students and schools as failures in league tables".

The action will be carried out by the various state teachers' unions affiliated with the federal AEU. The Queensland Teachers' Union, for example, has told its members:

"All action associated with the administration of the 2010 NAPLAN tests should be suspended. The tests when delivered should remain unopened and be returned. Where attempts are made to administer the tests, teachers should refuse to administer the tests.

"In the event that the government attempts to use outside employees or volunteers to administer the tests, teachers and principals should not participate

in any way with the recruitment of these people, should not cooperate with the use of school premises for the purposes of administering the tests, and should not cooperate in any way with the administration of the tests, including supervision of students or delivering of students to test sites".

The Labor government's education minister, Julia Gillard, called on parents to break the teachers' union action. Dianne Giblin, president of the Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, responded: "The federation is appalled with the decision by Julia Gillard, or the suggestion at least, for parents to supervise the literacy and numeracy tests".

Literacy and numeracy tests have been done in primary schools for some years, and used for diagnostic purposes, but without publishing school averages or lots of "teaching to the test". The new Labor government introduced uniform Australia-wide tests, extended them to years 3, 5, 7 and 9, and published school average results on a website called "My School".

"My School" is supposed not to give

"league tables", but only to allow comparisons between individual schools, a category of "similar" schools, and overall averages (see, for example, <http://bit.ly/indro>).

However, the definition of "similar" schools is very dubious, and data extracted from "My School" has been used "unofficially" to construct full-scale British-style league tables.

The federal union of private school teachers shares the AEU's criticisms of league-tabling, but says it will administer the NAPLAN tests. Private schools are big in Australia, with about 30% of primary students and about 40% of high-school students; but the state school teachers' unions are strong enough to make league-tabling unworkable. Although in Britain teachers are divided between several trade unions, some opposed to almost any industrial action, state-school teachers in Australia are heavily organised into a single union.

They should get the full support of other unions in Australia, not the hedged response of ACTU president Sharan Burrow, herself a former teacher trade-unionist.

IN BRIEF

• The ballot on the Communication Workers' Union's deal with Royal Mail runs until 23 April. The leadership is campaigning for a "yes" vote. But the deal is bad. It represents no concessions from management on the big questions of job cuts and restructuring, and will allow Royal Mail to continue eroding wages and casualising the industry unabated. Interviews with activists: www.workersliberty.org/node/13894

• 2,500 patrol staff at the AA vehicle breakdown service will strike on 2 May. The recognised union in AA, the Independent Democratic Union, say reforms could cut their pension values by nearly half.

• In a consultative ballot at the Nestlé factory in York, craft and process workers voted for a ballot to be held on industrial action over pay. Workers in the GMB and Unite unions want a 2.5% pay increase.

JERSEY

Island unions to fight cuts

BY BEA MILLS

Teachers, firefighters, nurses and other public sector workers seem set to take industrial action in Jersey against a pay freeze and £10 million in cuts.

The teachers' union, NASUWT, have called a march and rally on 24 April, to defend public services on the island. It will be the first march and rally seen on the island since the Nazi occupation!

Firefighters are due to begin industrial action on 20 April, with a withdrawal of goodwill escalating to strike action. The Jersey fire service is seriously understaffed with only just enough crew to cover shifts. It is already dependent on goodwill. If one firefighter is not able to make a shift then a double-shift has to be done by someone else. Where do you find £10 million in cuts in a situation like that?

Teachers will open a ballot for action on 26 April, after a long process of satisfying Jersey's anti-union laws, but more challenges are expected.

Nurses are just behind teachers in the balloting process.

Unfortunately, civil service workers have caved in and accepted a two-year offer from the government of 2 per cent for 2010 and 2 per cent for 2011. They

have got themselves into a multi-year award with no independent review body and no break clauses, and with an employer that has a track record of renegeing on deals. Indeed, the employer has already stated that the deal is too generous.

Jersey is now in the process of constituting a council of unions so that all the unions can act together. It is widening membership of this committee to private sector unions and will no doubt begin to draw in other groups of campaigners on the island as it grows. It is a council that is very much focussed on fighting the States Assembly over the coming cuts.

Students at the island's only college are also organising themselves into a branch of the National Union of Students and will join the march and rally on the 24th.

I've spent a lot of time talking to random people in coffee shops in St Helier over the past couple of years. Only in Jersey can you sit down in a coffee shop and start reading a Marxist book and end up with an audience within ten minutes. That audience has ranged from doctors and lawyers to single mums out of work, self-employed workers, students, unemployed, teachers, shop workers...

They all say the same thing.

"We want to fight the States [the government], we don't know how to do it."

The disputes that the unions have with the States Assembly are over the removal of free collective bargaining and the failure to negotiate a pay award for 2009.

But in talks with the employer, the NASUWT indicated that two more disputes would be taken up. The first was against cuts — a dispute that would be pursued along with the rest of the public sector unions.

The second dispute caused a collective cry of outrage and disbelief when heard about at NASUWT National Conference and was over parity with the UK in maternity leave and pay.

Maternity pay in Jersey for teachers is 12 weeks. You get six of those when you go off on maternity leave, you get the other six when you get back. If you then have one day off in the next three months, for any reason at all — authorised sick leave, bereavement, accidents, anything — you have to pay all of your maternity pay back.

Teachers have been told they can have improvements if these come out of their future pay awards; they, the employers would discuss it further but only if the ballot was called off.

The picture is the same for each of the public services who, in order to satisfy Jersey Law, have to go through these mediation meetings with an employer who doesn't care and won't budge.

Jersey has no party politics and is run by a States Assembly made up of independents. The Council of Ministers is at the top end and comprised of a bunch of six multi-millionaires known as the "Ski Club", as they have in the past set term times around their skiing trips.

The Chief Minister — who is elected by his fellows in the Council of Ministers and not anyone else — is Terry Le Sueur. He is extremely unpopular with the island population for bringing in regressive tax policies that have favoured the ultra rich. You have to pay extra tax on food, books and clothes, but there's no tax on yacht fuel!

The Treasury Minister Phillip Ozouf is the one who is driving through these cuts and pay freezes and who looks set to privatise the public sector.

Increasingly, he has bypassed the existing negotiating machinery and is now taking up HR matters with the Chamber of Commerce and bypassing even the States Assembly itself.

The time to fight back in Jersey is well overdue!

Privatising the skies

Aviation Authority (CAA).

Who works for NATS?

Air Traffic Control Officers and assistants form teams who look after a particular area of airspace or an airport. There are engineers who look after the air traffic infrastructure. There are also support staff like me, working on research, development and maintenance projects.

The work of support staff tends to get overlooked by the operational grades, especially the controllers, many of whom think we just drink coffee all day.

Is there a union where you work?

There are notionally two unions, but effectively three. Prospect organises the controllers and engineers separately; the controllers and engineers split off to get more by bargaining alone. PCS represents admin and support grades and air traffic assistants, but we just get the crumbs from the table.

Do you get the pay and conditions you deserve?

It depends what you mean by "deserve". We've got a public service background and a long history of strong unions, partly because it is an essential service and a strike would paralyse aviation in the UK. We're aware we've got it good, but they are always trying to take it away.

They closed the final salary pension scheme last year; they will reduce the redundancy terms again early next year; loads of allowances have been sold off; our pay deal was a concession at three

per cent last year and zero per cent this year, despite the company posting a massive profit for 2008 (£135.5 million).

How effectively have the unions defended you against these attacks?

The Prospect and PCS united slogan "One NATS, one pension" went out the window when they went into backroom talks and came out agreeing with management.

There was no one standing in front of us opposing it; we were truly sold down the river and will have a proper two-tier workforce soon.

Ordinary members don't even know who our negotiating committees are. Our pay deal was negotiated very secretly and was really hard to understand, being based on projected RPI figures from the depth of the recession, which helped the unions and management present it as a good deal.

NATS was one of New Labour's first examples of a "Public Private Partnership". How is this structured?

NATS is a company with shareholders. The Government owns 49% of the shares. A consortium of seven airlines owns 42%. BAA has a 4% stake and the remaining 5% is held by the staff. The airlines have the biggest influence, exerting pressure from above and below.

The main influence the government has is through the regulator, the CAA, as would be the case even if NATS was entirely privatised.

If you didn't know better, you'd think

we were just another cut-throat, profit-driven company.

What changes have you seen since PPP?

The whole thing is really slick, run completely like a private business. The initial pretence that NATS is "not for profit" has been dropped, which a lot of workers are not happy about as we feel a real pride in working to provide an excellent, safe service.

NSL, the commercial side of the business, can compete viciously for contracts around the world. NATS trades on its prestige worldwide.

How has the recession affected NATS?

At the start of the downturn, they said they needed to make savings. At first they shed posts by not filling vacancies and terminating the contracts of contractors. Then they started offering redundancies to staff. Just yesterday we've heard they are going to be offering redundancies again.

They are using the recession as an excuse. They made £135.5 million last year, meaning each employee generated around £22,000 for the company!

Revenue and traffic might have fallen slightly. But to be profitable, yet making redundancies, freezing pay and closing the final salary pension scheme, just doesn't add up.

It shows that it doesn't matter where you are or what you're doing, they will always come for you. Workers are not safe anywhere.

MY LIFE AT WORK

Jessica Barnard works as an air traffic controller for NATS.

Tell us a bit about the work you do.

I work as an air traffic controller for NATS. That used to stand for National Air Traffic Services. But since our £1.5 million corporate re-branding, we are "NATS, the UK's leading provider of air traffic management services".

NATS is split into two businesses. NATS En Route Ltd (NERL) handles mostly flights at a higher level and looks after most of the infrastructure, such as communications, navigational aids and surveillance equipment.

NATS Services Ltd (NSL) competes for contracts to run airports' air traffic and provide their engineering, while also providing other services such as aeronautical information, training of air traffic personnel, and consultancy services.

NERL is the more regulated part of the business, with most of its services being provided under licence from the Civil

WHO ARE THEY?

MICHAEL GOVE



Labour's manifesto commitment to "take over" the 1,000 least successful secondary schools in the UK (slightly less than a third) was not much more than an extension of an already existing policy. But it did have echoes of the kind of education policy the Tories' Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families Michael Gove has been saying. Except that Gove goes that little bit further.

Gove says much more of the state's education functions can be handed over to private business (they could take over schools and make a profit if they want).

For Ed Balls, who wrote the manifesto, if not for some of his New Labour colleagues (Lord Adonis, for instance), that's a step too far.

Private-school and Oxford-educated Michael Gove has a bit of a reputation for going "a little bit further". Fond of posing as a cultured, intellectual man, who is open to all sorts of ideas (including those of drop-out Blairite James Purnell), he has also been dubbed the Tories' neo-con. Someone who dares to say the things the Tories wouldn't want to say in case it spoiled their squeaky clean image.

He is, in short, an appalling man

ready to give voice to any populist, nerdy, neo-liberal, anti-working-class scheme going.

Under Gove you could imagine a self-important, unqualified team of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parents, Boy Scout leaders and company directors being allowed to take over schools. Popular but completely unexceptional people like Carol Vorderman will be sent out to schools to teach maths teachers how to teach!

Gove has a very particular view of education. It is, he says, the view of "most parents". This (fortunately mythical) group of people ("most parents") would apparently like their children to "sit in rows, learning the kings and queens of England, the great works of literature, proper mental arithmetic, algebra by the age of 11, modern foreign languages. That's the best training for the mind and that's how children will be able to compete".

And that betrays the real Gove — he isn't consistent and he doesn't really care about "most children". It's not so much that learning about the kings and queens of England (and the complex social and political background that accompanied their reigns) would be bad training. The problem is he wants children to *compete* — presumably in both education and the jobs market? In reality he wants a slightly broader *elite* group of working-class children to make it to Oxford and Cambridge.

Michael Portillo has predicted that Gove will one day be leader of the Tory Party. But then Gove is the author of a reportedly toadying autobiography of Portillo.

pendence of the Bank of England. That, said Balls, would "liberate the Treasury"... to stick its nose into the business of every other government department. Balls also supported New Labour's policy of "light-touch regulation" of the banks. That in turn helped to promote the expansion of Britain's financial sector... and we all know where that eventually led.

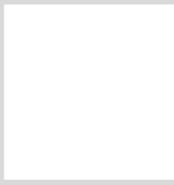
New Statesman hack Martin Bright once managed to get Ed Balls to call himself a socialist. "If it means I care about inequality and social justice, if it means that I believe we can build a sense of community by acting together, then I am happy to call myself a socialist." Not what we'd call socialism!

Since becoming an MP Balls has had less scope for intellectual innovation. With the most dramatic of New Labour's education reform in the past, Balls has been left to promote a mixed bag of "tidying up" measures.

The latest education bill contained a mix of the good (compulsory sex education), the populist (New York-style report cards for primary and secondary schools), the ill-thought out, (an overhaul of the primary curriculum, which emphasised traditional areas of learning), and the bureaucratic, (forcing teachers to undergo MOTs every five years to make sure they are fit to teach).

WHO ARE THEY?

ED BALLS



Ed Balls has been the Labour MP for Normanton since the 2005 general election.

His elevation to the Labour Cabinet (in 2007 as the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families) could have been his reward for being Gordon Brown's adviser from 1994 to 1999 and chief economic adviser to the Treasury from 1999 to 2004. In the latter post Oxford and Harvard-educated Balls was called the "most powerful unelected person in Britain".

For nine months between 2004 and 2005 Balls was employed by the Smith Institute, Gordon Brown's favourite political think tank. His remuneration was reported to be £100,000. Not bad for a gap year.

Balls is regarded as the "intellectual power-horse" behind Gordon Brown. Big in the Fabian Society, Balls was responsible for such ideas as the inde-

STUDENTS

NUS fiddles while cuts battles grow

BY DAN RANDALL, NUS TRUSTEE BOARD, AND CHRIS MARKS, HULL UNIVERSITY VP EDUCATION

This year's National Union of Students conference (13-15 April) represented a new low in terms of political and organisational culture for the student movement. Massive cuts to delegation sizes meant that the conference was smaller than ever, and structural changes which have made NUS even less accessible than before guaranteed an absolute minimum of political controversy in the policy debates.

Almost every mildly left-wing motion was heavily defeated and NUS's policies in favour of fees and cuts were maintained. A small victory was won when a motion in support of future strike action by the lecturers' union UCU was passed, but given the complete lack of any channels of accountability by which activists could control the NUS leadership, they will be able to ignore the policy and condemn the next big UCU strike.

The organised left was in a very weak position, representing perhaps 10% of conference delegates. As we go to press, conference is due to debate a motion in favour of new structural changes which

will see NUS merge with NUSSL (its own commercial arm) and AMSU (the Association for Managers in Students Unions, a bosses' club for managerial staff in student unions) to create a large commercial charity with a tiny, feeble campaigning arm. This would represent a potentially irreversible shift in the character of NUS away from a union model of organisation.

The pathetic irony of the whole affair is that the conference takes place as genuine grassroots student and worker resistance to cuts grows — battles that were almost entirely unrepresented at a conference entirely abstracted and disconnected from the day-to-day struggles NUS members face.

The real tasks for working-class activists in the student movement will not take place within NUS's increasingly atrophied and inaccessible structures, but on campuses and communities across the country.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is involved in building networks like the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts to meet those tasks.

• email: againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com or visit <http://conventionagainstfeesandcuts.wordpress.com>.

Abolish the anti-union laws

From back page

The situation in Britain is not equivalent to the situation in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Cuba or other countries where attempts to organise independent trade unions will land you in jail (or worse). But the recent turn by bosses towards exploiting the full anti-union potential that has always been latent in the law (introduced by Tories and stoically defended and preserved through half a generation of Labour government) is a sign of a ruling-class aggressively re-asserting its right to rule unchallenged.

The turn to legal repression comes in tandem with a renewed attack on the Labour-union link from the Tories and Lib Dems, which is a very thinly-veiled attack on the right of unions to assert themselves in politics. Whatever one thinks about why the unions are affiliated to Labour or how they use that affiliation, the right of unions to establish a political wing — accountable to and controlled by them — must be defended against Tory and Liberal attacks (and, indeed, against attacks by New Labour politicians seeking to sever the union link from above).

The question fundamentally posed by recent developments is one of power. Who rules in society? In whose interests do they rule?

The trade unions must counterpose to the bosses and their state (with its undemocratic, unaccountable judiciary) not a meek promise to run our ballots better in future but a challenge for power and a vision of a society in which the needs of working people and our right to decent lives — rather than the "needs" of profit and bosses' "right" to make money — are the primary concern.

Build a national campaign

BY JOHN USHER, DIRECTOR, UNITED CAMPAIGN TO REPEAL THE ANTI-TRADE UNION LAWS

The reference in a recent *Guardian* editorial to the requirements around balloting as "reasonable" is clearly outrageous. It's blindingly obvious that what we're seeing now is an increasing trend for employers to use injunctions and for the courts to accept those arguments.

In terms of how workers can respond, you've now got some figures even with the TUC saying that one of the responses will be wildcat action. If people do end up being incredibly frustrated by the application of very restrictive anti-union laws, necessity will cause them to break those laws. We would maintain that UK law is actually in breach of international law, including Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and various ILO conventions, as well as the Social Charter of the European Union.

There are 24 national unions affiliated to the United Campaign, and there's now a chance to reinvigorate our campaign and put down some roots in the movement. What we're convinced of is that there will have to be a response on various fronts. One of them will have to be a litigation strategy before the international courts, but that's slow and people obviously can't afford to wait on that. Those strategies will have to work in complement with more activist-focused, grassroots strategies.

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FAR RIGHT

How is the BNP doing?

From front page

BNP DYNAMICS

Despite the media coverage, gratuitous personal chutzpah and votes at the ballot box, the BNP is a relatively small political outfit. This is not to diminish the threat they pose or to discount the possibilities for exponential growth in the short-term. The 2009 European elections over-stretched and exhausted party personnel and finances. The 2010 General Election looks set to repeat this process.

BNP branches up and down the country have been instructed to find and stand candidates not only in parliamentary constituencies (up to 400) but also in council elections. Whilst many of these campaigns will exist on paper only, thousands of pounds and thousands of hours will be expended up and down the country delivering the fascists' message.

At the same time the BNP will be primarily focussed on the Barking and Stoke constituencies where Griffin and his deputy Simon Darby respectively, hope to boost council votes to ensure control over local councils by standing as parliamentary candidates. The possibility of a BNP Member of Parliament is not out of the question but the fascists themselves are under no illusions of the real prize: control or partial control over council infrastructures, schools, social services and millions of pounds of funding.

So the BNP have a plan: take it a step at a time, build the party locally, knock on doors, get some councillors elected, make a good showing in the notoriously unpredictable Euro elections, take control of one or two councils and continue to build from there. Much of this plan — the community campaigning, determined "localism" etc.- has its origins ironically enough with Sadie Graham, former BNP "group development officer" and arch-critic of Mark Collett.

Graham's complaint against Collett at the time of her expulsion in late 2007 was that he presented a major threat to the BNP's bid for "legitimacy".

Collett, the star of Channel 4 documentary *Young, Nazi and Proud* was a liability



Mark Collett

not just because of his questionable financial machinations and personal life but because of his outspoken affinity to more traditional, outspoken fascism. None of this fitted well with Graham's "easy with the Nazism" approach.

For whatever reason — be it the political threat posed by Graham's ascendancy or some mysterious personal loyalty to Collett — Griffin dispensed with the critic. Graham has taken to the internet once again to remind Griffin of her previous warnings.

TIMING

So why choose to act against Collett now? According to reports in *Searchlight* and discussions on the fascist website *Stormfront* Collett is relatively isolated within the BNP itself and in the wider "white nationalist" community more generally.

More than anything, the public move against Collett and the message it's sent to both the party and more widely signals a "stick to it" attitude from the leadership. Stick to the "slowly does it" tactic, stick to the "now is not the time for violence" attitude, maintain the "quiet revolution" perspective.

The British National Party in its present manifestation is still a viable prospect for British fascists. The BNP is still able to relate nationalistic and racist

ideas to the current political, social and economic malaise in society. In the absence of organised working class political campaigning, the BNP's message has some traction. It's entirely likely that they will massively increase their representation on local councils, will boost their showing in the polls come 6 May and even take control of an entire council. Griffin and his loyal supporters still have everything to play for.

OUTSIDE PRESSURES

But despite these prospects, the BNP is not the only game in town for those on the far-right with nationalist and racist ideas. The emergence of the English Defence League and the partial resuscitation of the National Front present potential outside pressures on the Griffin gang.

For those old-time fascists and the newer ones who look back to the "glory days" of violent street politics, the EDL is an attractive political alternative. Its media visibility and apparent support is a function of a sharp political differentiation that in some ways surpasses the social ground most often contested by the BNP: the consolidation of a deep specifically anti-Muslim racism.

Whereas BNP propaganda is infused with sometimes subtle, other times less so subtle, Muslim-baiting and anti-immi-

gration propaganda, the EDL rallies supporters behind unmitigated racial hostility towards Muslims.

Where the BNP suggests that the woes in the economy and social provision are the fault of immigrant groups, the EDL presents Muslims as an existential threat to "English civilisation". The "sharper" message, the more outright racism, enables EDL leaders to muster hundreds on the streets for violent confrontations. The BNP reportedly struggles to organise substantial canvassing teams.

None of this will have been missed by the BNP leadership. The pressures on them to deliver are manifold. The consequences of failing to deliver could be disastrous.

In such a situation, characters like Collett are perfect distractions and potential scapegoats come result time. Among the allegations made against Collett are that he misused campaign funds, delayed the printing of vital election material and deliberately sabotaged the leaflets that were printed. What better excuse for poor results?

Disaster in May could precipitate the desertion of many long-time fascists from the BNP ranks and will give a fillip to those on the extreme right of the party. A bad showing could see the creation of new political formations that attempt to relate to the milieu around the EDL. Such a jettisoning of cadre could see the BNP's public face lurch further to the "legitimate ground".

Right now the only thing that is clear, is that the election is make or break time for the BNP.

At the same time, the same questions and organisational imperatives posed by *Solidarity* to the labour movement and anti-fascists will remain after the election. Supporters of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, working with other working-class anti-fascists, have made moves towards establishing an effective national campaign against the BNP and EDL. We have just a few weeks to make this new network responsive to the realities of post-election Britain and the developments that will follow.

• More information about that network: <http://nottmstopbnp.wordpress.com/>

Developing the political alternative in Barking

By IRA BERKOVIC

An anti-fascist rally called by rail workers union RMT in Barking brought together around 100 labour movement activists and local workers, despite the theatre where the rally was initially supposed to be held cancelling the event following suspected threats of fascist violence.

Gathering in the courtyard outside the theatre, activists heard speeches from RMT officers and other local labour movement people, including a former shop steward from the Ford plant in Dagenham. The speeches focused very much on the need to confront the BNP on a social and political — rather than just moral — basis and provide radical working-class answers to the genuine

problems around housing, jobs and services which the BNP exploit with their racist lies.

Although the rally was, in and of itself, a token gesture, it does represent the potential for ongoing anti-fascist work in the area conducted on a working-class political basis and initiated by working-class organisations.

Charlie McDonald, a AWL member and activist in the civil service union PCS in East London who has been involved in anti-fascist campaigning in Barking, spoke to *Solidarity*.

"The Labour Party's operation is probably the most visible and active. On a certain level it's very slick and impressive. They canvass regularly and manage to turn out up to 50 people. The main thrust of their canvassing has been around a petition against the closure of the A&E department at a local hospital,

but beyond that it's been very apolitical and they still play to moralistic rather than political arguments against the BNP.

"Many of the people who come out and work for the Labour Party are from outside the area, including the union delegations. The local labour movement is very hostile to Margaret Hodge and there's some understandable reluctance on the part of local trade unionists to come out and work for her. New Labour apparatchiks don't make up the majority of the people who're doing work for the Labour Party out here but the political consciousness amongst the Labour Party people isn't particularly high. They don't really see what they're doing in class terms.

"A lot of people are perfectly happy to be open about the fact that they support the BNP. Their arguments are a mixture

of racist ideas they've picked up alongside a feeling of being betrayed by the Labour Party and a sense that working-class people's needs aren't represented.

"We have seen Richard Barnbrook [local BNP leader] out campaigning and there are areas where a majority of windows have BNP posters. Nick Griffin does have a chance of winning the parliamentary seat, but the more serious threat is that the BNP will take control of the council.

"Hope Not Hate have offices and workers down here and UAF have been organising too, but they're not particularly visible. There's a need to do some serious, long-term campaigning around concrete political issues; the Labour Party is saying next to nothing about housing or jobs and everything's being conducted at a very low political level."

IMMIGRATION

Countering the myths and lies

By ROSALIND ROBSON

They say: Britain is “full up”.

We say: Can a country of 250,000 square kilometres become full up in the same way that a train carriage become full up? No. Even if the UK’s population doubles we’ll all still “find a seat”.

If everyone in the world moved to, say, Watford, or Exeter, tomorrow, there would be an absolute shortage of housing and jobs. Such an overwhelming population inflow is inconceivable. But the right objects to quite small movements of people.

The *Daily Mail* voices the “concerns” of councillors in Peterborough about an influx of migrant workers from Eastern Europe. The *Daily Mail* expresses the idea that Britain “cannot cope”. They say housing and services cannot expand to accommodate new migrants.

Well, that depends. New migrants are also workers who provide more services and build more housing.

Provision for workers, such as housing and the NHS is generally forced on capitalism by working-class action. The welfare state was demanded, fought for and won by the working class movement after the Second World War. It is when the organised labour movement retreats that provision gets cut.

In fact the underlying message of the tabloid press is not so much absolute numbers but that “foreign”, brown skinned or “culturally different” people are by their very nature a “problem”.

They say: “The economic benefit from [the inflow of migrants] is very limited.” (Migration Watch)

We say: migrants are often highly skilled, contribute to economic growth and pay around £41.2 billion in taxes a year (Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, quoting latest government statistics). pay more in taxes than they use in services.

But there is a problem with the idea embedded in the term “economic benefit”. It implies immigration has one impact, and only one, across a single entity, “the economy”. It implies that “we”, the British, are all in it together; we have one set of interests, against the interests of “the immigrants”.

Britain is not one homogeneous whole. Britain is divided by class. Our concern is not with the bosses that run the businesses that benefit from exploiting migrant labour.

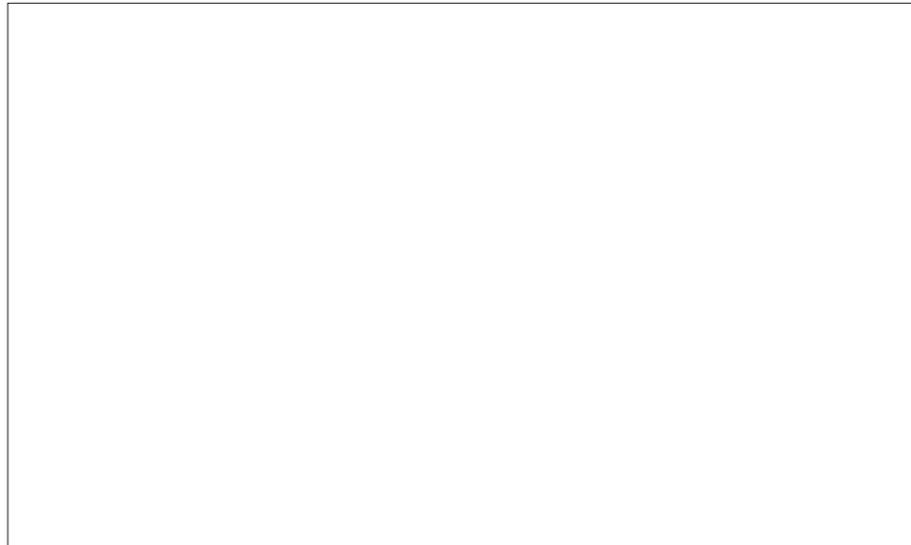
Our concern is entirely with the workers: how can both “British born” and immigrant workers unite to benefit from the mass migration which is a by-product of capitalist globalisation?

They say: immigration drives down wages.

We say: sometimes it may do. Increased inward migration to the UK over the last years *may*, through union weakness, have been allowed to have a negative impact on the wage levels of the low paid. But only a very slight impact.

The bosses would have tried to drive down wages for “entry level” workers whether or not these jobs had been filled by “native” or migrant workers. Whether or not wages are cut depends on us. An adequate minimum wage would solve the problem.

Migrant workers need unions to protect them. Unity between migrants and UK-born workers is the best guarantee



We need fighting unions

we have that wages and conditions will be levelled up, not driven down.

They say: we can and should stop mass migration now.

We say: short of some massive war, or ecological meltdown and collective ruination, or the coming to power of fascism in Britain, the increased movement of people to and from the UK (427,000 left the UK in 2008) is a fact. Modern information and transport systems are not going to disappear.

The knitting together of the global economy is, in many ways, positive. The problem is that this is capitalist globalisation, carried out by bosses, in their own interests. When their global system fails they want workers to pay the price.

They say: asylum seekers and immigrants come here to benefit from our public services.

Such stories are designed to appeal to the mean and selfish streak in us all and to push away the impulse towards sympathy and solidarity for people. They generate anxiety and hatred by playing on two fears:

- if immigrants take resources, there won’t be adequate facilities for everyone else;
- hard-stretched British people will have to pay extra taxes so that migrants can get e.g. NHS treatment.

Such stories strike a chord at times like these when there is a lot of poverty and lack of financial security. In such conditions scapegoating and division can grow.

The numbers of migrants are relatively small and cannot explain the basic cause of the NHS’s problems, or the lack of affordable housing. That is the fault of government and the capitalist system that rations housing on the basis of ability to pay and increasingly regulates health provision according to the law of the market. Agitation against immigrants on these questions lets the people who really are to blame off the hook.

We should demand the bosses (who profit enormously from migrant labour) pay for the expansion of services. Tax the rich to fund health and education for all!

Will we be able to achieve this, as we have in the past? Again, that depends on what we, trade unionists, campaigners, activists, do.

They say: Britain is losing its own culture.

We say: as the world’s economies and people are brought closer together, different national cultures merge, synthe-

size and change. This process has been going on for decades and it is speeding up. It is unstoppable; an attempt to stop it is utopian.

The fascist BNP claims: “Our culture is a combination of our history, our temperament, our sporting, artistic, literary and musical heritage, our environment, our interests and aspirations, our language, our religion and our form of government. Only the BNP values and wants to preserve our traditional culture.”

Nations are real and such a thing as national culture does exist. But the British “national culture” is the result of centuries of outside influence, not least waves of inward migration. Why should “British culture” be defended against further outside influences, now, in the 21st century?

And what about our “artistic, literary and musical heritage”? Isn’t a good thing we can now listen to rap music *and* Beethoven, read Australian novels *and* watch US films, see foreign players in British football teams? Why would anyone expect us to listen and read without

also being influenced and somewhat changed by the experience of these “outsiders”?

Not all foreign culture is good, and not all “British” bad. And vice versa. Culture should be assessed critically. If there is something oppressive or violent in a national culture (domestic violence, female genital mutilation, “gay bashing” etc) it should be challenged head-on.

History needs to be assessed critically, from a class viewpoint. There is a British working class tradition of internationalism and solidarity which includes the fight for votes for women, and the 1926 General Strike. That is a very different to the history to that of, say, British colonialism, Thatcher’s government, or Tony Blair and Gordon Brown’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We have much more in common with migrant workers than we do with our “own” bosses.

There are poor, vulnerable and politically uneducated people in the UK who are not racists but are still uneasy about fast changes in society.

Activists and trade unionists who understand the arguments need to explain to those people the choices they face. Either we unite with migrants, or we allow migrant workers to be used to undermine wages and conditions, to the benefit of our bosses and to the detriment of all workers.

Racism is a major reason that some people oppose migrants: “whites will soon be a minority” in some British towns, says Migration Watch.

The question of “culture” morphs into another — the issue of skin colour. With a sleight of hand, British “culture” becomes “white culture”.

We have to confront these issues and make the arguments.

Unite workers, black and white, all religions and none, migrant and British-born, “legal” and “illegal” to fight for jobs, housing and services for all! Open borders! Fight for asylum and immigration rights!

Together at work

Solidarity spoke to Kate, a London Underground worker about her experience of working and organising alongside migrant workers.

I work as part of the station staff team. There is a very diverse group of workers here. In the main British-born white workers but also Asian and black British, and migrant workers from Nigeria and Ghana, Poland and Ireland.

The cleaning staff have until recently been entirely migrant workers. The recent crack down on immigration status has seen young British-born white workers being employed. The cleaners’ wages are very low.

We do have discussions at work about immigration and asylum. I don’t know whether these are better informed than in other workplaces, but it is obviously easier to talk about the realities of migrant work when many of your colleagues are... migrant workers.

People also get bees in the bonnets. One of my colleagues — who is from an Asian background — has a thing about Turkish immigrants. She is aggrieved

about not being able to get a council house for her family, she’s projected some grievances onto Turkish people. But we had an argument and I changed her mind.

The myths about people who don’t work or who claim benefits are probably less common in my workplace. Here migrant workers are seen to be working bloody hard.

The organising of migrant workers, in the cleaners’ grade, has ground to a halt recently. This is largely because of a bad objective reality — many workers were sacked after a strike. The union hasn’t yet cracked how to defend individual migrant workers.

There are issues here for the whole labour movement — getting legal status for immigrant workers for instance — that have been taken up by groups like the Campaign Against Immigration Controls. And there are specific issues, issues for my union, the RMT. It is very difficult for individual migrant workers to put their head above the parapet. They need well-resourced structures to help them.

EL BARADEI RETURNS HOME

Egypt's workers rise

BY DAN KATZ

Mohamed El Baradei's return to Egypt on 19 February was marked by mass demonstrations in defiance of laws restricting political demonstrations.

El Baradei, former head of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Authority, remains an undeclared candidate in Egypt's 2011 presidential election. Without a party, or a clear programme, but with 220,000 Facebook supporters, he has alarmed the unpopular regime.

After meeting with opposition party leaders and Muslim Brotherhood members, El Baradei announced the establishment of the National Association for Change to fight for "constitutional reforms and social justice". A petition has been launched demanding seven changes, among them a scrapping of Egypt's notorious Emergency Law, provisions for independent monitoring of the polls and use of national identity cards for voting.

El Baradei has been able to hold public rallies calling for democratic change. In Mansoura in the Nile Delta he was met by 1,500 people who were asked to back changes to the constitution which would make it easier for independent presidential candidates to run.

President Hosni Mubarak has ruled brutally for the last 29 years. Mubarak, who came to power following the assassination of Anwar Sadat in October 1981, is now 81 years old and in poor health following a gall bladder operation. However he has been promoting his son, Gamal Mubarak, as his successor.

Hosni Mubarak has manipulated the constitution to restrict opposition parties and independents seeking to run in the presidential election. The government has added 35 new clauses to the constitution in the last five years.

Under a 2005 constitutional amendment presidential candidates must be a member of one of the "official parliamentary parties" for one year, and occupy a high ranking position in that party. Independent candidates need the backing of a large number of national and local council members.

Under the current rules El Baradei is likely to be prevented from running as an independent, and seems reluctant to accept an endorsement from an official opposition party. The last person who ran against Mubarak, Ayman Nour, a young, secular politician who was the runner-up to Mr Mubarak in the 2005 presidential election, was thrown in jail on fabricated charges of forgery.

Egyptian political parties operate under the restrictions of the Political Parties Committee (PPC) that, by law, can decide whether or not a party can be formed, intervene in internal disputes, and suspend its functioning. The PPC is headed by Safwat al-Sherif, who is also the secretary-general of Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). In practice the NDP can pick its own opposition.

The restrictions on political life are such that the NDP ran unopposed in 80% of districts in 2008 local elections, winning all but 1,000 of the 52,000 seats. And disgust with the charade meant that

Mohamed El Baradei. Secularists in Egypt are worried that the Muslim brotherhood could use Baradei's initiative to benefit themselves.

voter turnout was estimated at less than 5%.

The only opposition party with real strength, and the largest opposition bloc in parliament is the right-wing, Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. Secular opponents of Mubarak are — rightly — alarmed at the possibility that the Brothers could use El Baradei's initiative to benefit themselves.

The government banned the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954. However, Muslim Brotherhood members running as independents managed to win 88 of 454 seats of the parliamentary seats in the 2005 election.

Egypt is scheduled to hold elections for both chambers of parliament this year. The country's Emergency Law is up for renewal in May. It is routine for the security forces to detain hundreds of Brotherhood members without charge in the periods before elections. On 8 February 16 members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested, including their deputy leader. These are in addition to at least 41 others since the beginning of the year.

Egyptian human rights organisations estimate that between 5,000 and 10,000 people — mainly Islamists — are held without charge.

MUBARAK TIGHTENS THE LAW

Many human rights NGOs and single-issue campaigns have been able to escape government restrictions by existing as non-profit organisations.

A bill drafted by the Ministry of Social Solidarity that could become law within months would, "limit the activities of human rights organizations or shut them down completely by criminalising all forms of unregistered civic organisation... [with] ramifications for some of the most important political reform movements (such as the National Association for Change, Kifaya, April

6th Youth and others)" (From a statement by a coalition of NGOs).

The proposed law could also be used to target El Baradei's new organisation.

POLICING THE WORKERS

A new US Solidarity Centre publication (*The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*) comments: "Article 54 of the Constitution guarantees citizens the right to hold public meetings, processions, and gatherings 'within the limits of the law.'"

"But advance permission from the Ministry of the Interior is required and is rarely given.

"Demonstrations and other public gatherings are routinely surrounded by large numbers of Central Security Forces [a force of over 400,000] and, more recently, plainclothes thugs who beat and harass demonstrators and journalists, especially women.

"Opposition political figures and independent newspaper editors have repeatedly been detained without trial or hauled into court on spurious charges. When opposition figures are tried, they are often brought before State Security Emergency Criminal Courts or military courts, which rarely rule in favor of defendants and from which only procedural appeals are possible."

In 1957 the government permitted the establishment of a union federation, which subsequently became the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and the security forces. Although the ETUF is not formally part of the government, it has always been closely aligned with the state. Its leadership has always been firmly in the hands of the ruling party. During a strike by rail workers in 1976 the president of the General Federation of Railworkers said the strikers, "should be beaten around the head with iron fists."

The ETUF often polices the workers for the employers. For example, in 2008, Adel Haleem Atta Alla was punished (allowances cut by half and transferred to a different department) by management at the request of a representative of the official union, for leading a protest against the employers' decision to remove their right to health care at the Iron and Steel Company.

However the law makes it difficult for workers to join even the government-policed unions. Workers are prohibited from joining if they are employed by a small enterprise of less than 50 workers, immediately disqualifying over half of all Egyptian workers.

Workers organising outside of ETUF can be — and are — sacked. Collective bargaining is almost impossible in the private sector. The 2003 Labour Law makes it legal for an employer to fire someone without giving any reason at all.

"Pentagonal committees" made up of government representatives, bosses and union representatives have been set up to decide in labour disputes. During 2005 they received over 250,000 complaints, and issued verdicts in only 10% of the cases.

Legal strikes are almost impossible. Two-thirds of the ETUF board has to agree to any strike, which has to be declared 10 days in advance, with its intended duration stated. The Prime Minister can ban strikes in "strategic services", defined so widely it includes transport and bakeries.

And ETUF unions are banned from all political activity.

THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

In 1991 Egypt signed Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) agreements with the IMF and World Bank. 314 public-sector enterprises became eligible for privatisation.

By mid-2002, 190 firms had been privatised.

The privatisation programme speeded up rapidly after the appointment of a new cabinet under Ahmad Nazif and closely associated with the president's son, Gamal Mubarak.

The government's liberalisation of price controls left workers with no alternative but to demand higher wages to compensate. Pressed by job cuts and the unwillingness of new private capitalists to pay benefits or contributions to pensions, a rising wave of strikes began in the early 2000s, accelerating after the Nazif government came into office in July 2004.

Despite government repression more than two million Egyptian workers have been involved in 3000 strikes, demonstrations and sit-ins since 2004. Increasingly private-sector workers have been involved in action, forming as many as 40% of the participants in recent years.

Strikes have even taken place in sectors where action is banned — in hospitals, the post, military factories, and among ambulance and transport workers.

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WORKERS FIGHT AND WIN

The two breakthrough strikes were the actions in textiles and among tax collectors.

In December 2006 and again in September 2007 the 25 000 workers at Misr Spinning and Weaving (Mahalla) won substantial economic gains after militant strike action.

The December strike, started by women workers, lasted for three days and the September action lasted for six. By striking for several days at a time — rather than organising a (previously more common) work-in — and by being seen to defy the state (violence was threatened but not used) the textile workers broke new ground.

Following the Mahalla strike workers actions became better organised and planned. And workers began to be able to negotiate to conclude agreements with bosses and end strikes. During the September 2007 Mahalla strike a delegation composed of the textile workers' union federation president and the company chief executive negotiated with a delegation of strikers, which did not include a single member of the official union committee. These negotiations went on for more than four hours before reaching an agreement.

Then, in December 2007, 3000 municipal tax collectors held an 11-day sit-in strike in front of the Egyptian Ministry of Finance. The strike ended with the collectors being granted a bonus equal to two months pay and a pay rise of 325%.

Lifted by their success, their strike committee and its supporters gathered 30,000 signatures endorsing a new union and elected local union committees. In April 2009 IGURETA applied to become an independent union. The government eventually accepted the application.

The upsurge of worker protests since 2000 is uncoordinated on a national or regional scale. It also has little direct connection to any of the opposition movements in Egypt, including, thankfully, the Muslim Brotherhood.

EGYPT TODAY

The official unemployment rate stood at 9% at the start of 2008, but began to rise with the impact of the global economic crisis.

Real unemployment is between 20-30 percent and is compounded by chronic underemployment.

The Budget deficit rose from 11.8 to 20.2 billion Egyptian pounds in just three months after January 2009. Direct investment fell sharply and lay-offs continued throughout 2009. Official inflation runs at over 10%.

44% of all Egyptians live on less than \$2 a day. Over two million do not have enough income to pay for food, let alone other expenses.

Egypt's minimum wage has been 35 Egyptian pounds (£8.10) per month since 1984, decreasing from 60% of GNP per capita in 1984 to 13% in 2007. On Saturday 3 April 300 protesters assembled outside the Egyptian parliament demanding 1200 Egyptian pounds per month (£142). One demonstrator commented, "We're going to get rid of this dictatorship not via Facebook, not via El Baradei. It's going to be by independent action by ordinary Egyptians."

GAZA

Islamisation continues

By DAN KATZ

The creeping Islamisation of Gaza continues. Hamas' latest bans include Valentine's Day parties and male hairdressers in female salons.

The BBC interviewed one of the "five or six" male hairdressers in the Gaza Strip who are affected by the ban. Jokingly Adnan Barakat suggested he might be forced to move to more liberal areas, "like Somalia or Afghanistan."

Another male hairdresser was driven out of business by bomb attacks. Hatem al-Ghoul said, "They came twice in the middle of the night and blew up my salon with small bombs, once in 2007 and once in 2008."

Al-Ghoul is not sure who attacked his business, but many in Gaza believe Islamists more extreme than Hamas are responsible.

It seems Hamas is now having difficulty keeping the Jihadi groups in check.

Jaljalat ("Rolling thunder") has claimed to be linked to al-Qaeda. And The

Soldiers of the Monotheism Brigades declared: "We will not stop targeting the figures of this perverted, crooked government (Hamas), breaking their bones and cleansing the pure land of the Gaza Strip of these abominations."

In March Gaza Islamists fired nearly 20 rockets and mortars at Israel. Around 40 have been fired since the beginning of the year. Israel has retaliated with strikes on 28 sites in Gaza since the start of 2010. The rocket launchers appear to be a mixture of hardliners within Hamas and Islamist radicals from other groups.

And there is a simmering power struggle within Hamas, and between Hamas and more extreme Islamists. Bombs have blown up the cars of senior police officers, the mayor of Rafah, and of a leader of the Qassam Brigades, Hamas' militia wing.

In the West Bank Fatah is restricting further the ability of Hamas to organise.

The Palestinian Authority's religious-affairs minister, Mahmoud Habbash, has sent 200 new imams to manage mosques run by Hamas. He issues scripted weekly sermons and instructs censors to monitor

mosques.

According to the PA all the West Bank 1700 mosques, including nearly 300 conservative Hebron, are now in government hands.

When worshippers interrupted a PA endorsed preacher in Hebron's Ibrahim mosque and told him to speak out against Israel's siege of Gaza, the PA's local religious-affairs official had the crowd evicted.

On the other hand, worshippers in towns of the West Bank's main towns, Nablus and Ramallah, have ejected imams who condemned the Islamists in Friday sermons. Elsewhere official imams have had shoes thrown at them.

The PA has also dissolved the 92 charitable committees that used to provide Hamas with its patronage network. In their place the PA has appointed 12 of its own committees, which have removed the Hamas-dominated boards that offered services such as nurseries, schools, bakeries and cheap housing for the poor.

Sources: BBC, *The Economist***ITALIAN ELECTIONS**

Berlusconi

defies

Following Sarkozy's electoral setbacks in France, Italian liberal and left opinion confidently awaited the results of last weekend's Italian regional elections.

They thought the expected fall in the turnout would augur a setback for the Berlusconi government, mired in corruption and scandals as never before. News of his political death was greatly exaggerated, alas!

Of the 13 regions contested, Berlusconi added four to the two already in his power. The country is now almost equally divided centre-left/centre-right. But the nude facts say little of the two scales of defeat of the centre-left, rendered doubly bitter by the correctly-anticipated (and record) fall in the vote — one in three Italians didn't vote — and the seven to eight per cent decline in the vote for Berlusconi's Pdl.

For the most significant part of the government victory was due to the ever-spiralling fortunes — it took 12 to 13 per cent of the vote nationally while standing candidate only in the north centre — of the racist Northern League. In taking power in the Veneto and Piemonte regions of the north, it now effectively is in the saddle in the whole of the economic heartland of Italy, where industrial and financial capital predominate.

That the two regions of the south, Calabria and Lazio, were conquered by candidates close to Gianfranco Fini, president of the Chamber of Deputies and declared opponent of Berlusconi's faltering scandal-prone leadership, thereby sharpening tension and conflicts within, brought no comfort to the Italian opposition parties and movements.

Its major parliamentary voice, the Democratic Party, ex-Stalinist, long transmuted in form and content into the bour-

geoisie's dutiful client, took 26 per cent of the vote, more or less similar to what the Prime Minister managed. But the profound divisions within and between the forces of opposition ensured once more another debacle of the Italian left.

A debacle rendered more so by the fact that it has occurred against a background of a severe and worsening economic and social crisis: mass unemployment, savage cuts and massive attacks on the living standards of millions of workers, the old, the young, students and migrants.

And all of this carefully and cynically calibrated, through a near wall-to-wall TV and press campaign of racist invective and hate against the immigrant population in particular, and anyone who refuses to conform to the mixture of levity, vain posturing, and cretinism embodied in Berlusconi. Berlusconi who, driven to ever more desperate antidemocratic measures to save him from prison, has transformed the country into an open political sewer, confirmed recently by the Court of Magistrates announcing that cases of corruption have risen 200 per cent in the last two years.

Recently one of Berlusconi's parliamentary members, exposed as having been elected with the help of the Calabrian Mafia, stealing the voting cards of Calabrian voters in Belgium, and simultaneously embroiled in a two-billion euro recycling scandal orchestrated by the Roman underworld, was forced to resign in disgrace yet received a standing ovation from his parliamentary cronies as he was escorted in tears to prison!

So complete and ruthless has been the control of the state TV and media — Berlusconi's Mediaset is another universe of discourse entirely! — by his hand-picked "head fixers" that all programmes of political analysis, debate and criticism were banned for a month

before the elections.

The Democratic Party and the journalists' trade union said little against this.

Not surprisingly, a population notoriously TV-dependent for its view of the world remains indifferently ignorant of the true state of affairs and their causes.

It has only been through the actions of a tiny group of independent journalists plus a section of the liberal press, along with the ex-Tangentopoli magistrate Antonio Di Pietro, that a counterattack, exposure and criticism of Berlusconi and his government has been mounted.

The growing anger, protest and mobilisations found coherent expression and co-ordination through the Internet and the Web, culminating in the emergence of quintessentially populist, democratically inspired movements. The Popolo Vicino (the "purple people") and the Movimento Cinque Stelle ("five-star movement") — the comic Beppe Grillo, whose more radical polemical "systemic" critique of capitalism received a surprisingly high vote (as too did Di Pietro's parliamentary party Italy of the Values, despite a more pronounced free market ideology).

Politically and programmatically the success of these movements is doomed to be short-lived.

The centrality of the Italian worker movement, betrayed by its political and trade union leaders, misled into one crusade after another by sundry left talking Pied Pipers, and now largely overlooked or ignored by the "movements", cannot be the principal focus of such an exercise. In spite of everything, across Italy hundreds of workers struggle, often in tiny workplaces.

That spirit of resistance and self-sacrifice can forge a real mass movement able to fuse the anger, the energy and the ardent sense of social justice everywhere apparent among hundreds of thousands — even millions in this country.

WORKERS' LIBERTY AUSTRALIA

Preparing for the next turn

By COLIN FOSTER

Australian capitalism got through the 2007-9 economic crisis with less damage than any other rich capitalist country. Output never actually fell. All the banks got through without nationalisation or government bail-outs.

The Liberal [Tory] opposition is making an attempt to stir up a panic about government debt, but it's desperate stuff. In fact Australia, unlike almost all other rich capitalist countries, has no problem of spiralling government debt, and the international financiers know it.

To our surprise, and others', the housing market in Australia — which is similar to those in the USA, Britain, Ireland, and Spain, and had recently seen a "bubble" of spiralling prices — sagged only briefly, rather than plunging.

All this is thanks not to any special sagacity of the Australian government, but rather to what the Chinese government has done, responding to the crisis with gigantic public spending on industrial and infrastructural investment. Australia, heavily dependent on raw-materials exports to China, has benefited.

Politically, the effect has, perhaps paradoxically, been a double blow to the combativity of the workers' movement. The general crisis pushed much of the workers' movement in Australia, as in other countries, into a hunkered-down, holding-tight-while-the-storm-passes, posture. The relatively slight impact in Australia has meant that there have been fewer explosions at points where workers — whatever general preference they might have for "hunkering down" — feel no choice but to fight back; and it has boosted the political credit of a right-wing Labor government.

Industrial action is at a low level. Striker-days are down to about 30,000 a quarter, compared to about 100,000 in 2004, and about 200,000 at the turn of the century.

The unions ran a big campaign against the previous Liberal government over its anti-union legislation, and promised to press Labor vigorously for union rights. Labor has repealed the Liberals' attacks only in a very limited way, but the unions they have toned down their demands enormously since Labor took office in November 2007. Now the union leaders drown almost all other considerations under cries about preventing a return to office of the Liberals, who have an aggressively right-wing new leader, Tony Abbott.

In New South Wales a strong union campaign against electricity privatisation forced right-wing Labor premier Morris Iemma to resign in favour of a Labor "leftist", Nathan Rees, in September 2008. Rees then introduced a revised version of privatisation, and the unions subsided. Now Rees has been ousted by another Labor right-winger, Kristina Keneally, and she looks like to be ousted by the Liberals soon.

In Queensland, too, most of the unions, and the official Labor left, have gone along with privatisations pushed through by the nominally Labor-left state premier, Anna Bligh. (Although the Australian Labor Party is structurally

similar to the pre-Blair British Labour Party, one difference is that openly proclaimed "left" and "right" factions play a big role, and are usually run mainly by "left" and "right" unions. But the "left" is... not very left).

The lull will not last for ever, and maybe even will not last long. Two obvious possible triggers for a turnaround are a future rise in inflation, and a crisis in China in the fall-out from its hectic and unbalanced growth. But for now — so a conference of the Australian Workers' Liberty group in Melbourne on 27 February resolved — the emphasis for socialists must be on education, patient explanation, consolidation, and preparation.

Number 42 of the Australian Workers' Liberty newsletter came out soon after the conference. The conference resolved to continue the newsletter — in a modest format — on a regular monthly schedule. Of late it had become irregular.

Activists from Sydney reported on the reading group about the economic crisis which they had run there, and their plans to launch a new study group, probably around David Harvey's *The Enigma of Capital* in cooperation with left-wing academics at the University of Sydney.

In Brisbane, a reading group launched by Workers' Liberty on Gramsci's *Prison*

Notebooks has acquired its own autonomy, and is still going strong after nearly two years of weekly meetings.

Activists in Melbourne plan to start a study group there within the coming months.

Workers' Liberty activists are also active, sometimes very active, in their unions. The meeting discussed the campaign against the victimisation of Workers' Liberty activist Bob Carnegie from an offshore gas rig. The rank-and-file *Vigilance Bulletin* circulated among Sydney port workers has taken up the campaign, and we talked about ways of helping and developing collaboration with the *Vigilance Bulletin*.

Workers' Liberty has been central to the AusIraq group, a solidarity campaign for Iraqi workers and unions based in Sydney. Through AusIraq's work, one of Australia's biggest unions, the CFMEU, sent an official delegate to the Iraqi workers' conference in Erbil in early 2009.

AusIraq is now trying to develop direct links — regular phone or webchat conversations — between Iraqi trade unionists and Australian trade unionists. Lynn Smith reported that US unionists active in US Labor Against the War are keen to make such links three-way if they can be set up, and there should be possibilities for getting British trade unionists involved too.

Whether Workers' Liberty members should reinvest more effort into exploring and intervening into the Australian Labor Party was left as an item for further discussion.

Arenas to the left of the ALP do not look promising. Workers' Liberty was active in the Australian Socialist Alliance when it was set up in 2001, but after a while it dwindled. When the "Castroite" DSP "dissolved itself" into the SA last year, it was actually a rationalisation of the fact that the SA had shrunk to nothing much but the DSP.

In mid 2008 the DSP suffered a split of a minority around those who had been its long-time leaders, John Percy, Doug Lorimer, and others, now reorganised as the RSP. Also in 2008 three splinter groups in Australia linked to the SWP (Britain) came back together to form a new "official" SWP group, Solidarity, but it is still very weak compared to the "official" SWP group of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ISO. A "dissident" SWP group, Socialist Alternative, dating back to a split from the ISO in 1995, is doing better for itself, but by a tactic focused ruthlessly on propaganda and recruitment to the exclusion of broader initiatives.

The most serious activists of the Australian workers' movement will be reassessing, taking stock, and striving to educate themselves.

POLICY FILE: INEQUALITY

About 50 per cent of the population identify as "working class". Despite the term 'working class' vanishing completely from the official language of the Labour Party, the proportion claiming this now-unspoken identity has been fairly stable since the 1950s.

To be working class is to be at one pole of a pair. The other pole is the capitalist class. There are many middling groups, but the two main poles are clear. Most of us sell our labour-power to capital (or try to), and receive in exchange a more-or-less "living wage". At the other pole is a small group of bosses and elite officials who live from property income (shares, interest, etc) or from high salaries which they allot themselves. They accumulate wealth. That core class division defines capitalism.

In Britain, inequality of wealth and income has grown since Margaret Thatcher's Tory government took office 38 years ago. This inequality has increased further under New Labour, though not as fast as under the Tories. The top 1% increased their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% in the first six years of the Labour government.

In 1999, company bosses pocketed on average 47 times as much as workers. By 2009 they took 128 times as much.

Tories and New Labourites claim that equality is impossible, but we do have "equal opportunity", or could have it with a few more commissions, investigations, regulations, and mission statements. Barrow-boys become bankers, as long as they have the wit and the energy. If you fall behind, it's because you're idle or stupid.

Actually, Britain is at the bottom of the league for social mobility, among the richer countries — along with the USA, another country where free-market economics and union-bashing have been unleashed with exceptional force. In Britain, if A's dad has twice the income of B, then A is likely to end up with 40% more income than B.

And social mobility is getting less. Born in 1958 into a family in the bottom quarter of income-earners, you had a 17% chance of getting into the top quarter by the age of 30. Born in 1970, your chance was down to 11%.

Kids from poorer families lose out just because they are poorer.

Thirty years ago poorer men died 5.5 years before the well-off; now the gap is 7.5 years. The gap has grown despite improvements in housing and food availability, and despite a decline in heavy manual work.

Evidence is conclusive: poorer people are more stressed and less healthy because they are unequal, not just because they are poor. Being part of an exploited class is bad for your health.

An unequal society is unhealthier and unhappier even for the modestly well-off than an equal society.

No socialist proposes some artificially complete equality, still less uniformity. Socialism means greater freedom, and a flowering of individual freedom released from the compulsion on the majority to put most of our energy and majority into work shaped and organised so as to maximise the profits of the wealthy minority.

But equal access for all to decent food, housing, education, culture, and leisure is possible.

Immediately, the labour movement needs to fight to push up the minimum wage, to expand public services, to enforce a big expansion of council housing, and to tax the rich.

New Labour leaders claim, truly, that their changes in the tax and benefit system have somewhat favoured the worse-off. But the capitalist system has its own inbuilt mechanisms to increase inequality despite such changes.

Over the last 13 years, those inbuilt trends to inequality have far outpaced New Labour's little tinkering.

Peter Mandelson famously said in 1998 that he was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich". The fact is, some people getting filthy rich means other people getting filthier poor, and society getting filthy unequal.

To deal with the issue fundamentally we have to go beyond taxing the rich. The labour movement should fight for a workers' government which will take the whole of high finance into public ownership, under democratic control, as a public banking, mortgage, and pension service. The big corporations should be nationalised and run under workers' control. Democratic socialist planning should replace the free run of the market.

POLICY FILE:

WOMEN'S EQUALITY

On the latest figures, women's average hourly pay is still 20.2 per cent less than men's. The pay gap is bigger in the private sector, but the New Labour government has rejected union calls to make mandatory equal-pay audits compulsory

The Government insists (despite union demands) that money for equal pay in public-service jobs must be found from existing NHS, Local Authorities and other public sector bodies' budgets. Thus, divisive deals have been agreed in many areas, with the claims of women workers being set against male workers who then suffer pay cuts

Women still bear most of the burden of housework and childcare. The New Labour government introduced a right to some pre-school care for all three and four year olds. But nursery provision for under-threes remains scarce and usually expensive

And the public provision for three and four year olds is now being cut. "Thousands of children in some of the most deprived parts of the country will have their nursery provision cut by half, despite the Government's decision to delay an overhaul of early-years funding

"Local authorities, including Birmingham and Newcastle, plan to cut free education in nursery schools to just 15 hours a week". (*Times Educational Supplement*, 12/02/10)

The average employed woman living with an employed male partner does 15 hours a week of housework. The average male in two-jobs household does only five. Some of that inequality is due to traditional prejudices that no government could fix rapidly, but those prejudices are kept in place by the economic structures which channel women into part-time and lower-paid jobs

Women head nine out of ten one-parent families, and these women are facing new pressures under New Labour welfare "reforms". Measures introduced in November 2008 will gradually erode the length of time lone parents can claim income support. By 2011 most will only be able to claim until their youngest child's seventh birthday — nine years less than the current entitlement

Single parents with children as young as one will be required to go on training courses and work experience.

Cuts will make all this worse. Obvious targets for the Tories are child tax credit and working families tax credit, on which many worse-off women depend.

Conservative leader David Cameron has said he will back a cut in the legal time limit for abortion. This cut is supposed to be justified on grounds of improvement in medical science, but doctors oppose the cut. The practical result of the cut would be to deny abortion rights to some women who wouldn't get the doctors' say-so until it was impossible to be absolutely sure that they were within the time limit.

Shadow Defence Secretary Liam Fox has advocated a "huge restriction if not abolition" of abortion. Of Tory candidates in the target seats which the Tories have to win to get a majority, more than 83 per cent say they want the abortion time-limit cut.

The left and the in the general

What "efficiency savings" really mean

Christine Hulme is vice-chair of the PCS Department of Work and Pensions South-East Region, and secretary of Slough constituency Labour Party.

There is a lot of talk now about "efficiency savings" in the civil service. It's not new. That has been part of the spending reviews for many years.

The difference between Tories and Labour at this point is that Labour have laid out the spending review for years ahead. The Tories have provided no detail, just given a ballpark figure of the spending cuts they want.

They have given a commitment to no compulsory redundancies, and I think they may be able to keep to that, but only because in a department like mine, Job Centre Plus, we have 84,000 staff... of whom 15,000 are temps.

Public sector pensions are at risk. Whichever party wins the election will attack our pensions. Labour will probably try to increase the retirement age and to impose a rise in staff contributions. The Tories will try the same sort of thing, but more of it.

In Slough, the constituency Labour Party is well organised, though bureaucratic, and we canvass every week all year round, not just at election time.

We have 550 members in the constituency, and of those about 150 more or less regularly active. A lot of the Labour activists are also involved in local community activity, in the Pakistani or Kashmiri communities, and they are used to being out on the streets.

It helps in terms of policy locally that the Labour councillors and activists have to hear what people want, on the doorstep. But in the general election, so far, it's a choice for the voters between bad and really, really bad. The immediate issue is the speed of cuts. The Tory party is wedded to the idea of making cuts and contracting out more services quickly.

In Slough, the Labour Party tends to focus in its campaigning on a few good things the Labour government has done — the minimum wage, child tax credit, SureStart...

I have also been active in the Labour campaign in Hayes and Harlington, where John McDonnell is standing. There the campaign is focused instead on what a real Labour government *should* be doing, about affordable housing, or fighting redundancies, for example.

In Hayes and Harlington the difficulty is to get voters to see John McDonnell and his politics as something separate from the general record of the Labour government. But John McDonnell has a reputation as a hard-working, campaigning MP on a range of issues, and that helps.

Yes he will.

Take on the financial system!

Katy Clark is Labour candidate and outgoing MP in Ayrshire North and Arran.

The general election is a really important time because it's about the only opportunity that people get to show what they think. I find it concerning that many people aren't even sure whether they are going to vote at all.

That's partly because they see there is not much to choose between the main parties. I hope people are given real choice, in the weeks to come, by the Labour Party.

We're facing massive cuts in public spending, especially if the Tories get in, but so far the issue of National Insurance increases has been dominating the economic debate.

I want to see real debate about the economic crisis we've been through, what caused it, and how we make sure it doesn't happen again.

What would I say about that? We need to regulate the banks; take on the financial system; make people understand where power really lies, in the big banks and the multinationals, and take them on.

Labour has failed women

Rebecca Galbraith is an ESOL teacher and socialist feminist activist campaigning with Feminist Fightback.

Three issues I think are particularly important for socialists, in and beyond the election, are the public service cuts, the increase in racist politics, particularly against migrants, and the abolition of welfare support.

I work at Hackney College, one of the many Further Education colleges facing cuts and compulsory redundancies. We hear about the deficit, and the need to make cutbacks so often that it is understandable many people start to feel the government has no choice.

We are told to "tighten our belts" and that we are all in this together — we need to counter this. There is a notion that free education, state-funded childcare, etc, are something "nice to have" that we cannot afford now. We are told that there are not enough resources to go around. We can see the consequences of this with anti-migrant racism, and media attacks on benefit claimants.

Thinking about FE, there are colleges who don't have money left in reserves and who will struggle to stay open, let alone say no to the cuts. We need to put pressure on managers to stop the cuts, but more so we need to show that the government doesn't have to cut. Our intervention needs to be made now, around the time of the election, when politicians are nominally more susceptible to pressure.

In union campaigns against the cuts we need to go beyond the industrial issues and look at the political demands the class struggle needs. There are a lot of strikes at the moment, and that trend could continue, but these could well be depoliticised, unless we can make the socialist voice stronger and the labour movement political voice stronger.

Jenny Sutton is running as a TUSC candidate with the backing of UCU London Region. I'm supporting her campaign because it is closely tied to the UCU campaign against the cuts, it pushes for this to be as political as possible. It has a strong gender, race and class analysis and it shows the Labour Party's attack on education for what it is.

There have been questions in UCU meetings about the union's ties to Labour, how we hold Labour to account, how we hold the unions to account. I don't think it is wrong for unions to support independent candidates. Among other things, it is a way of holding Labour to account. Yet,

e labour movement election

living in Hackney, there is no socialist running so the Labour choice is to vote for Meg Hillier — a supporter of Yarl's Wood detention centre, among other crimes. While I agree broadly with the AWL arguments about the Labour-union link it feels fairly abstract, and the prospect of voting for Labour now, galling.

Both Tories and Labour are targeting women voters. This is contemptible, given their records. I think many feminists won't vote at all because all the parties are so bad for women. Clearly the Tories will be qualitatively worse. Already Cameron has spoken to the Catholic Church about lowering the abortion time limit from 24 to 20 weeks and allowing faith schools to opt out of teaching sex education. At the same time Labour's record has been appalling.

There is a case for feminists putting forward their own analysis and alternative programme, but this task seems fairly daunting for such a small socialist feminist movement to take on. More plausibly, socialist feminists should get involved and support candidates like Jill Mountford or Jenny Sutton who make the fight for women's rights explicit in their campaigns.

Build collective strength

Ryan Slaughter is an organiser for Community, a union formed from the merger of steel, ceramics and textile workers' unions. His comments come from a longer interview about Community's campaigns to organise betting shop workers, which will appear in the next issue of *Solidarity*.

Community is affiliated to the Labour Party, and that is about changing where the Labour Party is. We want people to be affiliated to CLPs and active within Trades Councils and debating their issues.

In recent years people who've attended CLP meetings aren't workers and people who're engaged in day-to-day struggles. We want people to understand the importance of engaging in politics and getting active in it.

A Tory government would be very damaging for us. Things like union learning programmes would go straight away, and those pots of money are so crucial to our movement. When you've got people who've worked in a steel mill since they were 16 and suddenly lose their job in their 50s, the union movement can use those resources to help their members develop the skills to get a new start and opportunities. Those programmes would be under threat under a Tory government.

The trade union movement can learn from what we've done in the betting shop sector. Winning recognition agreements is important but it's not the be-all and end-all.

Fundamentally it's about how you organise. We could've gone for a partnership approach or voluntary relationships, but we decided to organise directly and build up workers' collective confidence. If recognition or an official relationship with

management comes as a result then fine, but it's not the starting point. With a Tory government will come serious attacks on recognition agreements, and bosses pushing for de-recognition. That means the union movement has to set about building up our collective strength on the ground, from the bottom-up.

Break with Labour

Luke Hawksbee is a student activist in the Education Not for Sale network and an anarchist.

I think we're seeing the pinnacle of stagnation in our political culture. A hung parliament in particular would be the product not of a consciously divided society but of an electorate blind to class interests.

As a student activist, a potential Tory government for me would mean more privatisation, deeper cuts, higher fees, greater exclusion of the vulnerable, and

the erosion of the public services students depend on. In short – more work for me!

It's high time unions and the left groups broke with Labour. I may not necessarily believe a mass working-class party is the key to revolution, but I do believe it can be a bulwark against the attacks on us and a step forward in class consciousness. New Labour is no longer working-class in any sense, and the policy of tailing the trade union bureaucracy just isn't working.

Unity in the face of cuts is essential. When it comes to students, that means drawing the links to the rest of the public sector as a first step. Expecting more than this would be wildly optimistic.

The first step towards building working-class anti-capitalism as a real force in British society would be a concerted and active effort to crush sectarianism from below. We need open debate and serious collaboration.

Even a "new Old Labour"-type organisation, with new militants active within it, would be a step forward.

Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists

New supporters of the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists over the last couple of weeks include David Drew, Labour MP for Stroud; Pete Firmin, Joint Secretary of the Labour Representation Committee and political officer of CWU London West End Amal branch; and Dave Osler, Hackney North CLP and blogger at davidosler.com.

The campaign links a Labour vote to keep out the Tories with an effort to organise in the labour movement for working-class policies and for the unions to call Labour to account on those policies.

Christine Hulme, secretary of Slough CLP and vice-chair of PCS DWP South-East region, Val Graham, Derbyshire Unison and Chesterfield CLP, and Jason Hill, vice chair Musicians' Union Midlands Region, and activist in North Staffordshire Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, Andrew Coates, Branch Chair UNITE 1/460 Ipswich, and Theo Simon, lead singer of Seize The Day, are among many others who have also signed up. All signatories are in a personal capacity.

Some of the new signatories have taken bundles of SCSTF leaflets to distribute, or joined other SCSTF supporters as we go onto the streets to take the message to a broader public.

In Islington, north London, we have a local SCSTF leaflet for our street stalls, written by Climate Camp activists who independently came to roughly the same political conclusions as SCSTF.

A comment by one young woman who stopped at the SCSTF Islington stall last Saturday, 10 April, encapsulates the reason why we need these stalls.

Taking copies of all the literature she could get, she said it was good to come across because it was the first election she'd been able to vote in, and no-one seemed to be giving her any information.

The media are full of election coverage, giving all the information anyone could ever want about Sarah Brown's and Samantha Cameron's dress sense, and (in the style of a commentator giving tennis scores) about the latest wobbles in the opinion polls.

But quite likely this woman won't have had anyone offering her serious, informative discussion about the election, face-to-face.

In comparison with previous close-fought general elections, the streets are eerily quiet.

There are few other political stalls. There are few posters about. Many left-minded people are stuck in a mindset where they will go and vote Labour with gritted teeth on 6 May, or maybe just sit it out, but do not see their way forward clearly enough to be vocal and outgoing about election choices.

The job of SCSTF is to rally those who are — or can be made to be — vocal and outgoing, so that we can use the election to offer others a broader political perspective.

The basic SCSTF statement has now

Lib Dems are not radical

Chris Marks is Vice-President Education at Hull University Union and stood as a socialist candidate for the presidency of the National Union of Students.

Our student union is promoting a hustings in the SU along with the UCU, on the premise of putting pressure on candidates around pro-worker, pro-student policies.

There is some vague pro-Lib Dem sentiment among students but that's not really reflected at Hull. Lib Dems control the city council, but it's Labour in the student areas.

The Liberals are certainly not a progressive or radical alternative. They're also talking about making cuts. They've dropped their commitment to free education and working-class activists shouldn't be fooled into thinking that they'll be any different from the other two parties.

been produced as a printed broadsheet. Special SCSTF leaflets are available against the BNP (£20 per thousand), on cuts, on inequality, on housing, on women's rights, and on green jobs. SCSTF posters are available to display on stalls and noticeboards.

All of this material is available from the SCSTF website. Also downloadable from the website is the trade-union petition against cuts, a useful tool for approaching people when doing street stalls or going door to door.

By the time this article reaches most readers, we will have not much more than two weeks until polling day. Two weeks to rouse ourselves to get out there and offer some answers to people like that young woman in Islington.

In those two weeks we also have to find time to prepare for follow-up after 6 May.

In London, the SCSTF is co-sponsoring a conference initiated by the Labour Representation Committee for 15 May — "After the election, join the resistance" — and is setting up its own post-election organising meeting to take place on the same day as the broader conference, after the close of the conference and in the same place.

In Sheffield, SCSTF supporters are discussing with local Labour Representation Committee organisers plans for a joint SCSTF-LRC follow-up meeting on 19 May.

● <http://bit.ly/scstf>

CAMBERWELL AND PECKHAM

Housing, jobs, and pay on people's minds in election

By JILL MOUNTFORD (AWL
CANDIDATE IN PECKHAM AND
CAMBERWELL)

I met Paul while I was canvassing, and this is what he told me: "Even if you can't beat the Labour machine in this constituency, well done for standing."

"It is a good job someone is raising these ideas. Socialist ideas are the only real alternative to capitalist ideas, the only real ideas that can create a better, more secure world for the majority of people. Labour have forgotten the working class even at election time. I hope people vote for you to make it known that they support the big ideas even if you can't beat Labour this time round. Good luck."

And then at our public meeting on the Lettsom estate last Saturday, Chris said:

"I find it hard to tell the difference between Labour and the Tories. Blair continued where Thatcher and the Tories finished off in 1997. Brown is no better than Blair, still the unions are crippled by the anti-union laws the Tories introduced."

"There needs to be a big drive to unionise workers in the private and public sectors in preparation for the attacks on jobs and services that will take place — whichever of the two parties win the election. Workers are going to be forced to defend their jobs, and the services they provide."

Throughout the campaign housing, jobs and pay have been the big issues on the minds of many of the people in the constituency.

There simply aren't enough council homes in the area, and a large proportion of the stock is in poor repair. People complain that the local council (Lib-Dem/Tory-controlled) fails to invest in certain estates in preparation for selling them off, and rebuilding them with fewer and smaller homes under the private finance initiative. On one of these estates — which has more than 8,000 residents on it — residents point out in anger that the local council takes their rent money every month and invests nothing back.

The job situation is as bad for many workers and families. People complain about the kind of jobs that are on offer in the area: part time, low-paid, non-unionised work, where the statutory minimum wage is often ignored.

I've talked to people who work for the local council and their fear is redundancy in the coming months. One woman, a single mum, a frontline worker in housing, says:

"Unison needs to get themselves sorted so we can fight the council bosses and defend workers' jobs and residents' services."

She went on to say:
"I can't afford to be unemployed. It's not just losing a wage, though that's bad. It's what it does to people."

"I'm a young mum, and I know I need to set a good example to my little boy about working hard for a living. He needs to know what's important when he grows up. But he also needs to know that if I lose my job and become unemployed and have to live on benefits, it's not my fault — it's Gordon Brown's fault, it's the government and the banks' fault if I lose my job."

Security after Labour's 1997 general election victory, she oversaw cuts in lone parent benefit and incapacity benefit. Her championing of feminism in other contexts did not extend to working-class women, nor her principles of equality to the disabled. The move was unpopular, she lost her job.

Four years later she returned to the front bench as Solicitor General. Yet unlike many of her fellow MPs she is not a barrister.

In the election for Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Harman was seen as, and continues to be seen as, a politician from the centre of the party. The tag does not involve voting against the government on any single occasion.

What it does mean is making speeches to meetings of the "left of centre" pressure group Compass, and playing up the radical overtones of her feminism and the "equality agenda".

Back in January this year Harriet Harman posed as a class warrior against the rich, saying that class and inequality were still huge issues in British society, and being mildly critical of her own government.

As AWL candidate in the general election, Jill Mountford put it in a letter to the *Guardian*, if Harman had any credibility she would admit to all the other

CANVASSERS REPORT...

Daniel: I had a long conversation on a doorstep with a man who was a long-standing Labour voter who said he would never vote Labour again. He argued that the Labour Party had failed to support the working class and the poor.

He intended to vote Lib Dem. I am not sure if I persuaded him, but he was pro-union and he did not know the Lib Dems' anti-union record in — for example — local government.

He bought a paper and maybe I will go back and have another discussion next week.

Edward: I had a discussion with a disabled woman who argued that increasing the minimum wage to £8.80 per hour (a demand displayed prominently on our election leaflets) would not benefit her directly, but the quality of care she received would improve if her carers were better paid.

We took a street cleaner leafletting with us — I am not sure he had ever done anything like this before. It was a good experience. We gave out several hundred leaflets outside Peckham mosque last Friday. We had lots of good discussions and sold seven copies of *Solidarity*.

Mark: It is now very easy to sell socialist newspapers, and noticeably easier on estates than in more middle class areas.

We have had small numbers of people at our public meetings, but the discussions that have taken place have been useful. There's not much of a culture of

attending meetings any more. But people do want to talk and we've had lots of debates and discussions on doorsteps.

A lot of working class people just simply don't know how to engage. They feel disenfranchised because no mainstream political party articulates a view they share, and disgusted by politicians who they feel are rotten and corrupt.

It is sometimes hard to disagree. I had a long discussion with a woman worker who knew very well she was being exploited, but who couldn't see the point of voting for a small socialist group (of course we won't win the seat, or come anywhere near either) and thought her union was rubbish (it sounded as if it was).

I think part of the answer is to explain that the vote is not the main issue for us. What we're doing is making socialist propaganda for the long-term. After the election, we'll still be here. The more people we can convince now, organise now, the better we will be able to resist the cuts that are coming — no matter who wins.

Anita: I did a bit of canvassing this evening. I didn't have a lot of time, so I only managed half a street — about 25 doorbells — and yet I found a man that reckons he'll vote for any genuine socialist candidate.

It was interesting to hear what people thought. Most were undecided, though I think most of the indecision was about whether to bother voting at all. A few people said that whatever they did, they wouldn't vote Tory.

I was struck again by what an excellent opportunity the election is to get into political conversations on the doorstep. Not everyone would spend time talking to me, but they were apologetic about that, they were generally very prepared to talk.

Overall, I think canvassing is really worthwhile doing, I think it's actually part of the reason why standing in elections is a good thing for socialists to do.

Cath said she'd enjoyed canvassing during the campaign.

"I found it quite scary at first. People have such very different ways of expressing themselves, and so many different angles on the same important questions. To be able to reply coherently, and to break down some big ideas in to understandable chunks is a difficult skill.

"People can be quite eclectic too. People can acknowledge the need for workers to stick together, and still complain about work-shy single mums 'getting flats easily' or Eastern Europeans 'robbing benefits'.

"A lot of the myths in circulation are simply that: myths. Eastern European migrants mostly can't claim benefits, and no-one gets council flats easily — single mums, or anyone else. There are very few council flats! There's a waiting list of many thousands!"

● To contact the campaign, email jill@workersliberty.org or telephone 07796 690874.

WHO ARE THEY?

**HARRIET
HARMAN**

Harriet Harman has been the MP for Camberwell and Peckham since the 1997 general election, and before that was the MP for Peckham since 1982 until the constituency's abolition.

As well as being the Labour Party's Deputy Leader (since 2007) and Chair of the Party, the Leader of the House of Commons, the Lord Privy Seal, and Minister for Women and Equality.

After Barbara Castle (in the 1960s and 70s) Harriet Harman is the most powerful woman MP the Labour Party has ever had. She is also the longest continuously-serving female MP in the current House of Commons.

Does her political reputation match her formal credentials?

Privately educated Harman started her political career at the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty) but most of that career has been spent in the House of Commons.

As Secretary of State for Social

BOOK/ART

A memoir for a generation

Jordan Savage reviews *Just Kids* by Patti Smith.

This book is neither biography nor autobiography. It is not a book about Robert Mapplethorpe, it is not a book about Patti Smith.

Unlike Suze Rotollo's *A Freewheelin' Time: a memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties*, it is not the chronicle of a specific time in a specific place. Instead, this is the transformation of Smith's emotional experience of her relationship with visual artist Mapplethorpe into an object that communicates those emotions directly to the reader.

Rather than having structured chapters, *Just Kids* moves in waves of mood, determined by the state of Smith's relationship to Mapplethorpe at the time. Their relationship is also likely to determine the book's setting: if they are together, the action takes place in New York, when they are apart we head out, usually to France. Mapplethorpe coheres the characters of the book around him, so the periods that Smith spends alone are investigations of her own artistic growth, her journeys in search of the poets, of Jim Morrison and particularly of Rimbaud.

Mapplethorpe's developing relationship with his sexuality is also crucial to the tone of the book. Smith examines both Mapplethorpe's developing homosexual identity, and her own reaction to it, and the result is a sensitive, reflective account of the impact of attitudes to homosexuality and what is often more problematic ground — the impact of homosexuality on those whose lives are immediately affected by it.

Smith writes: "I think having to define his identity in terms of sexuality was foreign to him. His drives towards men were consuming but I never felt loved any less." Over and over again, Smith reiterated the profound connection she had with Mapplethorpe, and talks about what she calls the "duality" of his sexuality.

In many ways *Just Kids* offers a convincing challenge to a society in which we are expected to define our identities in terms of our sexuality — Smith identifies the conflict of social pressure to choose one lifestyle or another as something that Mapplethorpe found particularly stultifying.

The arc of his career as an artist is mapped out; he begins as a Catholic boy

painting angelic figures, the Madonna and child. Through experimentation with drugs and with his sexuality he progresses through darker, diabolic imagery; through work that deals with

taboo, violent edges of human sexual relationships and the BDSM scene until he emerges in the 1980s and 1990s as a portrait artist.

Divine and diabolic give way ultimate-

ly to human, and he becomes more balanced and confident in his understanding of himself. In the softer, lighter colours of his later work, he is able to return to Smith, his early muse, mimicking his troubled early mother and child images in his portraits of the singer and her children.

Cameo appearances in the book by the greatest artists and musicians of the 1970s could smack of opportunism, but the very arrangement of events in *Just Kids* makes it clear that as much as anything else, this is a book about artistic process. Bob Neuwirth's intense fits of writing; Gregory Corso's arrogance and neurosis — Smith opens the door on the structures behind one of the most prolific counter-cultural art scenes yet known, offering an explanation of how the energy and feeling of different parts of a movement bled into one another along the shared corridors of the Chelsea Hotel.

At times in *Just Kids* it does feel quite clear that prose is not Smith's preferred form. Most of the writing is lyrical and imbued with the images, energy and emotion familiar from her poetry and songs. This provides a highly wrought field, against which occasional peppering of colloquialism jar: Smith clearly intends to create a specific mood, an almost-fictionalised, elevated New York scene where the events of her narrative unfold. Smith asks a commitment to Romanticism from her readers, and too-modern or too-familiar language occasionally makes it hard to sustain this effort. For those eager to forgive, these moments do lend a note of authenticity; this is not just a dream narrative, but rather an account of real people and real things, told by an author who was also a participant.

Just Kids is a truly extraordinary book in terms of its subject, personal and political content and the manner in which it was written. From the outset it is inevitable that at the book's conclusion, Robert Mapplethorpe must die of AIDS-related complications. This is not only a Bildungsroman for Smith and Mapplethorpe, and an exciting background to the end of the hippy generation and the birth of punk, *Just Kids* is a memoir for the AIDS generation: the story of a scene, of sexuality and social attitudes, and a memoir for all the victims of an unanticipated threat.

Smith and Mapplethorpe

Contours of "Holocaust denial"

Andy McKay reviews *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* by Meir Litvak and Esther Webman.

This is good reading for anyone wishing to understand the current situation in the Middle East. It explains the centrality of "Holocaust denial" to Islamist and much other Arab political discourse, putting it into both its correct historical context and the wider context of the often incomprehensible politics of the most volatile region in the world.

Throughout the rest of the world "historians" like David Irving, Robert Faurisson and Fred Leuchter are discredited and viewed as little more than apologists

for Nazism. In the Arab world and Iran they are heroes whose views are regularly and sympathetically reported in leading newspapers and periodicals, supported in intellectual and religious circles. They are invited to address conferences and conventions sponsored by Arab ruling elites and in Iran by Ahmadinejad himself.

One of the many substantial strengths of this book is its very clear explanation of the crucial difference between "Holocaust denial" inside and outside the Arab world. In the rest of the world Holocaust deniers are neo-Nazi sympathisers who seek to exonerate Hitler's regime and deny the crimes of Nazism. In contrast, in the Arab world, as the Holocaust shows Jews as victims it is seem to give legitimacy and justification of Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel. It also,

so the script goes, detracts from the victimhood of the Palestinians. The political purpose in denying the Holocaust is not to support Nazism, which many Arabs detest, but to destroy the legitimacy of Israel.

The book also explain the absurdity and often contradictory myths at the heart of much Arab political thinking — there was a Holocaust but it was minimal, nothing compared to the suffering of the Palestinians; the Jews brought it on themselves; the Nazis had to do it in legitimate self-defence; it was only carried out with Zionist collaboration and to serve Zionist interests. All these myths are based on a distortion of history and a falsification of the facts, but they serve a key purpose in enabling the Arab ruling elite to mislead the Arab masses. This is an excellent and timely book.

BOOK

Sixties radicals and the Holocaust

Stan Crooke reviews *Utopia or Auschwitz – Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust* (Hans Kundnani).

Kundnani argues that the wave of radicalism which swept through (parts of) Germany in the mid to late 1960s had an “ambivalent relationship” to the country’s Nazi past, and that this “ambivalent relationship” also found expression in the “Red-Green” coalition governments elected in 1998 and 2002.

German radicals of the 1960s differed in some basic aspects of their politics from their counterparts in other European countries. They were more influenced by the writings of the Frankfurt School of philosophy (Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse) and their concept of “repressive tolerance” — society might appear to be liberal in its toleration of dissent, but this was really just a facade for its essentially repressive nature.

The role of revolutionaries, it followed, was to stage provocations which would push the state into taking repressive measures. This would expose the true nature of the state, thereby destroying illusions in the supposed liberal nature of late capitalism.

The working class had effectively been ‘bought off’ by capitalism and integrated into capitalist society. The agent of revolutionary change was therefore to be found in Third World national liberation movements and marginalised groups in the metropolis (such as migrant workers or delinquent youth).

Unlike their political counterparts elsewhere, German radicals also directly confronted the question of the Nazi Holocaust. Their parents had failed to prevent genocide — or had even condoned it. And ex-Nazis still held key political, judicial, military and financial positions in West Germany.

The radicals were “torn between the dream of a socialist Utopia and the nightmare of the Holocaust,” writes Kundnani. They “wrestled with the question of what it meant to be German after Auschwitz.” They

saw themselves confronted with “an all-or-nothing choice: Utopia or Auschwitz.”

In fact, though, the radicals’ relationship to the country’s Nazi past (and, as some of them saw it, Nazi present) was problematic.

Terms such as “Holocaust”, “Auschwitz” and “Nazis” were bandied around so liberally that the uniqueness of the Nazi Holocaust disappeared from view. Some radicals went a stage further and argued that revolutionary struggle would be possible only when Germans stopped having “hang-ups” (sic) about Jews.

The simplistic notion of “anti-imperialism” which the bulk of the radical left in Germany operated in the late 1960s also resulted in a particularly crude “anti-Zionism” which overlapped with anti-semitism. This was hardly consistent with the commitment to eliminating all leftovers of fascism in contemporary German society.

Kundnani also argues that there was a substantial streak of German nationalism amongst the German radicals. While there certainly was such a streak, Kundnani arguably vastly overestimates its significance.

That the left supported movements of national liberation in the remaining colonies is not evidence, as claimed by Kundnani, that the left was nationalistic in outlook. It simply means they recognised the right of peoples to be free from colonialism.

Nonetheless Kundnani’s analysis will sober up anyone who thinks that “anti-Zionism” is necessarily a different beast from anti-semitism, and that being of the left necessarily provides immunity from anti-semitism.

The second part of Kundnani’s book, however, is not only less readable but also less convincing.

Kundnani runs through the last thirty years of German history, covering the campaigns against nuclear power and the deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles, German unification, the emergence of “Red-Green” coalitions at regional and

national level, and the evolution of German foreign policy under those governments.

This overlaps with occasional snapshots of the later politics of some of the leaders of the student movement, and a much longer, but not particularly accurate, description of the rise of Joschka Fischer to the position of Germany’s Foreign Minister.

Kundnani’s bibliography indicates that he has read Jutta Dittfurth’s *The End of the Greens – Farewell from Hope* and Christian Schmidt’s *We Are the Berserkers – Joschka Fischer and his Frankfurt Gang*. But the Fischer who inhabits the pages of Kundnani’s book is far removed from the Fischer whom Dittfurth and Schmidt knew and describe so mercilessly in their writings.

Kundnani argues that the foreign policy pursued by the “Red-Green” coalition government gave expression to two different responses to the Holocaust. The responses led to the same conclusion — support for German involvement in NATO military actions — but, claims Kundnani, for very different reasons.

On the one hand, Fischer regarded the Holocaust as something which placed a particular obligation on Germany to take action to prevent another genocide. Hence his support for German intervention in Kosova.

On the other hand, the SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schroder embodied an approach to the Holocaust (supposedly) represented by student leader Rudi Dutschke. Schroder wanted to see Germany as a “normal” country that had overcome the Holocaust and its Nazi past. Like any other “normal” country, Germany should take part in NATO military action.

This argument is unconvincing on a number of levels, not the least of which is the assumed continuity of political thought between the Frankfurt anarchist Joschka Fisher and the German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, and a similar assumed continuity of political thought between Rudi Dutschke and (of all people!) Gerhard Schroder.

Was Brecht a misogynist and fraudster?

By PETER BURTON

Bertold Brecht is well known for his plays, poems, short stories and contributions to theatre theory and practice. His influence is also extensive in the films of Lars von Trier, Werner Fassbinder, Nagisa, Oshima, Ritwik, Ghatak and Jean Luc Godard.

Yet since the publication of John Fuegi’s biography of Brecht in 1994 — *Brecht and Company* — a debate has raged about whether Brecht was a fraud, with perhaps as much as 80% of “his” writing being the work of others, most notably three women — Elisabeth Hauptmann, Greta Steffen and Ruth Berlau.

Fuegi’s central argument is that Brecht had neither the talent nor the will power to write or finish much of the most famous work that he is credited for — *The Threepenny Opera*, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *Galileo*. The book claims the *Threepenny Opera* is 100% the work of Elisabeth Hauptmann Fuegi.

The 700-page biography, researched over 25 years, represents Brecht as an arch-manipulator of people and a misogynist who engaged in “sex for text” deals. Brecht had extraordinary charisma and charm that seduced figures such as Kurt Weill, W H Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and Charles Laughton, as well as the three lovers and creative collaborators Hauptmann, Steffen and Berlau.

Brecht was a product of a middle class upbringing in Augsburg, Germany — an environment and culture that saw “the denigration of women” as “wholly natural”. Plays with strong female characters such as *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, *The Good Woman of Szechuan*, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* could only have been written by these politically committed communist women, argues Fuegi.

Fuegi goes on to accuse Brecht of being a plagiarist, stealing works from French symbolist poets Verlaine and Rimbaud — in the 1927 play *Jungle of the Cities* for example.

Manuscripts in Elisabeth Hauptmann’s handwriting

or her strike pattern on typewritten texts prove beyond doubt that *The Threepenny Opera* was written by Hauptmann without either credit or royalties going to her. To the theory that Brecht might have dictated the text, Fuegi responds that the times and dates of when they were together don’t back this up. Brecht’s own contribution was the song “Mack the Knife” and a few “nips and tucks” to the look of the script.

Brecht’s relationship with women followed a pattern — use them to the point where they break with him. At that point, focus exclusively on the one who has broken away to get her back into the fold, then go back to the same maltreatment that went on before.

By far the most controversial part of the biography is Fuegi lumping Brecht in with Hitler and Stalin.

“To understand this century, it is essential to recognise the wholly irrational power these figures — whether Hitler, Stalin, or Brecht — exerted when they were encountered in person. Brecht is very much a part ... of the charismatic, irrational yet effective Pied Piper powers that could, in the case of both Hitler and Stalin, lure hundreds of millions of supposedly intelligent beings to embrace their butchers.”

Hauptmann, Steffen and Berlau were intriguing women, and Fuegi does a service in relating their stories and showing that they were both talented and more politically committed and ethical than Brecht. When Brecht went into exile in 1933, Hauptmann risked her life by remaining in Berlin in order to gather together and secure all of Brecht’s papers and manuscripts and get them out of Germany.

Hauptmann, according to Fuegi, was the author of most of the short stories. Margaret Stefan contributed significantly to *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Szechuan*. She continued to help Brecht while suffering from TB, dying painfully at the age of 33 from the disease. Her death in 1941, argues Fuegi, meant the virtual death of Brecht as a playwright. Berlau contributed to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Simone Machard*, and *The Good Woman of Szechuan*. She loved Brecht in her words “not wisely, but too well,” and was

not credited by him for her contribution.

In 1997 Sabine Kebir replied to Fuegi in *I didn’t ask for my share: Elisabeth Hauptmann’s Work with Bertold Brecht*. Kebir examined the Hauptmann archives at Berlin’s Akademie der Kunst and referred to previously unknown notes and letters as well as Hauptmann’s 1926 journal. Kebir suggest that as members of the Communist Party in the mid-twenties, they were drawn to the collective of artists, writers and intellectuals around Brecht precisely because it was a collective collaboration that promised to shorten the road to women’s liberation and socialism.

The women were openly interested in sex, sexual experimentation and autonomy in relationships free of ownership claims, including claims to mental property and sexual partners. Open marriages, triangular and bisexual relationships were part of the social utopia they pursued. These sometimes collided with more traditional needs and expectations, resulting in great personal pain — but this was a very different complex, contradictory reality from the passive women-as-victims story that Fuegi represented.

Fuegi’s book makes a strong case for Brecht being an overly controlling, self-centred miser who repeatedly used people and took credit for other’s work. Perhaps he was a misogynist also (in his will he asked to be buried with a stiletto heel through his heart).

Fuegi makes an undeniable case for these women being better known than they are and the book is worth reading for their stories alone.

However, on balance I don’t believe Brecht was a talentless, Svengali figure whose abuse of power was akin to a Hitler or a Stalin. Work like *The Seven Deadly Sins of the Petty Bourgeoisie* and *Days of the Commune* and poems like *The Song of the Class Enemy* and *Questions from a Worker Who Reads* are the work of a very gifted writer who contributed enormously to theatre theory and practice.

• John Fuegi, *Brecht and Company: Sex, Politics, and the Making of the Modern Drama*

LIFE, TIMES AND IDEAS OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI

A philosopher of praxis

We continue a series of articles with an overview of some of the events and political ideas of Antonio Gramsci's life by Martin Thomas.

Antonio Gramsci arrived as a student at Turin University in 1911 and joined the Socialist Party in 1914. He had had a difficult struggle to get to university — his family was poor — and while at university suffered very bad health.

Turin was one of the foremost industrial cities of Italy. Its population had increased from 338,000 to 430,000 between 1901 and 1911, with the growth of the great car factories such as Fiat.

Turin and a few other northern cities were, however, the exception in Italy. Overall Italy was not much more industrialised than Russia. Only about 12% of the employed population were industrial workers.

Figures for 1910:

Cotton consumption, kg per head

Russia 3.0, Italy 5.4

Steel production, kg per head

Russia 38, Italy 28

Coal consumption, kg per head

Russia 300, Italy 270

Italy, like Russia, was a country with some big concentrations of advanced, large-scale industry in the midst of a mainly agricultural and backward economy. Italy's agriculture was not more productive than Russia's.

The biggest structural difference was the much greater development of the cities in Italy. In 1910, Russia had two big cities, and they contained about 2% of the country's population. Italy had six, and they contained 9%. 86% of Russia's population was in agriculture, and only 60% of Italy's.

This also meant, however, that the industrial city of Turin was less central in Italian politics than the industrial city of St Petersburg in Russian politics. Turin was overshadowed in politics by the much less industrial cities of Rome and Naples. The workers of Turin could be isolated and marginalised in a way that the workers of St Petersburg — or London, or Paris, or Berlin, or Barcelona — could not.

Italy had vastly more small-scale urban crafts, small industry, and services than Russia.

Italy, too, was a more or less developed bourgeois democracy, shaped as such in the battles for the unification of Italy between 1859 and 1870. The feudalistic landlord classes of the south had been hegemonised and co-opted by the northern-based bourgeoisie.

The dominant strategy of Italian governments in the early years of the 20th century, under Giovanni Giolitti, was to co-opt northern industrialists and workers by concessions and protectionism, while squeezing the poverty-stricken southern peasantry (many already dependent on remittances from family members who had migrated to work in the USA or Argentina) without mercy.

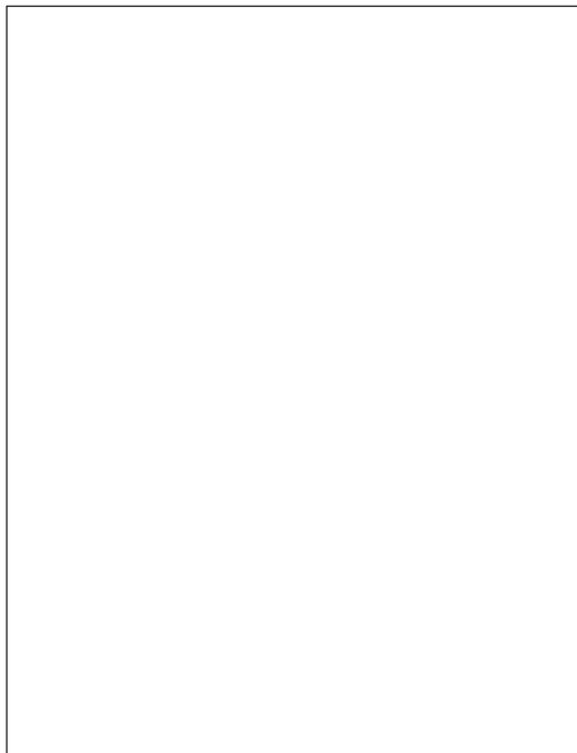
The Turin working class had a history of big struggles. In spring 1906, after a general strike in most of the northern industrial cities, the textile workers of Turin won an eight hour day. In March 1906 Fiat signed a contract recognising the ten hour day and the workers' "Internal Committees" (something like shop stewards' committees).

In summer 1907 a strike for an Internal Committee at Savigliano failed, and in October a protest strike against the shooting of workers in Milan was defeated.

In January 1912 a strike for a shorter working week failed, but a 57 hour week was finally won by a 93-day general strike in 1913.

Italy initially stayed out of World War One, and the Italian Socialist Party opposed the war. By the time Italy joined the war on the side of Britain and France in April 1915, war enthusiasm was ebbing everywhere, and the Socialist Party continued to oppose the war.

There was a wave of strikes in 1915 against Italy entering the war, and a bigger wave of strikes, with street-fighting, in August 1917. But the Socialist Party responded passively, rather than fighting to extend the strikes and bring them to victory.



The young Gramsci

THE FACTORY COUNCILS

By this time Gramsci was working as a journalist on the local Socialist Party press. He welcomed the October 1917 Bolshevik revolution, writing:

"The Bolshevik revolution is a revolution against Marx's *Capital*. In Russia, *Capital* had more influence among the bourgeoisie than among the proletariat. It demonstrated critically how by fatal necessity a bourgeoisie would be constituted in Russia, how a capitalist era would be inaugurated there, how Western-style civilisation would flourish there, long before the proletariat could even think of its own liberation, of its own class interests, of its own revolution... "[This is an exaggerated reference to the role of "legal Marxists" like Struve who took Marx's theory one-sidedly as a celebration of the progressive role of capitalism, and became important figures in bourgeois liberal politics].

"The Bolsheviks have denied Karl Marx, and they have affirmed by their actions, by their conquests, that the laws of historical materialism are less inflexible than was hitherto believed".

The Socialist Party was dominated by the so-called "maximalist" faction, led by Giacinto Serrati. They made many loud calls for revolution — and sincere ones, too: Serrati would end up in the Communist Party — but could see no way of developing workers' actual struggles towards that revolution other than strengthening the Communist Party and waiting for capitalism to collapse through economic crisis.

In March 1919 the whole Socialist Party voted to affiliate to the Communist International. Not even the reformist right wing — a small minority led by Turati, who however controlled the SP group in Parliament — dared oppose affiliation.

The main left-wing faction in the SP was led by Amadeo Bordiga, an activist in Naples. Bordiga's concept of revolution depended on building up an absolutely pure and hard Communist Party. If the Communist Party stuck to a pure revolutionary line, the masses would eventually come to it, and the Party would seize power. But otherwise the party would just bolster up reformist solutions for the bourgeoisie.

Up to mid-1920, Bordiga's main quarrel with Serrati was that Bordiga opposing socialist participation in elections, while Serrati supported it.

Gramsci's 1917 article represented a groping towards a more activist, interventionist conception of revolutionary politics.

In April 1919 Gramsci and a few others founded a new socialist party for Turin, *Ordine Nuovo*. Gramsci wrote later: "The only unifying sentiment arose out of

a vague passion for proletarian culture. We wanted to act, act, act..." They began to ask: "Is there in Italy, or Turin, the germ, the feeblest wish for, or even any fear of, government by Soviets?"

Gramsci answered yes. The germ was there in the Internal Committees.

The Internal Committees did not look promising as embryo Soviets. They were normally nominated by the trade union officials, and they ignored the numerous workers who were not trade union members.

In June 1919 *Ordine Nuovo* started its campaign for the Internal Committees to be transformed into factory councils, elected by the whole workforce. In September 1919 the first factory council was founded, at the Brevetti branch of the Fiat complex. By 26 October, 50,000 workers were represented by factory councils; by the end of the year, 150,000.

Gramsci wrote: "*Ordine Nuovo*, for us and those who followed us, became 'the paper of the factory councils'."

"The factory council is the model of the proletarian state. All the problems inherent in the organisation of the proletarian state are inherent in the organisation of the council.

In the one and the other, the concept of citizen declines and is replaced by the concept of the comrade... Everyone is indispensable; everyone is at his post; and everyone has a function and a post.

Even the most ignorant and backward of the workers, even the most vain and 'civil' of engineers, eventually convinces himself of this truth in the experience of factory occupation. Everyone eventually acquires a communist viewpoint through understanding the great step forward that the communist economy represents over the capitalist economy..."

The right wing and the centre of the Socialist Party were cool on the factory councils because they saw them as cutting across union organisation. Bordiga was cool because he saw the factory councils project as a syndicalistic diversion from fighting for state power. Arguably, he was not entirely wrong. The orientation to the factory councils in the big metal-working factories, where almost all workers were male, meant a lack of attention to other sections of the working class, including most working-class women.

The big metal-working factories were, however, the biggest working-class concentrations in Italy. In April 1920, they led a huge general strike in Turin. The Socialist Party ran no organised campaign to support the workers, and they were defeated.

In June the workers were in struggle again, occupying the factories and continuing production under workers' management. The Socialist Party delegated the task of doing something about the occupations to the leading trade union officials. The union officials organised a referendum in September 1920, posing the question as immediate revolution or negotiations.

A small majority voted for negotiations, and the occupations were defeated. Gramsci wrote: "The emancipation of the proletariat is not a labour of small account and of little men; only he who can keep his heart strong and his will as sharp as a sword when the general disillusionment is at its worst can be regarded as a fighter for the working class or called a revolutionary".

The workers' defeat opened the way for the rise of fascism. Mussolini would take power in October 1922 and consolidate it by 1926. But that was six years. Much remained in the balance over those six years. Gramsci set about trying to shape a new Italian Communist Party to weigh in the balance.

GRAMSCI AND THE WORKING-CLASS NEWSPAPER

Some of the ideas he would bring in to that battle had already been shaped in Gramsci's editing of the paper *Ordine Nuovo*.

Gramsci saw the common run of socialist journalism in his time as agitational, simplistic, bombastic, economic. *Ordine Nuovo* was different, much more reflect-

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L'Ordine Nuovo: Gramsci conceived of it as "a communist cultural review".

tive and "highbrow". He conceived of it as "a communist cultural review".

"We have... set out what we believe a paper, a communist cultural review, should be. Such a paper must aim to become, in miniature, complete in itself, and even though it may be unable to satisfy all the intellectual needs of the nucleus of men who read and support it, who live a part of their lives around it, and who impart to it some of their own life, it must strive to be the kind of journal in which everyone will find things that interest and move him, that will lighten the daily burden of work, economic struggle, and political discussion.

"At the least, the journal should encourage the complete development of one's mental capacities for a higher and fuller life, richer in harmony and in ideological aims, and should be a stimulus for the development of one's own personality".

"The workers loved *Ordine Nuovo* (this we can state with inner satisfaction), and why did they love *Ordine Nuovo*? Because in the articles of the journal they found something of themselves, their own better selves; because they felt that the articles in it were permeated with their own spirit of self-searching: 'How can we free ourselves? How can we realise ourselves?'

"Because the articles in *Ordine Nuovo* were not of cold intellectual construction but flowed out of our own discussions with the best workers and set forth the feelings, wishes, real passions of the Turin working class of which we had partaken and which we had stimulated. And also because the articles in *Ordine Nuovo* were almost a 'putting into action' of real events, seen as forces in a process of inner liberation and as the working class's own expression of itself. That is why the workers loved *Ordine Nuovo*, and that is how the idea of *Ordine Nuovo* developed".

THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

After the Second Congress of the Communist International, in 1920, Bordiga accepted the policy of the International in favour of taking part in elections. The chief issue between him and Serrati came to be that of splitting the Socialist Party.

Bordiga wanted to split quickly and form a hard Communist Party, however small. Serrati wanted to continue with a united party, though he admitted that some of the worst reformists would eventually have to be expelled.

In May 1920, Gramsci wrote a document entitled *Towards the Renewal of the Socialist Party*. He warned: "The present phase.. in Italy... precedes either the conquest of political power on the part of the revolutionary proletariat... or a tremendous reaction on the part of the propertied classes and governing caste... a bid to smash once and for all... the Socialist Party and to incorporate... the trade unions... into the machinery of the bourgeois state".

In response: "The [party] leadership... must become the motor centre for proletarian action in all its manifestations... Communist groups in all factories, unions, etc.... must develop the propaganda needed to conquer the unions, the Chambers of Labour [like Trades Councils] and the General Confederation of Labour in an organic fashion, and so become the trusted elements whom the masses will delegate to form political Soviets and exercise the proletarian dictatorship".

The document gained the support of Lenin and the Bolshevik leaders. But from then to 1922, Gramsci largely went along with Bordiga. He made no attempt to organise a distinct faction outside Turin.

In January 1921 Bordiga finally forced through a split. It was messy. The Socialist Party had had 216,000 members in 1920. After the split the Socialist Party (Serrati-Turati) and the Communist Party had a combined membership of less than 100,000. In 1922 the Socialist Party expelled the reformists, and in 1924, under pressure from the Communist International and against Bordiga's protests, the "Terzini" faction of the Socialist Party, led by Serrati, was separated from the Socialist Party and joined the Communist Party.

FASCISM

The fascist movement grew at enormous speed after the workers' defeat in 1920. The bourgeoisie, frightened after 1920, and faced with economic depression in 1921-2, gave it support. Significant numbers of pre-1914 syndicalist militants rallied to the fascist leader Mussolini, who was himself a former member of the Socialist Party.

In October 1922 Mussolini took power. At first he went cautiously, not even changing the constitution for two years. In May 1924 the reformist-Socialist parliamentary deputy Giacomo Matteotti was murdered after openly denouncing Mussolini in Parliament. In the months that followed, the fascist regime was shaken by mass revolt. But it weathered the storm, and in October 1926 imposed the "Exceptional Laws" which stamped out all labour movement and political activity.

"The Italian Communist Party came into being almost simultaneously with fascism. But the same conditions of revolutionary ebb tide, which carried the fascists to power, served to deter the development of the Communist Party.

"It did not give itself an accounting as to the full sweep of the fascist danger; it lulled itself with revolutionary illusions; it was irreconcilably antagonistic to the policy of the united front; in short, it was stricken with all the infantile diseases.

"Small wonder! It was only two years old. In its eyes, fascism appeared to be only 'capitalist reaction'. The particular traits of fascism which spring from the mobilisation of the petty bourgeoisie against the proletariat, the Communist Party was unable to discern. Italian comrades inform me that, with the sole exception of Gramsci, the Communist Party would not even allow

for the possibility of the fascists' seizing power..." (Trotsky, writing in 1932).

There was confusion not only in the Italian Communist Party but also in the International. Stalin and Zinoviev declared that fascism and social democracy were "twins".

Yet Gramsci failed to fight for his analysis against Bordiga. In summer 1921 workers had spontaneously formed anti-fascist defence squads. Bordiga condemned these squads as a diversion from the proper task of the revolutionary party, and a taking of sides in an internal quarrel of the bourgeoisie with which workers had no concern. The fight against fascism was inseparable from the fight against the bourgeoisie as a whole, and must be led by the CP.

The Socialist Party also opposed the defence squads, advocating peaceful resistance. Gramsci seems to have disagreed with Bordiga, yet he did not support the small faction in the CP, led by Angelo Tasca, which argued for support for the defence squads and for a general policy of united front.

THE FOURTH CONGRESS OF THE COMINTERN

Bordiga was opposed to the "united front" policy of the Communist International, other than in the trade-union sphere, where he accepted it. In March 1922 his view was accepted by the Communist Party, in the "Rome Theses". Gramsci voted for the Rome Theses, though later he would explain his vote as being because he did not wish to disrupt the party.

In mid-1922 Gramsci went to Russia for the Fourth Congress of the Communist International; after the Congress he stayed on as resident member of the Executive of the International, although much of the time he was out of action through ill health. He married Julia Schucht, a Russian.

Amadeo Bordiga

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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

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

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

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

ally friendly, shared the task of organising lectures and seminars for the other political prisoners). He depended heavily for his contact with the outside world on his friend Piero Sraffa (by then a professor of economics at Cambridge) and his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht. His wife Julia suffered a nervous breakdown and would let months or years pass by without writing to him.

In 1930 Gramsci's brother was able to discuss with him a crisis in the Italian CP. Three members of the Central Committee — Paolo Ravazzoli, Alfonso Leonetti, and Pietro Tresso — had been expelled for opposing Stalin's "Third Period" ultra-left line. After being expelled, they formed a Trotskyist group, the "New Italian Opposition".

Gramsci told his brother that he supported Tresso and the others against the "Third Period" line. Following that, the CP stopped mentioning Gramsci in their press until the late 1940s; then they would develop a veritable cult of him, and in the 1970s "appropriate" him as the fount of "Eurocommunism", a mutation of the Communist Parties into social-democratic politics.

However, it would be rash to claim Gramsci as a supporter of Trotskyism. He had opposed Stalin's persecution of the Left Opposition, and in the so-called "literary debate" of 1924 he expressed some guarded sympathy for Trotsky.

Yet Gramsci was aware of, and supported, the theses of the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1925, and his *Prison Notebooks* include several attacks on the theory of permanent revolution. The attacks, however, all rest on a poor understanding of Trotsky's position. Part of the background may be that since October 1924 Bordiga had been the most prominent non-Russian supporter of the Trotskyist opposition. (Bordiga's exiled followers and the Trotskyists would eventually part ways around 1930). Gramsci's polemics against Bordiga "spilled over" into polemics against the Trotskyist opposition.

In prison Gramsci decided, as he put it, to do something "für ewig", for the long term, and wrote 2848 pages of *Prison Notebooks*, dealing with philosophy; education; intellectuals and politics; Italian history; economism and the character of a revolutionary party; the organisation of political "hegemony"; "Fordism"; and other issues.

Much of the language of the *Prison Notebooks* was cryptic, making it easier for the Italian CP and then a whole swathe of "post-Marxist" intellectuals to "appropriate" Gramsci from the 1970s onwards. But a more loyal reading of the *Prison Notebooks* would see them as continuing to explore the ideas and goals of Gramsci before 1926.

"One attempt to start a revision of the current tactical methods", he wrote, "was perhaps that outlined by [Trotsky] at the [Fourth World Congress], when he made a comparison between the Eastern and Western fronts. The former had fallen at once, but unprecedented struggles had then ensued; in the case of the latter, the struggles would occur 'beforehand'..."

This would be interpreted by the Italian CP as indicating a struggle to win working-class hegemony in "civil society" — for example, by controlling city councils — bit by bit over a long period. What Gramsci meant was a longer process of united front tactics, of winning bases of support in the working class and influence in other plebeian sectors, of the sort he had sketched in his 1920 document on the *Renewal of the Socialist Party*.

"[Lenin]... did not have time to expand his formula [of the united front] — though it should be remembered that he could only have expanded it theoretically, whereas the fundamental task was a national one; that is to say, it demanded a reconnaissance of the terrain and identification of the elements of trench and fortress represented by the elements of civil society, and so on..."

"The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there was a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying — but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country."

Mussolini took power in October 1922

In Russia Gramsci was won over to the policy of the united front. Early in 1923, the fascist government in Italy arrested Bordiga and other prominent leaders of the Italian CP. In June 1923 the Executive of the International decided to reconstitute the CP leadership from outside, and from September Gramsci became the effective leader of the party, operating from Vienna together with other people from the former *Ordine Nuovo* group.

The rank and file of the party was still deeply Bordigist, and it was not until 1925 or 1926 that Gramsci and his friends really reoriented the party. By then it was too late.

The process was complicated by the fact that the degeneration of the Communist International had already begun. In the "Lyons Theses" drafted by Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, and adopted by the CP in January 1926, Comintern policy on "Bolshevisation" was followed to include a ban on factions within the CP.

Still, Gramsci restated his claim for an interventionist party, against Bordigism. "Only as a consequence of its action among the masses can the Party obtain recognition as 'their' Party".

The Lyons Theses also included a social-historical analysis of Italy, particularly of the "Southern Question", and of fascism.

In May 1924 Gramsci returned to Italy. He was able to operate for a while with the legal privileges of a member of parliament. In November 1926 the fascist government put him in jail, and would keep him there until a few days before his death in 1937.

GRAMSCI IN PRISON

For most of his ten years in prison Gramsci was seriously ill. For most of it he was also isolated (though there was an initial period when he was in the same jail as Bordiga and the two of them, person-

In other words, bourgeois rule rested on a vast complex of social institutions and networks (in many countries, though Gramsci did not make this explicit, on bureaucratised labour movements locked into a "loyal opposition" configuration).

The simple-minded approach, typical of many factions of Italian socialism before Gramsci, of agitation through superficial scandal-mongering against the bourgeoisie and championing the elementary economic demands of the working class, was inadequate in the face of such an enemy. Lenin's idea of the revolutionary activist as "a tribune of the people" was vital.

The working class must educate itself as a future ruling class; organise on a whole series of levels; and show itself as a potential leader to the rest of the plebeian population (in Italy, the peasantry), before it could defeat the bourgeoisie.

Gramsci condemned traditional Italian socialism sharply for its attitude to the peasantry of the south (the "Southern Question").

As Gramsci had written in an unpublished article of November 1926:

"It is well known what ideology is propagated through the multifarious forms of bourgeois propaganda among the masses of the North: The South is a lead weight which impedes a more rapid civil development of Italy; the southerners are biologically inferior beings, semi-barbarians, or complete barbarians, by natural destiny. If the South is backward, the fault is not to be found in the capitalist system or in any other historical cause, but is the fault of nature... The Socialist Party was largely the vehicle for this bourgeois ideology among the northern proletariat".

The question had concerned Gramsci since his first socialist activity in 1914. In that same year, 1914, "there had occurred in Turin an episode which potentially contained all the action and propaganda developed in the post-war period by the Communists".

The Turin socialists proposed to back Gaetano Salvemini for parliamentary deputy. Salvemini was a liberal rather than a socialist, but also the chief public champion of the southern peasantry. The Turin socialists wanted to use their control of a parliamentary "safe seat" — landlords, mafia, and the Church had electoral hegemony in the South — to give Salvemini a voice in parliament and demonstrate their support for the southern peasantry.

Salvemini did not stand, but he did speak publicly in support of the Socialist candidate.

For those who want to make Gramsci a pioneer of "Popular Front" tactics, it should be noted that the Turin socialists added: "The workers of Turin... will carry on their propaganda according to their principles and will not be at all committed by the political activity of Salvemini".

Gramsci summed up the approach he was trying to develop as follows, in another article from the 1920s:

"The metalworkers, the joiners, the builders, etc., must not only think as proletarians and no longer as metalworkers, joiners, or builders, but they must take a step forward: they must think as members of a class which aims at leading the peasants and intellectuals, of a class which can conquer and can build socialism only if aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If it does not do this, the proletariat does not become a leading class, and these strata, which represent in Italy the majority of the population, remain under bourgeois leadership, and give the State the possibility of resisting and weakening the proletarian attack".

Gramsci rejected the idea of the role of the Marxist party being just to build up organisational strength through crude scandal-mongering and economic agitation, and to wait for capitalist crisis to rally the workers behind it. Its role was always to seek for political initiative and for the intellectual and political high ground.

"Statistical laws can be employed in the science and art of politics only so long as the great masses of the population remain... essentially passive... [But] political action tends precisely to rouse the masses from passivity, in other words to destroy the law of large numbers... In reality one can 'scientifically' foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle... One can 'foresee' to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result 'foreseen'. Prediction reveals itself thus not as a scientific act of knowledge, but as the abstract expression of the effort made, the practical way of creating a collective will."

(These notes are a slightly-edited typing-up of a briefing paper for a London Workers' Fight forum, August 1974)

• More Gramsci: www.workersliberty.org/gramsci

Phyllis Jacobson

Phyllis Jacobson died on 2 March, aged 87, after a protracted illness. She was a veteran of the socialist and Trotskyist movement in the US. Together with her husband Julius Jacobson she was a member of the Workers' Party (later the Independent Socialist League). Later in life she helped produce the *New Politics* journal (both the first series which ended production in 1976, and when it was revived ten years later).

Tributes will shortly appear on the *New Politics* website: newpolitics.mayfirst.org

IRISH WORKERS' GROUP

The “national question” and the test of war

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

I want to make an addendum to my article on the “Irish national question” in the last issue of *Solidarity* (3/170).

One implication of Rayner Lysaght's story that “the national question” was a major, remote or immediate, cause or precipitant of the break-up of the Irish Workers' Group is that our side in the final dispute — the one for which I acted as spokesman — was somehow remiss in its commitment to the cause of Irish freedom.

We were, or at least some of us were, indeed “remiss” in the sort of a-historical nationalism which Lysaght embodies. We were internationalists and communists for whom the rights of nations — our own nation, or any other nation — were important, an irreplaceable part of our democratic programme, but not all-shaping, all-overshadowing, or all-eclipsing. Of course, I found chauvinism of any sort loathsome. So did Liam Daltun and, no doubt, others.

As with the nonsense about the “secret Zionists”, here too AWL's current policy on Ireland — we advocate a federal united Ireland, with autonomy for the Protestant-majority area — can be crudified, misapprehended, read back, and taken to shed light on the IWG.

Here too it is false rationalisation. Here too it begs the question of who, in their current politics on Ireland, has moved from the IWG positions. And here too the politics of AWL (then called Workers' Fight) in the 1970s are illuminating.

The allegation that we were deficient in our support for Irish national rights, like the charge that we were secret Zionists, disguises what is actually being said — in this case, it disguises the adoptive Irish fetish-nationalism of Rayner Lysaght.

Faced with the development of the IRA war out of the revolt of the Catholics after 1968, how did the Workers' Fight component of the old IWG Trotskyist Faction respond?

We “explained” and defended and publicised the rationale of those Republicans fighting the British state. And, as a matter of fact, we didn't mumble or do it shamefacedly either.

One measure of this is that Workers'

Fight was the only one of those political organisations in Britain who defended the Provisional IRA against the British Army, to have its headquarters raided and searched by the police when IRA bombs started going off in England. (Two or three years later a WRP college was raided after a young woman complained that she had been held there against her will, but that was another matter).

In those days the police didn't come to you at dawn, screaming and smashing the door with sledge hammers, as they did recently to my next-door neighbour in Peckham, looking for “illegal immigrants”. But in September 1973 a gang of armed policemen came early in the morning to the house in Gifford Street, Islington, where Workers' Fight had its headquarters.

When I opened the door to loud knocking, they rushed past me, “secured” the house, and then systematically searched it.

Nothing like that happened to any of the other Trotskyist groups; and certainly not to the Mandelite organisation (the IMG) of which Gery Lawless was by then a member and Lysaght a fraternal associate.

Indeed, by coincidence, at more or less exactly the same time as we were being raided, the British Left's leading “professional Irish nationalist”, Gery Lawless, was in the news too, but for a different sort of reason altogether.

While functioning as one of the two IMG spokesmen on Ireland (the other was Bob Purdie), Lawless earned his living selling information about Ireland and the Republican movement to journalists and newspapers. In September 1973, when bombs began to explode in London, Lawless claimed that he had received a formal Republican acknowledgement of responsibility for the bombing. The Provisional IRA itself was not ready to acknowledge the bombings and denied that Lawless had received the acknowledgment he claimed to have had. He continued, to the British press to insist that he had received a republican admission of responsibility, even when the Provisional IRA insisted he hadn't.

Whether Lawless really had received an acknowledgement and the

Provisional IRA then thought better of it and withdrew it, or, in pursuit of money and to boost his credentials, importance and market value, Lawless had dressed up his knowledge or deductions as an IRA statement, I don't know.

But in that period of confused signals and information Lawless let his “professional” concern for journalistic credibility push him into the role of a political fingerman against the Republicans in the British press. For a short while he was centre stage.

For example, he appeared in the *Daily Mail* as an authority — complete with the tall-tale version of his biography — who knew and valiantly insisted that the Republicans had set off the bombs in London, and he won't have done that gratis, either.

There was a great deal of coverage of that business in the Healyite daily, *Workers' Press*, denouncing Lawless in so many words as a police agent and anti-Republican provocateur.

Lawless admitted going to Scotland Yard, but it is highly improbable that he gave the police any information about the bombings which they didn't already have, or, indeed, that he had such information to give. In *Workers' Fight* I criticised Lawless's behaviour and the confusion caused by his dual role as a seller of information to journalists and simultaneously the IMG's public expert on Ireland, but my piece was mainly devoted to defending him from the Healyite

charge that he was a “police agent”.

In tandem with Bob Purdie, Lawless in the early 1970s wrote very pretentious and usually very silly analysis of Northern Ireland in the Mandelite press. The analysis was based on false analogies with the impact of the Vietnam war on the USA and the Algerian war (1954-62) on France. It ignored the massive difference between a conscript army fighting a full-scale colonial war against the overwhelming majority of a population, with big casualties on both sides, and Britain's Northern Ireland war, waged by a professional army, with small casualties, and actively backed by the majority in Northern Ireland.

Realising that he had been writing nonsense on this and other “Fourth International” political positions, Purdie soon dropped out of revolutionary politics.

As for Workers' Fight, certainly our “support” for the Provisional IRA war was reluctant and, for me, troubled. What the Provisionals did made little sense to me, and none at all after the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement. I could not follow after those like Rayner Lysaght who saw in what the Provisionals were doing the early stages of a “process of permanent revolution” leading to an Irish socialist revolution.

I did however accept, and try to discharge, the responsibility formulated by

Continues on page 22

As shown in *Workers' Fight*: Gery Lawless posing for the *Daily Mail*

POLL TAX ANNIVERSARY

Why Dukes pay more than dustmen

The "poll tax" — a flat rate system of taxation designed to replace local government rates — was introduced by Margaret Thatcher's government in Scotland in April 1989, a year before its introduction in England and Wales. By the election of 1992 the Tories had withdrawn the tax. Because thousands of working-class people could not, or would not pay the tax, some going to jail because of that refusal, the Tories were forced to back down. One important turning point in the anti-poll tax movement was a clash between demonstrators and police in London on Saturday 31 March 1990.

The poll tax had been a "flagship" policy for Thatcher, introduced alongside cuts in local government spending, reform of local services (privatisation and contracting-out), and undermining of local democracy. During this period, Labour-controlled councils mostly implemented the cuts and made thousands of workers redundant. Most Labour councils (though not all sections of the Labour Party) went along with the implementation of the poll tax.

Yet the poll tax policy failed and its failure was one of the factors behind the ousting of Thatcher from the Tory leadership in November 1990.

The text we print here, which tells part of the story, consists of excerpts from an unpublished document from our archives, and from a pamphlet produced by us in March 1990. We also print, on page 22, a commentary on the "poll tax riot". This is taken from *Solidarity's* forerunner, *Socialist Organiser*, 5 April 1990.

The poll tax system demanded a payment from every adult, and bore equally heavily on the lowest paid as on the highest paid. Nicholas Ridley, the Minister responsible for bringing in the tax, summed up the brutal "logic" behind it when he asked, "Why should a Duke pay more than a dustman?"

Unemployed people had to pay 20% of the poll tax with little compensation in their benefits.

In other words, many, many people could not afford to pay the poll tax. The slogan, "can't pay, won't pay" reflected the situation for hundreds of thousands of people.

The poll tax was introduced in Scotland in April 1989, a year before its introduction in England and Wales. The "Stop It" campaign was set up by the Scottish Trade Union Congress and involved the Labour Party, Scottish Nationalist Party, Liberal Democrats and the Communist Party. It also involved those Labour council leaders who were overseeing the compilation of the poll tax register!

The campaign lacked structure, democracy and politics and was based solely on the frustration of the registration process. However, in a few places the left was able to take it over and make something of it (e.g., in Edinburgh).

A "Committee of One Hundred" was also set up in September 1988 — the idea was to get 100 to pledge not to pay. But the campaign, in itself not a bad idea, was

The SWP

The SWP which had initially called for non-payment, dropped that call to switch to the non-registration demand. When non-registration looked unworkable they redefined the policy:

"Every workplace and local community should have a collection point for these forms to be sent back via Labour Party HQ".

In the summer of 1988 the SWP produced a pamphlet in which they argued against non-payment in the community as "even large numbers organised on a community rather than workplace basis do not themselves possess the strength to win..." This was combined with calls on the STUC and Labour Party to organise industrial action and for Labour controlled councils to halt the registration process.

By arguing against non-payment and counterposing it to non-collection and non-implementation they actually aided the right wing in the Labour Party and unions who wanted to collect the tax.

backed by George Galloway and his then political friends in the Labour Party.

The first big debate in the movement was over whether or not to call for "non-registration", that is to get individuals to refuse to put themselves on a poll tax register then being compiled.

We were in favour of maximum frustration and obstruction of the registration process and to use that as a way to build a campaign. But we were explicitly against the call for "non-registration" because it wouldn't (and didn't) work — people were registered on the basis of information already held by councils. Secondly we thought this would leave people open to being taken to court and being fined. In the event that did not happen.

In Scotland the SWP, anarchists and others called for non-registration. Pretty soon the campaign had to be dropped — registration simply happened.

The first anti-poll tax conference outside Scotland was held in Oxford on 27 November 1988, but was attended by only 28 local groups, mainly from southern England, and did not come to much. The second conference was 200 strong and held in Newcastle on 10 December 1988. It was sponsored, among others, by the Socialist Movement (an initiative set up by Tony Benn and others after Labour's general election defeat in 1987). Its aim was to use a variety of tactics: "... to unify and co-ordinate the various tactics of resistance and civil disobedience, from disruption of the register and payment, including mass non-payment, to public, trade union and civic non-cooperation."

Unfortunately no concrete initiatives came out of the event. A political and organisational vacuum was left to be filled by the Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party).

In August 1989 the Militant went all out to take complete control of existing poll tax groups as well as setting up local and regional federations in coun-

What we called for

Mass community-based action around obstruction of the register and non-payment will be essential for building up the overall campaign. But we must be clear: mass non-payment alone will not beat the poll tax. Community action must be used to turn the campaign into the labour movement and demand non-implementation by councils and non-cooperation from the unions.

At the moment (March 1990) the official Labour Party and TUC position is pathetic. They haven't even organised a national demonstration on the issue. The national Labour Party, the Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Authorities and

Mass poll tax demonstration 31 March 1990

terposition to long-standing existing broad ones. They then set up a national organisation under their control, gazumping the efforts of the Newcastle organisation to do the same.

But the Newcastle people, now called the "3D network" (no payment, no collection, no implementation) agreed (rightly in our view) to support the new Militant-dominated organisation, the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

The Federation agreed to call a national demonstration on 31 March 1990. The demonstration — around half a million strong — was built by all the different and various groups on the ground. It did not, however, have the support of the official labour movement.

Virtually all of the media coverage of the event was focussed on the violence sparked off by the police attacking the demonstration.

Labour MP George Galloway ...said ..."these lunatics, anarchists and other extremists, principally from the Socialist Workers' Party, were out for a rumble the whole time, and now they've got it. If they didn't exist, the Tories would need to invent them." [*Sunday Times*, 1 April 1990]

The anti-poll tax movement was appalled by statements made by Militant officers of the ABAPTF, chiming in with media and politicians, condemning the violence, promising to hold their own "investigation" and even to "name names".

It was this stance that led to the second biggest national anti-poll tax campaign being formed — the Trafalgar Square Defendants' Campaign.

In 1991 cuts that stemmed from the poll tax really started to bite, with numerous councils slashing services. The ABAPTF, despite a high level of activity on the ground, failed to broaden out the national campaign. There was no attempt to get a mass labour movement mobilisation to fight the poll tax and the cuts. The problem was a lop-sided emphasis on non-payment.

the entire trade union leadership have urged compliance with the law.

This can be changed. Lothian NALGO [forerunner of Unison] has pledged non-cooperation with attempts to recover fines for non-payment. CPSA [forerunner of PCS] branches have pledged that their members will not deduct money from claimants' giro to pay the poll tax.

In every town and city anti-poll tax coordinating committees must be formed, bringing together delegates from the local groups, union branches, trade councils and local Labour Parties. Women's organisations, tenants' associations, pensioners and black groups should also be encouraged to participate.

Dissident Labour councillors, MPs and union leaders willing to pledge themselves to non-payment can be used to build support...

POLL TAX ANNIVERSARY

Thatcher reaps what she sows

This article, describing the big anti-Poll Tax demonstration on 31 March 1990, appeared in *Socialist Organiser*, 5 April 1990.

Despite all their hypocritical talk about conspiracies by anarchists and Trotskyists, the police and politicians know that much of the violence that spread through central London last Saturday was a spontaneous outburst of rebellion against the poll tax and other aspects of Thatcher's Britain.

They know, too, that it was the police who started the violence when they charged down Whitehall into some hundreds of demonstrators who had sat down in peaceful protest opposite Downing Street.

The wonder of it is that such outbreaks have not happened before in a capital city where upwards of 75,000 people are homeless, and many of them sheltering in squats, hostels, or bed and breakfast places must now find the money to pay poll tax for the privilege of breathing London air...

Not to distinguish between foolish anarchists and people driven to spontaneous revolt is not to be able to understand what happened and why.

The main responsibility for what happened on Saturday lies with the leaders of the labour movement. No wonder people feel desperate and hopeless enough to lash out blindly when the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC confine themselves to verbal fireworks and fencing displays with Mrs Thatcher and her ministers...

As Tony Benn has said, had the Labour Party and the TUC backed Saturday's demonstration, then it could have been a million or more strong. Proper stewarding could have controlled the unruly...

Labour leaders Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley with those Tories to demand exemplary punishment of those arrested...

It has hard to imagine anything more disgusting, or more scandalous, than the Labour leaders... appealing to the Tories not to blame them but instead to form a common front against "the enemies of democracy". To unite with Thatcher against the enemies of democracy is to unite with the Devil to fight sin!

The ramming through of the poll tax by Thatcher's minority-elected government against the manifest opposition of a big majority of the electorate... is the very opposite of democracy.

If Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley are interested in democracy then they should cut the cackle and the cant about the democratic nature of Mrs Thatcher's tyranny and fight for the democratic rights of the British people now but campaigning for an immediate general election.

Not only Labour MPs like Hattersley and Galloway have gone in for "fingering" sections of the left and acting, or promising to act, as "felon-setters" for the police

by trying to identify left-wingers as being responsible.

The officers of the All-Britain Anti-Poll-Tax Federation — [Militant members] Steve Nally and Tommy Sheridan — have promised to hold their own "investigation" and then "go public naming names" (Nally). To whom?

To the police? To go public is to go to the police.

The left has a right to defend itself against anarchist disorganisers and against outbreaks of wild hooliganism, including the right to throw disrupters off marches. Nally and Sheridan had a right to dissociate themselves from the violence last Saturday.

But nobody on the left has the right to felon-set people on our side who act against Thatcher and her poll tax according to their best lights.

Nally and Sheridan are Militant people, and the All-Britain Anti-Poll-Tax Federation is completely (and very bureaucratically) controlled by Militant. Those who run Militant should call them to order at once; if they don't, the activists in the anti-poll-tax movement should.

The Militant-controlled All-Britain Anti-Poll-Tax

The police were out of control

Federation also bears responsibility for the chaos which engulfed the demonstration last Saturday, a responsibility second only to that of the leaders of the Labour and trade union movement.

They have a one-sided, exclusively "direct action" strategy for beating the poll tax — don't pay.

They talk for the record about not collecting, and call for a general election now to "bring down the Government", but in practice they pay no attention at all to the fight to line up Labour councils to refuse to implement the poll tax, or trade unions to refuse to cooperate.

This is surprising, but true. Militant burned its fingers too much in Liverpool.

And Militant is in considerable disarray politically. People in Scotland like Tommy Sheridan looked set early this year to stand as candidates against Labour in the local government elections. They seem to have been dissuaded.

It is right to advocate non-payment, and Socialist Organiser does advocate it. But Militant makes it into a one-sided panacea and foolishly ignores its limitations and difficulties while at the same time channelling the anti-poll-tax movement away from concern with the trade unions or with local government, which is the interface between the Tories, the labour movement, and the working class.

These politics — or lack of politics — help push young people new to politics and not part of the labour movement into anarchist attitudes.

More than that. Militant was in charge last Saturday. The Anti-Poll-Tax Federation is tightly controlled by them and patrolled in their usual ultra-sectarian spirit. Most of the stewards on Saturday were Militant (many of them full-time) or controlled and selected by Militant, and Militant had an airtight grip on the overall organisation.

There can be no certainty that better stewarding would have made a decisive difference, but it is a matter of fact that the stewarding failed completely at the end. Since Militant has a jealously-guarded near monopoly on the Anti-Poll-Tax Federation, the responsibility is Militant's when things go wrong.

To cap this inept performance with a public promise to investigate and publish a list of names of allegedly violent people there on Saturday — that is, in effect, to hand them over to the police — is to reduce things to a nasty and unpleasant farce.

Continued from page 20

the Communist International in 1920 to back "revolutionary nationalists" fighting the government of the state I lived in. And, as I've said, I did it not mealy-mouthedly. I now think that I let the "generic" Communist Internationalist attitude override my awareness of the complexities of Northern Ireland and, to a serious extent, the politics on the Irish national question which the IWG had — or seemed to have — developed in 1966-7.

As early as 1969 I advocated a federal solution as the only possible united Ireland. In the "small print" of the articles defending the Republicans in *Workers' Fight* I tried to present a truthful account of the realities of Northern Ireland.

At the beginning of the 1980s the organisation, on my initiative, began to reconsider its role and, in relation to Ireland, took on more of the role of Marxist analyst and propagandist and less that of being "militant" shouter of support to the Republicans.

We criticised the Republicans publicly in a way we had felt obliged not to in the earlier period. We became highly critical of the military campaign, and

advocated that the Provisionals end it.

We drew the necessary conclusions from the fact that you could not explain partition in terms of British imperialism alone, though the actual form of partition, with an artificially large Catholic minority in the Northern state, was indeed an imperialist imposition: see www.workersliberty.org/node/12315.

As a political tendency we made quite a few mistakes in the 1970s, essentially because our political values were one-sided and wrong in emphasis, being shaped by a view that our primary role was that of militant agitators against imperialism.

There are worse mistakes than to side militantly against "your own" government and with those fighting it in a just (albeit complicated) cause, the removal of the national and social oppression of the Six Counties Catholics. The one-sidedness was a grievous mistake, and we had to rectify it as part of a general political "reevaluation of values" in later years.

But Workers' Fight in the 1970s is the answer to any attempt to explain the break-up of the IWG by some lack of commitment or lack of militancy on Ireland's national rights by our side.

Why won't the SWP and Socialist Party join the SCSTF?

By MARTIN THOMAS

Why won't the SWP and the Socialist Party join the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists? The SCSTF links a Labour vote, to keep out the Tories, with a fight for the labour movement to assert itself for working-class policies against the New Labour gang.

SCSTF says plainly that we want Labour to win this election, but we also want the unions and working-class activists to fight Brown and create the basis for a government which will be accountable to the labour movement and serve the working class as the Tories and New Labour have served the rich.

Don't the SP and the SWP agree?

The candidates they are running cannot be a good reason for not backing SCSTF. The "Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition" run by the SP has announced just 30 candidates in England and Wales, and 10 in Scotland. The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) has hesitantly put a toe in, with two SWP members in England and two in Scotland under the TUSC umbrella.

TUSC will do anti-cuts campaigning, with ballot papers, in 40 constituencies. As Dave Nellist of the Socialist Party said at TUSC's national rally on 25 March, they know they will get "modest scores". Success "won't be measured by the votes TUSC will get but by the contribution to the fight back after 6 May". In other words, they have no hope of a vote big enough to be a useful political demonstration. The ballot-paper feature of their anti-cuts campaigning will not add much to it.

What about the other 606 constituencies? Don't those areas need a "contribution to the fight back after 6 May" too? Shouldn't SP and SWP join SCSTF there?

Although Labour has shifted hugely towards the "bourgeois pole" in the old Marxist formula for it, "bourgeois workers' party", it remains tied to the trade unions. That fact gives the SCSTF points of leverage.

But the SP denies it. It says that the Labour Party is essentially the same as the Tories. Its message to almost all voters for 6 May is: stay at home. Let it pass. Look elsewhere.

And even in the few constituencies where the SP has candidates, those candidates do not argue for the labour movement to mobilise for a different sort of

government. The AWL's candidate for 6 May, Jill Mountford in Camberwell and Peckham, has the call for a workers' government central to her agitation. The SP calls only for workers to back the SP candidates as a gesture of protest against cuts.

The SP's election campaign falls short of being political in the sense of proposing a programme, linked to today's conditions, for the overall running of society. It is an anti-cuts propaganda campaign, with ballot papers, in a few constituencies.

The SWP agrees Labour is still a "bourgeois workers' party". The SWP, unlike the SP, is for a Labour vote in the constituencies where there is no left candidate. But to find that out, you have to dig deep in its formal statements.

Was *Socialist Worker* of 10 April calling for a Labour vote? You tell me.

This is the nearest it came: "If the Tories win, it will be because working people can't bring themselves to vote for Labour".

The issue of 3 April had an editorial denouncing the Lib-Dems, but, again, only hinted that SW was recommending a Labour vote in almost all constituencies. The issue of 27 March had nothing at all of substance about the election, not even about TUSC.

The SWP line comes down to the same as the SP's, only more shamefaced. Even the SP admits (in the TUSC policy statement) that there is a difference between Labour and the Tories. "The likelihood is that a Tory government will make earlier and deeper cuts in public spending than a New Labour one. A Labour government may also be more vulnerable to trade union pressure not to outlaw industrial action in 'essential' services".

But both SP and SWP advise workers to do nothing about it — the SP because of its dogma about Labour having become a straight bourgeois party, the SWP because of more diffuse disarray. It as if the SP and SWP do not know the one thing everyone else knows about the election: that it is to elect a government for the next several years.

Are the TUSC candidates lighting a beacon so bright that all these problems are cast into shade? No.

The contempt for the trade unions which was ostentatiously displayed by the Blair government after 1997, and the modest shift to the left in union opinion shown

by union elections in the following six years or so (the "awkward squad"), imposed on the activist left a duty to try to use those events to regroup and crystallise some serious labour-movement forces in opposition to Blair.

AWL played a central initiating part in the Socialist Alliance — uniting SWP, SP, us, and other groups — which ran 98 candidates in the 2001 general election. If the Socialist Alliance had done better in 2001, and had been maintained, built on, and improved since then, we would have something now, though we would still need something like the SCSTF to complement it in this 2010 election.

In fact the SWP and the SP wrecked the Socialist Alliance. The SP walked out in December 2001. The SWP used the big majority which it had after the SP's exit to liquidate the Socialist Alliance in 2003 in favour of its abortive Respect coalition with George Galloway MP and segments of Islamic clerical fascism from the Muslim Association of Britain.

The opportunities to galvanise the left were squandered. In a sordid and unsuccessful scramble for electoral short-cuts, the SWP ended up with a coalition presenting itself to the electorate as "fighters for Muslims", the SP with No2EU. The SWP and SP also gave Tommy Sheridan the backing he needed to split and wreck the Scottish Socialist Party. New Labour was allowed to survive its misdeeds in government with the major polarisation of working-class opinion against it being to the right (UKIP and BNP) or to the camp of passive disillusion, rather than to the left.

Compared to the Socialist Alliance of 2001 — which was only a weak start — the TUSC of 2010 is a desultory, half-hearted caricature.

The best it can build as an input to the struggles after 6 May is a strengthening of the SP or SWP in the areas where they are running — and whether that is a positive contribution depends on whether the SP or SWP is adequate politically.

Even if non-SP/SWP socialists in those areas vote SP or SWP as a gesture of protest against New Labour, TUSC is nowhere near being a beacon, a means of focusing a broad perspective for the labour movement.

The most thoughtful SP and SWP members will be aware of that. They should join SCSTF.

UAF gives platform to anti-semites

By DAVID KIRK

On 30 March in Bradford there was a Unite Against Fascism meeting organised by a SWP member called "Muslim Youth Against EDL, BNP and Islamophobia".

The advertised speakers included some from the Lib Dems, Respect and the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK (MPAC).

For those unacquainted with MPAC this sounds like a pretty bog standard line up for a UAF event: ruling class politicians and unelected "community leaders" who have nothing to say about the poverty and unemployment facing working class youth in Bradford.

However, despite its bland name, MPAC is not just another conservative, communalist group like the MCB or the Muslim Parliament.

Since MPAC was founded in 2000 it has built up a reputation for propagating anti-semitic conspiracy theories and flirting with Holocaust denial.

One of MPAC's founding members, Asghar Bukhari, wrote to Holocaust denying "academic" David Irving in 2000 with a £60 donation saying: "You may feel like you are on your own but rest assured many people are with you in your fight for the Truth".

Bukhari told Irving another author "suffered like you in trying to expose certain falsehoods perpetrated by the Jews".

If you look at the MPAC website now, it denies Holocaust denial but criticises Muslims who commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day and states: "Remembering the Holocaust means to Muslims remembering Palestine and how we were robbed, enslaved and murdered because of what the Europeans did to the Jews, and then allowed many of those same Jews to do to us what had been done to them".

The suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank is real. However, to accuse Jewish Holocaust survivors of seeking the mechanised extermination of the Palestinian people is monstrous.

In September 2006 the Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism accused MPAC of promoting the idea of a worldwide Zionist conspiracy and using material taken from neo-Nazi, white nationalist, and Holocaust denial websites.

The report also says "[t]he use of 'Zionist' as a replacement for 'Jewish' is common on the MPAC UK website" and that MPAC has articulated antisemitic

conspiracy theories through the language of anti-Zionism.

Throughout their website they talk of the "zio-press" and how Hollywood and TV is dominated by Zionists. This is just recycling the old antisemitic canards of Jewish control of the government and media that have been used for hundreds of years.

The National Union of Students has no-platformed MPAC for its publication of "antisemitic conspiracy theories and inciteful racist material".

MPAC's hatred is not just aimed at Jews. They applaud an Iranian regime that executes and tortures LGBT people and women, just for daring to try to live their lives.

The English Defence League are vile violent Islamophobes. When they seek to attack Muslim communities, workers of all colours need to unite with them to smash the EDL. However, anti-racists cannot ally with racist and reactionary organisations like MPAC who are feeding off the fear the EDL provoke.

UAF and its supporters in the SWP argue that UAF consistently challenges racism. If this is not just fatuous rhetoric it must mean they do not invite peddlers of homophobia, misogyny and racist conspiracy theories like MPAC.

Network Rail and courts stop rail strike Abolish the anti-union laws!

BY DARREN BEDFORD

Network Rail bosses' successful use of anti-trade union laws to undermine a planned strike by signallers was the latest in a recent spate of actions by employers (particularly in the rail industry) that have seen High Court injunctions become a default bosses' response to any big strike.

The first planned strike by British Airways cabin crew workers was also declared illegal in a similar way.

In both cases, employers cited "irregularities" with the balloting process as their reason for seeking the injunctions, and the courts agreed that the ballots had indeed been "irregular". But what does that "irregularity" mean?

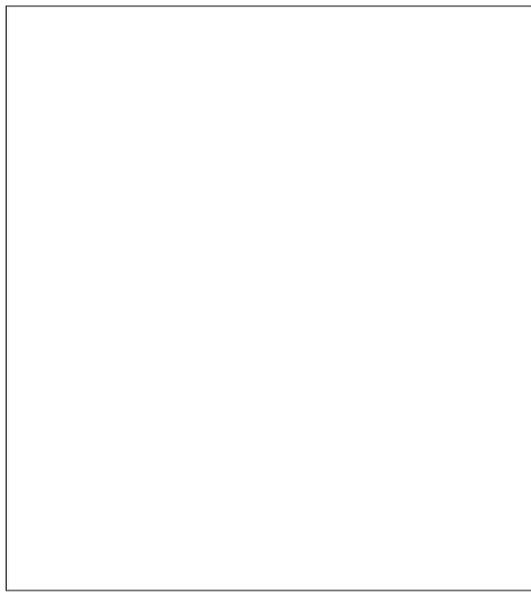
In BA's case, the argument was that some workers balloted (a few hundred out of a workforce of over 10,000) had, although they were still BA employees at the time of the ballot, accepted voluntary redundancies and were therefore not part of the relevant bargaining unit. But we can say with relative certainty that if Unite had excluded them from the ballot, BA bosses would have sought an injunction on the basis that the whole workforce had not been given a vote!

We can also say with absolute certainty that when bosses and courts conspire to hamstring workers' action, their motives have nothing to do with "irregularities" in the balloting process.

Bosses are not expressing their commitment to rigorous democratic procedure, but rather acting as intelligent class fighters and using the law as a class-biased ideological and practical weapon in class warfare.

The judge who passed the injunction against the BA strike said very little about the "irregularities" with the ballot. She said, "a strike of this kind over the 12 days of Christmas is fundamentally more damaging to BA and the wider public than a strike taking place at almost any other time of the year." In other words avoid, at all costs, any "damage" to BA's profits.

There may well have been some balloting errors



with the RMT's processes at Network Rail — how can it be avoided when balloting a workforce of thousands in a changing industry? But, errors or not, thousands of workers voted for strike action. That is an indisputable fact. It is also an indisputable fact that no workers whatsoever voted for — or had any kind of say in — Network Rail bosses' decisions to massacre their jobs and terms and conditions.

What recourse do we have when our bosses do something we don't like? None — other than the right to withdraw our labour. Bosses are now using the law in such a way as to effectively imply that this right no longer exists; workers must accept their bosses' rule unquestioningly, uncritically and unconditionally in every circumstance. Any society which allows its legal system to be used in this way cannot be meaningfully called a democracy. If Britain is a democracy, it is democratic only for the rich.

Continued on page 6

GENERAL ELECTION

How is the BNP doing?

BY CHARLIE SALMON

On 1 April Mark Collett, former British National Party publicity chief and one-time loyal follower of party leader Nick Griffin, was arrested and charged with making threats to kill Griffin and James Dowson, a shadowy figure with links to Loyalist terror groups who juggles fundraising for British fascism with running a virulent anti-abortion campaign in Northern Ireland.

Why would Collett, whose political skin — metaphorical and literal — has been saved by Griffin on more than one occasion, make such threats? Why, in the midst of a full-tilt bid for parliamentary seats and the control of councils in Stoke and Barking, would the BNP make public such allegations? What does this mean for the BNP's prospects in the polls and the likely future shape of fascist organisation in this country?

According to press releases from the BNP at the time of Collett's arrest, the police were not only informed of the personal threats but also that the police are investigating "financial irregularities" and the "leaking on to the internet of sensitive party information".

Threats and dodgy finances are nothing new to those who follow Griffin. Those who've stood up to Griffin in the past have been threatened, smeared and attacked. Sadie Graham, a former "star" of British fascism, is just one example.

The party is habitually late in returning financial statements to the Electoral Commission and when they do, glaring mistakes and omissions abound.

Over the past eighteen months the full BNP membership list has leaked onto the internet twice. The first time by associates of Graham seeking revenge for her expulsion from the party. Nobody has thus far been blamed or taken the glory for the second leak.

So how do the allegations against Collett fit together — as far as we can tell?

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