

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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For a Workers' Government!



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Mass strikes in France

We will make the rich pay.
Photo: Philip Wolmurth/
reportdigital.co.uk

Solidarity will beat cuts!

GERMANY

Mass protests greet the “tough times”

BY GUENTER MEISINGER

German politics is in crisis, with all the mainstream parties seeing a falling off in support.

Ninety percent of German people say they disagree with their government. The ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU), our Tories, is at 29 percent in opinion polls. This is the first time it's had less than 30 percent support since 1945.

The neoliberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) has fallen from 15 to four percent. Any party with less than 5 percent support cannot be represented in the national parliament!

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) — comparable to Blairite Labour — is on 23 percent; they haven't climbed out of the hole since the 2009 federal election. The Left Party got 12 percent last time; it is still on 10-12 percent. The Green Party has risen dramatically to 25 percent!

For weeks thousands of people have been marching and protesting in Stuttgart. Stuttgart is the capital of the

famous tourist district Baden-Württemberg, a conservative area.

It is the last area in Germany where the regional government is controlled by the CDU (since 1945). It is where the FDP did best. Now the Greens are on 30 percent! What happened?

The regional government made the nonsensical decision to move the railways from above to below ground. It made no sense but cost 20 billion euros! This at a time when the cities have no money for the poor, the homeless, the unemployed; when many libraries, swimming pools, parks, theatres and so are getting closed. Everyone knows there is corruption involved here!

Even bourgeois households have joined in the protests. The police have beaten many people up, even children and old people and with such brutality that four demonstrators were blinded! The pictures on TV of bloody eyes hanging out shocked the country. The demonstrations only got bigger, and there have been solidarity protests in many other cities — something that rarely happens

in Germany.

The chancellor Angela Merkel says if her party loses the Land election in March, she will give up. And this is a real possibility!

At the same time, there is very bad news:

- Racism is growing rapidly again.
- The polls suggest 20 percent might vote for a far right party, though such a party does not yet exist.

Some from the hard right of the CDU, who have left it, are discussing such a party with the semi-fascist Thilo Sarrazin who was until recently a member of the Social Democrats. He was a senator in Berlin, before joining the top ranks of Germany's national bank. They fired him a few weeks ago when he published a book claiming that Germany's existence was under threat from too many immigrants.

Sarrazin uses the old race-theories of the Nazis, saying that each race has its own specific genes. He gabbles about a “Jewish gene” and a specific gene for stupidity among Muslims (supposedly

A German anti-cuts demo

because of widespread incest). The difficulties Turkish and Arab children have at school he explains by their religion. Unfortunately his bullshit book has been a best-seller for weeks.

These already tough times and will get tougher. If we want to survive, we must be tougher than stone. On the other hand, we must not lose our sensitivity to other human beings; we must be even more sensitive. That sounds contradictory, but hasn't that always been the task of revolutionaries?

EDL IN LEICESTER

Racists allowed to rampage

BY AN SRF NETWORK SUPPORTER

Nearly 1000 English Defence League supporters protested on 9 October in Humberstone Gate, Leicester, while organised gangs of their supporters wandered across the city provoking confrontation with Asian youths.

Unfortunately, again, the official counter-protest called by the UAF was a minor (around 300 strong) and embarrassing sideshow. UAF's leaflet explicitly counselled Asian youth to refrain from engaging in physical confrontation, that is, from self-defence against the EDL.

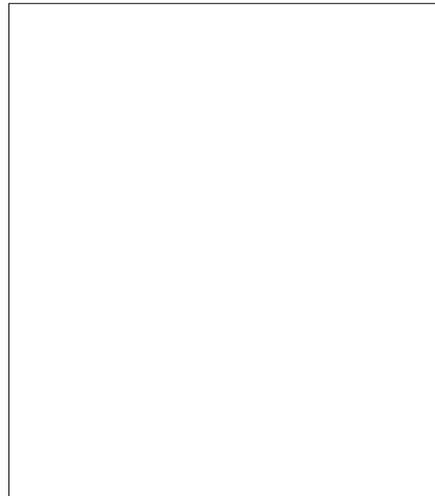
Yet about 2,500 other anti-racists were out on the streets opposing the EDL. The vast majority were Muslim and other black and Asian people in the Highfields district of the city. The rest were from uncoordinated socialist and anarchist groups.

A number of the anti-EDL people, acting independently from the UAF, were able to respond in kind to the EDL attacks. But the racist intimidation and violence of the EDL was very real and very frightening to many Asian people going about their daily business that day. Such organised racist intimidation cannot be allowed to happen again.

At one point around 300 EDLers pushed through police lines and chased local Asian youths and other anti-fascists. The police eventually were able to regain some control over the EDL breakaway but had the EDL made their way further up into Highfields they would not have fared well. Hundreds of local people in the area had been out on their streets all day, and these numbers grew to about 2,000 as word of the EDL spread.

The main organising force was undoubtedly religious groupings around the mosque, particularly the Muslim Defence League.

It is to be condemned that the only people to join them were small number of activists, mainly from the Stop Racism



EDL members clash with police

and Fascism network and the very recently formed and still small Leicester United Against Racism campaign.

The violent racism of the EDL will not be stopped by the police. It will not be stopped by prayers or multi-racial carnivals either.

The EDL will be stopped by anti-racists of all races and ethnic backgrounds, who are not embarrassed to identify themselves as a working-class force, taking to the streets. We can not only defend the Muslim areas, but stop the EDL from sending their racist gangs across the city as was so successfully done in Bradford.

But that takes organisation. It takes refuting the nonsensical arguments raised by Hope not Hate and UAF. It means building accountable local campaigns of working class anti-racists. Importantly, it means building those campaigns even more energetically and widely when the EDL threaten to march.

- Stop Racism and Fascism Network is attempting to do that, along with the Scottish Anti-Fascist Alliance <http://scottishantifascist.org.uk> www.srfnetwork.org

JIMMY MUBENGA

Organising against borders

BY BOB SUTTON

Jimmy Mubenga died on 12 October while on a deportation flight to his native Angola. Mubenga was being physically restrained by three security guards. According to other passengers, minutes before he collapsed Mubenga complained of not being able to breathe.

Jimmy Mubenga was a journalist who feared he would be killed upon his return by the Stalinist MPLA regime.

The *Guardian's* extensive report on the case was sympathetic to the human suffering wrought by the border regime, and that should be welcomed.

The *Guardian* has done a pretty good job documenting the facts here, what is this article for? Most readers of the *Guardian* will have read about Jimmy Mubenga's death as passive recipients of information — it may result in them raising an eyebrow, shaking their heads or possibly having a conversation or writing a letter.

For thousands of these readers, whether knowingly or not, immigration

controls are far from remote from their place in society.

They may work in an industry where migrants are some of the most super-exploited and battered sections of the labour force; or in a public service used as an extension of the border regime (they all are). They may be active in a trade union, whose effective mobilisation against immigration controls could play a massive role in ending the system that causes deaths like Mubenga's.

No One Is Illegal, a network based on community, anti-deportation campaigns and the labour movement, has produced a broadsheet paper to provide an overview of the issue of immigration controls. This, unlike the *Guardian*, has been done in order to agitate and organise as well as to inform.

Get involved in fighting these barbaric restrictions on freedom of movement, freedom to escape persecution, freedom to seek a better life!

- A free copy of the broadsheet will be distributed with the next issue of *Solidarity*.

• www.noii.org.uk

BIRMINGHAM

No homes for asylum seekers

BY VICKI MORRIS

Birmingham council has announced that it will no longer provide council housing to asylum seekers when a contract it holds with the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) ends in June 2011.

It says it will cooperate with UKBA to find a private sector supplier for those it would no longer house.

The BNP have attempted to exploit the announcement, claiming: “The decision

by Birmingham City Council to stop giving council houses to ‘asylum seekers’ is an indication of precisely how anti-British its previous social housing policy was... British people have been put last...”

In fact currently only 190 homes are used by asylum seekers, a drop in the ocean in a city that has 30,000 people on the housing waiting list.

Birmingham City Council is run by a Conservative/Lib Dem coalition.

COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW

Fast, deep, harsh. That's what the Tory cuts are. That's what the union fightback must be!

This Tory/ Lib-Dem government of millionaires, ruling in the interests of billionaires and plundering bankers, has now launched the biggest attack for eight decades on the working-class people of Britain.

Not since 1931 has anything like it been known.

The Government has no authority to do what it is doing. The voters in the May general election refused to give the Tories the majority to do what they planned.

A big majority voted against what the Tories are doing — voted Labour, or Lib Dem, or for other parties which denounced the cuts the Tories said they would inflict on working-class people and are now inflicting.

The Tories have a parliamentary majority to do what they are doing only because the Lib Dems ratted on the electorate. Campaigning for election against quick and deep cuts, they double-crossed those who voted for them.

This Government has no democratic mandate to do what it is doing. It is blatantly defying the will of the electorate, expressed as recently as in the May general election. The labour movement has a democratic mandate to resist what the Government is doing by any means necessary.

What does the Government now say it will do?

It is acting to throw at least one million workers out of a job! Under the Comprehensive Spending Review announced on 20 October, the Government is set to slash half a million jobs in public services. Knock-on effects will kill as many jobs again in private businesses dependent on public contracts.

It is cutting back social housing, which is already grossly inadequate. Government money for social housing will be cut to less than half its present level.

The universities' teaching budget will be cut 75%, the shortfall to be made up by higher tuition fees.

Housing benefit and a range of other welfare benefits will be cut. The big cuts in benefits for the disabled, already started under the Labour government, will be pushed ahead and increased.

Public sector workers are having their wages cut. They will have to pay much more in contributions to their pensions, which effectively is a big pay cut. Their pay rates will be frozen.

Under the Tories' plans, profits, bonuses, and top salaries will continue to rise. In fact, that is part of their argument for their policy: that quick cuts will help private business thrive. Decoded, that means: quick cuts will help profits, bonuses, and top salaries boom.

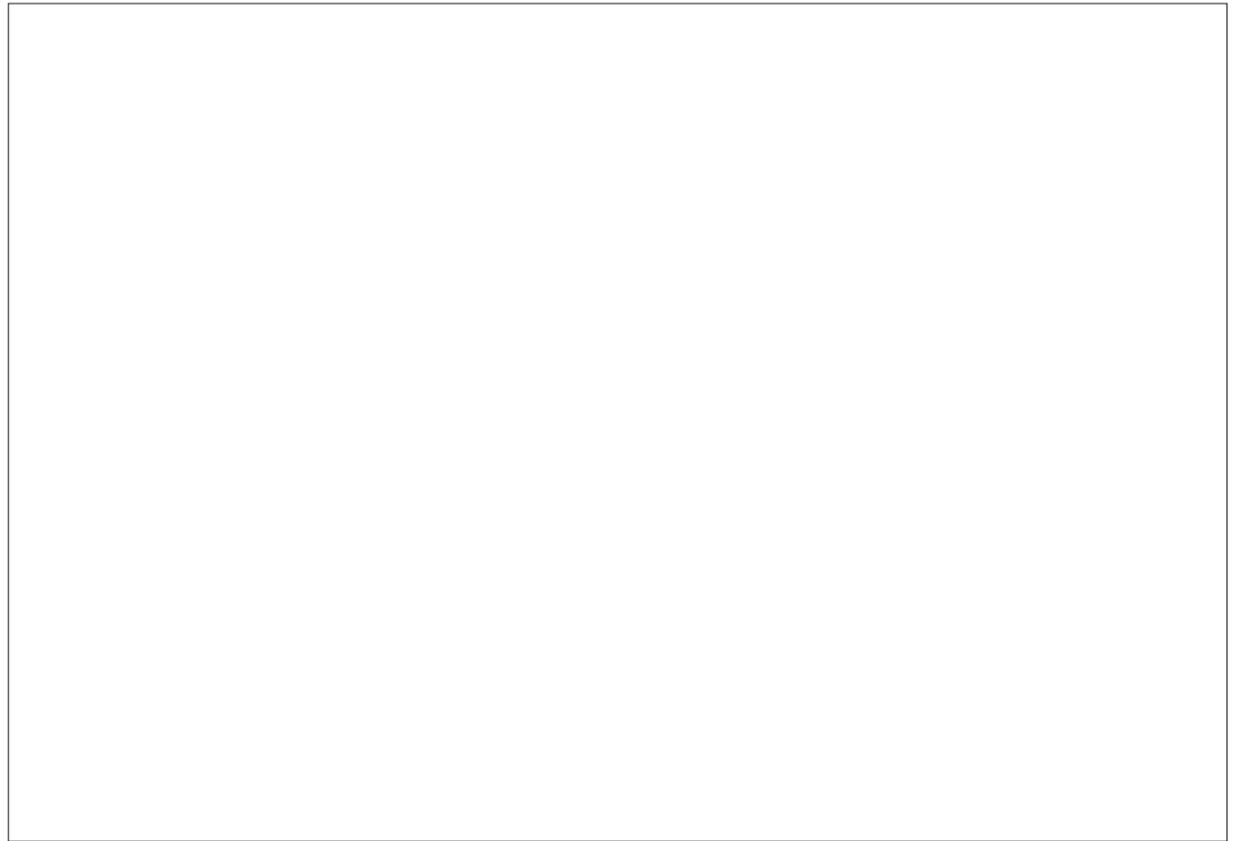
The cuts are a choice, and a choice driven by the desire of the Tory and Lib-Dem leaders to come out of this capitalist crisis with public services, the unions (now mainly based in the public sector), and workers' sense of social entitlement all forced down to a much lower level. "Never waste a crisis", is their motto.

A survey in the *Financial Times* on 19 October found that 90% of company bosses in Britain expect "a lot more industrial action" in the months ahead, and 75% of them backed the call by the bosses' federation, the CBI, to screw anti-union laws even tighter.

That is the general content of the Spending Review, and what lurks behind it. The rest is packaging and camouflage.

The Tories know that millions will be angry, and especially the cheated Lib-Dem voters. Anxious to help the Lib-Dem leaders, the Tories have done their best to "package" the cuts.

The Government started by talking about impos-



One million jobs could go. Photo: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

sible cuts in Government department budgets - of the order of 40% — so that it could later smooth over the figures and say that those cuts will be "only" 19%.

The Trident replacement will be postponed, and military spending cut.

Budgets for schools and hospitals will suffer, but not as badly as other budgets. The Government wants the impact of the cuts to be felt less in big "collective" blows, like schools and hospitals being closed as they were under Thatcher, and more in tens of millions of individual blows.

If it's a matter of millions losing jobs, losing benefits, having wages cut in real terms, paying more rent or having to beg for a friend's sofa or floor, paying extra university fees or not going to university, then — so the Government hopes — those millions will focus on "getting by" individually, rather than on collective resistance.

The labour movement began to enable working-class people to respond collectively when, as scattered individuals, we are helpless in a market-driven society. Now the labour movement must organise collective action — forge a political army out of the victims of this vicious class-war government.

The cuts are an outrage! The deficit does not have to be cut now. When it is cut, it can be cut by taxing the rich, not by penalising the poor.

It is times like this that the labour movement should live for: when individual "getting by" becomes catastrophically inadequate. In such a time the trade unions can grow, despite the loss of jobs.

- Learn from France! The French workers are showing us that solidarity can beat cuts.

- Make the labour movement fight! Demand that the whole labour movement refuse to cooperate with the coalition government.

- Demand the unions start the fight back now! With the excuse of not rushing things, the TUC lim-

ited its protest around the Comprehensive Spending Review to a token lobby of Parliament the day before.

Yes, we're not ready to stage a general strike tomorrow. But that does not mean that unions should sit on their hands until some hypothetical future time when everyone is "ready". Government offices are already being closed down. Local authorities are already issuing mass redundancy-warning notices. The unions should help their members fight back, and help link the battles.

- Demand that Labour councils defy the Tory/ Lib-Dem cuts, and mobilise local unions and working-class communities to demand the restoration of money for local services taken away by central government.

- Demand the Labour Party leaders support the resistance. Ed Miliband had promised that he would join the TUC protest on 19 October. He wasn't there. Nor was any other Labour leader.

TUC leaders explained that they "hadn't been invited", presumably in order to placate the Tory press which ludicrously calls Miliband "Red Ed" and "a puppet of the unions". Nothing can be won by running in fear from the Tory press. Run from mad dogs, and, encouraged, they will chase you!

Demand that Labour commit itself to repeal the anti-union laws, and to restore cuts made by the Tories, when we get this coalition government out. Argue for the perspective of a workers' government, democratically accountable to the labour movement and implementing a workers' plan for the crisis.

- Set up democratic anti-cuts committees everywhere, with delegates from trade unions, community groups, student groups, and local Labour Parties. Get them out on the streets and the doorsteps, building a movement that will push the union leaders into action.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Jobs and safety battles continue

The battle for jobs on the London Underground continues, with another 24 hours of strike action beginning on the evening of Tuesday 2 November.

Now fleet maintenance workers have voted overwhelmingly (88% in favour) for action short of a strike against cuts that have disrupted maintenance schedules, leaving equipment such as brakes in what the RMT calls "a lethal state of disrepair".

Management is still on the warpath, however. London Underground has announced another 800 job cuts, planning to get rid of 400 "support staff" and not filling another 400 posts currently either vacant or covered by temps.

RMT MATS (Managers, Admin, Technical and Support) rep Roy Carey said "We in the RMT believe you should not feel intimidated, or live in fear when coming to work. The fear and threat of losing your job is something none of us

need. We will fight every job cut."

Talks between bosses and unions at ACAS are ongoing, but in an instructive move RMT and TSSA have chosen to negotiate from a position of strength (i.e. within an ongoing dispute) rather than calling off their action just because bosses agree to sit round a table. A "review" of management's proposed job cuts began on Monday 18 October and will last for two weeks.

GLA CONDEMNS THE CUTS

At the third attempt, the Greater London Assembly has voted to condemn the proposed jobs cuts on the Tube. The Tories walked out of two previous votes. This time Labour, Lib Dems and the Greens succeeded in passing a motion. It is a useful addition to the industrial campaign. For regular updates visit www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk

Support Janine Booth!

AWL member Janine Booth is standing for election to the RMT's Council of Executives for the position of London Transport Region member.

At the time of writing, she had been nominated by 10 out of 16 RMT branches in the region, with 5 nominating her opponent and 1 yet to nominate.

Janine is basing her campaign on the principles of rank-and-file democracy. She wants to give grassroots RMT members more say over how their union is run. She is also campaigning for an

industrial strategy that aims to win, including the introduction of strike pay so RMT members can have the confidence to carry out prolonged disputes with management if necessary without fear of the financial consequences. And she is campaigning for socialism – at a time when London Underground bosses are attempting to make workers pay for a crisis they created, Janine is fighting for a vision of society where the interests of the working-class majority come first.

AWL members in London will be supporting the campaign by helping distribute Janine's election material at stations and other LU workplaces as well as canvassing staff. The Tubeworker bulletin will play a central role. Janine Booth is the only candidate in the election fighting for real change and grassroots control within the union.

• To get involved with the campaign, email janine.booth@btopenworld.com

CCD ballot: vote for action

BY A DWP CIVIL SERVANT

Mmeetings have been held to consult over strike action among Jobcentre Plus Contact Centre Directorate (CCD) staff. Action will be over conditions.

The use of call centres in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has expanded gradually over the past few years and is now the primary form of contact. And call centres involved in the Pensions, Disability and Carers' Service have been outsourced to Ventura, where the management are strongly anti-union. Staff terms and conditions are similar to those in private sector call centres.

The Telephony Implementation Project of October 2009 sees more changes. A range of existing Benefit Delivery Centres (largely processing sites), existing Contact Centres (call centres on a national "virtualised" network) and

mixed sites, were told that they would undergo a compulsory "transformation". For many thousands of workers this meant compulsory change from skilled benefit processing, appeals work, and decision making, to scripted and strictly scheduled call centre work.

Independent Left, the left wing opposition within PCS, argued that industrial action was needed to put pressure on DWP management to reverse the decision during the PCS negotiations with them. Unfortunately, moves to do that were rejected by the DWP PCS Group Executive Committee, on the grounds that negotiations must be exhausted before any action could be taken.

Now hundreds of staff in several sites have been compulsorily transferred from skilled jobs into what many members call the Contact Centre "regime". The role now includes strict working-time scheduling, no choice or flexibility over breaks, loss of flexible working hours and short notice submissions for leave or different working hours, and many other issues. So why is it only now that PCS are looking to ballot?

The AWL welcomes the ballot, even belated, but we also have a number of concerns. At present it is only the affected transformation sites which are being balloted, despite the fact that any gains made through action will be of benefit to all CCD staff.

Members have already raised concerns with the Left Unity leadership's likely proposal of one- or two-day strikes instead of selective part-paid longer term strike action or other forms of more effective action.

These fixed-term "protest" actions are short what many members would be willing to take. Furthermore, only the TPIP sites will be able to take part. The membership database in the Contact Centre network is not up to date.

Whilst further action throughout CCD is expected, many members will not feel the confidence in any initial strike action without the support and strength from the colleagues nationally.

We urge all members to vote for action but to demand the leadership is quicker and more militant in their reaction to struggle, and to remember that all affected staff must be included to ensure a successful outcome.

Vote McCluskey!

Members of Unite, Britain's biggest union (formed by the merger in 2008 of TGWU and Amicus), have been receiving the candidates' statements for the election of the merged union's first General Secretary.

Ballot papers will go out on 25 October, and must be returned by 19 November.

There are four candidates: Les Bayliss and Gail Cartmail from the right, and Jerry Hicks and Len McCluskey from the left.

Jerry Hicks's statement reads better than McCluskey's, except in its call for

retired members to have equal rights in the union. The contribution of retired members should certainly be valued, but the main decisions must be made by those directly involved, i.e. the members of working age.

The AWL is backing McCluskey, partly because of the issue about retired members, partly because McCluskey is the democratic choice of the (imperfect, but actually-existing) Unite United Left while Hicks's is essentially a personal candidacy with little potential to organise a rank-and-file left around it, and partly because McCluskey is the only candidate able to defeat Bayliss.

More: www.workersliberty.org/node/13588

Cleaners' struggles in global London

BY IRA BERKOVIC

Trade unionists and migrants' rights activists picketed the HQ of cleaning contractor Initial on 11 October, in a protest against the company's use of immigration status to intimidate worker-activists.

In one particularly outrageous case, a worker who had been underpaid was summoned to management's offices under the pretext of discussing the issue. When they arrived, immigration police were called and the worker was arrested.

"When people are becoming unionised and standing up for their rights, they're getting picked off by their management", said RMT Regional Organiser Steve Hedley. "It took the police a full 24 hours to decide that the person was actually allowed to stay in the country."

Cleaning workers' struggles have become a prominent feature on the landscape of class struggle in the capital; they demonstrate clearly the way in which bosses will use immigration laws as a weapon of class warfare. But they also show that even the most vulnerable and hyper-exploited groups of workers can take action and win victories.

After a long struggle involving several strikes, cleaners on the London

Underground (many of whom work for contractors like Initial and ISS) secured an across-the-board "living wage" — still low, but a significant improvement on the pay they previously received.

A long campaign at University College London has also recently seen it become the latest London university to pay its cleaners the London living wage, which is currently £7.85 an hour. The bullying and intimidation of worker-activists was a feature of that campaign, too, which included the sacking of Juan Carlos Piedra Benitez, who worked for cleaning contractor Office & General, in 2009.

A range of activists are also involved in an ongoing campaign of solidarity with cleaning workers, many migrant workers, in Sweden who are in conflict with the Berns Salonger nightclub in Stockholm. The cleaners, who are organised by the syndicalist SAC (Central Organisation of the Workers of Sweden), have been involved in a months-long campaign of picketing against Berns in protest at inhumane hours and barbaric conditions.

The Cleaners' Defence Committee, a grouping made up predominantly of revolutionaries of various stripes along with anti-borders activists, has taken the lead in coordinating solidarity with the Swedish cleaners, along with the IWW.

BBC pensions ballot: vote "no"!

BBBC staff are voting in a consultative ballot on a revised pensions offer from BBC management.

Indications are that they will reject the offer, which had been improved, though only slightly, as a result of the threat of strike action. Some activists in the NUJ have criticised their union for failing to make a recommendation to reject the offer. With members of BECTU, they have been campaigning under the name "Open Channel". Read their leaflet here: bi.ly/nuj-bbc

BBC accepts cuts

BBC management has agreed to freeze the licence fee for six years. This represents cuts of 16% in the BBC's budget. It is also taking over paying for the World Service (formerly funded by the Foreign Office) and the Welsh language channel S4C. A proposal to make the BBC absorb the cost of licence fees for over-75s has been dropped.

LONDON

Support the firefighters!

London's firefighters will walk out of work on Saturday 23 October and Monday 1 November after they voted overwhelmingly for strike action — 79% in favour on a 79% turnout.

The strike is part of an ongoing dispute over negotiations around shift-patterns, which London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) bosses recently broke off, deciding instead to threaten every single firefighter in London with dismissal if they refuse to sign contracts on new — and worse — terms. LFEPA's action comes against the backdrop of increasing willingness by public sector bosses to use mass sackings — or the threat of them — to undermine collective bargaining agreements and break trade union power.

A clear indication of the political resolve with which LFEPA are prepared to take on firefighters was given by senior LFEPA boss Brian Coleman when he said, in an interview with the *Guardian*, that he was prepared to “do a Ronald Reagan.” He was referring to Reagan's brutal smashing of a 1981 air traffic controllers' strike in which the American president sacked over 11,000 strikers and banned them from federal service for life. Coleman says that his words were “as good as a pledge” to sack fire-

fighters and that he was “relaxed” about having to do it.

Brian Coleman is a hardline Tory, implicated in expenses scandals and notable for fronting the plan for local government outsourcing and privatisation in Barnet. That such a man would want to take on and potentially smash a relatively well-organised and left-led union is not surprising.

But the dispute does not simply expose Coleman but, beyond him, exposes the puddle-shallow nature of “democracy” in this country. Our democracy increasingly begins and ends with the right to vote for inade-

quate candidates in all-too-infrequent national and local government elections; our working lives, the sphere in which most of us spend the majority of our time, are entirely walled-off from any kind of democratic control. If our boss wants to do something, he gets his way. If we don't like it, we get the sack. That is the model of industrial relations we can expect to see in Cameron's Britain.

It is because of the centrality of that model — based on the dictatorship of capital — that the entire workers' movement must take up the firefighters' struggle as their own. Already, local

government workers in Sheffield, Birmingham, Neath and Port Talbot, Walsall and Croydon are facing similar struggles. On London Underground, too, the numbers of jobs that bosses plan to slash seem to increase by the week.

It's because of the increasingly general nature of these attacks that the FBU's decision not to coordinate action with the next tube workers' strike is unfortunate.

Firefighters will strike for eight hours from 10am on 1 November, with the next tube strike beginning at 16:59 on Tuesday 2 November.

The “clever” explanation is that this timing will maximise impact, with Tube drivers' refusal to work on grounds of safety (no fire cover) during FBU action feeding into the strike on 2 November. Tube bosses will be able unable to get services back to normal in the “gap”. But wouldn't join picket lines and demonstrations be better?

Socialists should support FBU picket lines on 23 October and 1 November and mobilise in force for the joint FBU, RMT, NUT and PCS anti-cuts demonstration in central London on Saturday 23 October. If Coleman and LFEPA win, we could be facing a situation where every trade-union negotiation is conducted with a gun pointed at our heads. We cannot allow that to happen.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

“The Tories want to smash the unions”

Pete Davies, senior GMB organiser in Sheffield (where local government workers are facing savage cuts and the threat of mass redundancies), spoke to *Solidarity*.

We're still locked in negotiations with the council. We've had two half-days of talks this week and we expect those to become regular.

We're braced for the announcement of a 30% cut, which will be between £211 and £220 million depending on which accountant you listen to. The council will be looking to introduce those cuts over three years, with 15% in 2011-12 then 7.5% the following two years.

We find it extremely worrying that Sheffield city council has gone on the offensive against terms and conditions as their first step without even trying to consult, negotiate or reach any kind of voluntary solutions.

They've gone straight for cuts to sick pay and pay freezes. We're quite categorical that we will not accept any changes to terms and conditions, particularly as the council refuses to guarantee that any sacrifices our members do make to their terms and conditions will secure their jobs.

The council is also gearing up to launch a new set of PFIs and outsourcing projects; our members will simply not sacrifice their terms and conditions only to have their job sold off to McDonalds or whichever cowboy company the council plans to have running our services in future.

People are feeling a little battered and bruised at the moment because we've recently gone through a pay and grading

restructure where a lot of workers lost out. It was a very divisive experience to go through. It was imposed by the council in April without our agreement. However, there is growing anger and frustration and I think that will start to show when the hard reality of the CSR announcements hit.

We all know what's going on; workers are being made to pay for a crisis the bankers created. The ConDem government doesn't want workers to have any say in how the debt is paid but they expect us to bear the full brunt of reducing the deficit. I don't think workers will fall for that lie; we know it's a global problem caused by the greed of bankers.

We're trying to work as closely as possible with the Labour group on Sheffield council. We expect them to take control of the council, which is currently hung, certainly by next May if not before. That will be positive, as we can obviously engage with them more closely and directly. We've spent more time talking to Labour councillors in the last week than we've ever spent with the Lib Dems.

The Liberal Democrats simply don't want to talk to trade unions. We're encouraging our members and reps to join and get active in the Labour Party and we also want the Labour Party locally to engage more actively with the trade union movement. It's a two way process.

Nothing the Tories do should surprise us. They are what they are. You hear a lot of commentary about how these policies are reminiscent of the Thatcher years — well of course they are; it's the Tories. Quite simply they want to smash the trade union movement in this country. They don't believe in collective bargain-

ing or trade unions.

It's already extremely difficult to organise a strike in a way that can't be undermined by the employer using the courts and they're already talking about new legislation that I believe would make legal industrial action practically impossible in this country. However, those policies aren't inevitable. I don't know how long the Lib Dems will continue to support the Tories, and I think cracks are already beginning to show in the coalition.

BIRMINGHAM COUNCIL

Sacking threat

An activist in Birmingham City Union spoke to *Solidarity* about the council's issuing of redundancy notices to its entire workforce.

“The council has issued “Section 188” notices [under section 188 (a) of the Tories' Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992] giving unilateral notice of a new contract.

“But it's effectively a redundancy notice — if you don't sign, you're dismissing yourself because a redundancy notice will follow! This despite the fact that no one has actually seen the new contracts yet! There have also been other attacks, for instance on evening and weekend allowances, which I, as a full-

time carer, heavily depend on.

“I should also stress that a closure program has been going on in our Social Services department for five years; we have had a Tory-Lib Dem coalition council since 2004. In my department, adult learning disability, there were 29 ‘residential units’, i.e. care homes. Now there are two or three, all due to shut soon. The service-users mainly get pushed into care in the private sector.

“All the unions have gone along with this. They say as long as the terms and conditions of their members aren't affected, it's fine! Where do they think we will work when these facilities are gone?

“What we're looking at is an offensive by the city council (and their backers, Capital!) for the total destruction of social services.

“The stewards' meeting for my section was yesterday [19 October]; it's one of five stewards' committees in the council. At the moment the union is basically doing nothing. They say the council is consulting, and they can't do anything during that 90-day period, period. But the council's ultimatum is already out there.

“That was said again today. The meeting did pass a motion in favour of strike action (though with no timetable). But that has happened before, and it will simply go on to the branch committee, which is separate from the stewards' committees and very much sealed off. There are no members' meetings in our branch, despite it being the biggest union branch, probably, in Europe. So the motion may well just disappear.

“I'm not sure what the next step is, but I'll keep you informed.”

Hutton's assault on pensions

BY JOHN MOLONEY

Former New Labour minister John Hutton has produced a Stage 1 report on public sector pensions. Stage 2 will come out next year.

For such an important report, a report that will impact on millions of people, now and in the future, this stage 1 offering is very thin intellectual gruel.

It is full of charts, numbers and tables, but the conclusions do not readily flow from the marshalled evidence.

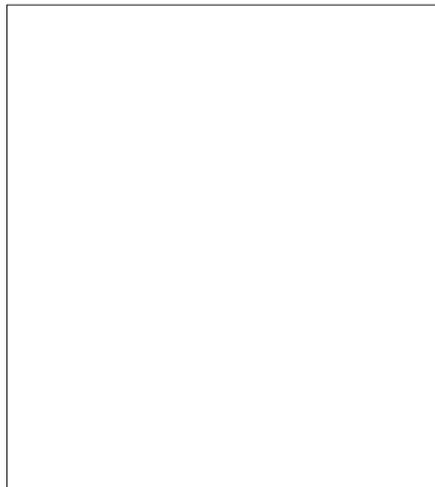
He doesn't say that public sector pensions are unaffordable — indeed he admits, that as a proportion of GDP, costs are due to flat line and then decline.

He admits that the calculation of such liabilities is fraught with difficulties and that the estimate of such liabilities is the assumptions used in the calculations. In other words he doesn't know what the world will look like in the 50 to 60 year timeframe over which the calculations are made.

Yet despite his own evidence he *knows* that the cost of public sector pensions is too high and the country, long term, cannot afford them!

The report has gaping holes. Whilst stating that average life expectancy is increasing Hutton doesn't recognise or acknowledge that life expectancy varies greatly between social classes, nature of work undertaken (i.e. manual or office based), gender, race and geographical area. Thus solutions for addressing the increase in "average" life expectancy impact differently on different groups.

Moreover he seems to have a model in his head that public sector workers are



Doing the Tories' dirty work: John Hutton

healthy in work; retire; enjoy decades of health, and then die.

The reality is that there are marked differences in health and well being between groups. Staff in manual work or jobs where the worker is supervised and has low control over the work process tend to be sicker than senior managers; they will be less healthy before and after retirement. Raising the retirement age means that such workers get to enjoy less time, whilst in good health in retirement, than other, more senior workers. Of course given their lessened life expectancy they enjoy less time in retirement in any case.

Hutton has not acknowledged research in the USA that shows that life expectancy is decreasing for some i.e. working class kids brought up on fast

foods and little exercise. He takes as a given that life expectancy is always increasing and uniformly for all.

In other words, what the stage 1 report lacks is an equality and social impact assessment which measures the impact of the report's recommendations on real people and which marshals all the available evidence concerning changes in life expectancy.

Whilst the media headlines have concentrated on his recommendations that pension contributions and retirement age be increased, little or no coverage has been given to his *thinking* about future pension provision or his explicit statements concerning reducing pensions in order to facilitate privatisation and outsourcing.

Regarding the latter, two quotes give a flavour of his thinking:

"...by taking on employees with defined benefit pension rights, private sector bodies expose themselves to the investment and demographic risks ... For larger firms, these risks might be considered manageable, although evidence submitted to the Commission indicates their concerns. But evidence also suggests that smaller firms and charities in particular feel unable to take on risks that could seriously harm their organisations if investments do badly or if longevity increases unexpectedly.

"As a result, they can either withdraw from the outsourcing process or purchase a pension from a third party. These pensions can involve contribution rates of about 40 per cent of salary, more than double the average employer contribution in the non-uniformed public service pension ...

"It is clear that structural reform of public service pensions could be part of a solution if reform creates a more level playing field with the private sector. The Commission's final report will deal with long-term structural reforms."

When discussing future pension provision Hutton states:

"The Commission will also consider elements of scheme design such as:

- ensuring normal pension ages are in line with latest developments in longevity;
- reviewing rules around changes to pension payments when they are taken before or after normal pension age to increase labour market flexibility;
- the implications of different indexation options for pension costs and incomes over time; and
- accrual rates in the different schemes.

"The Commission will also be considering the extent of accrued rights, their protection and the implications for future pension terms. The Commission is clear that protecting accrued rights does not extend as far as protecting current terms for future pension accrual."

Hutton wants to recommend major and detrimental changes to public sector pensions.

So how should the labour movement react to the Hutton report? Firstly they should attack it. It is a deeply flawed document. It can be readily pulled apart. Unfortunately the response has been muted, even respectful.

The movement should see this as the declaration of war it is. We cannot wait to fight it.

NHS WHITE PAPER

A charter for mass privatisation

BY TODD HAMER

The white paper *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS* proposes some of the most devastating changes to the NHS since its creation in 1948.

If the coalition manages to implement these proposals then we will lose the NHS as a publicly owned, universal and comprehensive health service.

Since the 1980s, both Tory and New Labour governments have sought to break up the NHS and sell it off to private business. The Tory-Lib Dem government are now poised to take a massive leap forward. What are their plans?

Every Trust will become a Foundation Trust. FTs are run like commercial businesses. Instead of planning services to meet the needs of the community, FTs compete with each other. Success is measured by financial calculation.

All evidence shows, competition between different FTs increases health inequalities and the postcode lottery. The Foundation Trusts are governed by an independent regulator, Monitor, which, unlike the Department of Health, is exempt from the legal duty to provide comprehensive and equal healthcare for all. In fact, the opposite is the case: Monitor now has a remit to increase competition by pushing privatisation. It is one quango that the Tories wanted to hold on to.

Restrictions are being lifted on how

Foundation Trusts can raise funds. Over the last ten years, more and more patient charges have been introduced to the NHS.

Things that used to be free and abundant are now scarce and costly. Patient transport, car-parking, television and telephone all cost money. This is now going to be extended to the care itself.

FTs will be able to offer unlimited private beds for people who can afford to jump the waiting lists. We will see the introduction of various top-up payments where patients can pay extra to get better quality care. We could imagine many tiers of healthcare, where patients are divided by their ability to pay.

This is particularly worrying as the government is also removing the targets for waiting times. Once again our right to life and health will be dependent on our ability to pay.

Private firms will make large profits from auxiliary services in the NHS. The evidence about whether privatisation is cheaper is highly disputed, but if it is, then it is only because it has driven down standards and the pay, terms and conditions of staff. Poor quality food, hospital superbugs and demoralised staff are a result of private firms running these services for maximum profit.

Tory-Lib Dems are proposing "the biggest privatisation in the world" with private firms taking over core healthcare services. The private firms will take all the low risk, most profitable procedures,

leaving all the high risk, high cost patients to the NHS.

Abolition of the PCTs and SHAs and replacement with "GP commissioning". They say they want to cut down on "bureaucracy". However, the "bureaucracy" is caused by internal markets and privatisation.

Up until 1980, the NHS had no internal market, no commissioning, no privatisation of services. It ran on a basis of block funding and planning to meet needs. It was the most efficient healthcare system in the Western world, with just 5% of the total NHS budget going on administration.

Since 1980, as privatisation has accelerated, admin costs have soared to 12% of NHS budget. GPs are not equipped to deal with these extra responsibilities and will need to hire some help. Far from abolishing the "bureaucracy", GP commissioning will have the effect of privatising the bureaucracy. Multinational corporations like United Healthcare and Serco are expecting to reap enormous profits by providing administrative support to the GPs. We will find private firms both commissioning and providing services.

All of this is taking place with £20 billion of cuts over the next five years. The government want to run the NHS into the ground and then sell it off to private business. They hope to create conditions where better-off patients are looking to subsidise their care. So the most

immediate effects are understaffing, pay freeze and attacks on our terms and conditions. We will also be faced with working in a system that cuts against our core principles where patients will be segregated and treated differently on the basis of class.

Fragmentation of our national bargaining power. Foundation Trusts will not have to comply with Agenda for Change and neither will private providers. We may find our ward being sold off to BUPA or Kaiser Permanente and ourselves working the same job but on less pay.

Instead of a united workforce of 500,000 healthworkers that can bring collective pressure on the employer to improve wages, terms and conditions, we will have hospitals where there are many different employers and a fragmented workforce.

WHAT IS UNISON DOING?

As the biggest public sector union, Unison is the main fighting force that can defeat the White Paper. However, so far the response has been very tame.

Unison has submitted a legal challenge to the White Paper saying that it has not allowed enough time for consultation. At a recent meeting of the Unison executive, the leadership of the union

Continues on page 11

HIGHER EDUCATION

Students gear up for fight

BY THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN
AGAINST FEES AND CUTS

The Browne Review of higher education funding has, as expected, recommended the abolition of the cap on university tuition fees (as well as more private universities and other privatising 'reforms').

Since 1998 we have gone from free tuition to fees of £1,000, to upwards of £3,000 – and now we face unlimited fees, regulated only by the market.

Browne was always going to recommend higher fees; his "independence" was just a way of drawing fire from the Government. The proposal is, in any case, an integral part of the Lib Dem-Tory coalition's broader assault on public services and working-class living standards. It will lead to a vast increase in student poverty and debt, and to a free-market system on the model of the US, with an Ivy League of academic institutions for an elite and under-funded, low quality higher education for the majority.

Like the coalition's other attacks, Browne's proposals must be fought militantly.

That the National Union of Students has, under pressure from the growth of anti-cuts campaigns, called a demonstration on 10 November is good. Everyone who wants to fight Browne's proposals should take part. The NCAFC will be supporting the Free Education contingent on the demonstration (see our website for more details). But that will not be enough to stop the Government.

We need direct action, including occupations, in every university and as many colleges and schools as possible across the country – modelled on the wave of occupations in solidarity with Gaza in 2009, and the anti-cuts occupations last year, but on a much bigger scale. Activists in anti-fees and cuts groups across the country need to start discussing how we can do this.

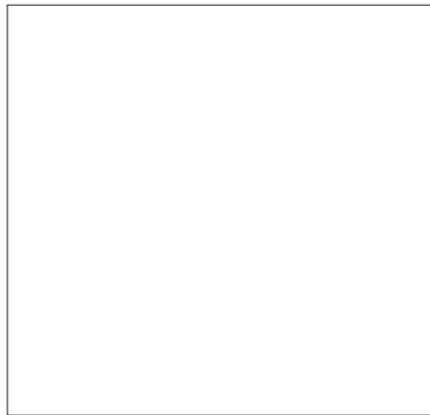
If you don't have a group, set up one up! Even if all you can organise is a first meeting in your school or college, go for it! We can help you.

IF WE FIGHT, WE CAN WIN

The Tories are vulnerable on this. The Lib Dems pledged themselves to oppose higher fees; they are so nervous that Lib Dem MPs have been ordered not to speak to the press. They will – should! – come under increasing pressure after Browne's recommendations are out.

Meanwhile, even many Tory voters will not be happy about being told their children must rack up £80,000 debt to go to university. An ICM survey for the Sunday Telegraph found that 62 percent of Tory voters support a graduate tax, compared with 29 percent for higher fees – almost exactly the same as the figures for the population as a whole. Free education was not an option in the survey!

If we pile on the pressure, the coalition will crack – helping push back their other attacks too. We owe it to ourselves and to everyone else fighting the cuts to be militant.



DEMAND FREE EDUCATION

The Government says free education would mean the poor paying for the children of the rich to go to university.

Anyone seriously concerned about

this problem would advocate taxing the rich and business to fund an expansion of free, quality higher education for as many people as think they would benefit from or enjoy it. That way the rich can pay for everyone's children to go to university.

This government of millionaires will tell us the money is not there. Yet last year, just the thousand richest individuals and families in Britain (the *Sunday Times* 'Rich List') increased their wealth by £77 billion. If the financial crisis demands drastic measures – and we agree that it does – that should mean taking hold of the wealth of the rich to preserve and extend the services the rest of us rely on.

We should not accept that the majority have to pay for a crisis caused by a tiny minority, whether through job losses, cuts in services or higher fees.

Contact NCAFC

www.anticuts.com
againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com
07775 763 750
Facebook: National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

NCAFC actions

Don't let the Lib Dems break their promises on fees!
Protest outside Lib Dem HQ
4pm, Monday 25 October

4 Cowley Street, London SW1P 3NB
Followed by a London NCAFC activists' meeting

Protest at Simon Hughes' surgery
2pm, Friday 22 October
Swedish Seamen's Church, 120 Lower Road, London SE16 2U (Surrey Quays)

Day of Action/National Walk Out, 24 November
There will be a national Day of Action, including walk outs and occupations, on Wednesday 24 November.
For more information see www.anticuts.com

What will Browne mean?

Solidarity asked J, a UCU activist at York University, her views on the Browne Review.

The Browne Review's proposals could open the door to an American-style system. Universities will, with a few caveats, charge whatever they like. We will have a marketplace where certain institutions pitch for working-class students by charging lower fees, while the more prestigious universities are essentially closed off to anyone who can't afford yearly fees of £10,000 or more. Is that a fair assessment?

I'm not sure about "lower fees". Browne is talking about a fee of £6k as a way of nearly paying the cost of educating a student for a year.

He reckons that the real cost now is £7k, and the lower figure is set to give universities the incentive to be more efficient i.e. cut costs. So, if there is the predicted 79% cut in Government support for teaching, universities will need to charge £6k to get near breaking even.

It's hard to see how some universities can charge less, unless they're able to do it in some departments that are cross-subsidised.

And new universities, with low levels of research income and funding from industry, will be particularly hard hit by the loss of teaching support.

So I can't see how certain institutions

could afford to make the lower pitch. The minimum cost of a three-year degree is likely to be just under £40k.

(See the UCU calculations at bit.ly/ucu40.)

As far as the "prestigious universities" go, this may well open up some fabulous opportunities. The *Times Higher Education Supplement* last week quoted a professor at LSE saying that "market forces create incentives to quality... it is terribly important to set quantity free".

What he means is that Browne recommends no limits to individual universities' intakes: so LSE thinks it will be able to up its fees and rely on its reputation to maintain the number of applicants.

If adopted, how will the Review's proposals intersect with trends we've already seen developing in the HE sector, such as attacks on courses or departments without a specific vocational (that is, money-making) application and the demands for two-year degrees?

I'm not sure about the demand for two-year degrees – but Browne is definitely going to have an impact on arts and humanities degrees in particular.

Courses which he does not treat as "priority" will have to fund themselves out of fee income, or be supported via income from elsewhere in the same university, or close.

Or there may be expedients like cuts

and mergers, so University A supplies a particular degree to Universities B and C when they close their own departments.

Results can include a selection from: a big reduction in choice, the disappearance from the UK of some areas of teaching (and the research that it was based on), job losses, students whose degree course shrinks drastically while they're taking it (because the department will close when they've graduated), loss of international standing in research areas, higher student/staff ratios, worse facilities...

What's the likely impact on international students?

Browne has a lot to say about international challenges and competitiveness, but nothing about international students.

They won't be affected by the proposed changes in fees for home students. But they may well be affected by further increases in the already high fees they have to pay, hiked up on the basis that they've always paid more than home students, so the differential has to stay.

And the loss of government funding for teaching plus the demand for "efficiency" are likely to have adverse effects on their experience. Which may well make it more attractive for international students to go elsewhere for a degree – cutting off what is currently a hugely

important source of university income for the UK.

What about the impact on education workers?

This is going to affect everybody in the sector. Universities are major employers. Closures of departments and of universities, plus pressure for "efficiency" will eliminate jobs in teaching, research, cleaning, catering, admin, IT, library, maintenance, portering, etc.

On the academic side, it is likely that there will be fewer permanent contracts and yet more teaching done by hourly-paid temp workers. This has implications for teaching quality for students – higher student/staff ratios, fewer teaching hours, less chance to make contact with staff for advice outside class time.

And there are also bad implications for access to library, etc, facilities, upkeep of University premises...

So Browne is likely to be bad for education workers and local economies.

How do you think the implementation of the proposals can be resisted?

We need active union work (including students and all the people who work in universities) plus a campaign to spell out the implications of Browne: a worse deal for most people and a massive loss of opportunity for families on low incomes.

EDUCATION CUTS

Schools are not safe from the cuts

BY PATRICK MURPHY, NUT
EXECUTIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

If you were to take media reports at face value you would think that schools were protected from the cuts being imposed by the Coalition government. The reality is very different.

While the money allocated to local authorities for distribution to school budgets seems likely to be protected from cuts, there is a whole range of services which are in real and imminent danger.

Local councils hold some money centrally which they use to maintain support services which could not be afforded by individual schools and are not needed in equal measure by all schools. The level of need in each school is usually related to the type of children they have on roll.

My own authority, for example, has a flagship service for deaf and hearing impaired children and for Gypsy, Romany and Traveller education. They also have a visually-impaired team and a teenage pregnancy advice service. These rely on the central budget to let them employ highly specialised teachers, teaching assistants, admin staff and so on.

This budget is being cut in a number of ways and on a scale which puts jobs and services at risk. The services are those which mostly support the poorest and most disadvantaged young people.

Council funding is being reduced as part of the deficit reduction plan. Leeds has had to find £1.9m from the budget for support services to schools. So far they have made this saving by filling only essential vacancies and cutting non-staff costs. At the same time they, together with other councils, are starting

redundancy consultations with staff and unions.

Second the previous Government had already announced that they would not renew a number of funding streams which are used to support schools. In particular local authorities will from 31 March 2011 no longer receive the national strategies money which employs teachers who advise schools on literacy and numeracy.

As a result many councils have issued redundancy consultation notices. We are told that the money is not being removed but being devolved to schools so they can decide how best to use it. The assumption is that many of them will "buy back" the service from their local council.

The third factor which will produce cuts in central services is the expansion of the academy programme. Every school which becomes an academy leaves the local authority and takes with them their bit of the central budget for services to schools.

Whether or not they need or use the services for SEN, bilingual or sensory-impaired children, they take the money back.

As the new Tory academy project is focused on the more 'successful' schools with more privileged intakes, this will mean more money for schools who need it less and huge cuts in the services available to children in schools with the most need.

At a recent gathering of NUT branch secretaries evidence of the impact of these three factors was already beginning to emerge. A survey of centrally-employed members found that current plans for job cuts included the following:

Durham: 63 Education Development Adviser posts to be replaced by 28 posts with staff having to apply for their own jobs. Bolton: 11 posts including Educational Psychologists. Kent: Secondary adviser posts cut from 40 to 13. Somerset: 8 Soulbury posts to go out of 9. Merton: all secondary consultant posts to go, primary posts to reduce from 5 to 2. Havering: 25 posts out of 40 are at risk. Wigan: 86 posts to go.

It will not be easy to fight these cuts. The workers involved are not the 'shock troops' of the education unions. Employed in small teams, working often in isolation and with individual schools, they generally have no record of militancy.

In addition they will have an image amongst school staff as the advisers and inspectors who impose the government's educational dictates on the rest of us with all the workload pressures that entails.

The defence of these jobs will require a broader political campaign amongst staff and parents in schools to assert the importance of the services they provide. Councils can be lobbied, demonstrations and rallies organised and strike action can be moved up the agenda.

The sacking of subject and curriculum advisers when the work they do is still

required is likely to mean more work for existing teachers in schools. Already in a number of areas "good practitioners" are being told by Heads that they will be expected to lead training and share their practice with other schools.

There will also be areas where centrally-employed education workers have more confidence. The NUT is, for example, holding an indicative ballot in opposition to cuts in central services for schools in Islington.

Perhaps the most worrying sign of all is the approach taken by Bury. There the council has issued section 188 dismissal and re-engagement notices to all its workers (except staff directly employed in schools) in order to force staff to accept new contracts on significantly worse pay and conditions.

The new contracts would freeze all pay increments (that's the automatic progression up pay scales) for three years and impose an additional three days of unpaid leave per year on all workers. Effectively the council would close its buildings for an additional three days and refuse to pay its staff.

These measures are a quick way to save millions of pounds at the expense of council workers and service users. There are already indications that other local councils are copying the Bury approach, in particular Luton. If it is allowed to succeed or go unchallenged it will be leapt upon by councils desperate to make huge savings quickly.

As far as I know indicative action ballots are being organised in Bury. All unions representing council staff in any area faced with this level of threat should be balloted as soon as practically possible. The trade union movement should treat an attack like this as an immediate threat to their members nationally and aim to kill it at source.

School support staff: action halts cuts

BY JACK YATES

Up to 2000 school support staff protested in central Nottingham on Monday 18 October in opposition to the local authority's plans to slash their pay and conditions.

Nottingham's Labour controlled city council — a clique of un-reconstructed Blairites — attempted to change the contracts of this overwhelming women-dominated, low paid and previously poorly organised section of the workforce to term-time only contracts, resulting in pay cuts of between £3000 and £7000. The council claimed that this blatant attack was forced upon them by "legal advice" that they were breaking the Equal Pay Act — legislation intended to protect women from unequal practices!

If the council bosses expected workers to accept these cuts quietly, they were very much mistaken. Unison acted quickly and vigorously to build and recruit in every school in the city, organising angry responses at school consulta-

tion meetings. Solidarity messages poured in from members of the National Union of Teachers in the city, expressing disgust at the council and support for their fellow workers.

The overwhelming response of the support staff has put a halt to the council's plans, which were due to be enacted on the day of the demonstration. They now plan to hold further consultations in the hope that anger will die down. The mood of the protesters indicates that this is very unlikely: calls for further action and activity — including strike action — received massive applause.

The lessons of this victory are vital if our movement is to respond effectively against the cuts to come. Unions must not underestimate the real anger and the resultant eagerness of workers to fight back. There can be no place for ten-month, fifteen-point campaign plans to mobilise our class for a fight. We should not entertain the bureaucratic notion that lobbying and letter writing are the same thing as working class organisation.

Our class is ready to organise and fight.

Cuts are a charter for homelessness

The Government is cutting the social housing budget to less than half of its current level. This cut comes on top of the cuts in housing benefit already announced.

Fewer houses will be built. What's built will be more expensive — about 80% of average market rents, where "social housing" today is about 40% of average market rents. The 1.8 million households on waiting lists for council housing will be offered only that "affordable" housing (80% of market average rent), mostly from housing associations.

Anyone who gets a new council or housing association tenancy will hold it only for five to 10 years (though existing tenants will still have security).

All this is on top of the housing benefit cuts, which, according to the homeless charity Crisis, will cost 160,000 households in London alone an average of £22 a week, and more after 2013.

Already, one million children grow up in overcrowding, and the average age of a first-time buyer without financial help from parents is 37. About 3600 people slept rough in London last year alone, and Crisis reckons that for every person sleeping rough there are 100 sleeping in homeless hostels and about 1100 living

with friends or relatives.

The certain results are:

More homelessness, from homeless-on-the-streets to the homeless who sleep on friends' sofas and floors.

- Poorer people "priced out" of inner-city areas, and forced into long commutes if they can find work at all.

- People who lose their jobs but could get work in other cities being unable to move there because rents and house prices become so much higher in areas with lower unemployment.

- More households forced into poverty because housing takes such a big chunk of their income.

Before World War Two and the expansion of council housing by the 1945-51 Labour government, about a third of the working class lived in "tenements". Only the recognition — by mass council house-building programmes — of housing as a social right changed that.

Labour councils should refuse to make the cuts in tenure and increases in rent (they are not compulsory). The labour movement should campaign against the housing cuts, and Ed Miliband should commit Labour to a big programme of council house building, to make good the backlog, as soon as the coalition is thrown out of office.

COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW

Questions and answers on the cuts

By CHRIS REYNOLDS

The Lib/Tory coalition says that the government just has to make social cuts, in the same way as anyone who has “maxed out” their credit cards needs to cut back. Is that true?

A. No. In the first place, there is nothing impossible about the government continuing with a large budget deficit for a while. Governments can’t “run out of money” in the same way that households or businesses can.

In the last analysis the question “where can the government get the money from?” can be answered simply: from the Bank of England printworks. There are limits on printing more cash, but the government is far from bumping up against them.

In the second place, military spending (total £37 billion a year) could be reduced further. The vast administrative costs of the internal market in the health service and the payments to private contractors under PFI schemes (up to £10 billion a year) could be axed.

In the third place, the deficit could be reduced by taxing or confiscating the huge wealth of the rich. Remember, inequality of wealth and after-tax incomes has spiralled since 1979, and continued to increase under New Labour.

Q. But none of those options will convince the Lib-Tory government.

A. The only thing that will convince the government is fear. Governments run huge budget deficits (much bigger, proportionately, than now), and sometimes even squeeze the rich, during and after wars because they fear military defeat or post-war upheaval more than the economic difficulties of budget deficits or the squealing of rich taxpayers.

Q. How do we frighten the government?

A. Nick Clegg has already told us, when before the election he announced his fear of “Greek-style unrest”.

Q. One-day strikes, then?

A. And more. The Lib Dems and Tories take Canada in the 1990s as a model of how to cut. Canadian workers organised a series of one-day local general strikes in protest, culminating in a strike which stopped Toronto in 1998. But the union leaders stopped there. We will need open-ended strikes, strikes where workers take action until the government backs down, the sort of thing that may be getting under way in France now.

Q. That’s impossible because of the anti-union laws.

A. The engineering construction strikes of 2009 broke the anti-union laws, but neither the bosses nor the government dared use the laws. Action on a sufficient scale can defy the laws. We can’t do that tomorrow. We can start mobilising, agitating, and organising in local anti-cuts committees.

Q. If the government doesn’t make cuts, it will lose credit in the international financial markets. It will have to pay higher interest rates to sell the bonds with which it finances its week-to-week spending. It will end up like Greece or Ireland.

A. It won’t do that straight away. And if workers all across Europe force governments all across Europe to back off from cuts, then the exchange-rate of the euro and the pound against the dollar may fall, but the international financiers are unlikely to desert European bond sales. But, yes, in the longer term, a government defying neo-liberal norms would see a spiralling crisis where international financiers demanded higher and higher interest rates to buy its bonds, or would not buy them at all.

Q. And then what?

A. Take over the whole of high finance, and put it under public ownership and democratic control! The free movement of finance across borders would have to be blocked, not in order to create a walled-off national economy but in order to seek new forms of cross-border collaboration governed by cooperation and solidarity between workers’ movements in different countries.

Q. This Lib-Tory government won’t do that.

A. As well as resisting the government and its cuts, we need to fight for a workers’ government — a government based on, accountable to, and serving the labour movement.

Q. You mean another Labour government?

A. Not another Labour government like the Blair-Brown one! Immediately, the battle is to win unions to working-class policies, to a commitment to fight politically for their policies, and to the principle of working-class political representation.

That includes a fight in the Labour-affiliated unions to win democratic control over the Labour Party leadership by the union and local Labour Party delegates at Labour conference.

To what extent that battle can force changes in the Labour Party, and make a future Labour government carry out measures which serve working-class interests, and at what point it might force a break, where the Blair-Brown New-Labourites split away rather than accept accountability, we will see.

But the political battle for the aim of a workers’ government, and for the working-class policies it should carry out, starts now.

Q. Why is the Lib-Tory government so keen to pay off the government debt?

A. The government is not paying off the debt. On its projections, government debt will be bigger in 2015 than it is now. What they plan to do by 2015 is to squeeze out the “structural deficit”.

Q. “Structural” means what?

A. It means the part of the gap between government income and spending which is “structural” in the sense that it would exist even in relative boom times. The other part of the gap is temporary deficits which more or less automatically heal with economic recovery. Those are caused by incomes and sales, and therefore tax revenue, being temporarily lowered in recession,

Q. All mainstream economists reckon it’s necessary to squeeze out the “structural” deficit, don’t they?

A. Yes and no. No government in a money economy could run a big permanent budget deficit, year in year out, slump-time or boom, unless it enjoyed a constant flow of foreign wealth-holders lending it more and more money, as the USA does. If a British government tried to run a big permanent budget deficit, it would suffer serious inflation and a collapse of the exchange rate of the pound. But the Lib-Tory government plans go way beyond recognising that constraint.

Q. How?

A. First, it’s guesswork how much of the government budget deficit is “structural” and how much is temporary. More optimistic figures for future growth would give you a smaller figure

for the “structural deficit”.

Second, governments can narrow budget deficits by cutting spending or by raising taxes. This government plans to do it almost entirely by cutting spending. It plans to cut some taxes, while raising others.

Third, the government plans to cut the deficit quickly, in the midst of recession. It could instead wait, let growth reduce the deficit, and leave government budget adjustments to be calculated later.

Q. So we should back the alternative proposed by Ed Balls, in vaguer terms by Alan Johnson and by Ed Miliband, and by the economic columnists of the *Financial Times*, Martin Wolf and Sam Brittan — fewer, slower cuts, and more tax rises?

A. Fewer and slower would be better than more and faster! But we should not accept the principle of any social cuts. All those people accept the principle of a lot of social cuts.

There is huge inequality. Budget deficits should be made good by taxing or confiscating the wealth of the rich, not by social cuts.

Q. But the quick cuts are just a political choice by the government? There is no real economic constraint on the government to do them?

A. The Tories subscribe to an economic theory — advocated by writers like Jeffrey Sachs — which says that quick cuts will work better for capitalism.

Week to week, governments get cash for their spending by selling bonds — that is, bits of paper which entitle the owner to receive the face-value at a fixed future date, say in ten years’ time, and meanwhile an interest payment every six months. They also sell bills, which are similar things, but shorter-term: they entitle the owner to receive final payment in a shorter time (usually three months), but no interim interest payments.

The government constantly has to sell new bonds and bills, if only to make the final payouts on the old bonds and bills falling due each month. If it sells more new bonds than it pays off old ones, then it increases its debt; if it sells fewer, then it decreases it.

The Tories recognise that they have to run deficits — sell more bonds than they pay off — for several years ahead. But they reckon that if they sell fewer new bonds than previously planned, then the interest rate they have to offer on bonds will be kept low. That will help keep down interest rates generally. Capitalist businesses will be able to get money to expand at a lower interest rate and more easily (because wealth-holders who would otherwise buy government bonds will buy corporate bonds or shares instead), so business will thrive.

Q. Will it actually work like that?

A. It may to some degree. No-one knows. Obviously leftist economists are predisposed to highlight the mechanisms by which public-spending cuts depress the whole economy, or by which

(conversely) continued deficits can pump up growth which in turn creates the resources to reduce deficits later; and right-wingers are predisposed to highlight the chance of government austerity helping private enterprise make better profits.

But some right-wing economists, too, question the government's story. The *Financial Times* backed the Tories on election day, but its main economic writers, Martin Wolf and Samuel Brittan, are furious about the government's plans. They think that by cutting public spending now the government will also pull down private capitalist business, by way of reducing market demand for goods and services bought by the public sector, by public-sector workers, and by people on benefits. The US government also thinks the cuts policies of European governments are excessive.

Q. Why should the government go for something so unpopular when they have no basis for it but guess-work?

A. There are at least three reasons.

One: the Tories have an inbred inclination to believe the "right-wing" story and to relish a chance to squeeze public sector workers and unions. They have an inbred disinclination to tax the rich.

Two: Angela Merkel's government in Germany pushed through a £66 billion cuts plan on 7 June 2010, although it has much less of a "debt crisis" than the UK. It is pushing other eurozone governments to make similar cuts and commit themselves (as Germany did in May 2009) to constitutional amendments banning budget deficits except in emergencies.

The EU, and most other capitalist governments except (hesitantly) the US government, have made a political choice, for a neo-liberal rather than a state-funded way forward from the crisis. That puts competitive pressure on the British government.

Three: the Tories' talk before the election about "restoring responsibility" (as they put it) to government finances ties them now.

A government which repeated soberly that it saw no immediate problem and it would adjust in due course might be ok. A governing party which raised an alarm about budget deficits, then made no cuts, would alarm the international financiers to whom the government sells bonds.

Once the international financiers are alarmed, then it is harder for the gov-

ernment to sell bonds. The interest rates it has to offer rise. Its future financial projections look worse. A vicious spiral of alarm damaging the government's credit, and the damage to the government's credit in turn generating more alarm, can develop, as it did for Greece after its October 2009 election.

Q. So governments are at the mercy of international financiers?

A. Today's huge, fast-moving, global financial markets, where trillions flow across borders every day, can cripple governments very quickly.

Q. So we can't do anything against the cuts short of defeating the whole of global finance capital?

A. Even this government could be pushed to delay and reduce social cuts. At present high finance is a more powerful lobby against taxes in its area than the labour movement is against cuts in ours! We could change that.

Q. And we could push the government to tax the rich rather than cutting social provision?

A. Yes! Of course, a government taxing the rich really heavily would suffer a flight of capital as much as or more than one running big budget deficits. The only answer to the power of global finance is to get workers' governments which will take over high finance, put it under public ownership and democratic control, stop the free flow of capital across borders, and create new forms of cross-border economic ties based on working-class cooperation and solidarity.

Q. Why do governments run debts at all?

A. The government can always get more pounds from the Bank of England printworks.

But constantly printing money in large amounts whenever spending runs ahead of tax receipts would eventually lead to uncontrollable inflation.

Selling bills and bonds from week to week — and having the Bank of England buy back some bills and bonds if it wants to get more cash into the economy — is the standard way of regulating money supply.

The system of government bills and bonds offers many advantages for the fine-tuning of government budget and monetary policy. (You can't "unprint" money.) But it wasn't invented for that. It started hundreds of years ago with governments scrabbling to raise cash

for wars, and evolved into an organic and central part of the financial system.

As Doug Henwood explains: "A large, liquid market in government debt with a central bank at its core is the base of modern financial systems". "Liquid" means that the bonds can be bought and sold easily. There are so many in circulation that you can always find buyers and sellers. According to Henwood, in the USA and Britain, financiers hold on to government bonds for an average of only one month before selling them again.

Who exactly holds all the £900-plus billion of UK government bonds currently outstanding is hard to say, because they change hands daily. And, monthly if not daily, old bonds come up to their final pay-out dates, and new bonds are sold.

Once the system is going, a government is obliged constantly to sell new bonds, if only in order to make the pay-outs on the old bonds.

As Henwood notes: "Public paper... provides rich underwriting and trading profits for investment bankers and interest income for individual and institutional rentiers... Government debt not only promotes the development of a central national capital market, it promotes the development of a world capital market as well... Public debt is a powerful way of assuring that the state remains safely in capital's hands. The higher a government's debts, the more it must please the bankers". ("Wall Street", p.22-3).

Q. Why doesn't the government solve its deficit problem now just by taking back from the banks, bit by bit, the money it handed out to them in 2008?

A. In 2008 the government helped the banks to the extent of £1100 billion — £18,000 for every child, woman, and man in the UK.

But that does not mean that there is £1100 billion sitting in bank vaults and the government could solve its problems, or alleged problems, about selling its bonds on the global financial markets by "taking back" bits of that stash instead.

A lot of the £1100 billion consisted of guarantees and credits designed to get the banks trading with each other again by saying that if a trade went bad, then the government would help out. Those guarantees and credits do not exist as a lump of cash that can be "taken back".

Some of the money was spent on buying out banks — Northern Rock and Bradford & Bingley completely, and Lloyds, RBS, and HBOS partially. The government could sell the shares it holds in those banks. But it wants them to be healthier before it does that.

Some of the government deficit is due to the 2008 bail-out, but that is essentially, for now, money which has disappeared into a black hole. Another part is due to tax income having shrunk in 2008-10, without public spending having shrunk.

The whole of high finance should be taken into public ownership, and without compensation to the big shareholders. Pending that, banks and bankers should be taxed more highly.

But neither of those measures is an easy, short-cut way for the government to improve its position in the global financial markets without bothering those markets. On the contrary, they are measures towards defying and breaking the power of those global financial markets.

THE LEFT

How (and how not) to build for a general strike

BY MARTIN THOMAS

On the 3 October demonstration against the Tories in Birmingham, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) carried placards saying: "TUC: call a general strike".

The SWP is pushing this slogan, not as a complement to agitation for action by individual workplaces and unions which could build up pressure sufficient to push the TUC into a general strike, but as a substitute.

In the civil service union PCS, for example — led by the Socialist Party, and on paper the most left-wing of the unions — the SWP has put down no proposals for PCS mobilisation to challenge the SP's reliance on the "Unison-PCS alliance".

It's like in 1992, when the SWP raised "TUC: call a general strike" as its answer to the Tory government of that day ordering a wave of pit closures. The slogan is just a sail to catch the political wind, not a summary of a worked-out political argument.

During the miners' strike of 1984-5, when a general strike was really on the agenda, the SWP had dismissed the call for it as "abstract". In 1972, when mass unofficial strikes over the jailing of five dockers pushed the TUC into calling a one-day general strikes, the SWP hesitated to raise the "general strike" call... until after the TUC had already raised it.

Even if the TUC General Council were suddenly to be converted to ultra-militancy, probably it would be a recipe for aborting the movement suddenly to call even a one-day general strike.

Militancy can build up very fast under the impact of the cuts and of the example given by French workers. But there's no point pretending it has already built up.

We can again start explaining the idea of a general strike, and the need to do in Britain what is being done in France. To shortcircuit the explanation with a demagogic catch-the-wind slogan will not help.

SOCIALIST CANDIDATE FOR US SENATE

“The candidate of class solidarity”

Dan La Botz is a well-known US socialist activist, a member of the Solidarity group. In next month's elections he will be standing for the Senate in the US state of Ohio. For more on his campaign, see <http://danlabotz.com>

How did you decide to run?

I had been following and writing about the economic crisis for about two years and it was clear to me this was no ordinary recession but really a depression. Then the Tea Party appeared presenting a right-wing interpretation of events. And they attacked Barack Obama, accusing him of being a socialist. These three things to me — the crisis, the Tea Party, and the debate over socialism — made it seem to me a propitious moment for a socialist campaign for office. Socialist Party members had asked me if I would be interested in being their Senate candidate, but I also considered the Green Party in which some socialists are active. I felt that I would be more comfortable as a Socialist Party candidate, where I could really point out the necessity of building a socialist alternative.

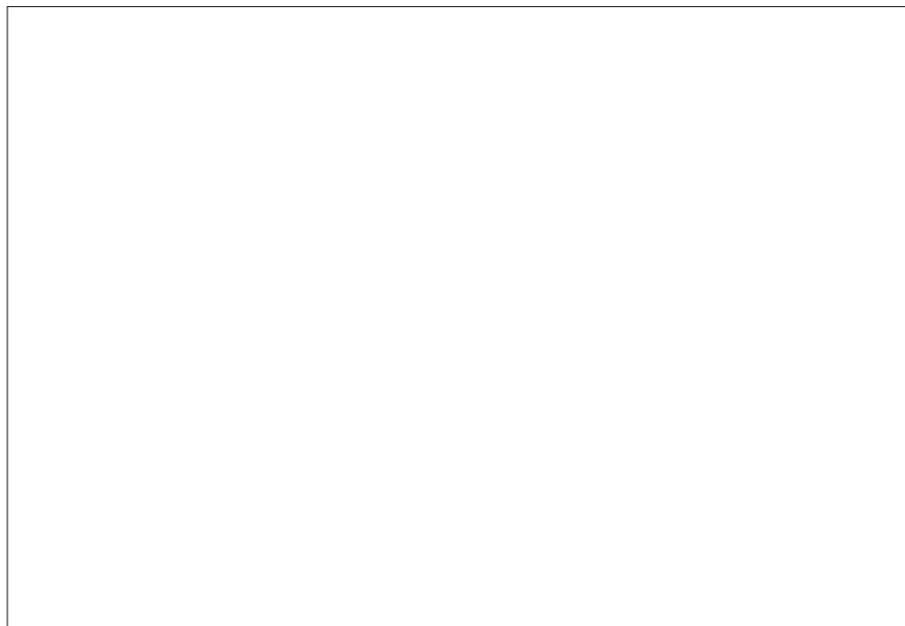
What are the main issues you're running on?

I have been running on three main issues: providing jobs for all, dealing with the environmental crisis, and ending US involvement in the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan.

I argue that when private enterprise has failed the government and the people have to act. I suggest that idle plants should be put to work under the control of unions, workers, consumers and with the advice of the environmental and social justice movements. I call for an end to the use of coal and the end of mountain top removal coal-mining techniques, while providing incomes to coal miners and power plant workers.

I argue for getting all US troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq now and stopping the drone bombing of Pakistan. Of course, I also talk about the rights issues and the scapegoating of African Americans, Latino immigrants, Muslims, and school teachers.

How has it gone so far? What kind of reception have you had? Who's involved in the campaign? What kind of labour movement or trade union backing have you had?



This is the first Socialist Party race in Ohio for the US Senate since the 1930s. The Socialist Party had very little organization in Ohio when I began in January of 2010, and unfortunately there have been no great labor or social movements taking place in this state. So we began with the idea of using the campaign to educate people about socialism, to build an organization of supporters of a socialist campaign, and to build networks of activists.

We have tried to find our initial organizers among those on the revolutionary left, members of the Socialist Party, of Solidarity, and of the International Socialist Organization, all three of which have endorsed the campaign. We have also had support from leaders, chapters, and activists in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and informally from members of the Ohio State Labor Party, a section of the Labor Party originally inspired by Tony Mazzochi in 1996.

I should explain that this Labor Party began with the participation of several major unions and many left organizations — but it basically soon decided that it would not run candidates to avoid conflict with labor union officials who by-and-large support the Democratic Party. The Labor Party pledged to be involved in labor union and activist work, but it had no candidates (with one or two local exceptions).

Consequently it did not represent a real political party and over time its

union and left supporters drifted away. The Green Party's Ralph Nader campaign [for president in 2000 and 2004] was obviously far more compelling than anything the Labor Party might do.

We have also had support from some individual Green Party members. In different parts of the state peace activists, labour union activists, and students have supported the campaign.

Throughout the United States the labour unions with very few exceptions are absolutely tied to the Democratic Party. Despite my long record as a labour union reformer and activist — or perhaps in part because of that record — I have been unable to get a hearing before local labor unions or federations. The AFL-CIO and Change to Win [the two national union federations] are both committed to the Democrats. All of the local union leaderships rushed to endorse Democrats early and are committed to electing them. Virtually the only exception to this in the US is the United Electrical Workers Union (UE), which has virtually no presence in Ohio.

What kind of achievements are you expecting or hoping for, votes-wise and otherwise?

We have spoken to thousands of people in the state, had our platform and positions published in many newspapers and received radio and television coverage of the campaign. We brought a Federal Election Commission complaint to protest our exclusion from the debates organized by the newspapers and television stations in the state. While we hope to receive thousands of votes, we will also measure the success of this campaign by our own goals of carrying out an educational campaign, building networks of activists, and creating a small socialist movement in Ohio.

Are there many other socialist candidates in these elections? What are you advocating workers do where there's no socialist standing?

There are a few other socialist candidates running in the United States under various party labels: Socialist Party, Green Party, Peace and Freedom Party and perhaps others. Where there are no socialist parties or candidates, I would suggest that people vote for the Green

Party candidates or for progressive independent candidates on the left.

I believe that a future working-class party in the United States will come out of a workers' movement, an upheaval from below, but in the meantime the electoral parties on the left (Green, P&F, Labour Party, Socialist, etc) serve an important role in raising radical platforms, in staking out a position to the left of the Democrats, and in allowing voters to register and us to measure the weight of the far left in US politics. While none of these parties today has reached the status of a mass working-class party, we can play an important role as the catalysts of a future workers' party in the United States.

What's your take on the election more generally? I've read Solidarity articles anticipating a swing to the right in voting patterns, because of disillusionment with Obama and a right-wing offensive.

The right wing of the Republican Party has helped to finance and organize the Tea Party movement and through both that movement and that party will benefit from the disillusionment of many with Obama. At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that polls by Gallup, Pew and Rasmussen show that about a third of American voters, especially young voters, are favorably disposed toward socialism. So what we are seeing is a polarization of the country, as part moves to the right and another part moves toward the left, with many left in the middle. The problem is that the level of class struggle is at an historic low point both in the labour unions and the social movements.

You're a member of Solidarity, but standing for the Socialist Party. Can you say more about that?

I am a member of Solidarity, but our organization has little or no experience up to now with electoral campaigns. The Socialist Party which offered the opportunity to run on their ticket has both the historic name of Eugene V Debs and Norman Thomas, enormously popular socialist leaders, and the experience of being involved in electoral campaigns. The Socialist Party principles and platform are excellent documents that I could wholeheartedly endorse, so I felt quite comfortable in also joining the SP and running on the SP ticket. The SP national staff have been very supportive and helpful in the campaign, as have the party's members.

What next, after the election?

We plan to continue to work to build activist and socialist networks in Ohio and to be involved in the movements which we have supported for years in Ohio, in the United States, and in international solidarity.

What can socialists in other countries do to support your campaign?

Socialists in other countries can let their compatriots and others around the world know that in the United States there are those who stand against American imperialism, militarism and war. We want to be known as the party, the candidate and the campaign of international working-class solidarity.

Mass privatisation

Continued from page 6

claimed their challenge has sent “an almighty shudder through the Department of Health”. This may be true but a legal challenge alone will only help postpone the plans. Unison needs a bigger response.

The Unison leadership believes that the best way to beat the Tory cuts is to fight a political battle and get Labour elected next time round. Partly this is because the leadership have no connection to or faith in the rank and file to take industrial action.

Unison general secretary Dave Prentis

says that “nurses and careworkers will not abandon their service users to go on strike” (Dispatches, Channel 4, 27 September).

But a recent survey in the *Nursing Times*, 25% of nurses said that they would take strike action if their job was at risk. This figure rose to 40% in intensive care nurses and 50% in mental health services.

It cannot be denied that years of service unionism and social partnership have resulted in a very poorly organised health branches. But we cannot let that cripple us in advance.

A serious leadership should be alerting the public to the dangers facing the health service and rallying support for healthworkers in struggle.

Healthworkers should be packing out union meetings and putting pressure on the leadership to take action.

A weekly Solidarity!

By CATHY NUGENT

Meeting on 16-17 October the Alliance for Workers' Liberty resolved to "turn outwards", to energetically throw ourselves into the developing global resistance to the harshest ruling-class offensive against workers for eight decades, and strive to be an adequate force within it.

We resolved to make our newspaper a weekly — and before the end of 2010! We think we need to increase the tempo of our political work in line with the new political situation... and we need your help!

Why should you help us?

Many new questions, new struggles and new experiences are being thrown up by the bosses' attacks.

In France, workers have launched a tremendous strike movement against pension reform. As the government sends in police against the oil workers it is fast becoming a political movement. How can French workers gain confidence; will they be able to develop political demands?

Here in the UK we have a job on our hands to win any kind of strike action. The TUC, the body that should be an organising centre for hundreds of thousands of workers now facing attacks on jobs and services, refuses to fight. It has put off any major demonstration against the Con-Dem cuts until March. Can trade union militants force the unions to resist and organise the necessary action — strikes, mass protests...?

To be successful these working-class struggles — and the very many smaller ones which confront us — need ideas. That is where newspapers like *Solidarity* comes in.

Many socialist ideas are very simple and one of the simplest is the idea of "solidarity" — a watchword for the times ahead. Working-class solidarity is when workers stick together. Workers need to do that because their interests are very different to those of bosses (we are not "all in it together"). Only by standing together can workers win.

Solidarity boiled down is, as the old phrase goes, "an injury to one is an injury to all". French workers need pension rights. UK workers need pension rights. It is all one fight. If workers use as their guide this one simple idea, it will help them win.

So we will be taking our paper onto the demonstrations against Sarkozy.

And we will be taking our newspaper onto the demonstrations around the UK against the Con-Dem cuts. Newspapers like *Solidarity* can help ideas become a "material reality", can help workers win.

Of course we are not big enough to lead mass struggles. We do not say that every strategy we advise for every struggle will be a surefire "winner". All we say is that we can influence individuals and individuals who are fully convinced of socialist ideas can play a valuable role in the movement.

They can be the voice who sways the argument for action in the union meeting. They can be the person who stand up against a union "full-timer" who wants to put a dampener on action. They can be the person who has clear ideas on "alternatives" to cuts in the political discussions of anti-cuts groups.

We do not ask people to believe we have a monopoly on the truth. We only ask people to judge us on what we do: to see that we are building a collective of life-long socialists who have educated themselves in Marxist ideas and the best traditions of the socialist movement; see that we try to renew those ideas as we participate in the struggles of the present; know that we try to pass on those ideas to other working-class militants and thus carry them forward to the future.

And regular readers of *Solidarity* will also know that we stand for a socialism that puts the democratic self-organisation of workers against all exploitation and oppression at its heart.

Our paper is the educator and the organiser of the people who produce, who circulate it, who read it regularly — and not so regularly. A weekly *Solidarity* will help all of us be more organised and politically confident in the grave, volatile and demanding times ahead.

There are four ways in which you can help us.

- Report for *Solidarity*. Send us short reports of your union, anti-cuts meeting. Or write to us about the cuts you face in your workplace or community.
- Sell *Solidarity*. Take a few copies to sell at work or in your college. Write to us at PO Box 823, London, SE15 4SE.
- Donate some money to help us make *Solidarity* weekly. You can donate at www.workersliberty.org
- Subscribe to *Solidarity*: you can do it at www.workersliberty.org/sub

France approaches general strike

By EDWARD MALTBY

We are approaching an all-out general strike in France. On Saturday 16 October and again on Tuesday 19th, 3.5 million workers and students demonstrated against the government's pensions reform.

Strikes in transport, oil, logistics and an increasing number of other sectors (including the security guards who deliver cash to shops) are bringing France to a halt. The government plans to use the police to break the strikes causing fuel shortages.

Mass meetings in workplaces every morning discuss the strike and vote to carry it on.

The strike is the result of several factors. The immediate spark is pension cuts. Sarkozy's government wants to raise the age at which one can retire from 60 to 62; and the age at which one can receive a full pension from 65 to 67. It also plans to remove the 'special regimes' under which workers in particularly physically demanding work can retire early.

This is part of a general austerity programme, which includes 7 billion euros' worth of cuts in public sector jobs and wages.

But behind the strikes is a more general "ras-le-bol", which is a French expression meaning "being totally fed up", in this case with France's right-wing president Nicolas Sarkozy. There is an increasing sense that he must go.

Sarkozy has outraged workers with his claims to be the "French Thatcher" — but also with his racist, brutal campaign of deportation of Roma and travellers from France. The last time Roma, Gypsies and travellers were deported from France en masse was during the Holocaust.

Strikers vs the French state

By CLARKE BENITEZ

Sarkozy is stepping up legal and violent repression against striking workers as the fuel shortage grows. Many fuel depots are blockaded by workers — the government is using police violence to break the blockades.

But possibly more alarming is the use of the threat of jail to send workers back to work at the Grandpuits Total oil refinery in northern France. On Sunday 17 October, three strikers were ordered by the chief of police to go back to work and load up several oil tankers or face five years' imprisonment. They complied, and the next day 30 workers were driven back to work with the same ultimatum. The strike continues — but this attack on the right to strike should alarm trade unionists across Europe.

British trade unionists should send solidarity to striking oil refinery workers, and condemn the actions of the French government!

• For a model motion for unions, see tinyurl.com/frenchsolidarity

We can win

FROM THE NEW ANTICAPITALIST PARTY

It has been seven weeks of strikes and demonstrations which are now at a higher level, developing in step with the mobilisation.

After the success of the demonstrations of Saturday 16 October, the day of strikes and demonstrations on 19 October was also a success with 3.5 million people in the streets and a huge youth presence. The college and university students have joined the dance.

Each time, more millions of demonstrators, it is confirmed that the movement covers the whole of the country. A reform which is unpopular with over 70% of the population can only encourage people in struggle and push others to participate in demonstrations or support the movement. It is through striking that we can build on our strength. By this we mean that it is us who make the economy work, and that all wealth is produced by our labour.

But it is the strike which allows us to block the economy, which allows workers to take the time to come together, to organise, to meet other workers in neighbouring workplaces, to take control of the struggle. That is the task facing us.

Sarkozy has schemes for improving "national identity". He champions the role of religion in public life, boosting the Catholic church and Muslim and Jewish religious leaders. In France, with its strong secular tradition, this is very controversial.

He wants to promote a right-wing, nationalistic account of French history, starting with reforming the National Archives — workers at the Archives have been occupying the building against these reforms for weeks.

No wonder that rail-workers in Lyon sang "let's throw Sarkozy under a train" last week.

A variety of local, sectoral issues have helped to provoke the strikes. There are many local ongoing disputes over redundancies and wage freezes in both the public and the private sector. Workers see a generalised strike movement as a means by which many scores can be settled.

The mobilisation has been going on since around April, but has only recently achieved "critical mass". The mobilisation has moved from periodic one-day strike actions, into what's called "reconductible" strikes.

A "reconductible" strike is one where workers meet in a mass workplace meeting (called a "general assembly" or "AG") every morning and take a vote on whether to continue the strike or not. This local rank-and-file democracy makes the strike more chaotic, more durable, and much more dangerous.



Buy it, read it, sell it

Approaches to strike

The French revolt is much stronger than the Greek one earlier this year which got so much publicity after fire-bombs were thrown on demonstrations in Athens.

The Greek movement was basically a series of one-day strike actions called from above. No strong rank-and-file co-ordination, capable of independent initiative, has been built there — not yet, anyway.

The French union leaderships did not choose the move to “reconductible” strikes of their own free will. They were put under pressure by the massive turnout on the one-day demonstrations and the fact that continuous strike action was already beginning independently under the pressure of local disputes in oil, ports and chemical sectors.

The call for “reconductible” strikes was a response to that pressure, and to the other pressure imposed by Sarkozy’s refusal event to sham negotiations with the union leaderships.

Reconductible strikes became have been used in several big disputes with the government in the last 15 years — 1995, 2003, 2006 and 2007. Not all those movements were successful — but they have created a culture of holding general assemblies as a means of running disputes. This memory has been held and transmitted by socialist and trade union

activists.

The move from one-day action to generalised reconductible action started on 12 October and is still ongoing. It was not easy — it was not an army marching to the beat of one drum, going into action at a pre-arranged signal from above. Rather, it was a complicated, chaotic phenomenon, with many small local retreats and little advances, adding up to a confusing, dynamic “big picture” of a movement advancing into a general strike.

The escalation began with certain core sectors — oil, transport, docks, chemicals — and certain core areas like Marseilles.

On Wednesday 13th, things looked difficult. In order for the strike to spread, the core sectors had to stay out. But in order for the core sectors to remain solid, the strikes had to spread.

As of Wednesday 20 October, that impasse has been resolved positively, in the direction of escalation. Most importantly, a political argument was won in workplaces and in general assemblies that strikers in the core sectors of the strike had a responsibility to lead and inspire the rest of the workers’ movement.

That idea, fought for by socialists and leftwing trade union activists, is now a deeply held conviction on the national rail network, a strategic sector for the French workers’ movement.

Organised, trained, and disciplined revolutionaries embedded in the workers’ movement have transmitted the experiences of previous years of struggle to younger workers and won them over politically to fight for a general strike. They have done this by a process of agitation lasting months.

A further factor adding to the health of the strike is the youth movement. Around 2,000 further education colleges are hit by a youth strike, and around 800 of those are physically blockaded, according to the student union UNL. The development of a student strike in universities is happening more slowly, but it is happening. About 400 high schools are on strike, blockaded, or occupied.

The French government is stepping up repression — the CRS riot police are provoking fights and arrests on demonstrations. On Tuesday/Wednesday night 19th/20th, police used violence to lift blockades on three fuel depots overnight, but as of Wednesday morning these blockades had been put back into force by workers and activists.

Sarkozy has ordered the forcible opening of all blockaded fuel depots. But we shall see how he gets on.

The government is set to vote on the pensions reform next week. But activists remember how in 2006 the CPE law [cutting employment rights for young people] was repealed shortly after being passed due to popular pressure. The slogan is, “what the Parliament does, the street can undo”.

In transport, the strikes are not 100% solid — around half of trains are running and the number of flights cancelled is not yet clear. “Snail operations” or go-slows by lorries on motorways, are multiplying. But in any case, the strike movement is

strong and getting stronger.

If the French working class wins, Sarkozy will in all likelihood be politically incapable of enforcing further austerity measures; and many local disputes will be won.

This is a class battle of global significance. If the austerity programme is halted in France, then one of the pillars of the European Union’s drive for a harshly “neo-liberal” resolution of the crisis has been shattered.

The ruling classes of other European countries will be demoralised and disorganised in their own cuts programmes, and the working classes will have been shown in practice how to beat those cuts.

The French revolutionary left did not foresee this movement a year ago. It certainly did not conjure this movement out of nowhere on its own. It has been able to play a large part in shaping the movement politically.

Its cadres have been able to set up general assemblies and strike committees where otherwise none would have existed. They have won the argument in workplaces on the necessity of fighting for a general strike. They have been able, in part, to determine the character and the success of this movement.

A French youth confronts riot police

That is because the revolutionary left in France, though numerically not that much bigger than in Britain, is qualitatively more embedded in industrial workplaces and union organisations, and less inclined to spend its time chasing after Islamic clerical-fascists (the SWP) or jobs in PCS union officialdom (the SP).

In Britain, we cannot foresee what struggles the next five years of Tory rule will bring. But we too will be surprised, one way or another. We will be put to the test. Either we will be able to make a decisive contribution, as the French revolutionary left has done, or we will not.

The only thing we can do now to help us pass the test is to prepare ourselves — to build our organisation, to educate ourselves, to increase our activity, to focus our activity more on the strategic priority of developing political influence in workplaces and union organisations.

I urge readers who want to be part of that trained, disciplined, socialist element in the British labour movement to join the AWL today.

• For the latest:
www.workersliberty.org/world/international/europe/france

LGBT LIBERATION

School students protest

BY MOLLY THOMAS

Spirit Day took place on 20 October. In an initiative originating with a teenage student in Canada, we were encouraged to dress in purple, the colour of the stripe representing ‘spirit’ on the LGBT pride rainbow flag, in honour of the six gay students in the USA who have committed suicide in recent months due to homophobic bullying.

At my school, Indooroopilly State High School in Brisbane, Australia, many of us decided to dress in purple to show our support and respect for members of the LGBT community and to make it very clear that sort of behaviour was not acceptable in our society. My friends and I dressed in purple to recognise the courage it sometimes takes to come out in repressive or uninformed communities.

While I was walking around my school, seeing people wearing purple and seeing the beautiful Jacaranda trees shed their purple flowers, ‘spirit’ seemed to be the perfect word to describe the people who refuse to buy into a narrow-minded philosophy, one of fear and ignorance.

BOOK

Life in Kim's Kingdom

Tom Unterrainer reviews *Nothing to Envy* by Barbara Demick.

By the entrance to the British Museum's Korea gallery is a case displaying a stone dagger dating from 1000-300 BC and a collection of stone arrow heads from 6000-2000 BC.

Next to these artefacts is a razor dating from the Koryo Dynasty of the 12th-13th century. The razor, used by Buddhist monks to shave their heads, was forged in the closing years of the Koryos — a ruling line from which the name "Korea" is derived.

Contrast the social, economic and technological dynamism of the besieged Koryo Dynasty — where the world's first moveable metal type was developed — with the decrepit, kitsch-Stalinist, pseudo-monarchical disarray of North Korea today. Where Kim Jong-il's one-party state relies on razor blade imports from neighbouring China, the Koryos engaged in expansive trade and probably exported them. Where the Kims preside over a hermetic kingdom where social and economic development are in sympathetic decline, the Koryo's and their immediate successors — tyrannical and despotic in their own ways, no doubt — faced forwards.

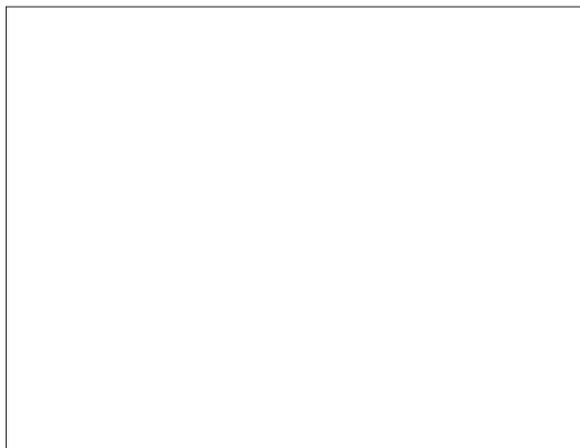
Barbara Demick's harrowing chronicle of life in North Korea, *Nothing to Envy*, details the trials, despair, poverty and brutality meted out to a small selection of "defectors" from North to South. It reveals more than just the personal motivations of a few very brave souls. Demick traces the totalising structure of the Kim regime and describes the consequences of even the most banal fracturing in the façade. Her interviews and investigation will turn the stomach but also offer great hope.

The sinking of the South Korean naval vessel Cheonan in April this year sparked fears that relations between North and South were tilting to the edge of war. Characteristically denying knowledge and responsibility for the attack, the North Korean military offered assistance to the South in its salvage and investigation of the attack. Together with the robotic pageantry of official celebrations and the diplomatic brinkmanship over nuclear weapons testing, the only high-profile news from North Korea comes from rogue or seemingly inexplicable events such as the Cheonan attack. Such events and responses are in fact rational manifestations of the dynamics of North Korean society. The regime lends itself to satire but a form of logic is at work.

These outward convulsions have been matched by internal changes, about-turns, concessions and periods of "loosening up" and "clamping down". Until the fall of the Russian and East European Stalinist states, North Korean leaders maintained an almost total control over their subjects. From Kim Il-sung's Russian and Chinese-backed assumption of power in 1949 up until the early 1990s, society was tightly controlled, socially and economically "stable". Through the period of Sino-Soviet splits, "revisionism" and "anti-revisionism", Kim Il-sung maintained relations with his Chinese neighbours and the Russian Stalinists, ensuring inward and outward commodity flows. For much of this period, the North outstripped South in economic development even in the face of US aid and support to the South before and after the Korean war. Everything changed with the fall of European and Russian Stalinism.

By the mid-90s North Korea was wracked by a largely state engineered famine that killed 2-10 percent of the population. In the past North Koreans depended on a state-wide rationing and token system; now the state couldn't meet even basic needs. The system began to crack in the face of creeping economic crisis. The regime's solution was to tolerate an improvised internal market and individual profit-making. Along with the food shortages, North Korea's industry ground to a halt. Millions of workers were flung onto the streets, removed from the suffocating routine of work-ideological training-eat-sleep-work-... Once removed, even the most ardent regime-patriots could no longer ignore the new realities: their homeless, starving, decaying, rotting fellow humans.

The vast majority of the population survived the famine by improvisation. Whether illegally growing food, trading across the North Korean/Chinese border, producing and selling commodities in cottage industries, or selling themselves for sex, people did what was necessary to ward off death. Many of them even made a profit. In purely economic terms, these moves were pro-



Kim Jong-il. His regime lends itself to satire but the suffering of the people is very real

gressive — a big step forward from the normal economic functioning. They were not tolerated for long.

The accumulation of private wealth could not be squared with a totalising but money-starved state accustomed to a steady command-economy. Kim Jong-il called a halt to accumulation by having his prime minister announce a re-valuation of currency. The process would involve people handing in their cash in return for fewer, lower-denomination notes. As such, the state would boost its bank account and rein in the market.

Very few people were fooled. Rather than hand money to a government that had nearly starved them to death, some North Koreans simply burned their money in the street! Others, disgruntled by the move, stopped trading for a day or two at a time which led to something akin to a "general strike" of traders. This was serious business in a country where such moves were not only unprecedented but where people lived and fed themselves on a day-to-day basis. The state capitulated, raised the amount of money that could be traded in, and had the bureaucrat in charge of the changes shot.

Demick's interviews with defectors from the North chart the impact of the crisis on individuals and their families.

"Dr Kim felt fortunate to have been born in North Korea and was especially grateful that the government

had allowed her, the daughter of a humble construction worker, to go to medical school for free. She felt that she owed her education and her life to her country. It was her greatest ambition to join the Workers' Party and repay the debt she owed her nation."

Dr Kim was a patriot. Even in the depths of the famine — where her work as a paediatrician brought her into intimate contact with the dying and dead — she did not question the basic patriotic assumptions taught to her from the earliest years. When she found her work too emotionally draining, she switched to another medical field without considering the bigger picture. Dr Kim was a strict adherent to party teachings and philosophy, an aspirant party member and eager gofer for local apparatchiks.

Whilst undertaking cleaning duties in the hospital party offices, Kim discovered that she would never be able to join the Workers' Party because she was racially "suspect". Kim was devastated: the party, country, "idea" that she loved more than anything else had nothing but utter contempt for her. It had all been a lie. Stripped of illusions, the terrible reality of the famine became clear. Kim fled to the South via China.

Jun-sang was a privileged young party member. A science student chosen for training at a university in Pyongyang, Jun-sang did not suffer the deprivations of the famine and neither did his family. He lived in a relatively isolated world inside the capital city. He had access to foreign books, newspapers and journals and read voraciously. In bizarre conditions the most bizarre texts can offer inspiration. One such instance was Jun-sang's reading of a Russian Stalinist pamphlet on economic reform from the 1980s! The pamphlet's argument planted a seed of doubt in his mind.

"On one trip in 1998, when the North Korean economy was at its worst, Jun-sang was stuck in a small town in South Hamgyong province where he usually switched from the eastbound trains to the northbound line up the coast... As he waited, his attention was drawn to a group of homeless children... One boy, about seven or eight years old, sang. His tiny body was lost in the folds of an adult-size factory uniform, but his voice had the resonance of a much older person. He squeezed his eyes shut, mustering all his emotion, and belted out the song, filling the platform with its power.

"Uri Abogi, our father, we have nothing to envy in the world. / Our house is within the embrace of the Workers' Party. / We are all brothers and sisters."

Obituary: Benoit Mandelbrot

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Benoit Mandelbrot, the most famous mathematician of the last half-century, died on 14 October. He became famous for developing new branches of mathematics with immediate visual appeal and wide practical application: chaos theory, and fractals.

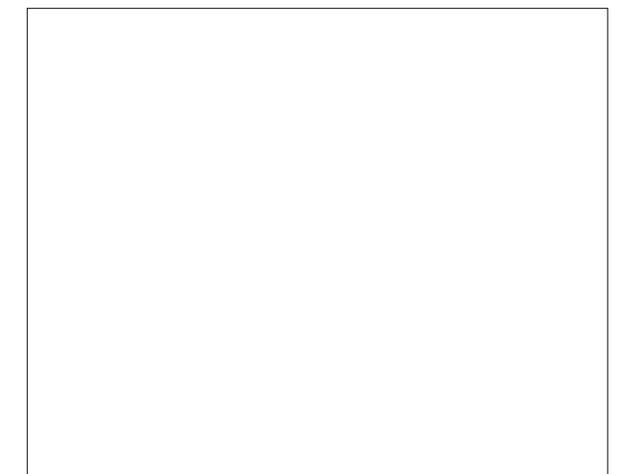
The "Mandelbrot set" (see picture) exemplifies them. It is "chaotic" in the same way that, for example, turbulent flow of water is. It is "fractal" in being "self-same": put a small segment of it under a magnifying glass, and you see the same "roughness" as you do in the whole shape.

Popular accounts of chaos theory sometimes present it as a story of indeterminism. Actually, it is a story of how simple deterministic relations can produce eerily complicated results.

For anyone who has done A level maths, the Mandelbrot set is defined very simply: all the points z in the complex plane for which the function z -squared + c does not diverge under iteration.

The application of Mandelbrot's ideas to economics has recently been popularised by Nassim Nicholas Taleb's bestseller *The Black Swan*: basically, even if economic quantities follow relatively simple mathematical relations, their interactions can produce "weird" results, like the 2008 financial crisis.

In mathematical economics, Mandelbrot stands as the opposite pole to Gerard Debreu. Both men studied mathematics in Paris in the 1940s, and were formed by the same influence: the "Bourbaki" school of French mathematicians.



The "Bourbaki" group, including Benoit Mandelbrot's uncle Szolem, Debreu's teacher Henri Cartan, and others such as Jean Dieudonné, tried to reconstruct mathematics in a more rigorous, abstract, and "top-down" form.

Debreu was enthusiastic, and became the leading figure in developing neo-classical economics into an elaborate mathematical scheme, adapted by many banks in the run-up to 2008 to guide their financial ventures.

Mandelbrot reacted against "Bourbaki". As he put it: "Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, and bark is not smooth..."

More: <http://bit.ly/mandelbr>
<http://bit.ly/alejandro>

AWL CONFERENCE 2010

“The most important conference in decades”

BY PAUL HAMPTON

Closing the AWL's conference, which took place on 16-17 October, Jill Mountford concluded that it was “the most important conference for our group in over two decades”. New times, and with them new responsibilities for revolutionary socialists, were the backdrop to the event.

While the AWL is a small propaganda group at present, we aspire to the liberation of humanity, to a higher civilisation brought about through working class self-emancipation. To achieve such ambitious goals we require, first, rational assessments of the state of the world, from which we draw out the main political conclusions; and, second, the will and drive to carry out the decisions taken to help change the situation.

PERSPECTIVES

The main discussion at the conference, and the most contentious, was around the perspectives document (which we print here in full). Sean Matgama set out the objective conditions that define the period ahead in much of the world, including Britain: a capitalist economic crisis that threatens to lurch again into recession, together with cost cutting, public service-smashing states determined to make the working class pay for the crisis. In Britain the Con-Dem coalition will unleash an age of austerity, unless the labour movement resists.

Sean argued that the election, coming on the back of the crisis, had opened a significant gap between Labour and the Tories for the first time in over a decade. In the aftermath of the general election, with Ed Miliband beating his Blairite first-choice brother to the Labour leadership and the reversal of the Bournemouth decision from 2007, which will once again allow unions to put motions to the Labour conference, it was imperative for socialists to relate to the Labour Party. Union members had voted for Ed Miliband and should call him to account on his promises, not least to oppose Tory-Lib-Dem cuts. The union-Labour link remains and continues to be the main axis for unions to assert themselves in politics.

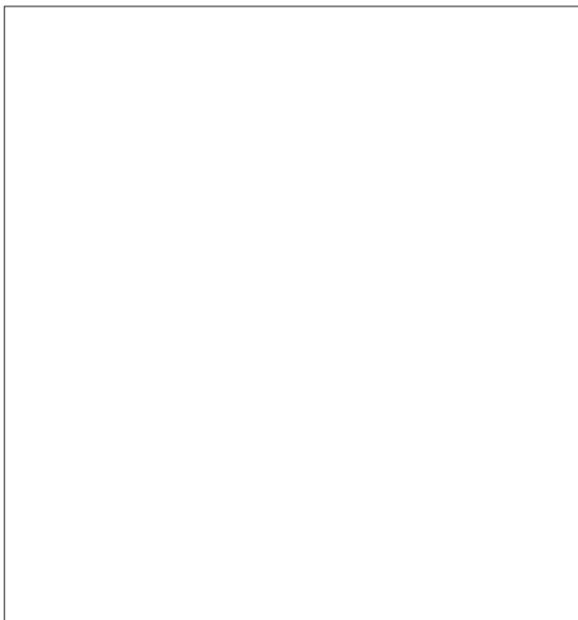
This orientation is particularly important in the light of failed left electoral projects. Recent attempts at left alliances such as Respect and TUSC have been politically disastrous as well as garnering little support from workers. Such projects in the coming period are not our priority, but we remain open in principle to backing solid socialist or singular AWL-sponsored challenges.

In the debate Paul Cooper likened the pressure of the crisis grinding on the working class to the movement of tectonic plates. This pressure has and will exert itself on the Labour party and union structures, he said, giving openings for socialists to organise. What mattered was the class logic of the situation, and what working class people understood by it.

Amendments from John Bloxam sought to emphasise the importance of electoral challenges outside Labour and to reword the document's broadly favourable (but for now, tentative) position on potential moves inside the RMT and FBU to reaffiliate to the Labour Party. Those amendments fell. One amendment which stressed measures to promote politics in non-affiliated unions was passed.

A WEEKLY PAPER

The most important decision taken by the conference was to make the *Solidarity* newspaper a weekly. Cathy Nugent urged the conference to commit to a more frequent paper, because that's what the new political situation demands. She argued that the paper plays the role of a collective propagandist but also a collective organiser, erecting a scaffold for the organisation and establishing its political rhythm. From the floor Pat



Jill Mountford

Yarker caught the mood, explaining how he had used the paper in building anti-cuts work, to the degree that even members of other organisations had helped sell it. Comrades pledged to increase sales on estates, outside workplaces and colleges and to write for a more regular publication.

ANTI-CUTS

Tom Unterrainer moved the document on anti-cuts work. The central demand is for local anti-cuts committees to coalesce around trades councils, as the most democratic labour movement bodies available. This approach, with the potential to unite local unions and other campaigns, is in sharp contrast to the front organisations being built by the Right to Work, Coalition of Resistance and NSSN. Comrades agreed to work conscientiously to build local committees, drawing new layers into struggle as well as reviving the labour movement.

THE UNIONS

Chris Hickey moved the resolution on unions. He started by registering the potential threat of job losses — more than a million — which he said, if the Con-Dems succeeded, could spell the last hurrah of trade unionism as we've known it. Chris argued that the existing union leaderships, including the bulk of the awkward squad, were “unfit for purpose” — as indicated by the two-tier pensions deal agreed by PCS in 2005. Serious rank-and-file projects, built around workplace and industrial bulletins, are the way to rebuild militancy and democratise the unions. It was “class, not sectional perspectives” that marked out the AWL's trade union approach, he said.

ANTI-FASCIST AND ANTI-RACIST WORK

Anti-fascist and anti-racist work has been a particularly important part of AWL activity in the last period. Our involvement in the Stop Racism and Fascism (SRF) network, set up last March, was the culmination of vital work done to stop the BNP festival in Codnor. Pete Radcliff also drew attention to the important work in mobilising against the EDL and defending Asian communities from attack. He contrasted the effective mobilisation in Bradford with the rampage the EDL carried out in Leicester. The servile role of the UAF and Hope Not Hate in organising festivals while leaving the EDL to run amok was made by a number of speakers. The consequence is also to leave defence of Asian

communities to Islamist organisations and to promote precisely the communalism the EDL and BNP feed on. Bob Sutton moved an amendment, which was carried, to sharpen our propaganda around immigration and to clarify our critique of the anarchists and the Socialist Party, with whom we work in the SRF network.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The debate on the AWL's women's movement activity was probably the spikiest of the whole event. Cathy Nugent moved a report on AWL work and how we work with organisations such as Feminist Fightback. She concluded that we needed to strengthen the AWL women's fraction within the group — the conference agreed to set up a Women's Commission — and in our interventions among the wider layers of women coming into activity, especially given the disproportionately large impact of the cuts on women. Jean Lane moved amendments, including one which sought to slightly de-emphasise tackling individual sexist behaviour, but these fell. There was some discussion over what we mean by “socialist feminism” and what it means for us as we work for women's liberation, but with a distinctive, working class women-based approach. That discussion will continue as we develop educational work on these issues in the organisation.

WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION

The AWL has distinguished itself in recent struggles around ecology and climate change, developing a distinctive class-based approach. We played an indispensable role in the Vestas struggle, and have been an important force in labour movement and climate camp activity in recent years. Stuart Jordan argued that although the climate movement has been knocked back this year, our work within the broad-based Workers' Climate Action will continue to be important.

NO SWEAT

The AWL has also played an important role in sustaining the No Sweat campaign, which continues to do useful solidarity work, particularly with strikers in internationally well-known textile and garment production. Daniel Randall urged comrades to build No Sweat, particularly on campuses with People and Planet groups and to make links with Bangladeshi workers in London.

STUDENT WORK

Ed Maltby moved the student work document. This year will be pivotal, with massive cuts and tuition fee hikes planned by the government. The AWL is part of the National Campaign Against Fees and cuts, which is planning a wave of direct action, demonstrations and occupations. NUS structures remain frozen over, but there are still opportunities (see page 7 of this paper).

BUILDING THE AWL

Sacha Ismail argued that the conclusion from all the discussion was that the AWL plays an irreplaceable role in working class struggle. Without our struggle for ideological clarity and class consciousness, many necessary and rational arguments would simply not be heard in the labour movement. Without our intervention, the course of the class struggle would be worse.

Jill Mountford urged comrades to have the confidence to lead and to convince people to join the AWL. Being right but small was cold comfort, she said. We should redouble our efforts to become a decisive force in politics.

www.workersliberty.org/node/15272

DEBATE

The crisis, British politics, and the tasks of revolutionary socialists

The general line of this document by Sean Matgamna was adopted by the AWL conference on 16-17 October 2010

1. WORLD CRISIS

The banking crisis of 2007-08 and after changed politics everywhere in ways that are still unfolding. The possibility of a “double-dip” economic slump looms threateningly. Even without that it is now commonplace for economic commentators to talk of now as the worst economic crisis in 80 years. There is enormous unemployment in Europe, America and other areas.

The cost to states such as the British of shoring up the banks, and the bankers, has locked governments like Britain’s into a vicious circle that may turn into a steeply downward spiral. Increased state debt makes them vulnerable to the moods and swings of international money market speculation. That leads to government drives to cut back on state expenditure so severely that the consequent weakening of effective demand — social service cuts, withdrawal of state contracts for goods and services, etc., unemployment — becomes a major force pushing economies towards the “double dip”, a deeper and worse slump than that triggered by the banking crisis, whose tsunami ramifications are thus still working through economies and societies.

2. NEW LABOUR’S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

In Britain the New Labour government responded to the banking crisis with decisive action to stop the banks collapsing. It put a strong state scaffolding around the banks to shore them up, putting the state and its resources in their place.

In fact, it responded rather as the right-wing US Bush government did. It put in vast amounts of “public money”, taxpayers’ money, and nationalised the most insolvent and most threatened financial institutions.

The New Labour government had worked through eleven years of prosperous times, since it took power in 1997, to serve the rich and to maximise private gains from public institutions they own and control. It now acted decisively to “nationalise” the losses the rich would otherwise have suffered. Though its actions probably did prevent the public catastrophe of the banks and the credit institutions, and the high street cash machines, seizing up, it acted as the ideologically tool-up market-worshipping government of the rich that it had been and still in the new conditions was.

When prosperity returned, the nationalised banks would be restored to their previous owners so that profits could again be privatised. As it turned out, the government would even let the crisis-breeding bankers still siphon off their accustomed enormous bonuses.

Within the framework of capitalism and its laws of operation, they acted very effectively to manage the crisis. Yet at the same time, their action made the fundamental case for socialism — that the social economy, privately owned, needs to be socially owned and controlled.

3. BRITAIN IN THE NEW “AGE OF AUSTERITY”

The dawning of a new age of austerity and government retrenchment has transformed British politics in the following main ways:

It made it imperative, from their point of view, for the bourgeoisie and their governments to inflict enormous cuts on welfare provisions and in government economic activity. The New Labour government said it would “do what was necessary” here, as did the Tories, the then-ostensibly alternative government. But New Labour talked of a different pace of cuts, and

a different balance between tax rises and cuts (and so, about 60% the amount of cuts advocated by the Tories).

For the first time in two decades, serious political and social differences emerged between Labour and the Tories, between the two main parties of neo-Thatcherism. This was expressed in the Tories’ objections to the Keynesian government role the New Labour government had operated in meeting the crisis. It was expressed as a different time-scale for cutting the deficit, and a different balance between tax rises and cuts. That was no small division.

It had enormous implications for the scale and severity of the assault on living standards which both New Labour and Tories said was necessary. There was a difference between the two parties in who should pay, and how much, in the era of cuts.

To say here “oh, New Labour too would cut severely”, while true, would be to miss the whole political dynamic in the political space between Labour’s probable cuts and the Tories’. It would be so “abstract”, so far above it all, as to eliminate a vision of the terrain of British politics for years to come.

In short, in 2008-10, the relative-boom conditions that had shaped the quiescence of the labour movement in the long years of prosperity under a New Labour government and the almost universal acceptance of market economy as the only possible economy, were radically changed.

4. THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE CRISIS

Labour movements in history respond differently to crises as they are solved by the ruling class. The recent or not-so-recent experience of a labour movement determines how it will respond. Labour movements differ in their recent history and therefore they will respond differently [see endnote].

What is the state of the working-class movement now as it begins to face the coalition government’s assault?

a) The working class and the labour movement have experienced 15 years of comparative prosperity, low unemployment — 13 of those years with a New Labour government that, while blatantly serving the rich, also engaged in expansion of public services and low-level redistribution by instruments such as tax and pension credits.

b) There are 7 million organised trade unionists. But whole areas of the economy are non-union. Ideas and labour movement goals of socialism, even in the vague and incoherent sense, inadequately-defined but heart-felt by many, have been marginalised. Thinking in market terms — acceptance of capitalism — is predominant.

c) In the 1990s the trade unions helped create New Labour. Since then the trade unions, despite occasional flurries of verbal protest and with a couple of exceptions, have supported New Labour and the New Labour governments. They remained tied to that government until the end. The emergence of a new generation of union leaders after about 2000, the so-called “awkward squad”, proved a false dawn. With few exceptions, those leaders have so far offered little more than verbal leftism to differentiate them from the previous right-wing generation of union leaders.

d) The Tory anti-union laws which Thatcher enacted 30 years ago as an essential part of defeating and subjugating the militant labour movement and the working class remain on the statute books after 13 years of government by a party still heavily on labour movement financing. The union leaders’ acceptance of that and their failure to do anything about the anti-union laws, alongside their submission to New Labour politics of which keeping anti-union laws was part, is perhaps their single greatest crime since they left the miners to fight alone in the great strike.

e) Through the 20th century the Labour Party was the party of the labour movement, the bourgeois workers’ party. Since 1994-7 it has had many of its old structures and its modes of relating to the trade unions

and the working class destroyed or changed radically in terms of their previous function.

Annual conference as a living congress of the labour movement in politics no longer exists. Most constituency Labour Parties are depleted in membership, political life, and ability to intervene in the national Labour Party.

In the late 1970s the Labour Party counterposed itself to the Wilson-Callaghan government as critic and medium of protest and organised resistance, but the Labour Party in the New Labour epoch was gutted by the New Labour leaders. This was done deliberately with the intention of freeing a future Labour government from the pressure of the labour movement and of the militant Party rank-and-file — to destroy potential agency of working-class resistance to such a government.

The renegade-leftist Labour Party leader from 1983-92 Neil Kinnock said: “We’ll get ‘our betrayal’ over and done with before we form a government”. And Blair carried through that programme, winning the 1997 election with an explicit promise to keep the anti-union laws and to try to make New Labour “the party of business”.

As our press has many times pointed out, this disenfranchised the working class to an enormous extent. It greatly devalued the power of the working-class vote to affect affairs of state — even if only as loud criticism and organised opposition to government — and therefore devalued its democratic value. Without its own party, even in the very limited sense in which old Labour was its own party, the working-class vote was nullified.

f) There is in the working class a widespread, self-dividing chauvinism, fomented by sections of the millionaire press. Unless it is successfully fought it will hinder working-class development.

Thus the working class enters the crisis in poor condition. It also, however, enters it without a recent history of crushing defeats: the miners’ defeat of 1985 is old history to anyone under the age of 40. There are great difficulties in the way of an effective working-class fightback against the coalition government, but not such as to guarantee in advance that there will be no militant resistance.

As revolutionaries, we register the difficulties; we do not deceive ourselves by painting up small fightbacks as much bigger than they really are; we keep in mind that when resistance comes, it may well be in places, at times, and on issues that we did not exactly expect; but we advocate and orient to the best possibilities of resistance. We do not accept defeat in advance. If we did so, we would make ourselves a factor working against effective resistance, not for it.

5. THE ELECTION AND AFTER

Coming on top of the widespread and deep disillusionment with the Iraq war, and with Prime Minister Brown’s limitations as a Blair-style PR-adept politician, the economic crisis put the lid on the coffin of the New Labour government.

In mid-2009 opinion polls pointed to a crushing general election defeat, perhaps even electoral meltdown, for New Labour, and a big Tory majority in the post-general election parliament.

In fact that did not happen. Labour lost, but the Tories did not win the election. The Labour vote held up better than looked likely.

The Tory cuts programme is being implemented, compliments of the Liberal-Democratic Party in the coalition government. The Lib-Dems campaigned in the general election against most of what it will help the Tories carry through. The coalition government lacks a democratic mandate for what it is now going to do.

Why did the general election produce results that a year earlier would have astonished us?

By the time of the election there was a far wider public understanding than the polls could accommodate that the difference between the projected Tory and

Maybe things could have been different if the small beginning — very small and shaky though we said it was, at the time — made by the Socialist Alliance in 2001 had been built on positively, rather than trashed by the SP and SWP. In fact anti-Labour left electoral efforts were already in decline by 2004, and passed through periods of farce (Respect, the SSP split, No2EU), before arriving at a desultory and politically very thin effort, mainly by the SP but with token participation by the SWP and a few others, at the 2010 general election.

In principle we are for socialist candidates challenging Labour. We are for continuing the fight for working class political representation in the main ways proposed since 1997 and the Blairite coup in the Labour Party, including anti-Labour electoral challenges. The practicalities depend on the circumstances and the quality of the socialist, or would-be socialist, candidates.

For the next period there is no prospect of an anti-Labour electoral project being an axis around which a big and healthy left-wing force can be regrouped. However in the course of positively advocating and arguing for “left unity” we could have a good impact on activists around the left and there may be limited opportunities. We do not have the resources to run an electoral effort big enough to make a generalised impact as the AWL alone but that should not rule out singular limited local electoral initiatives under our own banner where this makes sense. There is no value for us in becoming fifth-wheel helpers to desultory campaigns by the Socialist Party and its occasional allies.

Anti-Labour electoralism cannot be a priority for us in the coming period, but there may be limited opportunities. There may be cases where we will back solidly-based socialist or labour movement candidates, or stand our own candidates, in order to challenge slavishly cutting Labour councillors. The difficulties that would cause for our Labour Party fraction work should not be decisive against such activity we would assess such candidacies on a case by case basis.

7. LABOUR MOVEMENT AFTER THE ELECTION

The central fact that the AWL must register — the AWL, which has become progressively disgusted and alienated at New Labour in government and the leaders’ stifling and strangling of the old Labour Party — is that the union link has survived the long period of New Labour government. The political history of the British labour movement, of the interaction of its trade union and political parts, and the interaction of both with the working class, now begins a new chapter.

The undemocratic structures imposed on the Labour Party in 1997 are still there, but to fetter those structural changes as the sole defining factor would be as wrong as dismissing them as inconsequential.

The New Labour political machine is intact. Its first-sight reality is no longer as the “party of business” ostentatiously marginalising the trade unions, but a Labour Party substantially defined, in popular awareness, by its opposition, in common with the trade unions, to “extreme” Tory cuts. For the next period, the working class, the unions, and the Labour Party are pushed together, and in a situation where there is no other political force even loosely connected to the working class which stands as a credible political alternative to the Tories.

b) One union has disaffiliated from the Labour Party (FBU) and one has been expelled (RMT). These unions are of course very important, and especially important for us as areas of higher-than-average militancy. But, as the election showed, they are a politically marginalised element of the trade union movement, and with not even the most roughly adequate political basis to create a viable alternative to the Labour Party.

To focus our political agitation on the creation of “our own” small militant political labour movement, grouped around the RMT leadership, and defined essentially by the quality of not being affiliated to the Labour Party, would be sectarian project-mongering of the sort which Trotsky defined in the Transitional Programme of 1938 as functioning above all to take pockets of militants out of the broader labour movement.

It would mean the AWL giving up on the prospect of socialists influencing and transforming the bigger unions, that is the main trade unions, the major part of the labour movement.

It would mean the AWL renouncing an across-the-board fight in the labour movement for our class-struggle politics in favour of pleas directed at and conditional on the RMT leadership.

c) Thus, the Labour-union links, through seriously

changed, have survived. The history of the interaction begins again and in radically changed conditions to those of the last 20 years.

When the prospects seemed to be of New Labour continuing to rule for a long time in conditions of prosperity and of chronic Tory disarray with the unions continuing for an indefinite period to play dumb horse to the New Labour rider, we floated the overarching conceptualisation of some sort of CIO-like regrouping of the militant unions, Trades Councils and perhaps other elements, as an organising centre. It was seen an open-ended formula, not exclusively limited to battle within the Labour Party, but it was never presented as “our alternative to the Labour Party”, or linked with a call for more militant unions to disaffiliate. It was suggested as a storyline that would allow people to make sense of the situation.

We refused to accept the invitation of some comrades to play the role of trade union sheepdogs for the Blairites by opposing on principle any action that might lead to unions being expelled from the Labour Party. Until our 2008 conference, our own basic line was that affiliated unions should begin a fight to transform the Labour Party, and if that fight led to expulsion, well and good. We advised a fight, not a policy of pick up your marbles and withdraw.

Events have now re-invigorated that policy. With Labour in opposition and opposing the Tory cuts, the political alignment of Labour and the unions is restored. There is no visible or foreseeable trigger that will separate off the affiliated unions from New Labour. If disgruntled militants advocate disaffiliation, our job will be to explain to them that a union willing to fight can achieve much more by agitating within the main bloc of politically-active unions than by hiving off, and we point to the experience of the FBU to confirm that.

d) If the sharp polarisation that existed in the General Election with Labour and the unions aligned against the Tories continues, and it probably will, there are likely to be serious moves in the disaffiliated or expelled unions to reaffiliate to the Labour Party. It is probably too early in the post-election evolution of the Labour Party for us to take the initiative and advocate that, as we did in the RMT in 2007, but we should take no dogmatic positions against it.

Concretely, in current or near-future conditions, RMT or FBU reaffiliation to the Labour Party would add lively pressure there in favour of reconstructing Labour Party democracy, in favour of a firmer stand against cuts, and so on.

It could also make for more fruitful political life in RMT and FBU, promoted by the “feedback” from Labour Party battles into those unions.

We should not trip ourselves up by moving too fast on this. But if serious moves for reaffiliation develop within either union we should not oppose them, even if, for example, they come from people not on our political wavelength such as soft-left Labourites.

In all cases, we assert our own politics and our own views on how affiliation should be used, by amendments, by speeches, or by leaflets and articles.

Within the sizeable group of unaffiliated trade unions, we continue to argue the need for politics and a political voice for workers (including active use of political funds; continuing moves to support labour movement candidates supporting union policies and action against the cuts etc; participating in forums about advancing working class political representation; affiliation to the LRC).

8. THE LIMITS ON LABOUR REVIVAL

In the last year there have been some moves by the unions to restore Labour Party conference, and since the general election some tens of thousands of people have joined the Labour Party. A further inflow of new life may come if the Labour party, allied to the unions, is the centre of opposition, even if only verbal opposition to the “Tory cuts”.

These small stirrings, though small, indicate that we should seriously explore the life of local CLPs and Young Labour groups, and again make a practical reality of our never-formally-abandoned policy of doing limited but organised “fraction work” in the Labour Party and in the Labour-related structures of the affiliated unions.

However, the pressure for a radical restructuring and revival of the Labour Party as a living organisation that a massive defeat might have produced does not now exist.

That Labour in opposition would “oppose Tory cuts” and chime in with the unions was entirely predictable. But the General Election and its outcome will shape events in the labour movement very differently from what might have followed a crushing defeat for

Labour was defeated at the general election, but not decisively. What happens now?

Labour cuts was enormously important to working-class lives. That understanding triggered and connected with working-class memories of Thatcher Toryism in the economic slump of the 1980s, to make anti-Toryism a powerful force in the election. Brown and New Labour made the economic differences between themselves and the Tories the axis of their election campaign.

Labour came to seem to large chunks of the electorate to be preferable, more trustworthy than the Tories. The pre-election surge in popularity for Nick Clegg and Vince Cable probably expressed a widespread wish that there was a better choice. But in the end that did not translate into seriously-increased votes for the Lib-Dems.

The outgoing Brown government attained a level of credibility as critics of the Tories and as a more trustworthy government that would have seemed miraculous a year earlier. In their opposition to the Tory programme, the New Labour leaders chimed in with what the trade unions were saying. It may also be that voters who had benefited from such New Labour reforms as tax credits were influenced: there is a danger that our standpoint in judging New Labour and its deficiencies can make us miss things like that on our political radar screens.

There was a sizeable element in the Labour election vote of “Labour returnees” — of once-Labour voters rallying in the crisis in response to fear of the Tories, rooted in memory as well as in concern with current political issues. That fear was a major thing among organised workers.

The fact that Labour would also have made cuts, and the fact that Labour councils will make cuts in response to Lib/Tory government constraints (while saying that they are softening those cuts as much as they can), will not change that picture, any more than similar facts about Labour and Labour councils have changed it in previous periods of Labour-union opposition to aggressive Tory policies. We demand that Labour councils refuse to cut, and that Labour and the unions organise militant action, not merely verbal protest, against cuts; but to think that Labour failing to meet our demands wipes out the fact of Labour and the unions being the large, “credible” alternative to the Tories with some working-class links would be totally to misestimate our own clout.

6. OUTSIDE-LABOUR LEFT ELECTORALISM

The other fact established by the general election was the failure of the attempts, since 2000, to use electioneering during the years of New Labour rule to build on working-class resentment at that rule and against New Labour’s suppression of effective working-class political representation and to regroup a substantial body of left and working-class activists.

New Labour, and a convincing Tory victory.

In such a situation there would be no prospect of an early return of Labour to government in a routine election, not for a long time. Now however we face a situation where Labour can reasonably hope to win the next election.

Indeed, the Tories do not have a working majority. It is possible (though unlikely) that the Lib-Dem/Tory coalition will fall apart before its five years are up.

The government will incur great unpopularity from the butchery its cuts will inflict on the people. Thatcher was rescued from that sort of unpopularity by the Falklands War. Labour's dangerous disarray greatly contributed to the Tories' 1983 election victory. There is now no equivalent for Cameron and Clegg for what the Falklands War was for Thatcher.

A corollary of the common front of Labour and the unions against the Tory-Liberal cuts will be to focus trade unions and the Labour Party rank-and-file on winning the return of a Labour government in the next general election, soon. That will create great pressure not to "rock the boat". (A great upsurge of industrial militancy might change all that, of course, in ways we cannot foresee).

Within the Labour Party and in the trade unions, the leading layers of New Labour politicians, especially the younger ones, are not utterly discredited, as they might have been by a crushing Labour defeat and outright Tory victory.

The feebleness of the Labour Party organisation in the country and the lack of other than a token youth movement probably made the difference between Labour defeat and victory in the May 2010 election. Those who run the Labour Party must know it. Both the Milibands look to something like the "Obama model" — an ad-hoc organised network of loose supporters beyond the party — as their guide for restoring the Party's fortunes. That is not at all necessarily counterposed to restoring or renovating the Party structures, and some of it would certainly feed into the Party structures.

A modest revival of Labour Party life is likely, but it starts from a very low level, and the urgent pressure for shake-up and restoration which crushing defeat would have brought is not there.

There is no mandate for the elaborate and costly evasive action which full-scale AWL reinvolvement in local Labour Parties would require. What is indicated now is serious exploration and a restart of Labour Party fraction work. The exact scale and proportions should be decided and reviewed in line with events and evidence.

9. THE WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

The considerations above about the limits of life in the Labour Party structures are important in deciding how much involvement in the Labour Party and its structures the AWL should have now. They cannot decide the general political attitude we should take to the Labour-union bloc.

Speculation here is not the prime business of the AWL. We need to work out a line of intervention in these fields which will allow us to build our own

organisation and multiply its contacts with the organised working class.

Our general policy for opposing the government and its cuts is outlined in other documents and need not be repeated here in detail. We fight for social provision under democratic control, against privatisation and marketisation. We fight for an effective right to strike, to take solidarity action, and to organise, against anti-union laws.

The key conclusion from the experience around the election, what it delineates and tells us about the political state of the labour movement and the working class in politics, and the facts of the new government, is that for now and for the next foreseeable period the Labour-union bloc is still central in working-class politics, and cannot be "bypassed".

Agitation to "make Labour fight" — including "make Labour councils fight" — has to be a central political theme. It has to be a central theme irrespective of calculations we can make that official Labour's "fight" against the Tories will be feeble. It is one of the day-to-day expressions of the general agitation, which we should continue, for a workers' government.

By workers' government, we mean a government based on the labour movement — the actual labour movement, not some selected small "left" splinter of it — accountable to the movement, and serving the working class.

"Of all parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers... and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the program of the 'workers' government'.

"Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers' organisations possible? Past experience shows, as has already been stated, that this is, to say the least, highly improbable..."

"However, there is no need to indulge in guesswork. The agitation around the slogan of a workers'... government preserves under all conditions a tremendous educational value... [to] aid the striving of the workers for independent politics, deepen the class character of these politics..."

In the unions (mainly) and through our Labour Party fraction work, we fight for the reconstruction of Labour Party democracy, including the full rights and function of Labour Party conference, and the mandatory reselection of MPs and other representatives. We agitate for the unions to use their positions in the Labour structures to reconstruct Labour Party democracy and to push the policies decided by their members for social provision, for union rights, against cuts, etc.

We defend the unions' right to participate collectively in politics, and thus fight against any moves by the Lib/Tory government to legislate against collective union funding of political parties.

10. LEFT UNITY

We call for unity of the activist left on these class-struggle axes, on every level from unity in local anti-cuts committees, in local class-struggle-based anti-fascist campaigns, and in rebuilding Trades Councils, upwards.

We should not have any illusions about full-scale unity between the bigger left groups happening without huge political reorientations of a sort not likely short of big changes around us. There is a big gap, not only of day-to-day political differences, but of basic political approach and culture, between us and the kitsch left. Agitation for unity (that is, for those political reorientations) is still a necessary part of political education. It is a necessary tool in our battle to spread our ideas and build the AWL.

11. THE AWL

We must raise the AWL to the level demanded of it by the scale of the capitalist crisis, the assault being made on the working class by the new government, and the challenge posed to the labour movement.

This calls for "Leninising" the AWL — shedding the sluggish discussion-circle habits which we have contracted in the long period of relative political quiet, increasing the tempo and the discipline of our activity, turning outwards.

It also calls for a renewed drive to educate ourselves and convert the educated into educators, so that each one of our activists can be a centre of political energy and enlightenment in their anti-cuts campaigns, in their union, or on their campus.

The details of what we must do on these counts are dealt with in other documents.

ENDNOTE

For instance, once the American workers got over the shock that began with the Wall Street slump in late 1929 and the mass unemployment and destitution that followed, they went on the offensive and created the CIO and the modern US industrial unions. By contrast in Britain the slump dampened down the British trade-union movement and crushed much of it. The explanation for the difference was in the different history and recent history of the British and US labour movements.

The British labour movement came out of World War One greatly strengthened in organisation and militantly combative. It remained comparatively militant even in the period that followed the betrayal of the General Strike and the onset of the slump. The workers' previous disappointments, the inconclusive nature in terms of stable gains of the great struggles, the defeat and betrayal of the General Strike, and the demoralising experience of the Labour government of 1929-1931, prompted a collapse of industrial militancy in the 1930s.

The American workers had had no such disappointed militancy or betrayal and defeat. In the 1920s vast numbers of them had bought into the "American Dream" of an ever-upward cycle of capitalist prosperity — as indeed so many British workers have bought into such ideas in the last 15 to 20 years. Therefore they brought no baggage of experience comparable to that of the British into the slump.

After a while they got their bearings. The Ford cars of workers, which in the 1920s had been cited as the visible manifestation of American prosperity and proof that the US working class was "bourgeoisified", were used to facilitate the innovation of flying pickets as the workers confronted the employers.

In Britain in the decade and a half before Thatcher, the workers showed tremendous militancy, even bringing down the Tory government as a result of direct action (in February 1974). For much of the 1970s there was a rippling wave of factory occupations. The political result was only the Wilson-Callaghan government; the economic result, wages barely keeping pace with inflation; the result in terms of working-class consciousness, bafflement. The most tremendous industrial struggles since the 1920s — in which vast numbers of workers had wanted generally and all too vaguely a fundamental change in British society — had produced only a Wilson government.

Faced with the tremendous slump and mass unemployment from 1980 and the determined class-war-waging Tory government, militancy collapsed. When the miners struck in 1984-5, it was against the background of a very crestfallen labour movement, very damped-down, shackled by anti-union laws, and unwilling to give the miners the solidarity they needed to win.

AWL news



A carload of AWL members is going to France on the weekend 22-24 October, taking messages of solidarity with the strikes there from union branches such as Lambeth Unison, but also planning to bring back ideas, inspiration, and reports to the labour movement in Britain.

AWL conference on 16-17 October opened with a report from Ed Maltby, who had gone over to France the week before to find out about the developing movement.

Another feature of AWL conference was a hall much more extensively decorated than usual with displays and posters, thanks to the efforts of South London AWL member Jill Mountford.

The posters are available in pdf form to local AWL branches, to use on street stalls and for decorating meeting rooms, at www.workersliberty.org/posters.

Stalls with decoration attract more attention than the plain-vanilla paste table. Red cloth costs little and can

be bought anywhere. Strips of that red cloth, attached to sticks which are in turn attached to the stall table, create literal red flags for passers-by to notice rather than literary ones.

AWL effort in the last few weeks has been focused on preparations for our conference, and on the burgeoning anti-cuts movement. But London AWL members have another big job, too.

AWL member Janine Booth is standing for the London Transport Region seat on the RMT Exec, on a platform of changing the union to make it more democratic.

The other candidate is Lewis Peacock, a Socialist Party member, standing on a platform of support for the incumbent RMT leadership.

AWL members are out trying to cover as many as we can of London Underground's 270 stations and 50-odd depots with campaign leaflets.

The survivors of Atlantis

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

The twentieth century was full of terror and tragedy, and mass murder on a scale that beggars imagination and even comprehension. It was also in terms of things attempted, the most heroic in the history of humankind.

It was terrible in its murderous and enormously destructive wars of mechanised, automated, and finally automatic machines of mass murder — wars in which many millions died, by no means only combatants, and whole cities were levelled to rubble.

Terrible in its peacetime social devastation and the destruction of countless lives wrecked by economic dislocation and slump. Terrible in the recreation of the medieval Jewish ghettos in many cities, in the middle of the twentieth century, as preparation for the slaughter of six million European Jews in industrial factories designed for mass murder.

Terrible in the spawning of Leviathan totalitarian states able to use the technology of industrial society to exercise an unprecedented level of control, and without interruption for decades, over hundreds of millions of people. The East German workers who fell under the wheels of the fascist juggernaut in 1933 did not emerge from totalitarian rule for 56 years!

Terrible, in the decline of Marxism and socialism. And tragic above and beyond the many millions of individual human tragedies which the events referred to above entailed, because none of it was necessary. Better, immeasurably, better, was possible to humankind in the twentieth century.

The technology used to produce horror and slaughter was itself an aspect of an overall situation where not only better was possible, but where it was necessary and overdue, and where its retardation was the precondition for the horrors that engulfed humankind in the middle of the twentieth century.

At the core of the tragedy of the twentieth century was the tragedy of a socialist labour movement that had been built over decades to ensure what might be called an orderly historical succession — of working class socialism to capitalism — but proved unable to do that. It proved unable, despite tremendous efforts, to resolve its problems and difficulties. Was it, as it began to look to Trotsky at the end, and as the threat of it looked to Max Shachtman a decade and three decades later, a case of looming mutual ruination of the contending classes of capitalist society? The Communist Manifesto had listed such a thing as one of the possible outcomes of the class struggle.

In the 1920s Trotsky had used as metaphor for the effect of dogmatic reformism in the British labour movement, the image of chickens bred so fine that they could not peck their way out of the eggshell and stifled in it. It seemed to many by the late mid-1940s to be the very image of the working class in recent history. The man who had spent most of the 30s living with Trotsky as his secretary, Jean van Heijenoort, who had also been one of the secretaries of the wartime rump Fourth International centred on New York, abandoned politics in 1948. He declared that the working class had definitively failed as a revolutionary class able to take humankind beyond capitalism and class society. Large numbers of hitherto revolutionaries came to the same conclusion, without like van Heijenoort writing an article to explain themselves.

To the dilemma before humankind, posed by socialists as the alternatives of “socialism or barbarism”, History’s answer seemed to be Stalinist barbarism spreading over much of the world and a weak and faltering bourgeois democracy in a historically privileged part of it, western Europe and the USA.

THE HEROISM OF THE WORKING CLASS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

And with the tragedy of mid-twentieth century humanity, within it, an essential part of it, went the heroism of the working class — not all of it, not everywhere, not always, but enough of it, in enough places, enough times, to indicate what had been possible. In country after country, decade after decade, heroically the workers

had risen.

Within that working class heroism, within the best of it, there was another heroism — that of the revolutionary left, in many countries, many times.

The list of working class movements, strikes, political campaigns, armed revolts, against capitalism and Stalinism, is a tremendous one. A long series of movements, aspirations and revolts against usually great, sometimes very great, and often insuperable odds.

The list is vast. A near-arbitrary selection — things I know a little about — is very long.

The Russian workers moved in great waves of strikes, from the 1890s. In the Russian Revolution of 1905, which was ultimately defeated, the workers created in the soviets — elected workers’ councils — the beginnings of their own democratic system. In the same year, in the most advanced and most historically privileged of advanced capitalist countries, the USA, the Industrial Workers of the World was founded to organise the “unskilled”, migrant and other workers, irrespective of race or creed, initially as a socialist and industrial-unionist-led movement. Its strikes were often small, and sometimes not so small, civil wars in which the working class side would suffer numerous casualties.

In Dublin after 1908, and especially in the great “Labour War” of 1913-14, the workers of Dublin, then the second city at the heart of the leading capitalist and imperialist power, rose off their knees to “seize the fierce beast of capital by the throat”, James Connolly’s summary description of the workers of Dublin and their movement can not be bettered:

“The Irish Transport and General Workers Union found the labourers of Ireland on their knees, and has striven to raise them to the erect position of manhood. It found them with no other weapons of defence than the arts of the liar, the lickspittle and the toady, and it combined them and taught them to abhor those arts and rely proudly on the defensive power of combination...”

In Russia, in October-November 1917, the workers covered the country with a network of workers’ councils. They overthrew the man they knew as “Tsar Nicholas the Bloody” (now a saint, no less, of the Russian Orthodox Church!) and in October/November set up a soviet state. At the end of 1918 soviets covered Germany and Austria, but instead of consolidating the power of the working class, their leaders set up the bourgeois Weimar Republic.

Communists took power for a few weeks in 1919 in both Hungary and Bavaria. Even in backward rural Ireland striking workers in small dairy-produce factories, creameries, ran up the red flag and proclaimed their strike committees to be soviets, in perhaps three dozen separate cases. Limerick City was controlled for a while in 1919 by the Workers’ Council (in British terms, Trades Council), which declared itself a soviet and contested control of the city with the British

The workers rose many times throughout the twentieth century: Spain in 1936-7.

administration and its army.

In the 1920s the workers of China acted as a powerful independent force, fought great strike and other battles. In 1936 the workers of France organised a general strike, and won large reforms to wages and conditions. In the USA the workers organised great sit-in strikes and organised a powerful industrial federation, the CIO. In Catalonia, the workers took power in 1936/7 — to be smashed by the unwitting combination of their anarchist leaders, who did not believe in taking state power, on one side, and on the other, the Stalinists, who physically crushed them, opening the way for four decades of fascist rule.

In Britain in the mid 1940s the working class, which had its own deep-rooted parliamentary tradition, voted for the socialist transformation of Britain, and got instead very big reforms, the modern welfare state, achieved by the Labour Government. In France, in 1944 working revolt challenged the Nazi occupiers. The magnificent Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943 was led by socialists — socialist Zionists amongst them — and workers did most of the fighting.

In the 1950s, workers in East German, Poland and Hungary rose against Stalinism. In Poland they won serious concessions, making Poland at that time the least totalitarian of the Stalinist states. In Poland, the workers moved again in 1970 — hundreds were shot down at the Gdansk Shipyards. In 1968, nine million workers seized France in a tremendous General Strike. In 1969 the Italian workers mounted great strikes. Between 1971 and 1975-6 dozens of factory occupations were mounted in Britain, where, in 1974, in waves of militant industrial action, the high point of which was a miners’ strike, the working class drove the Tory government out of office — an ill-judged appeal to the electorate against the miners led to the dismissal of the government — and put in the treacherous Wilson Labour Government.

In August 1980, the workers seized effective control of Poland and started on a struggle that eventually led to the overthrow of Stalinism — to be replaced by bourgeois democracy and capitalism. In Britain in 1984/5 the miners fought a bitter 13 month long strike in which they faced the mounted police of the Thatcher government — a strike in which a victory that would have smashed the ruling class offensive was possible.

There are many, many, many other examples of working class industrial battles, rebellions, armed risings, seizure of factories, general strikes — back to the Paris Commune of 1871, where the workers held power for nine weeks in the first workers’ state in history; back to the Chartist General Strike of 1842 in the north of England — in bourgeois history “the Plug Riots”; and beyond that, a dozen years earlier, the seizure of Lyons by the silk workers; and back beyond

Continued on page 20

that...

The historical record that contains such tremendous struggles, without definitive victory, does, of course, raise many questions about the nature and capacity of the working class as a revolutionary class. It points to the great difficulties which the working class, the basic exploited class in capitalist society, faces: it cannot develop control of a portion of the means of production within the old system, as in its time the bourgeoisie did within and under feudalism and absolutism.

The working class, again unlike the bourgeoisie on its historical journey, does not develop its own culture within this system. Its class-consciousness and historical awareness and aspirations fluctuate. Habitually its leaders — its trade union as well as its political leaders — help the capitalist rich and powerful against their own people in return for personal advancement.

Though the working class has known its age of reform under capitalism, we accumulate many defeats, not all of which the working class is able to learn from. It sometimes has to live through again and learn things earlier workers knew. What the things listed, and all the other similar things not listed, indicate is that though the working class has not failed to fight, again and again, and again, there are special difficulties to be overcome if the working class is to emancipate itself. The question for socialists is: what can be done to overcome those difficulties?

But what the things listed most decidedly refute, is the idea that the working class has no inbuilt antagonism to the capitalist class and their system. They refute any suggestion that workers will never again revolt against capitalism.

As I write, the workers of France are in a great eruption of strikes and street demonstrations against capitalism's new era of austerity. The long absence of open big-scale class battles in Britain does not point to a death of class struggle, but to the fact that the bourgeois won great victories over the working class in that struggle in the 70s and 80s. The virtual destruction of the old Labour Party by the New Labour disciples of Thatcher was part of that series of defeats.

The Russian workers, led by the Bolsheviks, proved in 1917 that the working class can take and consolidate power, when certain objective and subjective preconditions are met. That is one of the reasons why the bourgeoisie sustains an ideological offensive against the memory of the October Revolution, identifying it with the Stalinist counter-revolution against Bolshevism, the Stalinism that destroyed the working class power. They conflate and identify the rule of the workers with the rule of those who overthrew the workers' power, and massacred the Bolsheviks!

THE PARADOXICAL "ANTI-SOCIALIST" REVOLUTIONS IN RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE

But, it may be argued, the greatest manifestations of the revolutionary power of the working class for the last third of a century were working-class revolts in eastern Europe and Russia, not for but against socialism and for market capitalism.

Those great deeds of the working class did not point in the direction of post-capitalist socialism but in the direction of capitalist restoration in the Stalinist states.

Socialism died of shame, failure and self disgust in Eastern Europe. Socialism was tried and is now deservedly rejected as an all-round social and historical failure. The workers wanted capitalism, and socialism, "history's great dream" — so bourgeois and ex-

socialist propagandists alike say — goes the way of other ignorant yearnings and strivings, taking its place in the museum of quackery alongside such relics of barbarism as alchemy.

Yes, at the end of the 1980s, which had opened with a self-confident Russian Stalinist invasion of Afghanistan at Xmas 1979 (the last in a series of expansions during the 1970s, which even saw a Russian-financed Cuban army fighting in Africa), "socialism" seemed to die of shame and self-disgust, first in Eastern Europe and then in its USSR heartland. It was rotten and stinking for decades before its outright collapse.

Not since the Italian Fascist Grand Council met in 1943 and declared the Fascist system at an end, had anything like it been seen! "Socialism", so the bourgeoisie's ideologists brayed, had been tried and was being rejected as a failure and a curse on those it had ruled over. And, yes if the Stalinist systems were any sort of socialism, then socialism at that point died, and it deserved to be dead.

"Socialism" was rejected most explicitly by the working class in Eastern Europe and the "USSR". In Poland it was a working class movement, Solidarnosc, that made the anti-Stalinist revolution — the anti-Stalinist bourgeois revolution. "Actually existing socialism" melted like islands of ice in the thawing seas of international capitalism. Its most implacable enemies included the very working class in whose name the "socialist" states claimed their social and historic legitimacy.

Yes, but what was it that the workers and working farmers, the office workers and the intelligentsia, revolted against, when they revolted against "socialism"? They revolted against:

- National oppression by the USSR and within the USSR (and by Czechs in Czechoslovakia, Serbs in Yugoslavia).

- The subordination of individuals, social groups, and nations to an all-powerful state, through which a bureaucratic ruling class exercised its economic exploitation and political tyranny.

- The denial of free speech, free press, free assembly, free organisation.

- Exploitation and poverty, combined with outrageous privilege.

They wanted instead:

- National and individual freedom.

- Democracy.

- Prosperity and equality — or an end, at least, to the peculiarly glaring sort of inequality imposed on the Eastern Bloc by bureaucratic privilege. Like the Parisians seeking equality in the French Revolution, they would find that equality and capitalism are incompatible.

That the workers thought they could get what they wanted, or at least get more of them, under a market system — that it was Western Europe and the USA that gave them their positive idea of the desirable alternative to Stalinism — is very important: that determined what happened in 1989-91. But it is not the end of the story.

What had the failure of Stalinist "socialism" proved?

- That rigidly bureaucratic systems, where all power, decision, initiative and resources are concentrated in the hands of the state, cannot plan economies effectively.

- That the workers become alienated from a supposed "workers' state" when in fact it means rule over them by privileged bureaucrats.

- That socialism is impossible without freedom and democracy, without free initiative and comprehensive

self-rule.

- That socialism is impossible when it is posed as a way, under a totalitarian state, driving the people, to develop backward national economies, rather as the working class seizing power in an advanced capitalism-prepared society.

The collapse of European Stalinism proved all these things. But then paradoxically the experience vindicates, rather than disproves, Karl Marx's idea of what socialism is, what it is not, and its place in the succession of class societies. No pre-Stalinism Marxist ever believed that such bureaucratic tyrannies could, or should, succeed as "socialism". As we have seen, Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks, who are cited as the fountainheads of Stalinism by people who either know no better, or refuse to "know" what they know, did not think they could.

For the socialism of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Mehring, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, it is good that millions of people in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union rose in revolt against "socialism" and "communism".

Stalinism was never socialism. But (like the revolts in Europe in 1848) the revolt against it was socialism in embryo. The mass self-assertion and revolt of millions of people is the raw material of socialism — socialism as liberation and self-liberation, here self-liberation from state tyranny and grotesque state-organised inequality.

Such revolt does not, of course, necessarily develop into conscious mass socialism; yet, it is its necessary starting point and one of its essential components. There can never be a viable socialism without it.

It would be a true miracle if the workers in the Stalinist countries had attained political clarity after many years in darkness. It would be remarkable if they had not been confused and bewildered by the official "socialism" which meant tyranny and poverty, and by the capitalism of Western Europe which meant comparative prosperity and liberty. Men such as Lech Walesa, the hero of Solidarnosc who looked for his ideal society to the capitalist world, the opposite of the society he had grown up in, and Arthur Scargill, who led the miners strike in 1984-5 and in his own confused way was an honest militant working-class leader but who looked east, to Stalinism, the opposite to the society he lived in, were tragic mirror images of each other's limitations.

What East European and Russian workers gained in 1989-91 was the freedom to think and to organise, the freedom to struggle and to learn from their struggles. Out of this, the first steps towards socialism — independent workers' organisations, trade unions, and even parties — have emerged again in countries in which history seemed to have ended in Hell with the imposition of Stalinism half a century earlier. In the east, working-class history began again.

The East European and Russian revolts of the working class against Stalinism vindicated the anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks, those who made the Russian Revolution and died, most of them, fighting Stalinism.

STALINISM AND BOLSHEVISM

Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks led the workers organized in democratic workers' councils, soviets, to power. They fought ruthlessly against the bourgeoisie and the opponents of socialism. They smashed the walls of the Tsarist prison-house of nations and gave social democracy to the oppressed nations — a majority of the population — in the Tsarist Russian Empire. Far from substituting themselves for the working class, the Bolshevik party, by

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.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

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its leadership and farsightedness, allowed the working class to reach and sustain a level of mass action hitherto unparalleled in history.

The Bolsheviks were fallible human beings, acting in conditions of great difficulty. Mistakes they may have made in the maelstrom of civil war and economic collapse are proper subjects for historians and socialist discussion and debate. As their critic and comrade Rosa Luxemburg wrote in 1918, the Bolsheviks would have been the last to imagine that everything they did in their conditions was a perfect model of socialist action for everywhere at all times.

When things began to go wrong the Bolsheviks stood their ground. The workers' risings were defeated in the West. Invasions and civil war wrecked the soviets. The Bolshevik party itself divided. One section took a path on which it ended up leading the bureaucratic "Stalinist" counterrevolution. The surviving central leaders led by Trotsky fought the counterrevolution on a programme of working class self-defence and of renewing the soviets.

Those Bolsheviks went down to bloody defeat. Stalinism rose above the grave of Bolshevism, just as it rose hideously above the murdered socialist hopes of the Russian and international working class. That working class hope turned into nightmares in which we are still gripped. By the late 1930s Stalin had slaughtered the leading activists not only from the Trotskyist, but also from the Right (Bukharinist) Communist and even the original Stalinist faction of the Bolshevik party of the 1920s.

Stalinism was not Bolshevism, any more than it was any kind of socialism. Trotsky, who was to die at the hands of Stalin's assassins, put it well and truly when he said that a river of working class and communist blood separated Stalinism, from Bolshevism.

The dying Lenin, in the first place, and then the Left Opposition founded in Moscow in October 1923, whose leaders were Trotsky and Rakovsky, fought the Stalinist counter-revolution that overthrew the workers' state. Fought it to the death of vast numbers, almost all of them, in Stalin's concentration camps, jails, and homicide chambers.

TROTSKY AND THE TROTSKYISTS

Trotskyism was no arbitrary or merely personal creation. The Trotskyists took over, developed and fought for the ideas of the early Communist International — the International, which itself inherited the progressive work and root ideas of the previously existing socialist movement. The ideas of what came to be called Trotskyism were the continuation and summation of the whole history of the socialist working-class movement.

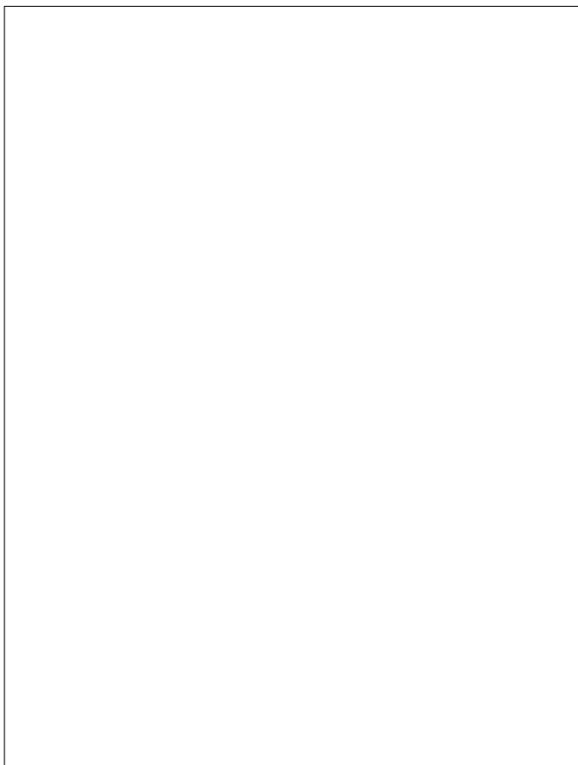
The Trotskyists held to the original perspectives and programme of the Communist International, the world-wide party of socialist revolution that Lenin and Trotsky set up in 1919 — to the goal of winning working-class power in the advanced capitalist countries. But that programme could only be fought for effectively by a mass movement; those perspectives depended for their realisation on the living activity of millions of revolutionary workers. And the millions-strong world-wide army of "communism" was in the grip of the delusion that Stalinism was communism. Organisationally, it was in the grip of totalitarian "communist" "parties" controlled by the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy, which used lies, corruption, and gangsterism to keep its hold.

In the 1920s and with decreasing conviction up to the Moscow Trials Trotsky and his comrades saw USSR Stalinism as a progressive alternative to capitalism and to capitalist imperialism. But they registered also that it was neither an adequate, nor a viable, nor a desirable alternative. And from 1937 Trotsky became increasingly hostile and negative about the "USSR" which at the end of his life he defined as only potentially progressive. (See *In Defence of Marxism* and the present writer's introduction to *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*).

Max Shachtman, adapting an old joke about the Holy Roman Empire, pointed out that in the name "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" there were four lies: it wasn't a free union, there were no soviets, it was in no way socialist, and it was more a Stalinist absolute monarchy than any kind of Republic.

Trotsky did not properly name Stalinist imperialism "imperialism", but he described it in fact, and counterposed to it a working-class programmatic alternative. Thus, for example, Trotsky championed independence for the Ukrainian nation, oppressed by Great Russian Stalinist chauvinist.

What if "the separation of the Ukraine threatens to break down the economic plan and lower the productive forces", asked Trotsky. "This argument, too, is not



The Trotskyists fought for the ideas of the early Communist International

decisive. An economic plan is not the holy of holies. It is impermissible to forget that the plunder and arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy constitute an important integral part of the current economic plan...

"The question of first order is the revolutionary guarantee of the unity and independence of a workers' and peasants' Ukraine in the struggle against imperialism on the one hand, and against Moscow Bonapartism on the other". Trotsky understood perfectly that the USSR was a Great-Russian Empire.

The Trotskyist rearguard of Bolsheviks were comprehensively defeated, inside Russia and everywhere else. They could not rise politically when the working class had been defeated and beaten down. Let one of those Stalinists who crushed Bolshevism and lived to finally understand what happened, Leopold Trepper describe them for us.

Leopold Trepper was the head of the USSR's spy network in Nazi-occupied Europe. After the war Trepper was imprisoned by the KGB and only released during the post-Stalin thaw in the mid 1950s. In his autobiography *The Great Game*, Trepper honours the Trotskyists for their unyielding opposition to Stalin thus:

"The glow of October was being extinguished in the shadows of underground chambers. The revolution had degenerated into a system of terror and horror; the ideals of socialism were ridiculed in the name of a fossilized dogma which the executioners still had the effrontery to call Marxism.

And yet we went along, sick at heart, but passive, caught up in machinery we had set in motion with our own hands. Mere cogs in the apparatus, terrorised to the point of madness, we became the instruments of our own subjugation. All those who did not rise up against the Stalinist machine are responsible, collectively responsible. I am no exception to this verdict.

But who did protest at that time? Who rose up to voice his outrage?

The Trotskyists can lay claim to this honour. Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice-axe, they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra.

Today, the Trotskyists have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed."

AMBASSADOR COULONDRE, HITLER, TROTSKY, AND TROTSKYISM AFTER TROTSKY

On the very eve of the Second World War, the German fascist dictator Hitler had a last meeting with the French ambassador Coulondre.

Soon, for the second time in a quarter-century, France and Germany would be tearing each other to pieces in war. Coulondre remonstrated with Hitler about the Nazi deal with Stalin, the Stalin-Hitler pact.

It would mean war, he told Hitler.

He conjured up for Hitler the memory of what had happened at the end of the last world war. Working-class revolt had swept across Europe. Revolutionary workers brought down the German Emperor; they took and held power in Russia; they took power and were overthrown in Hungary and in Bavaria. Europe was swept by strikes, factory seizures, and great mass movements of workers determined not to go on in the old way and desperately looking for a way out of war and capitalism, a way to a socialist society.

That, said Coulondre, is what you risk unleashing once again. To dramatise his point, and to evoke as vividly as he could for Hitler the horrors he was conjuring up, Coulondre pronounced the name under which he, and the European bourgeoisie, thought of the socialist revolution.

"The real victor (in case of war) will be Trotsky. Have you thought of that?"

Trotsky! Together with Lenin, Trotsky had led the Russian workers' revolution in 1917. He, with Lenin dead, had opposed the tyrannical Stalin regime in the USSR. Now a hunted exile, he preached the need for socialist revolution as the only alternative to the barbarism into which capitalism and Stalinism were plunging the world. For the bourgeoisie of the world and for the Stalinists who ruled the USSR he still personified the threat of working class revolution.

Almost exactly a year after the conversation between Coulondre and Hitler, on 20 August 1940, in Coyocoan, a suburb of Mexico City, the Spanish Stalinist Ramon Mercader, posing as a co-thinker in order to get close to him, smashed Trotsky's skull with an ice-pick and he died the following day.

When, at the end of World War Two, the great wave of working-class revolt Coulondre had conjured up to frighten Hitler did sweep Europe, it was controlled or repressed by the Stalinist organisations.

Trotsky left behind him a weak and tiny movement — a small splinter from the gigantic world communist movement which drew in those who had rallied to the Russian Revolution.

Most of the communists stayed with Stalin, who controlled the "Soviet" state, because they did not understand that a political and social counterrevolution had taken place within the collectivist property forms that continued to exist in the Soviet Union.

By the second half of the 1940s, the USSR had survived and had conquered a new Stalinist empire covering half of Europe. Its European borders were established in the middle of Germany, a hundred miles west of Berlin. Russia was one of the two great world powers.

In Eastern Europe systems like that of the USSR were created; in China and other countries, Stalinists made revolutions which were against the big capitalist powers, and against the bourgeoisie, but also against the working class. In the West, in France and Italy for example, the Stalinist movements, on Russia's orders, helped the bourgeoisies to rebuild their states.

Stalinism expanded into new areas, covering one third of the world. Capitalism, which had seemed almost on its last legs in 1940, entered a post-war boom. The mass labour movements of the advanced countries settled in to live with and under capitalism. Capitalism experienced such lightning-flash revolts as the general strike in France by nine million workers in May 1968, but easily survived them.

The majority of the forces making up post-Trotsky Trotskyism continued to see the Stalinist states as degenerated or (the new ones outside Russia) deformed "workers' states", socially in advance of and superior to capitalism. Russia, Eastern Europe, and China were, they believed, "post-capitalist", in transition between capitalism and socialism.

Trotskyism thus seemed to be the embodiment of an idea whose time had come—and somehow passed it by; a movement whose programme, or the economic fundamentals of it, had been made reality by its Stalinist enemies, and grotesquely twisted into horrible shapes in the process.

TROTSKY AND THE USSR

Why had Trotsky held on to the view that Russia remained a degenerated workers' state? Trotsky rejected the idea that Stalinist Russia was a viable class-exploitative society for the same reason that he had rejected Stalin's and Bukharin's programme of building up socialism in an isolated Russia ("socialism in one country").

He did not believe that a system of production more

Continued on page 22

advanced and more viable than capitalism could be developed in an enclave alongside capitalism, and come to replace it by outgrowing and out-producing it. The idea was utopian — a reactionary utopia.

Trotsky stuck to the idea that Russia remained (or maybe remained) a workers' state, a very degenerated workers' state, a "counter-revolutionary" workers' state, because he thought that his assessment should, until events forced him to a different general conclusion, remain within the established Marxist notion of the necessary evolution of the stages of class society. He thought it was too soon, after the experience of Stalinism for only a short period — in historical time a very short period — to shift the theory. As he wrote in one of the polemics, he reserved the right to "revolutionary optimism".

He registered the Russian realities conscientiously. In September 1939 for the first time he recognised the possibility that Stalinist Russia as it was, without any new counter-revolution, might in the near future have to be recognised as a new form of exploitative class society. Then he said, wait: let us see what happens in the war. He had good reason for holding to that view then. It did not imply the sort of politics which the "orthodox Trotskyists" would follow vis a vis Stalinism after his death.

Class society had gone through a number of stages — primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, etc. — and a number of in-between transitional formations, with each stage or formation leading into another. (There had been distinct systems of "Asiatic despotism" or "hydraulic society" in various parts of the world, from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, through the Inca and Aztec societies in the Americas, to India and China, which in terms of social and economic development had been blind alleys and which had been broken up by the impact of the arms and the trade of European capitalism.)

In the basic Marxist theory, working-class rule and socialism could not precede advanced capitalism. Capitalism prepared the way for socialism by its creation and education of the proletariat itself. Socialism, the beginning of the elimination of class exploitation, was impossible until relative economic abundance, the social precondition for the abolition of classes, had been created.

Before modern capitalism that precondition had not been created and could not be created. In conditions of low labour productivity and of scarcity, classes of slaves and masters had arisen again and again. Classes and class exploitation were a necessary condition of civilisation for human history before capitalism.

The idea of socialism preceding advanced capitalism was in Marxist reasoning as absurd as the idea of the child preceding its parents. Capitalism was the father of socialism, and the working class its mother.

It was in defence of that basic pillar of the Marxist theory and programme of working-class socialism that Trotsky and his comrades had rejected "socialism in one country", the early rallying-programme of the Russian bureaucracy that had overthrown the working-class power set up in 1917.

That way of focusing it — socialism in "one country" — was misleading. The question was not whether socialism could be built in one country, or six, or eight countries. The USSR was anyway a great deal more than "one country". Its territory covered one-sixth of the Earth's land surface.

The question was whether socialism could be built in backwardness, before advanced capitalism had done its work of developing the economy and the working class.

The Marxist programme of socialism presupposed the resources of the entire international economy, woven together into a world system by advanced capitalism. It was an international programme to replace international capitalism, or it was an utopia, an attempt akin to the colonies constructed by pre-Marxist utopian socialists to build up an alternative society and compete with capitalism from outside.

The Marxist programme was built on the development of the working class within advanced capitalism, and that working class eventually coming to be able to overthrow and replace capitalism. A classless socialist society could not be created at will in conditions of economic backwardness.

In conditions of economic scarcity, exactly the same thing would happen with any new putatively socialist society as had happened throughout history. In Marx's words, "all the old crap" would re-emerge: class differentiation, class struggle, the establishment of an exploiting class lordship over the producers.

Like Lenin and the Bolshevik party in 1917, Trotsky saw and expected that in isolation the economically backward Russian state where the workers had power

would inescapably be engulfed by world capitalism, which would link up with the peasantry and other petty bourgeois groups within its boundaries.

An alternative society — in the theory of "socialism in one country", a nominally socialist society — could not be built side by side with advanced capitalism and go on to replace it. The "alternative" society would inevitably suffer an inner transformation, rooted in its backwardness, that would reduce it to the surrounding international level of capitalist society.

A stable, fully-formed alternative type of exploiting class society, emerging on the fringes of capitalism to compete with it and replace it from outside, was ruled out for the same reason that "socialism in one country" was.

A system built on a low level of economic development, and therefore of labour productivity, and cut off from the world networks and connections created by capitalism, could not coexist independently side by side with advanced capitalism and successfully compete with it, for just the same reasons as "socialism in one country" could not.

For Trotsky, it seemed more rational to categorise Stalinist Russia as a freakish, short-term aberration from a workers' state — however great or even dominant the aberration — than to theorise that a new form of class society had emerged and was competing successfully with capitalism. In the end, he proved right in thinking that the Stalinist USSR was an unviable aberration — but his timescale was hugely, disorientingly, mistaken.

Trotsky's final position had been that the USSR simply could not survive the World War. It would go down, either before the forces of world capitalism, or before the Russian workers rising against the autocracy. And if, against all his calculations, which were based on the idea that the Stalinist system was unstable and transitional to either restored capitalism or a renewal of the workers' power, the USSR survived? He said: in that eventuality Stalinism would have revealed itself to be a new form of exploitative class society, neither bourgeois nor working class.

At the time of his death Trotsky was close to identifying the Stalinist states as a new form of collectivist class society, and said explicitly that if certain things happened — which did in fact happen with the survival in Russia and expansion of Stalinism — then there was no alternative but to redefine Stalinism that way. If Trotsky had lived and stuck to what he was saying in 1940, he could not have done what the mainstream "Trotskyists" did in the late '40s and after.

As far as what he wrote and said can tell us, Trotsky would not have been a post war "Trotskyist". Trotsky's heroic rearguard struggle against the Stalinist counter-revolution and the corruption of the world communist movement was the historic "Trotskyism". Post-Trotsky Trotskyism is something else again. Yet, broadly, it remained the legatee of the old mass communist movement that — to adopt Isaac Deutscher's image — had vanished like Atlantis in the sea.

THE SURVIVORS OF ATLANTIS

When the Trotskyist mainstream, in the late 1940s, turned towards a more "positive" account of Stalinism, there was a mass exodus from its ranks. The defeated and depleted Trotskyist current, always small, shrank in the 1950s to being very little, even miniscule. In Trotsky's time the gap between its ideological riches and its small forces had been one of this movement's most characteristic features. Now, in terms of its ideas, too, it shrank

The major surviving Trotskyist current, the so-called "orthodox Trotskyists", organised in the "Fourth International" of James P Cannon, Michel Pablo, and Ernest Mandel, and its splinters, the Morenists, Lambertists, Grantites, Healyites, etc., sided with the Stalinist camp in the world polarisation into two blocs. They were "critically", but "unconditionally", for the "defence" of the Stalinist bloc against the other bloc, and for all its full and partial partisans. The expansion of the Stalinist bloc was, they insisted, the World Revolution advancing, though, to be sure, advancing in unexpected and uncongenial ("deformed") ways.

They identified Stalinism of various sorts with the "world revolution", and regarded the Stalinist states as "progressive". Automatically they took sides with the Stalinist bloc in its imperialist competition with capitalist imperialism and even in such an old-style colonialist enterprise as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan (1979). They backed China in Tibet in 1959 and after criticising the Maoists for tardiness in extending "the revolution" to Tibet.

These "orthodox" Trotskyists came to accept the essential utopian idea behind "Socialism in One

Country" by way of adopting the view that the USSR, and later the Stalinist bloc, were societies "in transition to socialism". Although Isaac Deutscher was not himself a Trotskyist — he insisted on that — he was greatly influential with the post Trotsky Trotskyists. What he wrote about the rosy prospects before the USSR, in for example his 1960 book *The Great Contest*, now reads like wild ravings.

Mao was proclaimed the political legatee of Trotsky, not Stalin, for instance by Pierre Frank in an introduction to a collection of Trotsky's writings in the French language. Much scholastic ducking and weaving by such neo-Trotskyists as Ernest Mandel was devoted to "proving" that Stalin's "socialism in one country" had been refuted by the spread of "the revolution" — that is, of Stalinism, — far beyond the borders of the USSR.

As we've seen, "one country" was not the point of Trotsky's objection. The point was that it was utopian to imagine that a country, or even, in the new situation, a bloc of countries, could evolve from backwardness to compete with, overtake and overthrow advanced world capitalism.

For the USSR and the East European satellite states these "orthodox Trotskyists" advocated Trotsky's old programme of working-class revolution. Following Trotsky, they called what they advocated a "political revolution". In fact what they, like Trotsky, advocated was a profound social revolution, the destruction of the Stalinist state power and its replacement by a working-class regime based on workers' councils. That meant a fundamental transformation in property, from ownership by the totalitarian state, which was itself owned by the Stalinist autocracy, to ownership by a democratic working-class quasi-state.

For the countries in which Stalinist guerrilla armies had won power in civil wars and made their own Stalinist states, the "orthodox Trotskyists" tended to advocate not revolution but reform as the way to working-class democracy. Some of them, by way of "open letters" to the Chinese or Yugoslav "comrades", turned themselves into utopian-socialist would-be advisers of Stalinist ruling classes on how to abolish their systems!

In at least two senses this was not the "Trotskyism" of Trotsky. The post-Trotsky Trotskyists shifted from seeing Russian Stalinism as a freak phenomenon that could not survive — Trotsky's position — to seeing the "USSR" and new Stalinist states as stable social formations, "in transition to socialism". Socialism itself would be at the other side of working class "political revolution" against Stalinist autocracy or — in China and other countries — radical democratisation; but this view implied an acceptance of the logic of "socialism in one country", of the idea that Russia could develop in parallel to capitalism and outstrip it. The fact of other Stalinist states coming into being had no bearing on this.

This thinking was also a radical turn away from Trotsky's tentative conclusion that if Stalinist Russia survived the world war intact it would have to be radically re-conceptualised as a new form of bureaucratic class society.

On such questions the politics of the "orthodox

Labour democracy campaign launched

Labour and trade union activists have set up a "Task Force" to campaign for Labour Party democracy over the coming months of the official "review of party structure" decided by the Labour Party conference in October.

At present, the "review" is configured as a stitch-up. Labour Party HQ will collect "submissions" between now and June 2011, and then the Joint Policy Committee (a body dominated by Shadow ministers) will draft a report to be presented to Labour Party conference 2011, probably on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

The Task Force will be campaigning for a more open review, and also to get key rule changes which already have wide union and CLP support — like the right for conference to amend National Policy Forum documents, or vote on them in parts — onto the agenda in 2011.

• Download the leaflet from www.workersliberty.org/taskforce, email labour-democracytaskforce@gmail.com, call 0207 219 1982, or write to Task Force, 3 Gibraltar Walk, London E2 7LH.

For the “orthodox Trotskyist” Pierre Frank, Mao was the political legatee of Trotsky!

Trotskyists” were a hybrid of Trotsky’s and those of the pre-war Brandlerite “Right Communists” or critical “liberal Stalinists”, splinter from the Communist International. Isaac Deutscher, though he had been a Trotskyist from 1932 until 1940, was after that a Brandlerite in his ideas about the USSR. Brandlerite politics and assessments suffuse his very widely read three-volume biography of Trotsky, and his biography of Stalin.

For the last sixty years of the 20th century, most anti-Stalinists were of this “orthodox Trotskyist” — or better, “orthodox Trotskyist” / Deutscherite — persuasion. In their own inadequate and contradictory way, despite their belief that the advance of Stalinism in the world was the “deformed” advance of the socialist world revolution, nevertheless, they were anti-Stalinist. At their worst, when calling on Stalinist ruling classes to reform their own system, they advocated radical reforms that, if they were realised, would not have left much of Stalinism intact.

Their adaptation to Stalinism was never uncritical adaptation — those who ceased to be critical ceased to be even nominally Trotskyist. It was a misguided attempt at a revolutionary socialist “accommodation” to the fact of Stalinism, so as to promote the “full” Trotskyist programme. It was never inner acceptance of it, never a surrender of the idea that the Stalinist states had to be democratised and transformed.

But Ernest Mandel, for example, used his erudition and his intellectual talents to weave, from the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, ideological clothing which could be draped on the expansion of Stalinism in order to identify it as part of the world revolution of the proletariat. Directly and indirectly, over the years, this “orthodox Trotskyism” tied large numbers of anti-Stalinist militants into accepting, tolerating or half-justifying aspects even of Russian Stalinist imperialism.

As a truthful picture of Russia began to form out of the mist of fantasy, lies and falsification — after say, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, to put down the emerging “socialism with a human face” there — many CPers were disillusioned. Orthodox Trotskyists could not experience that sort of “disillusionment”. They knew all the horrors of Stalinism already and had a theory — “degenerated and deformed workers’ states” — to frame them. So long as nationalised property existed the Stalinist state would be “progressive”, anti-capitalist and worthy of defence.

So in 1979, when Russian invaded Afghanistan, many CPs — the British for instance — condemned the invasion and called on Russia to withdraw. Every orthodox Trotskyist organisation in existence, with the exception of Socialist Organiser-Workers’ Liberty, refused to oppose the occupation. There was a big minority in the French organisation LCR which wanted to call for the withdrawal of the Russian army, but some groups were very enthusiastic for the expansion of the “workers’ state”.

Mandel, the most important orthodox Trotskyist thinker, played a role similar to that of Karl Kautsky two generations earlier, who rationalised, from the point of view of a hollow “orthodox Marxism”, what the leaders of the German social democracy and trade

unions did. But Mandel was worse than Kautsky. Kautsky devised ideological schemes to depict the time-serving activities of a bureaucratised labour movement as an effective drive for working-class liberation; Mandel produced similar rationalisations for totalitarian Stalinist states and empires — Stalinism that must be judged historically to have had no relationship to socialism and working-class emancipation but that of a destroyer of labour movements and an enslaver of working classes.

It was their assessment of the USSR, inherited from Trotsky but erected by themselves into a self-blinding dogma, that trapped the orthodox Trotskyists into letting themselves be reduced, too often, to the role of mere satellites of the Stalinist bloc and its partisans in the capitalist states. That misidentification of the USSR was one pillar of a complex historical disorientation: the existence of the Russian degenerated workers’ state and the coming into existence of other Stalinist states was seen as proof that this was “the era of wars and socialist revolution”.

Almost everything “Trotskyist” in our early 21st century post-Stalinist world — including Solidarity and Workers’ Liberty — has its roots in that “orthodox Trotskyist” current. It was, probably, the ambiguities, self-contradictoriness, and politically protean character of that current which allowed it to survive, in many political variants and compounds.

THE OTHER TROTSKYISTS

There was another Trotskyist current — that of Max Shachtman and the others who fought Trotsky in 1939-40 because they rejected any sort of “critical support” for the Russian Stalinist army in its war with Finland (from November 1939 to April 1940).

They went on to break, in 1940-1, with the idea that the USSR was any kind or degree of workers’ state. In response to events, they elaborated a distinct strand of Trotskyism.

In the 1940s the “orthodox Trotskyists” floundered politically in face of, first, the unexpected survival of Russian Stalinism, and then the eruption of Stalinist imperialism. Like Bible-fetish Christians, they read in the Big Book of “Trotskyist” “orthodoxy”, where they themselves had written as immutable dogma an unrepresentative selection of Trotsky’s works and phrases, especially on the USSR.

In contrast, the “other Trotskyists”, the “heterodox Trotskyists”, responded to the consolidation of the Stalinist autocracy and the rise of its empire to the eminence of second power in the world with accurate reporting and sober assessment of its meaning for socialist theory and its implications for the socialist working-class programme.

It can be argued (as I have argued, in detail and at length, elsewhere) that this heterodox Trotskyist current, in fact, despite its episodic dispute with Trotsky in 1939-40, continued the politics of Trotsky and applied them to the world, and specifically to Stalinism, in the way that Trotsky himself would have done if he had survived into the 1940s. Be that as it may, they evolved

a distinctive Trotskyist tradition and gave it life.

For two decades and more, they produced a powerful literature that has for that period no equal, nor any near relative or rival. Ultimately, from the end of the 1950s, their tendency too fell apart.

Where the orthodox Trotskyists saw the Stalinist states, which expropriated capitalism, as the advancing (“deformed”) world revolution, the heterodox Trotskyists saw Stalinist revolutions as the advance and spread of totalitarian slavery that they in fact were.

What they had in common, the two basic strains of post-Trotsky “Trotskyists”, was the belief that capitalism was collapsing and dying. For the “orthodox”, that gave them confidence that History was (sort of, in a “deformed” blood-thirsty way), on their side, and shaped the way they saw Stalinism.

To the Shachtmanites capitalism was sure to be replaced soon, one way or another — and the choice of replacement was either Stalinism or socialism. In the capitalist prosperity of the 1950s and 60s, they saw only a respite in the disintegration and death-decline of capitalism. The prosperity could not last, and, therefore, so it sometimes seems in their writings, it did not really exist, at least in terms of the long-term perspective.

Stalinism was indeed expanding, and it would continue to expand for some years after Shachtman’s death in 1972. Following through the line of thought that under bourgeois democracy, in sharp contrast to Stalinist totalitarianism, the working-class movement could function, and could prepare itself to create a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, Shachtman and his close friends went over to the US-led bloc.

They abandoned the socialist programme of independent working class politics, of the “third camp”, and sided with bourgeois-democratic capitalist USA against the Stalinist bloc, seeing the US and its allies as the only halfway viable alternative to Stalinism. They took that course for reasons that have much in common with those which led the “orthodox Trotskyists” to back the Stalinist bloc (critically — but the Shachtmanites too were critical of “their” bloc).

Within that bloc, they thought, working-class independent socialism could emerge, otherwise it would be crushed by advancing Stalinism. Shachtman became mired in the dirty politics of the Democratic Party. As a tendency, his co-thinkers evolved into born-again social-democrats. Shachtman himself never abjured support for the October Revolution, but some of his co-thinkers would (see Al Glotzer in *Workers’ Liberty* 16).

Others in the heterodox Trotskyist tendency — Hal Draper, Phyllis and Julius Jacobson and a few others, who started the magazine *New Politics* in the early 1960s — rejected Shachtman’s course and maintained independent socialist politics. But in their own particular way, they too moved very far from the politics of the tendency in its heroic days of the 40s and most of the 50s. They rejected the project of building a revolutionary socialist party. Draper repudiated and rejected what he called the “micro-sect” project of organisation-building. They became mere propagandists — with propaganda, to be sure, of a very high order.

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