

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 135 10 July 2008 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

WHAT NEXT IN ZIMBABWE?

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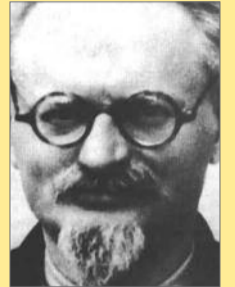
STRIKING FOR EQUALITY

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TROTSKY AND "TRADITION"

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Brown tells workers: "I'll oppose even 1990s rights".

Unions must break with Brown!



Brown's stance is brutal and clear.
Photo: John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk

BY COLIN FOSTER

Gordon Brown's Labour Party has been begging money from the unions. It is in deep debt and many of its former millionaire and business donors, put off by repeated scandals and by the probability that the Tories will form the next government, have stopped paying.

Timidly, and mostly behind closed doors, some union leaders have started demanding concessions in return for the cash. The GMB, led by Paul Kenny, has said that it wants voting over industrial action to be "modernised".

Brown responded rudely: "There will be no return to the 1970s, the 1980s or even the 1990s when it comes to union rights, no retreat from continued modernisation and there can be no question of any re-introduction of secondary picketing rights".

"Even to the 1990s" — even to what we had when Margaret Thatcher left office in 1990, before the Tories' final major anti-union legislation in 1993! To laws which already banned solidarity ("secondary") strikes and pickets, and strikes without prior ballots, that 1993 law added compulsion on unions to give bosses seven days' notice of ballots and of industrial action; to identify to the employer the union's members involved in the ballot; and to run all strike ballots by post, not at the workplace.

"Secondary picketing rights", explicitly ruled out by Brown, would simply mean that it was no longer illegal, for example, for the Gate Gourmet catering workers at Heathrow Airport, sacked en masse in 2005, to organise picket lines to try to persuade other workers at the airport to support them.

Amidst the medley of issues being raised by union

leaders, Brown is right to identify union rights as central. Unless workers have the right to take speedy (and sometimes surprise) action against employers, and to reach out to fellow-workers for support — and those are the main things banned by the laws which Blair and Brown inherited from the Tories and continue to enforce — workers' demands on wider social issues will always be powerless.

Brown's stance is unsurprising to anyone except those union leaders who suggested, or dreamed, that Brown might be more responsive to working-class concerns than Blair. It is also absolutely brutal and clear.

The question is, what will the organised working class — that is, essentially, the trade unions — do now?

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NHS ANNIVERSARY

Human need, not profit!

BY ALISON BROWN

Sixty years after the formation of the NHS it's difficult to imagine a time in the past without it, or a future with it gone.

Before the Second World War health care in Britain was dependent on how much money you had to spend on it. The government had little role in provision beyond public health information on hygiene or communicable diseases. It was assumed that the individual, not the state was responsible for paying for the health of themselves and their families.

Health care was available in a patchwork system of local GPs, charity or church funded hospitals or Poor Law hospitals. Only in the 20 great teaching hospitals would specialties like surgery be available. If you were rich health care was available. If you were poor your options were limited. The majority of Britain's workers could literally not afford to be ill.

Early attempts to set up a comprehensive system of unemployment and other benefits collapsed as the economic crises of the 1920s struck. The imperative for change came with the Second World War. With large civilian casualties expected from German air raids there was a pressing need to create a national health service to keep the country working.

The Emergency Medical Service provided 1,000 new operating theatres, and tens of thousands of new beds and created a National Blood Service. At the start free treatment was limited to war casualties, but was extended and by the end of the war the principle and feasibility of a national health service had been comprehensively demonstrated.

This wartime health service was consolidated and expanded by the radical Labour Government of 1945. Coming to power after a landslide victory it was mandated to "build a land fit for heroes". A militant and expectant working class made sure Labour kept to their promises. When the Beveridge Report, the blueprint for the Welfare State, was first produced in 1942 it had enjoyed cross party support in Parliament. At the war's end the Tories started to backtrack, wanting to restore capitalism and the rule of profit to normal.

Despite the fact that Britain was all but bankrupt with the cost of war, the NHS overspent massively in its first year, as a huge backlog of medical complaints came to the attention of doctors for the first time. But there was never an issue about the NHS producing a surplus, and no profit by proxy. The government had a duty to provide health care and the cost was secondary to the moral principle.

The story since 1948 has been one of a constant battle to maintain and develop the health service against its critics. Yet it still remains remarkably cheap and efficient compared to health services elsewhere in the world.

New Labour is throwing away the founding principles of the NHS and taking up another model — that of the United States. The US, lacking a strong enough workers' movement and suffering from some of the biggest social inequalities, was the one major industrial nation not to have socialised medicine. There health is still a business, a big business at that.

The actual experience of living in a Britain without the NHS now rests in the memories of our older generation. But the memories are vivid. Their anger and worries about the future explain why so many

of them are involved in fighting for it now. The foundation of the NHS was not inevitable and its future never been guaranteed. From the very start it needed to be defended against those that would like to rip it apart as an affront to the holy principle of profit. That fight goes on, and it will require a militant labour movement determined to stand up in the face of the capitalist "common sense" view of the world where everything must have a price in order to have a value.

We need to re-establish the NHS on the principle that human need and the right to life are more important than profit. The campaign for the NHS should be one of the major elements on which we rebuild our labour movement, and instill the courage to go beyond reform, to challenge the basis of capitalism itself. For as long as capitalism creates and defends a market where life can be bought and sold, the NHS will be under threat.

DARZI: MORE PRIVATISATION

In the week of the 60th anniversary of the NHS the government has presented its vision of the future as developed by the unelected Health minister, Lord Darzi. Amongst all the gloss this report signals the way for a further move away from the founding principles of the NHS.

Within the report there is much about an ongoing commitment to the service and the need to drive up standards. What is not so obvious is the continued and expanding role of the market in delivering these goals. There is no evidence that these market-led changes mean better care. In Scotland and Wales where the governments have in the main rejected privatisation there has been

no falling behind in standards. In fact in Scotland the scrapping of prescription charges and free nursing care for the elderly show a different model is possible.

As in the original Darzi report commissioned for London the major innovation is the polyclinic. These will provide GP services alongside diagnostic testing, minor operations and consultant out patient clinics all now found in hospitals. Sounds good but the threat to current provision is threefold: in the first place it opens the door further to the private sector, companies like Virgin Healthcare, who the government has stipulated will provide these new centres, in the second it will force the closure of smaller, more personal and accessible GP surgeries and thirdly it will mean the end of the District General Hospital.

The market created via foundation trusts and the national tariff has already seen many specialist services transferred away from local communities to the big teaching hospitals in the cities. Polyclinics will see a further reduction in the one choice patients constantly demand access to good, local, comprehensive health services. The dynamic of these reforms will take health care back to the time before the NHS with most specialist services only available in a few regional centres and local care in the hands of privately run polyclinics.

The original aim of the NHS to provide free accessible healthcare for all is being replaced by providing a chance for profit to all prepared to take it. Communities will and do take action to defend their local services. The 60th anniversary celebrations are a chance to develop a campaign to defend and maintain those founding principles of social solidarity that created the NHS.

Build this anti-capitalist feminist event!

A STATEMENT

We are feminists who have come together from a number of groups to organise an event on Saturday 25 October 2008. We are excited and energised by the current resurgence in feminist activism in the UK, but we think that the kind of feminist movement we build and the kind of politics it has, matter.

We are committed to an anti-capitalist feminism which sees the interconnections between all struggles against oppressions and against capitalism, and we want to build an event that creates an open space to discuss this and develop our ideas. But we don't want to just talk about our politics — we want to fight to actually change the material conditions of women's lives, to fight misogyny and our own exploitation, and to involve as many women and men as

possible in the campaigns that will be at the centre of this event.

We want the joint event to provide us with a forum to come together, participate in open debate, develop strategies to work towards our common aims, network, make alliances and inspire each other to build a strong and active feminist movement. We need to unite to challenge women's oppression and exploitation. We want to fight for the rights of all women — and that includes the rights of sex workers and 'illegal' migrants.

We organise using non-hierarchical, consensus-based decision making. We recognise the power structures that exist among us, based on the inequalities of our society, which amplify some voices and marginalise others, and we will actively work to confront them. Decisions are taken at monthly meetings, which are open to fem-

inists of all genders. There's also the option to work autonomously in self-defined groups (e.g. women-only). We respect the fact that women have a diversity of experience and we see this as positive in that it enables us to learn from each other.

Key issues on which we want to organise include...

- Defending and extending reproductive freedom.
- Opposing rape and sexual abuse.
- Fighting racism and immigration controls.
- Building solidarity with and between women workers.
- Challenging all forms of heterosexism and increasing our freedom of sexual expression.
- Struggles against capitalist exploitation.

• Contact: feminist.fightback@gmail.com

Break with Brown!

From front page

The union leaders now timidly making requests to Brown voluntarily abandoned their political voice in the Labour Party last autumn, when they voted for Brown's ban on the unions' and the local Labour Parties' right to put political motions to Labour Party conference. They have let this summer's union conferences go by without raising a murmur at the

move which shut down Labour Party conference — once "the parliament of the labour movement" — after 107 years of life.

On all precedent, they will now quietly accept Brown's declaration, and concentrate on trying to get sops and concessions on less pivotal issues.

But a working class which remains stifled industrially by anti-union laws is one that will see real-wage cuts, privatisation and marketisation of social provision, and erosion of civil rights continue unrelentingly.

Under the impact of higher inflation rates and Brown's public-sector pay freeze,

workers are beginning to stir back into industrial militancy. That action must be extended into political militancy.

Activists should fight for the unions to break with Brown, and to join together to rebuild independent working-class representation in politics. If only through a pioneer minority at first — as with the original Labour Representation Committee in 1900, which initially had union affiliations totalling only 20% of the total trade union membership — the unions must move, directing their political funds towards Labour and socialist candidates who will back workers' rights rather than to union-basher Brown.

Whose fault is climate change?

I'm not a great one for polls, given the skewed questions and the dodgy sociological categories, but among the general gloom in recent polls on the environment, one finding stood out.

In the Guardian's ICM poll last week, the number of people who thought that environment should be the government's priority rather than the economy was substantially higher (56%) among the lower income, less well-educated DE demographic than among the better-off ABs (47%).

The poll also underlined the smaller ecological footprint of people on lower incomes. Only 42% of DEs took a foreign holiday over the last three years, whilst 77% of ABs did. Better-off people also own more cars, as you might expect — only 5% of DEs have three or more cars, whilst 15% of ABs do.

The argument has long been put that workers "can't afford to be concerned about the environment". In reality it is the rich, with their corporations, their states and their consumption that causes the problem. And more importantly, there are signs that it is workers who most want to do something about it. That's a sentiment socialists need to build on.

NORTHERN ROCK

Left unity? Yes! But why is the “left” divided now?

There are a sizable number of “unite the left” calls, campaigns, conglomerates and projects in Britain now. Do any of those calling for “unity”, a “new Marxist Party”, etc., have any prospect of uniting? Not at all! The unity projects serve as mere hypocritical packaging for the real message — “come join us”!

(The exception may be a small re-grouping between the International Socialist Group — Alan Thornett and Dr John Lister, a writer for the Stalinist Morning Star — and a few ex-Socialist Workers Party activists who sided with George Galloway when “Respect” split. The rumour that they will take as their common name: “Right wing ex-Trotskyist dim-wits for George Galloway and Islamist clerical fascism”, is, we understand, untrue.)

This is a “left” so confused that it let itself be led into a popular front with Islamist clerical fascists, with the tainted mercenary George Galloway as one of its chief tribunes!

The “groups” and “parties” are organised as tight single-faction organisations, with a pre-designated leadership, and at any given moment a narrowly defined set of ideas which function as shibboleths and, in fact, are not open to discussion. Internal dissent is not allowed, or is allowed only so long as it does not impinge on the cardinal doctrines or personages of the group. Dissent in the public press is very, very rare, and mostly unknown. Minorities are not allowed to organise freely.

Most groups have, internally and externally, the defining spirit of the narrow, persecuting, heresy hunting religious sect. The feeling and emotions and commitment which are a necessary part of any sustained socialist activity are focused on the group, “the party” and counterposed to everything else, including the labour movement.

Such formations are quasi-religious, as Marx long ago explained:

“The sect sees its *raison d’être* and its point of honour not in what it has in common with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from the movement”. The sectarian leader, “like everyone who maintains he has a panacea for the sufferings of the masses in his pocket... gave his agitation from the outset a religious and sectarian character. Every sect is in fact religious... instead of looking among the genuine elements of the class movement for the real basis of his agitation, he wanted to prescribe the course to be followed by this movement according to a certain doctrinaire recipe”. To “demand... of the class movement that it should subordinate itself to the movement of a particular sect”, or to “want to preserve your ‘own workers’ movement’...” is likewise the mark of the sectarian. (*Letter to JB Schweitzer*, 13 October 1868.)

They need intolerance, a “party regime” that keeps an iron grip — as in the SWP — and the typical internal atmosphere of an intense religious cult — or else they would disintegrate. They need certainties and dogmas and — as in the Socialist Party — consecrated, infallible leaders, and a faith which separates the faithful and the saved from the sinners and those who are “anti-party”. These can be sustained and kept in place only when dissent is forbidden or limited and ritualised.

A political culture in which every participant has the taken-for-granted right to disagree with the majority, to pose awkward questions, to express dissenting opinions and to proselytise for them — that would be anathema to the quasi-religious “Leninist” sects.

They do not follow Lenin’s ideas, but at best those foisted on the Communist Parties by Zinoviev and then Stalin in the 1920s.

That was not the way the Bolshevik Party was run. Lenin explained in 1907: “The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action... Criticism within the basis of the principles of the party programme must be quite free... not only at party meetings but also at public meetings” (*Collected Works volume 10*).

Contact with a more open, democratic and rational ways of organising would dissolve the pretensions of the leaders of such groups, and dissipate the holy aura surrounding them, their ideas and their organisation. For that reason the groups not only control or stifle elements of such an approach within their own ranks, but also cultivate and foment extreme hostility and hatred for it when it comes from outside. Instead of teaching their supporters to rea-



Renewal? No just the same old sect-buidling

son about the world, they teach them dogmas, mythical histories and fictitious political genealogies about themselves.

The amazingly puny resistance and, afterwards, recoil which the SWP’s collapse into a popular front with clerical fascists (and into taking Arab-Islamic money, which is now admitted): that is the measure of the cult-sect nature of that organisation. Its loss of prominent members to Galloway and alliance with clerical fascism is the measure of the profound political decay at the heart of the SWP.

We must learn the lessons from the experience of so many who have tried to be honest socialists, but who tragically have fallen back into the primitive, semi-religious, sectarian approach characteristic of the dawn of the pre-Marxist labour movements in the last century and earlier.

The pseudo-“Leninist” sect regime is immensely wasteful. It works to create splits out of every dispute. In any serious dispute, the minority must crush the existing leadership, be crushed itself, or split. This reality in turn works to justify the absolute predominance of the leadership. They are the alternative to splits, disruption and further fragmentation. If not us/me — chaos!

Such regimes cannot give revolutionaries a rounded Marxist education, or make them into self-sustaining revolutionary socialist cadres. That is one of the key reasons for the perpetual haemorrhaging on the left, and for the inability of so many, when they become disillusioned with their “parent” organisation, to reorient themselves and the parent group or, failing that, learn and start afresh on a more healthy basis.

Moreover, it works against spreading socialist ideas in the labour movement. An organisation where “the line” is established internally by top-down decree will use the same methods of proclamation and hectoring in the labour movement — with self-sterilising results. The worst example here is the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal (then united as Militant) for a decade and a half ran the Labour Party youth movement as an authoritarian “school” for obedient adolescents.

The root sectarianism is sectarianism in relation to the working class and its movement. Revolutionary socialist organisations do not sink into the existing labour movement and accept it at its present level. We try to develop it and lead it forward — as Marx put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, to represent the future of the movement in the movement of the present; but we do relate to the working class and its movement, at all its levels, as it is. Without such an orientation, Marxists can be anything you like,

academics, ivory-tower prophets, moralising critics of society and of history — but they will not be serious working-class revolutionaries. Instead of their ideas being a guide to action, they will become the shibboleths of the sects into which potentially healthy socialist organisations have let themselves shrink and sink.

A viable organisation able to do the work of agitation, propaganda and organisation in the working class - the work that will make it a real revolutionary party - cannot be built except in the working class, in working-class struggle, and in the working-class movement. A “revolutionary party” or group, even a small group, that is not engaged with all the key political processes in the working class and in its existing movement, and which does not offer perspectives for the broad labour movement and try to carve them out, can not be a revolutionary party in more than name. It will be an a-political fetish for its devotees, not a political tool for working-class activists.

We organise the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty in the spirit of these criticisms of the “left”. We are a democratic collective, committed to rational democratic working-class politics. We conduct our discussions openly in the pages of our press. We have been able to keep that open regime without losing effectiveness in action.

A democratic regime can do at least six important things that its opposite has no hope of doing. It can:

- increase the chances of reaching clear and accurate conclusions;
- provide the organisation with essential insurance against the certainty that sometimes its established leadership will be wrong and require correction;
- make it likely that members and sympathisers will understand controversial decisions better;
- train those members and sympathisers in the art and habit of dialogue and debate which they need if the whole organisation is to be able to operate sensitively in the labour movement and learn from the class struggle;
- by treating the readers of the organisation’s press as adults, rather than children to be given bland, one-sided, simplified, “processed”, manipulative summaries rather than the real texture of the reasoning of the “grown-ups” inside the organisation’s committees, a democratic regime makes the press more educative and interesting;
- give minorities on big political questions a plausible guarantee that they will not be crushed, silenced, or forced to pretend they think the opposite of their real opinions, and thus avoid unnecessary splits.

The regime of the single admissible “line” gives the activist only the choice of being autocrat or silenced political serf. Hence overheated struggles for dominance, and the secessions of serfs in revolt against being gagged and suppressed. This aspect of the neo-Trotskyist left is a direct infection from Stalinism. It is in no sense Leninist or Bolshevik.

Generally, the argument that democratic openness costs too much in delay and in effort diverted from external activity is a short-sighted one, as a counting-up of the revolutionary energies wasted and dissipated in decades of excessive splits and sectarian dead-ends shows.

Yet, of course, democracy should not be confused with “the tyranny of structurelessness” — a chaotic mess where anyone can debate anything at any length and at any time. Democracy has to be structured to be real; and even structured democracy is not a cure-all.

Even the most democratic revolutionary organisation will founder if it does not develop a leadership with sufficient political capacity, coherence, consistency, vigour, authority, and ability to renew itself.

Such a group will differ from a sect because the leadership will not be unchallengeable or unremovable, and because everybody in the organisation will have equal rights in discussion and decision-making.

Better than the world we have of small groups of socialists maintaining a malevolent silence towards each other except an occasional snarl, would be one in which there was at least discussion and dialogue between the dwellers on the atolls of our fragmented “left”.

The most urgent questions that need to be discussed are those raised by the popular front of so large a part of the ostensible left with Islamist clerical fascism.

Demagogic hypocrisy about the immediate possibilities of ‘left unity’ can only work against honest discussion.

IN BRIEF

•RMT: The RMT has called a ballot of Charing Cross Group Tube workers for action in solidarity with Jerome Bowes, a member of station staff at Elephant and Castle unjustly sacked after an incident on New Year's Eve.

Jerome was subject to verbal abuse after witnessing a fight between two passengers, and manhandled by a drunken passenger. When this passenger punched him, Jerome swung round in self defence and caught him, breaking a small bone in his own wrist. No managers were present, even at one of the busiest stations on one of the busiest nights of the year.

Although he was himself on the receiving end of abuse and an assault, Jerome has now been sacked by Tube bosses. This despite the fact that the witness statements from other staff all back Jerome. The RMT is therefore balloting its members on the Charing Cross Group as well as making an appeal through formal channels.

•ARGOS: Argos distribution and warehouse workers have voted to take strike action against a below-inflation 3.8% pay offer at a time of record profits for the retail giant. There was a 67% vote for action, with over 75% of staff taking part in the ballot. The bosses will only offer a 4.1% pay rise in line with the retail price index on the condition that workers accept an attack on their sick pay scheme, despite the fact that many of them earn as little as £17,000 a year.

Pay is not the only issue at Argos. Warehouse staff are under heavy pressure, directed by a computer voice system which also monitors their every move to assure 'efficiency'. Similarly, Argos drivers have to drive high-sided lorries for up to 50 hours a week in all conditions. These conditions make the sick pay scheme all the more necessary.

Argos management have furthermore tried to sow division between existing staff and new Polish agency workers. But by organising English classes where management refused to do so, the Unite union has been able to win over Polish workers to join its ranks. This makes it all the more unlikely that management can use agency staff to undermine the strike.

The four distribution centres set to see strike action are Basildon in Essex, Bridgwater in Somerset, Heywood in Greater Manchester and Magna Park in Leicestershire. Staggered strike action is planned for 17 and 24 July, followed by four days of stoppages starting on 30 July.

• ACADEMIES: NUT and Unison members at the Hayward school in Bolton have voted to take strike action on 15 July in response to plans to take the school out of local authority control and turn it into an academy.

Unison members at the nearby Withins school are to strike on the same day, in their third day of action opposing the marketisation of the education system.

Both schools have already been subject to job cuts in what is seen by the unions as preparing the way for bigger attacks when the schools come under private control, although the local authorities claim that cuts are a response to falling student numbers. Barry Conway, secretary of the Bolton branch of the NUT, commented: "If [student numbers] are getting smaller, so should class sizes, which is a good thing. It should not mean staff cuts."

The Hayward school is set to be put under the control of the owners of the Cohens pharmacy chain, while Withins will be run by the Church of England in collaboration with managers from Airtours.

TUBE CLEANERS

London Underground cleaners to fight on

London Underground cleaners organised by the RMT have taken three days of strike action to demand a fair wage and better working conditions. Clara Osadiede, secretary of the cleaners branch, spoke at a meeting hosted by the Labour Representation Committee (LRC):

"London Underground is the most prestigious metro in the world. It forms the bedrock of the city. The importance of London Underground cannot be overemphasised. The high volume of travellers makes cleaning more difficult. Cleaners are having to work harder. The cleaning companies have no democratic structures. Cleaning bosses are like task-masters. The treatments of cleaners and the conditions under which they have to work is like the slave trade. The conditions are terrible. Cleaners are often harassed and bullied. They are paid peanuts for the work they do. This has been the case since privatisation, it's gone from bad to worse. We know that Transport for London managers get a decent wage but cleaners live in abject poverty.

The RMT has brought the cleaners together, united them and educated them. I am proud to be a part of this union. For many years the RMT appealed to the clean-

ing contractors for fair pay and decent conditions. Now, for the first time, cleaners voted unanimously for action to get fair pay and decent conditions. We say 'No to exploitation' and demand 1. A London living wage: cleaners live in terrible conditions, sharing rooms with two or three others; 2. Decent pensions: some cleaners have been in service for more than twenty years and have no decent pension; 3. Sick-pay: at the moments we are only entitled to statutory sick pay; 4. Free travel to work: cleaners have to pay to go to work and travel between the stations they have to clean; 5. A stop to third party sackings: Metronet and Tube Lines [the contractors] can sack cleaners without reference to London Underground; 6. We demand dignity and respect. We are often treated like non-entities. One manager told other workers not to say "please" when talking to cleaners. We ask that cleaners be brought back in-house. The cleaning companies have no moral or ethical standards.

Many of those striking have been intimidated by management. Suddenly, just when we are saying no to exploitation, managers are saying National Insurance numbers are incorrect. Some of our members have been sacked. We are not going to

be threatened! We are strong. Despite the attacks we will strike again. We are determined to fight on. This strike is not just about money - it's for dignity.

We call on every one of you to help us to put an end to this exploitation!"

Despite a campaign of threats and intimidation the RMT cleaners have resolved to continue their action. The prospects for victory in the dispute have been enhanced by the decision of the TGWU-Unite - which organises cleaners separately from the RMT - to ballot members for action. Up until now TGWU-Unite members and non-unionised agency staff have been used to scab on RMT strikers. The decision is to be welcomed but the initial refusal to ballot raises questions about how the TGWU-Unite organise and how they will work with the established RMT campaign.

The London Underground cleaners dispute remains a vital test for the labour movement as a whole. The struggle to organise the unorganised, fight racist employment practices and defend the rights of immigrant workers - along with the battle to overturn Thatcher's anti-trade union laws - will shape the future of the labour movement.

Feminist Fightback takes direct action to support cleaners

On Friday 27 June, after attending the Stratford picket line, Feminist Fightback activists took over the lobby of the London Underground Limited (LUL) headquarters to express our solidarity with the striking underground cleaners. Armed with feather dusters, brooms and mops, we set about helping Transport for London "clean up their act".

Eight of us, both men and women, confidently strode past the security guard and proceeded to cause disruption in the large lobby. For about 20 minutes we set to work cleaning, while we called out the demands of the tube cleaners' strike and explained the gendered nature of this work - mainly women, who are totally undervalued and subject to sexual harassment. Our seemingly inoffensive cleaning activities and 'cheery' demeanors confused the security for long enough for us to make our point to the whole building before we were carried out the doors!

Women's work? Although not all tube cleaners are women, cleaning has traditionally been perceived and undervalued as "women's work" and bosses have seized on this to entrench low pay. As feminists we want to highlight the extent to which work such as cleaning, cooking and care work is undervalued.

Cleaning is vital work and women workers deserve fair pay, decent conditions and an end to indignity and vulnerability at work. In strikes like the cleaners', an undervalued workforce is fighting collectively and challenging the whole status of cleaners as a super-exploited group cut off from the rest of the workforce. This strike represents women workers taking action for self-liberation.

Building on our first action Fightback carried out another piece of direct action on Thursday 3 July. We accidentally littered and succeeded in closing down escalators and causing disruptions at Bank and Tottenham



Court Road stations to highlight the importance of the work done by cleaners. We then returned to the LUL headquarters at St James' Park, dumped a lot of rubbish outside and leafleted the public until we were moved on by police. The strike this time got a lot more news coverage, as did our action - for example the *New Statesman* article "Feminism and the Tube".

Direct action isn't the whole of it but our stunts have been useful in making cleaning work - normally done at night - visible. The stunts have also succeeded in increasing press attention, causing disruption and annoyance at the LUL headquarters and getting new people involved in our activism. It was interesting to have the experience of challenging authority (security guards and police), and to be able to do this because of our collective strength. It is also important to note that the cleaners supported us undertaking these stunts, and it provided a way for us to use our more "privileged" position to do something that cleaners could not have because of uncertain immigration status and fear of losing jobs.

Feminist Fightback's activist model is about building bridges between anti-capitalists and socialist, labour movement based politics. The campaign also tries hard to

build links between the student activist movement and labour movement women's struggles. While this still needs to be concretised more thoroughly the current solidarity we are involved in with the cleaners is a strong example of how our socialist feminism can build bridges with women workers' struggles.

London Underground cleaners play a crucial role in keeping the Tube running. Pressure needs to be placed on Transport for London to take responsibility for the workers who clean their underground; we intend to keep stepping up our direct action against them.

If you want to get involved in the next direct action contact: feminist.fightback@gmail.com

GLASTONBURY

Ten young members and sympathisers of the AWL attended this year's Glastonbury festival, working on the bars run by Workers' Beer to raise money for the group and various campaigns. We also collected tips and organised collections for the Tube cleaners' strike, raising about £300.

Glastonbury is a bit more political than the other major music festivals. Workers' Beer helps to run a tent called Leftfield, with left-wing and trade union stalls, speakers, comedy and bands.

Leftfield is distinctly less radical than it used to be, but we helped spice it up a bit by selling *Solidarity* and leafleting for Ideas for Freedom. The main thing, though, was the opportunity to talk politics among ourselves and with our contacts, both when relaxing and when pulling pints.

All that, and we got into Glastonbury for free! If you'd like to come and work with us at festivals in the future, get in touch: skillz_999@hotmail.com

WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

Brown and Picasso

BY COLIN FOSTER

Gordon Brown dreads union demands for legal rights for workers to take industrial action beyond the most parcelised and regulated because, he says, that would clash with "modernisation".

I read about that the same day that I went to see an exhibition, "Picasso and his collection", about one of the great modernist painters and the artworks he kept in his house and his studio and took inspiration from.

For Brown, "modernising" means servility towards the "modern" wishes of the "modern" ruling classes. Since the 1980s, capitalist governments have redefined their role as "selling" their countries as sites for world-market capital to perch in.

Brown's ex-CBI-chief minister Digby Jones summed it when he commented on the government's quickly-watered-down plans to squeeze "non-domiciled" wealthy foreigners living in the UK ever so slightly for tax: it would mean that "the product isn't as good as it was". Another bosses' spokesperson put it similarly, saying that maybe "the next shop" would be "offering a better price".

So Brown is scared that workers' rights will annoy world-market capital, and it will move to "the next shop", or another "product". So scared that he can't even pause to reflect that the big multinational enterprises, whatever they say, actually reconcile themselves to other countries in Western Europe, all of which have less cramping labour laws than Britain; or that there is nothing especially "modern" about harking back to the era before 1906 in legal curbs on workers' rights to take action.

Brown, in his flat subordination to the dominant demand of the moment, is typical of mainstream politicians. As Picasso typified genuine modernism in his day, Brown does too but in exactly the opposite way.

Picasso constantly invented new styles, constantly and consciously drew on what was "out of date". Among the painters whose works he most sought to acquire were Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the most "conventional" of the impressionists, a man who had been trained by working as a lad painting images in a factory onto plates and cups, and Henri Rousseau, considered a "naive" or "primitivist" painter.

As Marshall Berman puts it in his book *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, "To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction. It is to be overpowered by the immense bureaucratic organizations that have the power to control and often to destroy all communities, values, lives; and yet to be



Modern workers challenge "modernisation". Writers Guild of America strike

undeterred in our determination to face these forces, to fight to change their world and make it our own.

"It is to be both revolutionary and conservative: alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic depths to which so many modern adventures lead... We might even say that to be fully modern is to be anti-modern: from Marx's and Dostoevsky's time to our own, it has been impossible to grasp and embrace the modern world's potentialities without loathing and fighting against some of its most palpable realities".

Or, again, Robert Hughes on modernism as a combination of enthusiasm for the potentialities created by burgeoning capitalism and revulsion from its meanness and cruelty: "we must invent a new environment of buildings, cities, images and tools, whose end will be to create new societies of men and women. This engineering will get a name: modernism. It will be buoyed up by an immense and irrational hope..."

The working class is by its nature modernist in Berman's sense — both modern and anti-modern. It knows how to sift the "irrational" dross from the rational in modernism, and how not to collapse into dismissing all hope for something bigger than Blair-Brownite "modernisation" as "irrational". Or, at least, it *has to be* "modernist" in order to live and breath.

A government which was "Labour" in the sense of more than a traditional label, a genuine workers' government, would have to be "modernist" in the sense of Berman or Picasso, and not at all "modernising" in Brown's sense.

The first step in achieving it is for the unions to start to live and breath properly as working-class organisations: to define their own policies and programmes, rather than aspiring only to nudge Brown a few centimetres on this or that issue.

EDUCATION

Test-marking fiasco: scrap SATs!

BY PATRICK YARKER

In May, 11 and 14 year olds in England's state schools faced the tedious annual round of public tests in English, Maths and Science. All results of those tests were supposed to be with schools this week. They won't be.

At the last moment the government acknowledged that such was the incompetence of the private company newly-charged with administration for this year's testing-programme that a delay in the return of all results to schools was unavoidable. The Education Secretary, Ed Balls, promised an inquiry. ETS Europe, the hapless company who won the £157M testing-contract for the next three years, taking over from Edexcel, England's privatised exam-board, declared lessons would be learned for next year. They promised that over 90% of results would be in schools by the original deadline. Even if this claim is true, that will leave schools still awaiting the scores of almost a million test papers.

ETS Europe is part of the giant US company ETS, which likes to present itself as "not-for-profit". It claims this status as a business offering a public good: the mass standardised testing of schoolchildren. The "not-for-profit" badge wins it approval from the gullible and a lighter tax-burden under US law, much to the annoyance of its competitors.

ETS is a latecomer into the big-money world of edu-business, one of whose favourite franchises is tests-u-like. It formed a "for-profit" subsidiary just in time to cash in on the latest boom in Stateside mandatory mass-testing inaugurated by George Bush's 2001 "No Child Left Behind" legislation. Rapid development of software to facilitate computerised marking has been one of the results. Test-papers may be scanned and made available for marking anywhere in the world, allowing the process to continue non-stop. ETS also markets increasing numbers of what it calls 'wrap-around products', such as materials to train teachers not in what's educationally-useful but in readying students for testing.

A self-declared "billion-dollar commercial entity", ETS has offices worldwide, for the mass-testing model of education relentlessly seeks to open new markets. It is headquartered on a 360 acre site which the IRS (the USA's tax inspectors) valued recently at \$133 million. The company

holds a similar sum in stocks. It employs over two thousand staff, and its executives receive large bonuses on top of high salaries, and in some cases a 'signing-on' fee. But the company is 'not-for-profit'. Some of the profit it hasn't made this year comes from public money diverted to ETS via schools, in the form of the fees required for students to sit NC tests. We pay, indirectly, a private business to oversee our children as they take and are judged by tests we oppose and which serve no proper educational purpose. The House of Commons Select Committee for Education sat through days of evidence revealing the way NC tests are detrimental to students, teachers and schools. Its recent report urged the government to re-think the whole over-testing strategy begun by the Tories and maintained by New Labour.

That this year's test-marking would turn out to be a fiasco could have been foreseen by anyone reading the message-boards on the TES website. Hundreds of posts testify to the inefficiency, maladministration and bravura Laurel-and-Hardyesque incompetence over which ETS Europe has presided. There must be grave doubts over the quality of the marks so far awarded, partly because ETS was so confident in its systems that it removed various double-checks and re-marking processes kept in place until this year.

Comments by markers on the inadequacies of ETS Europe once again give the lie to claims that the private sector can be relied on for efficiency, reliability and high-quality service. Markers' comments on the nature of some of this year's test-questions reveal yet again the poverty of NC testing and the falsity of its judgments of children.

Yet the deeper issue remains why any teacher continues to act as an NC test-marker. Doing so enables this educationally-damaging testing-system to keep operating, however chaotically. It lends a vestige of credibility to a testing-system rejected by the rest of Britain and the bulk of England's private schools.

Teachers should re-think what they are doing by their involvement in NC test-marking. Instead of calling for ETS to do better next time, they should at the very least stop undermining by their participation in the marking-process the efforts of other teachers to end NC testing. Best of all, they should join those efforts and help scrap SATs.



Recent research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that around £13,400 a year is required to maintain a minimum standard of living. The Treasury currently estimates the minimum acceptable income as no less than 60% of the median

What's in a minimum?

wage. The question is "what is a minimum standard of living?"

For Brown and Darling it may just mean being able to house, feed and get yourself to work every day but for those surveyed it means more than this. We live in a world where the basic measure of 'liveability' is set at the level of 'reproduction' - that is, the ability to 'reproduce' a work force on a daily and generational basis. Ideally, the capitalist class would maximise their profits by only handing over enough money to enable workers to feed, rest and wash ourselves - and perhaps have a few kids. The results from the Joseph Rowntree study

show that the minimum standard of living depends upon an income consistently in excess of the 60% line.

£13,400 isn't going to buy you a brand new car, two holidays a year, designer labels and vintage wine. It's not - as some will surely portray it - a demand from an increasingly greedy, 'aspirational' layer of society. This level of individual income is required to live a life that involves more than the daily slog of work, leaves you with enough money to have a minimal life outside of work.

These results may explain the recent increase in the number of workers putting

in more than 48 hours a week. From 2007 to 2008 around 180,000 more of us worked in excess of 48 hours. That's a total of 3.25 million workers or 13% of the entire workforce. The current minimum wage stands at £5.52 for workers over 22 years of age. If you worked 48 hours a week, that translates into £13,772 a year - just a few hundred pounds over the bare minimum.

The recent leaps in living costs (food, fuel and housing), the credit crunch and other economic factors mean that the bare minimum is increasingly difficult to achieve - and not just for those on the minimum wage.

IRAQ

International Labour conference in Erbil

Plans are underway to hold an International Labour Conference in Iraq in August 2008. Unions supporting the conference including the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq and the militant Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions centred in Basra have published a statement describing this as "an important and urgent step toward strengthening and unifying the labor movement in Iraq".

As well as Iraqi trade unions representing oil workers, portworkers, railworkers, engineers, builders, teachers, mechanics, printing workers and electricity workers, the conference website says that the initiative has been backed by US Labor Against the War and the international aid wing of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

The conference will take place from 22 to 24 August in the city of Erbil — a relatively stable area in the north of Iraq — in a secure location.

Conference organisers are calling for labour movement organisations from around the world to come to the conference and support the effort to organise against government repression of trade unions, the occupation of Iraq and terrorist attacks on labour movement activists and their organisations.

Furthermore, the Iraqi unions involved in the conference have launched an appeal to raise \$150,000 (£75,000) to cover the costs of the event.

More information, including the statement calling for the conference, is available in English and Arabic at the conference website www.workerstoday.com

ZIMBABWE

Strike against Mugabe once and for all

DAVID BRODER SPOKE TO MIKE SAMBO FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION ZIMBABWE

What is the current state of the ISO Zimbabwe and the labour movement?

Over the last two years the ISO Zimbabwe grew but this year we have faced more significant challenges. We are trying to stay relevant to the working class, but it is hard to operate. We work around the trade unions but not with the bureaucrats. Most unions support the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, but there are also rank-and-file groups within many of the unions. Furthermore, in the case of the Zimbabwe Graphical Workers' Union, the rank-and-file opposition has actually taken over the leadership of the union. We aim to distribute our paper *Socialist Worker* among these workers, facilitate meetings and give advice to the labour movement from the left.

You used to refuse to back the MDC, but in the recent election shifted to supporting it. What changed?

Our current position is to support the MDC: it is hard to organise workers against them. After the recent elections we shifted from no support [for the MDC] to seeing it as the only way forward for the opposition. We have to get Mugabe out. The ISO is fully in support of the MDC, unconditionally but critically. Of course, we cannot keep quiet about the betrayals of the MDC leadership. It was created as a workers' party in reaction to the failings of neo-liberalism, but it has diverged from its original aims and has ceased to represent workers. It has been hijacked by white farmers and middle-class neo-liberals. We have to criticise their failures, but facing



Looming split in MDC

imminent crisis the opposition needs to put forward a united programme.

How would you analyse the situation the opposition faces after the second round of the elections?

First I will talk about before the election, when Mugabe unleashed a reign of terror on the opposition. He closed NGOs down, made it impossible for trade unions to operate and crushed the structures of the opposition parties. Mugabe killed not only people but even the livestock belonging to opposition supporters. Many people have gone underground to evade capture — the government wanted to arrest me, for instance. It was impossible for the Movement for Democratic Change to campaign, so they pulled out. But since the elections there is no longer so much violence. Rather, Mugabe wants to pull the MDC to the table - to help find economic solutions and political stability with a Government of National Unity. There has

been much talk of such a government being put in place. Mugabe has released the political prisoners, including Women of Zimbabwe Arise activists, [MDC General Secretary] Tendai Biti [who is out on bail but still facing treason charges] and civil society leaders. These concessions are bribes to the MDC. The situation has changed significantly.

What is the MDC's attitude to negotiations with Mugabe?

There is a looming split in the MDC. Some say they should refuse any talks with Mugabe — this more radical section is led by the General Secretary — since he is a murderer and not to be trusted. But the party spokesman Chamisa has said that the party is prepared to talk on the condition that Mugabe stops the violence and releases the political prisoners. Tsvangirai too will be willing to negotiate if such conditions are met.

How can you keep up resistance to the regime?

The main problem facing us at the moment is that people — not just activists, but the mass of the people — have been demoralised by Mugabe's show of force. There is a need to restore confidence that we can fight him. Important for this is the unity and regroupment of all the opposition parties and civil society. We need acts of civil disobedience, saying that these elections were not legitimate and Mugabe is not legitimate. But at the moment strikes are difficult, since although many union leaders are militantly opposed to the government, security agents will thwart them. The police and the military will crush resistance. To take action prematurely would risk people, and so we need to build our forces and make sure our machinery is well oiled. Rather than sporadic action, we need to strike against Mugabe once and for all.

CAMPAIGN

Let Amdani Juma stay!

BY ISABEL TURNBULL

Anti-deportation campaigners in Nottingham are trying to stop the deportation of Amdani Juma, a Burundian refugee and worker at the Nottingham Refugee Forum.

The case is set to be looked at again towards the end of summer. Campaigners hope that the Home Office will allow him discretionary leave to remain. The omens do not look good. The Home Office and the minister, Liam Byrne have been taking an increasingly hard-line approach. Byrne is particularly keen not to set a precedent where asylum seekers from Burundi are concerned or to suggest that the peace accord in Burundi is ineffective and that it is unsafe for asylum seekers to return to that country, despite the evidence.

Amnesty International in their recent communication of 16 May stated that "scores of civilians suspected of supporting an armed opposition group have been arrested by police since the start of April, and are at grave risk of torture. Seventeen detainees are being held in a cell measuring two metres square in a cachot in Ngozi".

According to local human rights monitors, they are being denied family visits and going hungry. There is no toilet in the cells. Human rights organizations and Friends of Burundi (a community organisation set up by Burundi people to support their community in the UK) have consistently identified the country as a place where the situation has not improved and where there are numerous cases of executions, torture and beatings of civilians and detainees. The Foreign Office has recommended that no British national travel to Burundi as it is "unsafe".

An estimated 300,000 people were killed in the armed conflict in Burundi that began in 1993.

Amdani came to the UK in 2003 and was granted humanitarian protection and has recently applied for indefinite leave to remain. The threat to deport him was made even though he was tortured in Burundi for being a pro-democracy activist and narrowly escaped death because of ethnic conflict. Many of his family and friends have faced torture or have been murdered. Amdani has no friends or networks in the areas of Burundi, yet the Home Office wishes to

return him. He suffers from the additional problem that he is originally not from Burundi but from Rwanda, is half Huto and half Tutsi and would be accepted by neither community in Rwanda, making his position very insecure.

Amdani's record since coming to the UK has been exemplary. No-one can say that his stay in the UK has not benefited the community. He has been involved in national organisations to do with HIV awareness and refugee rights as well as being actively involved in community organizations in Nottingham, advising Nottingham Social Services and other East Midland bodies on asylum issues. Amdani has worked with the Terrence Higgins Trust in Nottingham and they have stated that his work within the African communities on HIV/AIDS is crucial and pivotal to their organization.

His experience of detention is a familiar story to those involved with asylum cases. Amdani was moved four times over a period of a few weeks and finally ended up at Campsville Detention Centre outside Oxford. He was given no notice of the numerous changes made to his location making it difficult for contact to be main-

tained with him. The sophisticated levels of security and the fact that even visitors and friends of Amdani were fingerprinted and photographed when visiting reflects the way that the Home Office seeks to criminalise those people whose only crime is to have been persecuted in their own countries. The detention centre at Heathrow — the last port of call before asylum seekers are forced out on flights is run by a private company who are paid commission for those people that are 'persuaded' to return.

Many people are bewildered by the UK's attempts to expel Amdani — a decision that only makes sense if viewed in the context of a government that is keen to adopt a right wing agenda over asylum and immigration.

You can access additional information about Amdani online:

- On the Facebook group 'Keep Amdani Juma in Nottingham'.
- On the blog Friends of Amdani: a campaign group about Amdani's case, at www.friendsofamdani.wordpress.com
- Watch the film on YouTube.
- There are now 4,000 plus articles on the web including sites in California and Kenya that refer to his case.

VENEZUELA

Independent workers' party to stand up to Chávez

BY PAUL HAMPTON

Two reasons to cheer in Venezuela recently, as socialists restarted the task of building an independent workers' party, separate from Chávez's ruling bourgeois PSUV.

In April supporters of Orlando Chirino within the C-CURA trade union left organised a conference to establish a new workers' party. Chirino has a socialist and trade union history predating Chávez's time in power, and is a leader of the UNT trade union federation. In recent years he was also a leader of the PRS socialist party. He opposed Chávez's constitutional referendum and was victimised for trade union activity in the state-owned oil company PDVSA last year.

The move to form a new workers' party is reported in a highly informative interview in the recent *Permanent Revolution* (PR) magazine by Wlodek Flakin. It flows from Chirino's analysis of Chávez's party as a bourgeois and Bonapartist force. He explains how undemocratic the PSUV is and how far it is from the workers' movement.

Asked about the founding congress, he replied: "The delegates were completely knocked over by the top leaders of the government. Even though the delegates voted, the election of the national leadership was totally undemocratic. Why? The congress



UNT leaders. Orlando Chirino is on the far right of the picture

gave a list of 300 names to Chávez, and Chávez filtered these very well and picked 69 who could be elected. This way, even if the ones he most favoured weren't elected, there would still be people close to him."

Asked about the presence of some socialists in the PSUV, Chirino pointed out that only one member of Marea Socialista was a

delegate (out of 1,677). He added:

"There is no debate, no possibility to present documents. Right now there's a battle going on about selecting candidates for the elections at the end of the year, and Chávez has said that anyone who presents themselves as candidates too early will be expelled.

"There is no possibility there to set up a revolutionary current, a tendency, a fraction to participate in these debates. Further, a party that is openly connected to the government can't be an instrument of the working class."

Chirino also nails the myth that the bulk of C-CURA have gone over to the PSUV, arguing that the group around Marea Socialista were a minority and that many came back after the referendum was defeated.

Also at the end of May, another current from within the PRS, the JIR socialist youth organisation, held its own conference and declared for the establishment of a new organisation, adopting the name Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (LTS). The group, linked the PTS in Argentina, has also stridently upheld an independent working class line against both Chávez and the opposition in the presidential election in 2006 and in the referendum.

The organisations are not without political problems, given their Morenoist roots. However they share a common analysis of Chavismo – one also held by the AWL – as well as an orientation towards Venezuelan workers. Socialists internationally should do everything to help these comrades, by publicising their efforts and by making solidarity. They represent the best prospects for Venezuelan workers in the current situation.

Anti-semitism in Venezuela

BY JACK YATES

The insects that swarm around decaying human bodies reveal a great deal about the cause and timing of death. Stomach contents are even more informative. Pathologists drain the fluid, conduct biological and chemical tests, look carefully at samples under the microscope. In this way they can pinpoint the exact cause of death, or at least discern the last meal of a murder victim. Analogous methods can be applied in politics. You can tell something about a regime by the vermin it attracts. But to get some sense of the real cause of political illness, a peek inside the guts is necessary.

And so it is with Venezuela. President Hugo Chávez has forged close economic and diplomatic ties with a long list of repressive, anti-democratic regimes since coming to power. Among this list is Iran, whose leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claimed: "The distance between our countries may be a bit far, but the hearts and thoughts are very close". There are exactly 7,219 miles between Caracas and Tehran. How many miles, exactly, separate the clerical-fascists in Tehran and the Bolivarian 'revolutionaries'?

Venezuela has no tradition of anti-semitism. The 260,000 Jews who live in the country are mainly descended from European and North African refugees who fled during World War Two. Nazi fugitives chose to squirrel themselves away in Argentina, Paraguay and Chile rather than the relatively cosmopolitan Venezuela. So how can we explain the



Norberto Ceresole

recent outburst of anti-semitic attacks?

According to the neo-conservative *Commentary Magazine* and the pro-Chávez *Venezuela Analysis* website, synagogues and Jewish community buildings have been sprayed with anti-semitic comments like "child killers", "Jews get out", "Jews are dogs" and swastikas intertwined with the Star of David – often alongside the symbol of the Venezuelan Communist Party. In September 2006 the *El Diario de Caracas* newspaper carried an article stating: "Let us pay attention to the behav-

our of the Israeli-Zionists ... Possibly we will have to expel them from our country ... as other nations have done". Jewish community centres and schools have been repeatedly raided by armed government agents who claim to be investigating "subversive activity".

Venezuela Analysis claims that these incidents – and others not catalogued here – do not signify a turn in the regime towards anti-semitism but are the result of fervent "anti-imperialism". They claim that leading members of the Caracas Jewish community, including the city's most prominent Rabbi, have been involved in the various plots to remove Chávez. Some of them were pictured standing side-by-side with the 2002 coup leaders and more recently on student demonstrations against a referendum to allow Chávez to stay in power indefinitely. This "explanation" – a mirror of the sort of nonsense conjured up by the reactionary anti-imperialist left in this country to excuse their allies in Hamas and Hezbollah – simply does not fit with the reality of Chávez's own comments and the political history of his closest advisers.

On Christmas Eve 2004 Chávez addressed the nation: "The world has enough for everybody, but it happened that some minorities – the descendants of those who crucified Christ ... took possession of the riches of the world. A minority appropriated the world's gold, the silver, the minerals, the waters, the lands, the oil, and has concentrated the riches in a few hands." The reference to the classic anti-semitic "Christ Killers" should be noted here. That some of

Chávez's most fervent supporters are distributing copies of the tsarist forgery the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* also indicates that this anti-semitism is increasingly deep rooted. Add into the mix Chávez's long-standing association with Argentinian fascist and Holocaust denier Norberto Ceresole and even the slowest of us should be able to see a pattern emerging.

Ceresole had a vision for South America that conveniently knitted into Chávez's "Bolivarianism". He envisaged a federation of Latin American states led by a group of "caudillos" – fascist strongmen. Acting as an adviser to Chávez, Ceresole was present during attempts to take power militarily until being deported from the country in 1995. He believed that the greatest threat to Chávez laid in the "Jewish financial mafia."

Chávez's political eclecticism - ranging from socialist phrasemaking, liberation theology to the counsel of fascists - is one thing. But Venezuela has become a double-edged sword for socialists. Where some idiotically claim that a really existing socialist revolution is taking place in the country and remain silent in the time-honoured fashion of their Stalinist forebears, others – who perhaps have few illusions in the "socialist" content of the Chávez regime – will remain silent for fear of aiding the "imperialist aggressors". Socialists should be clear: Chávez is no socialist, Venezuela is not in the midst of socialist transformation and the growing signs of anti-semitism are enough to confirm as much.

ANTI-FASCISM

Why we need a political alternative to the BNP

BY CHARLIE SALMON

In the June 2008 issue of *Searchlight*, Nick Lowles makes a sober assessment of the recent “Hope not Hate” campaign against the BNP and the electoral successes of that party. Nick raises some important critical points. But he concludes by proposing an essentially identical campaigning strategy — advocating the very worst aspect of recent campaigns. The various flaws of mainstream anti-fascist campaigns (“Hope not Hate” and “Unite Against Fascism”) have their roots in the general political retreat of the left. This article examines why that is.

Nick Lowles: “Many of the people now turning their back on the Labour Party have not shared the economic prosperity of recent years. Many in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent and Dagenham now find themselves in a worse economic position than a few years ago.”

Nick Lowles blames New Labour’s strategy of “triangulation” for the shift to the right and subsequent loss of working class support. “Triangulation” is a strategic turn pioneered by Bill Clinton’s advisers in the early 1990s. It meant adopting some of the political ideas of your opponents in order, so the argument went, to rise above the standard left/right spectrum; thus forming a “political triangle”.

Nick cites research from *The End of Politics: Triangulation, Realignment and the Battle for the Centre Ground* by Alexander Lee and Timothy Stanley to demonstrate the sociological shift in votes away from Labour: “In 1997, 50% of C2 voters and 59% of DE voters supported Labour. By 2005 this had dropped to 40% and 48% respectively” (C2 and DE refer to “lower middle class” and “unskilled manual” groups — in Marxist terms, both groups are working class). He also reports that “A survey of wards that produced the best BNP votes in May shows plainly the profile of BNP supporting areas. All but one rank well below average in the Indices of Deprivation and the one exception, Queensbury in Bradford, is roughly average. Nearly all are among the top 10% most deprived areas.”

The “cause and effect” relationship between the strategy of “triangulation” and the subsequent shift in voting patterns only tells us so much. It’s a useful analogy for the political process that has transformed the Labour Party. But the reality of Labour’s shift to the right — a shift of more substance than run-of-the mill “Old Labour” conservatism — is that it has ceased to be a vehicle for working-class politics in almost every way. Over the past ten years the affiliated trade unions had some potential to shift party policy and the shape of government. That this potential went unused allowed Blair, Brown and allies to pursue their ideological commitment to the interests of the capitalist class and the related attacks on the working class. But at the 2007 Labour Party conference the party leadership pushed through policy that will remove any and all mechanisms for the trade unions to wield political influence. As yet there are no signs that the major affiliated unions will stage a fightback.

DEFENDING OURSELVES

“Now, it is much easier to engage in a joint action when the question before the proletariat is not one of taking the offensive for the attainment of new objectives, but of defending the positions already gained.”

Leon Trotsky, ‘The United Front for Defense’

The BNP are not on the brink of taking power. The government is not about to hand power to the BNP to quell an unruly, revolution-minded working class. There is not an immanent life-or-death struggle between the labour movement and the forces of reaction. The BNP are in a period of steady growth — securing local support, recognition and political positions. But the election of Richard Barnbrook to the Greater London Assembly demonstrates that things can change quickly: there are a series of small steps that could — in the right conditions — propel members of the BNP into the European or British parliaments.

When Trotsky wrote about “defending the positions already gained” he was addressing himself to the two dominant sections of the German labour movement, the Stalinist Communist Party and the reformist Social Democrats. Along with a small band of German supporters, Trotsky called upon these two mass organisations to combine in a united front to defend the working class and

its democratic rights from fascist reaction. Reading him now — with the knowledge of how events unfolded: the crushing of the labour movement, the internments, murders, death, destruction and above all the Holocaust — can be exasperating. The 20th century could have been a very different place.

Despite the different circumstances, the struggle against fascism today hangs on the labour movement defending itself.

Recent anti-fascist campaigns have — in the main — emerged as an urgent reaction to BNP members standing in elections. Local campaigners find that a fascist is standing in local elections, someone goes to their computer and prints off a “Don’t Vote Nazi” or “Hope not Hate” leaflet, makes several thousand copies and organises people to deliver them through doors. More often than not, those delivering the leaflets neither live or work in the area.

The idea behind such campaigns is that the leaflets will increase voter turn-out — encourage those who hate the BNP but who are not particularly motivated to vote for anyone else to get down to the ballot box. It hardly seems to matter who they actually vote for just as long as they don’t vote for the BNP.

In the right set of circumstances this strategy can work. Where the BNP parachute in a candidate, where none of the patient, consistent door-to-door work has been done, voters have no more reason to put a tick next to the BNP than for anyone else. But the BNP have moved beyond this sort of campaign. As Nick himself points out: “In the recent election we found that our general Hope not Hate leaflets worked in some places but less well in others. The general trend was that they were more effective where the BNP was standing for the first time. In other places, such as Stoke-on-Trent and Dagenham, where support for the BNP is deeply entrenched, we need a different approach and one that addresses local issues and concerns.”

In places where the left has all but collapsed, where the organisational sinews of the labour movement have withered and where no adequate community responses to the BNP are possible, “get out the vote leafleting” campaigns still have a place — but we should not kid ourselves that this is an adequate response.

A different approach — elements of which have been pioneered by *Searchlight* — is both possible and necessary. There are a very small number of local anti-fascist groups that engage in consistent, campaigning work against the BNP. Often, the purpose of these campaigns is to root anti-racist and anti-fascist ideas and activity in the local community. At least one of these groups — in Nottingham — has organised demonstrations, lobbies and physical resistance against BNP activity in addition to building local contacts, delivering leaflets and holding meetings. The question is: on what political basis are these campaigns organised? What do the leaflets say? What other groups and organisations should they work with?

POLITICAL RETREAT

Nick Lowles: “There will be some who argue for a solely class-based approach to anti-fascism but a refusal to work with mainstream parties will only hand dozens of seats to the BNP and quicken its electoral advance.”

There is some very strange “logic” involved in this statement. It’s rather like the Catholic priest who renounces God but continues preaching on Sunday mornings because he can’t think of any other way to live. He knows the congregation’s prayers will never reach Heaven and that no God lives up their to act upon them. But what else would he do with his time if not preach?

The organised left and leading sections of the trade union movement are in political retreat from working-class politics. Take, for example a recent *Socialist Worker* article: “Unite Against Fascism (UAF) is calling on its supporters to set up rallies and local anti-fascist groups in every part of the country. In every locality there are musicians, artists and community leaders that thoroughly oppose the fascists and what they stand for... When these forces are organised, they can expose and weaken the fascists.” Now it’s true that local artists and community figures can give useful assistance to anti-fascist work but for a “socialist” newspaper to urge activists to contact these people first for any campaign, rather than the local trade union and labour movement, is astonishing.

Nick demands that anti-fascist campaigns should work with “mainstream parties” and “faith groups”. He does so

after carefully explaining that the BNP is growing as a result of the attacks by “mainstream parties” on the working class and because bigotry still has a hold on the minds of large sections of voters! At one “Hope not Hate” meeting just before the May election, in an area targeted by the BNP, there were around twenty speakers: a handful of trade union bureaucrats, one representative from each of the major (and not-so-major) religious groups, a scattering of local campaigners and representatives from Labour, the Lib Dems and Tories. Other than as a one-off show of consensus against fascism, what good is a meeting like this or a campaign based on a melding of the opinions represented at it? How is an organisation like this supposed to reconcile the views and interests of such a broad, “popular” pool of thought with the political issues posed by the BNP? The short answer is that you can’t.

Far from strengthening the anti-fascist movement, this sort of campaign politically neuters it. When you try to cover over the very real political and ideological contradictions between combating the terrain covered by BNP propaganda and reconciling the views of Tories and vicars you end up with a mish-mash of popular phraseology and poses. “Of course we’re against fascists ... they’re really rather nasty.” History has shown us the criminal effects of such “popular fronts”.

THE ALTERNATIVES

There is no immediate, viable political solution to the BNP. There is not one political party to which anti-fascists can point as a solution to working-class political representation. Socialists should not run away from this as Nick Lowles does by saying that the BNP requires a political solution and then formulate a rather un-political programme for anti-fascists. Something different is required.

That alternative will come from the struggle to arm the labour movement with working-class politics and to mobilise it on this basis. This struggle must start with the basic organisations of the labour movement: trade union branches and trades councils.

Imagine a situation where a trades council became aware of BNP activity in the area. What would socialists propose as basis for anti-fascist activity? How about the following:

“We seek to build links between the labour movement and community groups in order to:

1. Mobilise the labour movement and communities to campaign against local fascist activity;
2. Support direct action against the fascists and the defence of communities targeted by fascists eg. postal workers who refuse to deliver BNP election material and demonstrations to stop BNP activity;
3. Expose the bigoted lies of groups like the BNP for what they are and work to extend anti-racism and other liberation campaigns within our movement;
4. Educate the community, and in particular young people, about the nature of groups like the BNP;
5. Oppose all forms of racism, including the demonisation of immigrants;
6. Develop materials and campaigns that contest the political terrain adopted by the far right — counterposing working-class solidarity to their politics of race hate;
7. Organise workers and communities, black and white, British-born and migrant, to fight back against cuts and privatisation — for decent jobs, homes, education, services and democratic rights for all.”

Would such a statement have trade unionists running for the hills in horror? Would it alienate community groups? Almost certainly not.

Such a statement leaves aside one important question for socialists — what to say about elections. It is not possible to dodge the issue — people will ask “if I don’t vote for the BNP, who should I vote for?” Such a question requires an answer.

Wherever possible socialists should stand candidates in elections. Standing in every single ward or constituency is not (currently) possible but such initiatives can provide a beacon to all sorts of campaigns. Socialists should talk about the idea of a workers’ government, explain the sort of fight involved in achieving real workers representation.

The fight against fascism cannot be conducted through popular fronts, by jettisoning working class politics. Any serious fight against fascism is a fight to transform the social conditions that allow fascism to grow. It is the fight to transform the labour movement.

UNION STRATEGY

Rank and file participation and political representation

By **STUART JORDAN**, UNISON MEMBER

At the union conferences held this summer, anger at the Brown administration gave the left the opportunity to pose serious questions about working-class political representation. Everyone agreed that there is a gaping hole in the political landscape that the organised working class need to fill with socialist politics. However, the solutions that organised socialists are proposing fall short of what is necessary. This was made eminently clear by the left's failure to make any change to the unions organisational and political links with the Labour Party.

The Socialist Party's Campaign for a New Workers' Party typifies a sectarian and inconsistent response to the crisis of working-class representation. For example, at the Communication Workers' Union conference, the Socialist Party were quite open about the Campaign for a New Workers' Party and their affiliation motion fell by ten to one. At the PCS (civil servants) conference, where the SP control the executive, the CNWP was not even mentioned.

But it was at Unison conference that the sectarian nature of the CNWP project became plain for all to see. Leading SP activists in Unison are at the forefront of the democracy struggle within the union. Four of their main activists are subject to a witchhunt and are being hounded out of the union on the ridiculous allegation of racism (support their campaign here: www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk).

Throughout conference week they rallied round them impressive support, held large fringe meetings, and also led the struggle against the Labour Party and the union leadership on the conference floor.

The left looked set to win a Socialist Party motion at the end of the week – “New Labour, what do we get for our money?” This motion was re-prioritised by an overwhelming majority of conference, after the Standing Orders Committee sought to remove it from the agenda.

The motion was straightforward and called for a full review of the political fund arrangements (arrangements that are currently controlled by an incredibly undemocratic, unaccountable bureaucracy).

As the debate approached, regional secretaries — in contravention of union rules — distributed propaganda on conference floor, claiming that the motion was a conspiracy cooked up by the SP in order to get Unison to join the Campaign for a New Workers' Party.

Throughout the debate, Norma Stephenson (who had already announced to conference that she had stood as a New Labour MP) shook her head whenever the left spoke and beamed with pride whenever someone from the right spoke. The turning point came when a right-winger on the National Executive stood up and directly attacked the SP for their clandestine plans. The SP comrades had run a very effective campaign throughout conference but were left speechless at this fairly predictable accusation.

None of them denied that this was their plan and there was no one from the Labour Party speaking on their side. To top it all, members of the Labour Representation Committee were getting up on the wrong side of the debate to give the leadership a bit of left cover.

The SP had no answers. They did not reiterate that Labour Party Link did need reviewing. They neither denied that their motion had anything to do with the CNWP, nor did they make the case for joining the CNWP — it just wasn't mentioned.

The CNWP is a simplistic solution that exists in the heads of the SP cadre, but bears little relation to any of the real struggles inside the labour movement. Without considerably more support in the rank and file, it is pie-in-the-sky to think that the SP can gain union CNWP affiliations. The CNWP remains nothing but a front to recruit individuals to, one at a time. And once you have been recruited to the CNWP there is nothing for you to do except recruit more people — there is no real political work to be done in the here and now.

DEMOCRATISE THE UNIONS

But what would a CWU or a Unison affiliation to the CNWP actually look like? SP members are keenly aware of the problems inside the unions. Many of their best activists are subject to witchhunts and are leading the struggles for democracy. If Unison did affiliate, the CNWP would become dominated by the same bureaucrats that are currently chasing SP comrades out of the union! If the CWU did decide to affil-



What will political representation mean in a union like PCS which is not affiliated to Labour?

iate then would CNWP meetings become a hotbed of political activity for postal workers, call centre staff and BT operators?

No — it would be the CWU bankrolling the SP and imposing certain bureaucratic restraints on the CNWP's politics.

All this points to another task for the left in the unions. We will not see the working-class political representation we need until we democratise our unions and build a rank-and-file movement that can force union policy into the political sphere.

The SP comrades in Unison at least, are at the forefront of the democratisation struggle; here the CNWP project merely serves to create a gap between practice and theory. The CNWP is completely separate from all the other work that is being done in the unions. It is a project that exists outside of the class struggle and purely in the realm of well intentioned ideas. It typifies the “mañana socialism” that has defined this tendency for decades in that it does not link up the reality of today with the possibilities of the future.

But it's not just within the unions that inconsistencies and muddle-headed approaches to the question of political representation are on display.

At a recent meeting convened by the rump of Socialist Alliance “independents”, representatives from a broad spectrum of the left (not including the SWP) discussed the possibility of left unity at the next general election. Whilst the AWL considers left unity, open debate and cooperation at election time as important and necessary steps, we do not confuse — as did some of those attending — this sort of work with the fundamental fight in the unions. With members of the the Green Left, LRC, Galloway's Respect and the SWP's “Left Alternative” in the room — organisations with radically divergent views and more than one fundamental political difference between them — any “unity” would be on a minimal basis, involving some long period of debate and discussion. But rather than recognise this point, calls for a new socialist party in “one, at most two years time” were made.

RANK AND FILE

So how do we go forward? The dead end for political representation is the notion that the influence of the Labour Party within the affiliated trade unions leads to the trade union leaderships to acquiescence. This logic suggests that if Woodley, Prentis, Kenny and Simpson backed some “real” socialists then all the problems with the unions would be solved.

While New Labour undoubtedly holds massive influence within the trade union hierarchy, the problem of working-class political representation is not simply one of being shackled to the Labour Party. There are plenty of unions not affiliated to Labour who refuse to fight. The problem lies, as ever, in the relationship between the leadership and the rank-and-file.

The story of the PCS is telling. At the moment we have a

SP-SWP leadership in the PCS, who are so worried that the membership is not behind them that they sap the militancy of the union with consultation after consultation, showcase 24 hour strikes, and an industrial strategy that is clearly losing. If they led the union with a fighting strategy, they might inspire some confidence from their membership, increase the activist base and actually win their industrial disputes. A left leadership is useless in itself unless it actively seeks to build a militant and organised rank-and-file. But more often than not, the rank-and-file movement that consciously organises against the bureaucracy is a precondition for any left leadership.

Both in the political and the industrial spheres we see low levels of rank-and-file organisation and activity, leading to “left” leaderships resorting to bureaucratic fixes. At some point we need to cut through this vicious cycle, by building from the bottom up and inspiring from the top down.

The SP comrades need to develop a strategy within the unions that links up the fight for democracy and accountability with the project for political representation.

This has been the aim, as we see it, of the Labour Representation Committee. With the affiliation of six trade unions and 120 smaller organisations, the LRC is a campaign for a new workers' party. It is not seen as a front for any small socialist organisation — just a vehicle for the promotion of union policy in the political sphere. It is not a perfect organisation; some affiliated MPs occasionally take right-wing and backward positions, (eg voting to cut abortion time limits recently). But a bigger barrier to its success is the level of activity and democracy within the affiliated unions.

The lack of activists willing to concentrate their energy in the LRC has led many leading figures to look towards bureaucratic fixes. The whole project would be massively strengthened by an influx of non-Labour Party socialists who are engaged in the democracy struggles within the unions and who understood the two struggles as inseparable.

The LRC is often accused of being solely concerned with “reclaiming the Labour Party”. This misrepresents the dynamics within the organisation. The more bureaucratically minded in the LRC gave up on the project of working class political representation before it has even began. Their analysis bears more in common with the trade union bureaucracy's notion of gaining favours from sympathetic politicians. It is based on a belief in a mythical past where these favours were forthcoming and the Labour Party was “owned” by the unions. All we need to do is reclaim that party.

But such a time never existed. The degree of political representation that was gained in the past was always dependent on the struggle for democracy and accountability. That is why both the SP and the LRC right wing, with their delusional and historically fanciful Labourism, fail to connect the struggle for democracy with the struggle for political representation.

The inventiveness of capital

LOOKING AGAIN AT MONEY

Much of the current discussion of global finance focuses on massive growth in credit. We get stories about the huge growth in fictitious capital, about speculation, and about how money and finance have grown out of proportion to the “real” economy. But there is more to finance than the credit system — recall that this is how Marx depicted money all of 150 years ago. If the current financial situation were just a story of big financial growth it would be of no great consequence. We would find, and we are finding, that the credit bubble will burst, there will be losses (amounting to personal hardship), but no systemic challenge.

The really significant change of the last 20 years is not growth of the credit system. It is the fact that money has increasingly taken the form of financial derivatives and securities. In other words, money has in a sense moved into the sphere of commodified risk. It has invited us to consider the possibility that we may need to change our understanding of what money is in modern capitalism. In the current financial crisis, for instance, it is securitized debt, not debt itself, that has been at the heart of the problem. This is important, not incidental, because to understand money and finance, we now need to go via derivatives and securities, as much as via “the over-expansion of credit”, “speculation” and “hot money”. The latter are really just cheap, moralistic jibes.

To get to what this means, we need some historical context. The state used to oversee the stability of the money system. The state linked the present to the future. It controlled interest rates. It controlled exchange rates. It controlled agricultural prices.

As the state withdraws from doing these things, people, and financial markets, face a lot of risks and uncertainties. As the state has withdrawn, the market has come in. The market is now linking the present to the future, and this is done in a competitive and contestable way that doesn't produce stable prices. For some this is a signal that capitalism is in trouble because it can't trade at fundamental values, with stable money. But this is only one possible interpretation.

The contestability of prices may also be understood as adding a new competitive dimension to capitalist accumulation. Indeed, a whole new range of products have emerged to compensate, as it were, for the

absence of state guarantees. They are products that specialise in price contestability. Things like futures and options and swaps are the market's alternative to what the state used to do. So we find that financial derivatives, relating to interest rates and exchange rates evolve to provide insurance against financial contingencies (including the risk of financial failure: credit derivatives). What's more, when we see these financial futures, options and swaps trading exposures to interest rates and exchange rates, they themselves start to look very much like money. More precisely, they start to blur the distinction between what is money and what is capital.

This explanation could go further, too. The state used to oversee lending practices for housing. Now it doesn't. Instead, we see subprime and securitized debt as the market takes over the risks of home lending. Debts become commodified in highly liquid markets — and they start to play a money-like role. But these are a very different sort of money from the way we usually think about money as cash and bank deposits. And the notion of “credit” doesn't capture what is important here.

Question to Dick Bryan: In an article in Historical Materialism 14:1, Costas Lapavistas responds to your idea by writing: “The commensurating function (of derivatives) is nothing more than the carapace of the commodity form placed over hedging and speculative strategies involving several underlying financial assets. Derivatives have no obvious hoarding and paying functions in the world market, and they are certainly not ‘the anchor of the global financial system’. In so far as such an anchor exists today, that is the US dollar...”

Indeed Costas is quite hostile to this interpretation. But we need to clarify what is misunderstanding and what is disagreement. Costas wants to draw all money back to “credit”, as if this is the ultimate descriptor of capitalist money, and anything not looking like credit is ipso facto precluded as money.

Even within a functionalist definition, derivatives do play a money function. They are a store of value in volatile markets. They aren't like a bank vault, though, because they store very large amounts of money for very short periods. Take for instance a futures contract on wheat: it is an alternative to storing wheat in a silo. It is in a very immediate sense a store of value. Financial derivatives on say exchange rates are no different in this specific sense: they preserve value. They reflect the money uses of capital (capitalists), where a store of value means not preserving something, but benchmarking its value to competitive processes. They store across time (when interest rates change unpredictably) and they store across currencies (when exchange rates change unpredictably). The problem, I think, is that when, like Costas, you start with functionalist definitions of money (money as means of exchange, store of value, unit of account, etc), then financial volatility, such as we are currently seeing, is posed as a threat to the functionality of money, and hence as arguments that we need better regulation, so that the functionality of money can be safely restored.

This is a view that has respectable support within and outside of Marxism. And one need not disagree with the benefits of such regulation. But Marxists must surely have more to say about the changing nature of money itself. Perhaps here also is the problem that money is posed as only a product of the state, so the state is the only one that can fix it up.

But as a Marxist, I start from a different position — not from the premise that all money emanates from the state; rather that there can be no presumption that the financial system “should” be stable or in some sort of proportion to production, or any of these

“balance” sorts of premises. Hence, I think we have to start by saying that financial instability is not itself an issue of crisis. The left seems so keen to call everything volatile a crisis!

If you start from the presumption that money embodies contradictions, and they can play out as volatility, different questions arise from those of how to regulate to restore stability. The first question is to frame the contradiction, and how it plays out. The next issue to ask is how does capital itself deal with volatility, and one answer, I think, is that it uses financial derivatives. This is the sense in which derivatives are a monetary anchor. The US dollar wins the popularity contest as the world's most used currency, but when the value of the dollar itself is not anchored (such as to gold under Bretton Woods) and it is of uncertain value (as it is right now), it cannot be called an anchor. Anchoring has to be about the commensuration of value, not popularity, and in that process, the critical issue is not “can everything be converted to US dollars?” (for that is trivial), but how do we deal with discrepancies when there is no single stable measure of equivalence. The answer I give is that non-equivalence has itself been turned into a commodity to be bought and sold. By creating financial derivatives, capital has made it profitable to solve its own problems of non-equivalence!

Those are the sorts of questions we need to pose. The current so-called subprime crisis will pass. It will play itself out. The regulations may or may not change. But the changes to finance through derivatives and securitization are here to stay. We will always have derivatives and securitisation within capitalism. They may be recent innovations, but they describe an essentially capitalist way of calculating the relative values of different parts of capital and different forms of money.

Notice also, that the way I've framed this issue, we don't have a disjuncture between money and the “real” economy. Derivatives and securities are part-money and part-capital, so we don't need to frame these spheres as separate. So the analytically-impooverished observation that finance has grown out of proportion to the “real” economy — as if there are correct proportions, and as if there is a clear dichotomy (following Friedman and the monetarists!) — does not arise.

As an aside: who would have imagined 20 years ago that the mortgage-backed securities would have the liquidity of treasury bonds, or that, as their liquidity dried up, central banks would be exchanging mortgage-backed securities (of indeterminate value) for cash. It's a sign that the world of capital and the world of money just can't be separated.

Having said that, liquidity always brings its own particular disturbances because where assets are easy to buy and sell, rumour and perceptions can drive trading decisions. Perceptions can always turn down. There can always be some flow-through from financial aggregates into trade and investment. Keynes got this right, though it is a particular politics that says that the state should take over and manage, and that the outcome is a remedy. The possibility of that Keynesian remedy was contingent on a whole set of conditions that were only in place for a relatively brief period. It's time to look more closely at the conditions that characterise our age.

CAPITALISM IS ADJUSTING

I don't see the current disturbances as a fundamental crisis. Company profit rates are high. In general, companies aren't exposed to significant debt. Investment levels are high. The world economy is booming. But we have found that risk has been underpriced in the last few years. The pricing of risk is being recalculated. Companies that want to borrow now have to pay more to borrow, and that's probably as it should be. In the foreseeable future, capital will be funding investment increasingly out of retained earnings and share issues. Leveraged buyouts (private equity deals) will be fewer. What's happening is a not an unreasonable adjustment. But it's an adjustment with collateral damage. The odd bank will go broke. Individuals lose their houses. Bad things happen. And there is an important class dimension here, as many of the costs are borne by an organisationally weakened working class, where risks are being transferred onto individuals and households.

Question: You say that we should not overestimate the role of the dollar in the world economy. Would you also say that the role of the US state in the world economy more generally is overestimated? You have said that the state is withdrawing from many economic functions. Does this mean that the international markets are becoming much more important than the formal international institutions in which the US is still hegemonic?

At the World Economic Forum in January, George Soros announced the end of the dollar era. Soros has made many correct calls — indeed he has just published a book crowing about his recent successes in volatile financial markets. But this one was a big call, and there is no immediate answer. He may have won shorting the dollar, but I'm not sure what alternative money unit he's gone long on.

The US dollar is far and away the world's



Does the dollar still rule?

Marx's telescope

This Workers Liberty pamphlet looks at the light that a little-known but major work of Marx, the *Grundrisse*, can bring to understanding 21st century capitalism. By Martin Thomas.



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Labour poster criticising the Tories for overseeing house repossessions, something that will now be part of *their* record in government, as the effects of capitalist restructuring start to bite

most used currency. The Bank for International Settlements data show that the dollar is on one side of 86 percent of financial transactions. The Euro is on one side of less than 40 percent (think of 100 transactions — with 200 “sides” to those transactions). It is anyone’s guess whether there will be diversification away from the dollar and indeed also from the euro.

But on the specific role of the US state and its role in managing global finance, I think US hegemony should not be so closely tied to an idea of the elevated status of the dollar. The City of London is the predominant world financial market for currencies, but it doesn’t rely on the predominance of the pound. I can imagine a world in which the dollar is a much less important currency, but it wouldn’t necessarily preclude US institutions being hegemonic within the global financial system.

But I think we need to disentangle a few issues here. One is the global authority of US institutions. I don’t feel an expert on this, but I always find Panitch and Gindin persuasive.

Another is an evaluation of the strength of the US economy itself, and whether there is evidence of an economic decline that might itself precipitate a loss of US hegemony. In this context we often see cited the huge US current account deficit, and the idea that the US economy has something unsustainable about it. It is argued that this is the Achilles’ heel of the US economy, and undermines its global standing.

I think concerns about the deficit are out of place. The Federal Reserve recently put out a document which I think is absolutely right. It says that the US makes up about 30% of world capital formation. About 30% of mobile international investment is going to the US. If you were a financial adviser, you would describe this investment spread as a balanced portfolio (there’s that word again). It so happens that when the rest of the world puts 30% of its mobile assets in the US, that materialises as a huge current account deficit for the US economy. Put another way, the question is why so many people and organizations what to put their assets in the US; not why those actions generate a net deficit.

There are two different logics at play. One is the logic of individual investment and competition between investment alternatives — where will people put their assets; how will capital perform — and the other is the national logic — how does it look on national balance of payments data.

As Marxists, we should be saying that it is the former logic that really drives development. We should look at what impels capital to locate where it does. The national aggregations which show that the capital flows lead to a huge current account deficit, or to a huge debt position for the US economy, should be very much a secondary consideration. It remains important only because a lot of people think it is important. Its importance has no profound material basis.

And internationally, US companies are

highly profitable. It is worth remembering that the US produces two sorts of balance of payments data — the conventional one, based on geography, which measures activity of the territorial space; the other based on ownership, which compares the performance of US (owned) companies (at home and abroad) with foreign companies (within the US and outside). We may have reservations about how ownership is measured, but it shows consistently that while the US space is in deficit, US companies globally are in surplus. If we are talking about US global hegemony, this latter fact would seem important.

Question: A lot of central banks are buying US Treasury bonds and, because of the decline in the dollar, losing quite heavily on them...

Coming out of the subprime crisis, what we can expect to see, and do see, in the financial markets more caution and conservatism. What does conservatism mean here? It could mean treating the US dollar as a safe haven. That has been the conservative position for the last 50 years.

Another version of conservatism is to hedge against the dollar and acquire a diversified portfolio. You don’t just hold US assets; you hold euros, Australian dollars, renminbi... You spread your assets around a range of currencies (and different forms of assets) because each individual one will go up and down.

The battle is going to be about which of these conservative positions is dominant. One possibility here is that we will find that the hedge funds and the pension funds are likely to go for the diversified portfolios, and the big banks are more likely to go for the US dollar. The fact that the banks have a bias towards the dollar is in itself a sign of continuing US hegemony. These banks are big institutions. They look to the US economy as their engine-room. They have a lot of investment in the US economy. It is a world they understand. There is something conservative about big banks, and they “grew up with” the US dollar. Hedge funds and pension funds on the other hand, looking for rates of return, will want to spread their assets to give constant returns to their investors. There are different financial cultures in the different institutions. I would not play it up too much; and it’s not a clear dichotomy. But there are different tendencies that are worth considering as we look in the crystal ball.

Then the question becomes: are we going to see, as some people argue, a “re-intermediation” of finance?; that is, more and more transactions and asset management going through the big banks? In that case, there will be more likelihood of people buying US Treasury bonds and relying on the integrity of the US dollar. Or are we going to see continued disintermediation, because the big banks are seen as high-cost, cumbersome, and so on, and more money going through hedge funds and pension funds and more diversified portfolios? I think that is too hard to call at this stage.

WORKERS AS CONSUMERS

Question: Costas Lapavistas has stressed the degree to which finance has come to feed more off consumer revenues than off loans to business...

Yes, I think this is an important point. One of the corollaries of that is that capital is having a second dip at surplus value. You put a worker on a loan and part of their wages come back to capital in the form of interest payments.

But the process should be seen as broader than just the second dip at surplus value. It’s not just about interest payments coming out of wages. In the last 20 years or so we have seen labour being treated like capital, the household being treated like a small business. History has asked households to take on a lot of financial decision-making. One aspect here is servicing the mortgage, but more than that. It requires households to decide whether to have a 20 year or 30 year mortgage, and at fixed or floating rate; how to balance the car loan with the credit card etc. These are complex financial calculations that require taking positions about an unknowable future. It comes back to the issue of the state withdrawing from guaranteeing the future.

And it’s not just decisions about interest payments. It’s about deciding whether or not and how to “invest” in a range of things. Education is no longer sufficiently provided by the state, so it has to be a personal investment. How much do I invest? Where do I borrow, etc? For my telephone and electricity, which provider will I use?; which contract will I sign? Which superannuation fund or pension fund do I join; what risk profile do I want it to adopt? The list is long, and you don’t really have the choice of not playing. So being working class now means engaging in competitively-driven risk calculation and management.

Also, because the interest payments are contracted before the wage is earned — if you don’t work that week, you still have to make the interest payments — you lock workers in socially and culturally to the capitalist production system. Workers don’t want to go on strike. They can’t afford it. They have the interest obligations they have to meet.

Question: But on the other hand, workers today have easier access to credit. If they don’t get paid for a while, they can let their credit card bill mount up. And they can put off mortgage payments for a month or two...

Perhaps, although there is a lot of evidence of low income people being “maxed out” on credit — the multiple credit card problem, of borrowing to repay debts. The evidence shows that the best predictor of working class financial insolvency is not so much low income, but irregular income; in particular, a period out of work. That’s when a difficult but viable debt-servicing becomes non viable, leading to re-financing on worse and

worse terms, etc. And the reality is that to strike itself makes income irregular.

But let me put this matter more broadly as a class issue, not just an income issue. The IMF has, perhaps surprisingly, described households as the global financial system’s depositories of risk of last resort. Households absorb all sorts of risks to underwrite capital, the most important being flexibility in employment contracts. In terms of risk analysis, capital has devices to hedge its risk. I’ve talked about them earlier. For workers, labour power cannot be hedged — it can’t be securitised, because it cannot be separated from the worker him/herself. For capital, financial insolvency means the company goes under, but limited liability means that personal assets go untouched. Investors in Bear Stearns lost their investments, but they did not have to put their wealth into covering the company’s losses. But for labour, where labour power cannot be separated from the worker, insolvency means personal insolvency. In the subprime crisis, insolvent mortgagees have not just lost their investments; they have lost their homes.

Some other aspects of families can be hedged — through things like insurance on health, car and home, through going to the dentist for checkups. But the evidence is showing that poor families are bailing out of these sorts of forms of risk management — they need current income to keep the family going and repay the debts. So the risks households are exposed to mount and mount. Sicknes, a car crash, a toothache can lead to insolvency. And not because of poverty per se, but because of financial over-commitment. These are the ways in which households are the risk-absorbers of last resort.

Question: Can we discern the limits and contradictions of what you see as this new expansionary regime of capitalism?

I don’t know that it has any contradictions that are different from the fundamental contradictions of any capitalist economy — between production for use and production for profit.

We are seeing a system of accumulation that is getting bigger and bigger, and in a sense also more and more efficient. Capital is increasingly able to turn things into commodities. It can increasingly break down its own bundles of assets into the constituent assets, price each of them separately, and maximise the efficiency with which it uses each asset.

We are seeing a huge intensification of accumulation, and critical to it is the intensification of the performance of capital. In a sense that is a newly discovered phenomenon of the last 15 to 20 years. It is tempting to predict that it can’t keep on accelerating at the rate of that recent period.

But we have seen an amazing period of growth in the last 20 years. We know, historically, growth always goes in cycles. It will slow down at some time. Where the slowing is going to come from, I don’t know. What staggers me is the inventiveness of capital in finding more and more things to turn into commodities. Perhaps the next wave is the environment — polluting rights are being turned into commodities, and creating a hugely profitable industry. That bubble might burst, just as the dot.com bubble burst, but the inventiveness of capital will continue.

The growth is fragile growth, of course, and it is bound up with accusations of speculation and the like, but it is growth, and it is what capitalism is about. But I think what finance shows us is actually how powerful labour potentially is. In part this shows through the capacity of low income mortgage borrowers to bring down some big financial institutions. Alternatively, the global pool of superannuation funds — labour’s capital — shows how critical labour is to the funding of investment. The broad political task is to move this beyond labour as capital (failed capital, in the case of the sub-prime market) and frame it as the financial form of labour’s capacity to mobilise and transform the world of capital for itself.

• Dick Bryan is the co-author of a recent book, *Capitalism With Derivatives*, and of several articles, in which he argues that the recent rise of financial derivatives marks a fundamental new stage in capitalist development, and especially in the development of what functions as “money” in capitalism. He is a professor at the University of Sydney. He was talking to Martin Thomas.

WAR IN IRAQ

Democrats have no answers for Iraq

BY SACHA ISMAIL

On 7 July I had the privilege of hearing Gene Bruskin, convenor of the US Labor Against the War (USLAW) campaign, speak in London, at a public meeting organised by Naftana, which does solidarity work with the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions. I interviewed Gene when he visited the UK in 2004, was very impressed and wanted to hear how the campaign had developed since then.

As in 2004, Gene spoke about the difficulties of building up a working-class anti-war campaign in the United States, where the labour movement has a tradition of uncritical support for “its” government’s foreign policy. Against the odds, however, USLAW has flourished: it now has over 200 affiliates, representing some three million organised workers. After five years of building at the grassroots, both the AFL-CIO (the US equivalent of the TUC) and a big majority of national unions have some form of anti-war policy, and USLAW has played an important role in this.

The campaign has continued to combine mobilisation of the labour movement to oppose Bush’s war policy with concrete solidarity with the Iraqi labour movement, the latter at a much higher level than anything we have managed to achieve in Britain. Its record on both counts is very impressive, and I urge readers to check out its website (see below).

At the meeting on 7 July, Gene spoke very movingly



Bush is on the way out. But that doesn't mean that anti-war labour activists should back Obama

about the crisis of the Bush regime and the sense of hope that has filled the US labour movement as it finally comes to an end. Here, however, he surprised me by supporting the Democrats’ Barack Obama and pretty uncritically.

John McCain, Gene rightly stressed, is a warmongering reactionary. But his claim that Obama expresses “the spirit of the civil rights movement, the social movements of the 30s, the best elements of the American revolution” was, to put it politely, less convincing.

Frances is busy doing interviews, trying to get a constituency office running in East Glasgow, organising a hustings meeting etc. The SSP is trying to raise money (given we’ve been made skint by the split). All SSP members should get behind Frances and this campaign!

Is this the kind of revolutionary regroupment we need?

The International Socialist Group, which so enthusiastically supports George Galloway’s side of the split in Respect that it handed over its monthly paper to Respect Renewal, has launched a call for “revolutionary regroupment”.

Revolutionary Regroupment is a fairly transparent effort to bring into a renamed ISG the small group of SWPers who resigned after siding with Galloway in the split — including prominent members Matt Wrack, Kevin Ovenden, Rob Hoveman and Jerry Hicks — and whom the ISG has been heavily promoting and courting since then. There is nothing wrong with that, of course; the comrades are perfectly entitled to try to recruit anyone they like. But revolutionaries should be under no illusions about what the formation represents, either in terms of personnel or of basic political character.

The RR statement describes the project as a “proposal made by members of the International Socialist Group, Socialist Resistance, a group of former members of the SWP and some independent Marxists not presently in any organisation”. SR is the ISG plus some flotsam and jetsam consisting of ex-members of this and other groups; goodness knows who the “independents” are, but safe betting they have a similar age profile and political character. If the ISG pulls it off, it will strengthen its meagre forces and may gain a higher general profile on the left; they may even hope to recruit out of the Green Left as disillusionment with the Green Party sets in (presumably this is what motivated their call for a Green vote in the recent London mayoral elections). All this represents neither a regroupment of significant forces nor an influx of new activists.

There is nothing wrong with trying to regroup relatively small numbers on the revolutionary left into a common organisation. It is the political basis of the ISG’s project that is the problem.

Most of the statement is made up of bland “Marxist” commonplaces: “common traditions as active revolutionary socialist”... “shared analysis of class society”... “capitalism is an outmoded system”... “creation of a socialist society”... “capitalist state cannot be reformed”... “the working class, the only agency that can transform society”. And so on and so on for over 800 words.

The real bottom line is expressed in points 2 and 12 of the statement: “This proposals emerges from practical collaboration over the recent period in building Respect” (ie Respect Renewal) and “We believe that the building of a united party of the working class is one of the overarching

There is no doubt that this sentiment is what many workers, including organised workers, are expressing when they support the Democrats against McCain. That must be at least part of the reason why Obama has been able to turn out tens of thousands for his rallies and muster such enthusiasm for his campaign. These facts do not alter either the nature of his policies or the fundamental character of the Democratic party.

Gene presented it as question of Obama “moving to the centre” under pressure from corporate interests - and argued that the left, labour movement and anti-war movement need to exert “counter-pressure” to keep him true to his own instincts. I think this misses the point about what the Democratic party is: one of the two cartels through the ruling class dominates US politics and excludes the working class from having a political voice. Obama is a loyal servant of that ruling class — and of its imperialism, even if he differs with Bush/McCain on tactics.

Gene Bruskin’s speech was very inspiring, but it was also representative, in this sense, of the tragedy of the US working class.

- 2004 interview with Gene Bruskin, see www.workersliberty.org/node/2360
- Why the AWL does not support Barack Obama, see www.workersliberty.org/node/10826
- US Labor Against the War: www.uslaboragainstar.org

strategic tasks for revolutionary socialists in this period. The role of revolutionary Marxists in helping to build Respect [again ie Respect Renewal] over the next period will be an important one.”

It would be out of place here to analyse the statement’s various glaring inadequacies as a Marxist political programme. The essential point is that the comrades locate themselves, and their regroupment, firmly within the framework of the non-socialist, non-working class and in some respects quite reactionary Respect Renewal group. The idea that a “united party of the working class” can be built through an organisation of this sort, led by the likes of George Galloway and Yvonne Ridley, is laughable.

Revolutionary Regroupment is not a mini-version of the new anti-capitalist party project initiated by the ISG’s sister organisation LCR in France — which, for all its problems, represents a move to regroup working-class and socialist activists around the idea of working-class political independence. It is, rather, an attempt to shore up an organisation which has made itself central to the British left’s abandonment of class politics.

ISG excludes Workers' Liberty from youth camp

Sticking, unusually, with the ISG theme...every year the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) tendency, of which the ISG is part, holds an International Youth Camp. Since many FI sections have large youth groups — unlike the ISG, whose average age must now be heading towards 60 — this is a major event, with many hundreds participating from the FI and other organisations (for instance, Scottish Socialist Youth usually send a contingent).

This year, an AWL member who until recently lived in France and is also a member of the LCR youth section, will be attending as part of the French delegation. Since this option is not open to the rest of us, we approached the ISG to ask about coming on their coach. Despite repeated emails and face-to-face contact, our request was ignored for several months.

Then, after we met the cheeky buggers giving out leaflets advertising the event on the anti-Bush demo in London — leaflets which described the event as “unmissable for any young socialist” — we were phoned and told it would not be possible for us to attend. Why? Because the AWL and ISG do not work together, and more specifically because we “are in the Labour Party”. The latter is untrue; in any case, what does any of this have to do with our right to attend the camp?

The reality is that the ISG does not want any competition, and is afraid to face the AWL in open debate. Having no youth except a couple of members of other USFI sections living in Britain, it does not want to risk losing the handful of contacts it may have scrounged up to take to the camp; moreover, it fears being embarrassed by exposure of its pro-Galloway antics in front of the rest of the FI. This is, to put it mildly, pathetic — much like the ISG.

- www.internationalcamp.org

LEFT ROUND-UP

Back the SSP in Glasgow East!

The Scottish Socialist Party has decided to stand former MSP Frances Curran in the upcoming Glasgow East by-election.

The AWL has serious criticisms of the SSP — and of the platform on which Frances is standing. It is typical of the reformist politics, muddying the message of class struggle with parliamentarism and left-wing Scottish nationalism, which has characterised the organisation since its inception. Nonetheless, we will be supporting Frances’ campaign.

Workers face a pay freeze, soaring prices, and cuts and privatisation in public services. We are prevented from resisting by anti-union laws which are still fully in force, and we face wave after wave of attacks on democratic rights. With the abolition of the last remnants of Labour Party democracy at the Bournemouth conference, we have been robbed of any mechanism through which we can express a working-class voice, independent of all the ruling class parties, in politics and in elections.

Whatever the limitations imposed on us, workers will resist, will struggle. At the same time, there is an urgent need to constitute an organised force which can give political expression to this struggle. Clearly, we are a long way from that goal — further, in fact, than we have been for some time. But standing working-class, socialist candidates in elections can be part of the process of rebuilding.

Despite its inadequacies, the SSP campaign provides an opportunity to draw a basic class line, to use the election to organise workers in Glasgow around a basic working-class perspective and rebuild the left’s forces. (This is true of the SSP in a way that is not true of “Solidarity”, the organisation led by Tommy Sheridan, which will also be standing a candidate.) To reject even this limited opportunity would be sectarian abstention.

- For more information on the campaign visit www.scottishsocialistparty.org

PAULINE BRADLEY REPORTS FROM GLASGOW

Iwas out on Saturday [5 July] in Glasgow East, despite being held up by the Orange Lodge parade! 20 plus SSP comrades came out, handed out leaflets, ran stalls, put up posters etc in the wind and rain — including those who’d argued against standing.

Today we learn that the MP who resigned Glasgow East has claimed £500,000 for his constituency office, which was in his house; his wife and daughter worked there. Labour have struggled to find a candidate and are now fielding Margaret Curran, who is already an MSP — so if she wins she’ll be an MP and an MSP for two different constituencies! “Solidarity” are standing but they’re dead in the water.

FILM

Helpless male?

DARCY LEIGH REVIEWS A COMPLETE HISTORY OF MY SEXUAL FAILURES

I'm not entirely sure how to feel about this film. Perhaps a combination of disgust, pity and admiration.

Thirty year old British film-maker Chris Waitt tries to hunt down his ex-girlfriends to ask them why they all broke up with him. Unsurprisingly, none of them really want to be involved in his project, so, he gets his mother to do it. She proves to be more persuasive than him as a few of them agree to meet up to tell him (and the camera) what an awful, unreliable, thoughtless partner and person he is. In an unexpected turn, the film gets quite serious and he reveals himself to be impotent and films his experiment with different treatments for this before concluding that he is still in love with an ex-girlfriend.

This film epitomises documentary-making at its best — it goes in unexpected directions, beginning with the question of why Waitt is so bad at relationships and following through his self-discovery, despair and then “progress” with a new partner. What subject-matter could a film-maker know more intimately than their self? (Yes, it is as self-absorbed as it sounds). The film evokes both respect and sympathy for Waitt's self-reflection and exposition of himself so openly on screen. However, I can't help but feel that my sympathy should be limited.

It seems to suggest that his failure in relationships is due to the failure of his penis and not to him treating his partners badly. At the same time, this poor treatment is portrayed in a comical light and his conclusion seems to be to find someone who'll accept his “flaws” rather than treating people better. In fact, he is rewarded for his general ambivalent approach to life with a new, happy relationship in the end who he meets whilst drunkenly approaching women for sex in the street.



Chris Waitt: thinking about himself again

The film perpetuates what seems to be a version of masculinity prominent in youth culture which reifies male helplessness and dependency in the face of strong women (or rather, women who are left to do all the work and put up with poor treatment).

The showing I attended was doubly strange because, at the Edinburgh Film Festival (where the film was set), many of Waitt's ex-partners were in the audience and Waitt himself spoke (looking somewhat sheepish and embarrassed) at the end. Some members of the audience took the opportunity to suggest that the film absolved Waitt of all blame and to ask whether he was, in fact, gay. Most of these people seemed to be old friends, acquaintances and the new partners of Waitt's ex's.

I remain unable to decide whether this film is a beautiful example of the strength of a man who confronts his own issues, or whether it's a pointless exercise in self-derogation, humiliation that ultimately reaffirms Waitt's attitude towards women as acceptable, hilarious and ultimately “successful”.

BOOK

Appetite unfulfilled

ROSALIND ROBSON REVIEWS DINNER WITH MUGABE BY HEIDI HOLLAND

Heidi Holland has interviewed people who have been either close to Mugabe — or as close as he has allowed them to be, which is not very — or who have had critical political dealings with him: from Mugabe's brother to his Harare tailor and every kind of associate in between. The niece of Mugabe's first wife, who the couple adopted. The jailer with whom Mugabe struck up a sort of friendship during his eleven years in jail under the Rhodesian (British) authorities. A former comrade, pushed aside in some long-forgotten Zanu internal faction fight. Lord Carrington, the patrician Tory politician who negotiated independence and black-majority rule for the new Zimbabwe in 1980. Ian Smith the racist former ruler of Rhodesia. Clare Short who as New Labour's International Development Secretary managed to so incense Mugabe he took to calling Blair “worse than Hitler”. The head of the Jesuits in Zimbabwe, the sect that educated and substantially parented Mugabe in his early life, and now acts as apologist for the regime. And last but not least, Mugabe himself.

Hartmann wanted to tell a story of Mugabe's emotional life (such as it must be), what drove him to so much brutality and ruthlessness in politics. Anger mainly. But of course Hartmann can't get that close to Mugabe. No one has ever been that close to him, and now he is protected by so many Zanu-PF gatekeepers, isolated from real life Zimbabwe, surrounded by sycophants hoping for a share of the patronage, sitting up in a self-built ivory tower of grotesque self-delusion. He is now a man who — as Hartman credibly describes — believes he was destined to rule Zimbabwe.

So does any of this add a great deal to our understanding of Robert Mugabe? Is this really, as the book jacket claims, the untold story of a freedom fighter who became tyrant? No and yes.

Hartmann is very keen to stress three things: that Mugabe is a product of a depressed and delusional mother, that he would have been very traumatized by the desertion, at the age of ten, by his father and that he is very intelligent and well read. It doesn't take three psychologists (the number employed by Hartmann to advise her) and multiple repetitions to let the reader know that these are significant facts. In the end I didn't find the psychological story of Mugabe's childhood all that interesting. More interesting would have been more details of his time in prison, his experience in exile in the guerilla nationalist movement.

Nonetheless some of the interviews are revealing and make clearer the historical dynamics which have shaped present day Zimbabwe. The book is worth getting just to read the interview with ever-self-pitying, ever self-revealing Clare Short — this helps illuminate the story behind Mugabe's high-pitched rhetoric against the colonialism of Britain. It is interesting that Mugabe was happy to do business with people like the Tory, Lord Carrington. According to Carrington Mugabe preferred a true bourgeois, a true colonialist. The old school Tories understood what colonialism actually meant and therefore what was at stake for people like Mugabe (in Mugabe's case, as time went on lots of aid and trade).

In a sense Mugabe has in a completely hypocritical way hit on something. New Labour are simply bourgeois arrivistes who don't want to take responsibility for the crimes of the former (or current) imperialist power they run. Clare Short expresses this very clearly in her own “I have never been wrong about anything even when I contradict myself” style: “We are a new government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and as you know, we were colonized not colonizers.” You're Irish, so you can never do anything imperialist?!

You won't learn a great many facts and history from her book but Hartmann is very good on showing us some of the idiocies, greed and hypocrisy of the people who have clashed with and sucked up to Mugabe.

BOOK

The Chinese migrants' tale

PETER BURTON REVIEWS CHINESE WHISPERS: THE TRUE STORY BEHIND BRITAIN'S HIDDEN ARMY OF LABOUR, BY HSIAO-HUNG PAI

“If you don't want to do the whole session, you can just buy parts. Three pounds for touching her face and hair, £10 for touching the upper part of her body, £20 for fondling the lower part of her body. Would you like a cup of tea first?” — a Chinese female housekeeper at a brothel in Cheam, Surrey.

From brothels in London to a lettuce farm in Sussex and Chinatown kitchens, this courageous and heart-wrenching book documents the super-exploited lives of the army of undocumented Chinese workers living in the UK. Hsiao-Hung Pai went undercover for the *Guardian* to expose the secret hell of fear and sweat that exists in a subterranean twilight world. Everywhere she goes, she finds that illegality itself multiplies the misery and that all attempts to improve their lives are doomed as “illegal's” move from one terrible job to another.

Gangs attack “massage” joints with impunity, robbing undocumented workers who have been paid in cash, dishing out example beatings to workers who have done nothing wrong. Waiters earn far below the minimum wage, and invisible labourers fall sick in hellish factories. Exorbitant fees are charged for overcrowded accommodation and essential documentation.

Britain is one of the many developed countries that has so far failed to sign up to the 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, which states that human rights and certain minimum standards of welfare should be extended to all migrant workers, regardless of their legal status. In Britain, “illegals”, as the tabloids call them, have no rights. Contacting the police or accessing the health service are not options as this means deportation. Blocks on giving agency workers equal rights compound the misery.

Cockle pickers drown, people die from exhaustion after working 24-hour shifts on production lines, and families back in China are forced to take on more debt once the existing debt is paid off.

There's political capital to be made prosecuting gangs bringing illegal immigrants into Britain, but very little to be had protecting the rights of migrants once they are here. In fact there is a carve up between gangmasters, agencies, factories and the government to super-exploit illegal immigrants using the fear of deportation at any time to keep it all in place.

Hsiao-Hung Pai shows why so many Chinese workers risk their lives to work in Britain, having been driven out of China by economic reforms implemented since it joined the World Trade Organization (nearly five million workers in state-owned factories were made redundant between 2001-2006 in the north-eastern provinces alone). She demonstrates the ways British consumers benefit from their labour.

A concluding chapter on the role of the unions and what direction campaigning organisations should take, together with the rest of the book's contents, makes *Chinese Whispers* an essential book for trade union activists and anti-sweatshop campaigners.



REVOLUTIONARY CHARTISM PART FIVE

The sacred right of insurrection

CHRIS FORD CONTINUES A SERIES

FORERUNNERS OF 1848

Harney wrote that “before taking a prospective glance at the future” of the need to “indulge in a retrospective view of the past”. Up until this time many working class radicals remained within a nostalgic view of the past — Cobbett saw the solution to the barbarities of the Industrial Revolution in the restoration of the former way of life. In contrast Harney wrote that in history:

“We shall find, that in all ages, in all countries, with but rare and momentary exceptions, the many have been the slaves of the few — we shall see the human race, the eternal prey of blood-stained kings and conquerors, of tyrant aristocrats, of hypocritical, lying persecuting priests, and the last and worst of all, of scoundrel-cannibal usurers, schemers, and profit-mongers. We find the whole of these vampires, kings and priests, lords and usurers, in one never-ending conspiracy against their fellow creatures...”

This view of history anticipated some of the ideas of the *Communist Manifesto*, published in Harney’s *Red Republican* eleven years later. Harney wrote that oppressors had reduced the earth, which could be a “paradise for man into a hell, from which the oppressed and suffering people have found no relief but in the grave”. But an earthquake had changed everything — “the great French Revolution” and the eternal Rights of Man were asserted. Whilst that revolution had fallen due to enemies from within the fact that it had happened had changed everything. “But if the Revolution failed, the principles that gave it birth are immortal”.

If the arrogant ruling classes of England believed they were secure with the fall of Jacobinism they were but “Miserable fools” for they were now transplanted into England. Harney was confident in declaring the masses had “seen through the delusions of your enemies; nearly nine years of ‘liberal’ government, of ‘feelosophical’ legislation, have taught you the blessings of middle-class sway”. Having realised who their “worst enemy” was the working class relied on “themselves alone” to build their own movement. The only tragedy of the situation in Harney’s opinion was the absence of support from the Irish movement who under O’Connell’s leadership remained in alliance with the Government: “Deluded by sham-patriots, you have forgotten the deeds of your fathers, and are content to wear the chains of your soulless oppressors: be it so, with you or without you Britain shall be free”.

There was however no chauvinism in Harney’s critique. He cautioned “Let me not be misunderstood. I do not yet despair of the co-operation of the Emerald Isle”. He hoped for the downfall of O’Connell bringing about the unity of the movements. The *London Democrat* now saw Chartism as the anchor of European revolution with Harney citing the hopes of freedom across the continent “but Englishmen all look to you”.

Harney called on the workers to prepare for 6 May (when the Chartist petition was due to be presented to Parliament) in a manner that could not be misunderstood and one can only consider it miraculous good fortune he was not arrested: “One word of advice. In the two or three weeks you have remaining, let me exhort you to *arm*. I mean you that are yet unarmed”. This was a call already being taken up in practice and Harney knew it. The mood that April can be taken from subsequent Prosecution evidence against Timothy Higgins, secretary of the Ashton-under-Lyme Radical Association. “For some time back a considerable number of fire-arms have been sent into the town... Up to the month of April last, large bodies of men have met together late at night and early in the morning for the purpose of training for military exercises”. It was not all clandestine: ten thousand Chartists, many openly armed, demonstrated on 20 April in the town and speakers were repeatedly interrupted by the workers discharging their weapons. In Harney’s opinion there should be no delay, the “man who would now procrastinate is a traitor”. If there would be procrastination it would be in the Convention and it was there that Harney and the LDA were focussed.

A meeting had been arranged for 22 April on Kennington Common to elect a delegate for East Surrey. The LDA seized the chance and mobilised their divisions and sections. In a demonstration of thousands behind their banners the meeting saw the moderate Charles Westerton defeated by Joseph Williams by a large majority. In the Convention there were incriminations at the action of these “self-styled Jacobean”. The opposition to



The revolutionary Chartists invoked the traditions of the French Revolution

Williams was defeated on the intervention of O’Connor who secured the acceptance of Williams. O’Connor declared that “if Jacobin clubs or Democratic Associations infuse fresh zeal into the Convention, so much the better”.

The agitation of the LDA in preparation for 6 May continued with mass meetings on 22 and 29 April at Smithfield Market. Monday 22 saw the arrival of the People’s Charter in London, and under the banner of the LDA a mass meeting carried the People’s Charter into the City. Within the Convention the reality of the looming decision of what to do next was invading the walls of the “People’s Parliament”, the convention. O’Connor carried a resolution on 22 April to bring to an end all the work of the agitators delegated around the country. He now expected the Convention to set itself on a war footing and meet permanently. The Convention would have to act on the rejection of the petition. They should consult the country on the way forward, which in his opinion was a general strike; the workers would “meet the cannon with the shuttle and present the web to the musket”. If such a course was taken then the ruling class see it as nothing less than the commencement of a revolutionary challenge. As such it was the duty of the Convention to prepare for such consequences - but there was no hint of this in O’Connor’s proposals.

ARMING FOR REVOLUTION

The very next day General Sir Charles Napier entered into his diary that “These poor devils are inclined to rise, and if they do what horrid bloodshed”. Napier had taken command of Northern England on 4 April 1839, responsible for any counter insurgency. He took seriously the possibility of rebellion and set about constructing a strategy to counter it. The Government was now responding to the growing unrest with greater resolution. With O’Connell’s refusal to unite with the Chartists the government could confidently remove troops from Ireland: three regiments were transferred to the industrial heartlands along with a number of other troop and artillery movements. Amidst social tension now verging on breaking point Harney was considering another possibility, which the Convention had not even contemplated, a possibility just as dangerous as repression — delay. The Whig Government of Lord Melbourne was in crisis and there was now real possibility of it falling completely. In his column in the *London Democrat* Harney asked “what should the people do?” in the event of Parliament being dissolved before the petition could be presented and a decision given:

“A dissolution of the House of Commons before the presentation of the petition, or the House can be tested respecting the Charter, is something more than possible. The people should therefore be prepared for such an event. And should such be the case will they quietly await another session of Parliament? Will they destroy their own energies, and waste the means of victory they now possess, by stupidly “kicking their heels” for another three or four months?”

Harney’s answer to the government misfortune was to take the initiative and make it their opportunity. The people should “take their affairs into their own hands”. Harney returned to the ideas espoused by O’Brien in the old *Poor Man’s Guardian*. In the event of a Queen’s writ for a new election “let the people of each county, city, and borough, wherever democracy hath reared its head, assemble at the place of nomination on the day appointed, and then and there nominate the men of their choice”. The assemblies of the disenfranchised workers would “nineteen cases out of twenty” elect the Chartist and the process

would show the legal election of the tiny few entitled to vote to be an undemocratic sham. “Should the shopocracy demand a poll, so be it; but let the devils poll by themselves — let the democratic electors and non-electors take no part in such a swindling proceeding”.

On O’Brien’s hustings plan Harney posed the question of what the role of these elected representatives was, whether it was to co-operate or supersede the existing Parliament. It had to be a revolutionary course, for to “elect representatives without enabling them to take their seats in the Legislature, would be the veriest farce imaginable.” The role of electing representatives would be part of an unfolding struggle; the next stage would be to form an organising centre for a mass mobilisation. The representatives once elected would be “furnished with a body-guard of sturdy sans-culottes” organised and varying “according to the strength of the democracy in the district”. Harney proposed that this body should enforce its authority: “What army could resist A MILLION OF ARMED MEN?”

It was this plan, not a rising on 6 May, which General Napier was most concerned about. According to FC Mather, Napier was planning his counter-insurgency out of concern for the “prospect of an outbreak in the Manchester area at Whitsuntide (c.25 May) and about the idea of a march on London from the provinces, which Harney was popularising at Chartist meetings”. Harney’s comrades in the *Northern Liberator*, writing on the “Coming Revolution”, claimed that the Chartists could put on the field a force of half a million, Napier’s preparations involved plans for street fighting in Manchester and to use artillery from Nottingham to engage a Chartist march on London in the Derbyshire hills.

Harney believed the movement was at a decisive phase — “We are on the eve of a Coercion-Bill for England. Our right of meetings and associations is about to be attacked”. Within Government circles discussion was taking place over measures of repression, Lord Melbourne was considering moves to halt the arming of the masses for the purposes of insurrection and Lord John Russell informed Parliament of the possibility being still open for a disarming bill. In the *London Democrat* Harney appealed: “Arm, and be prepared, if need be, to fall back upon your first and holiest right — the sacred right of Insurrection.”

THE WAR OF CLASSES

By May 1839 Melbourne’s Government operating on a tiny majority became exposed by the crisis of over colonial rule in Jamaica. From the provinces the demand for troops was pouring into the Home Office. When the state moved against Welsh Chartists the response saw *The Times* declaring a “Chartist Outrage - The Town of Llanidloes in the possession of revolutionists”. The myth that the workers would not fight was exposed. Prisoners were released and the town held for three days before troops arrived in numbers. Harney’s warning of a Coercion Bill was bearing fruit, whilst the counter-revolution was not one violent blow but rather a process of mounting repression. The arrest of Convention delegates Vincent and McDouall was ordered by the Home Office and on 3 May a Royal Proclamation was issued against those “unlawfully assembled together for the purpose of practising military exercise, movements, and evolutions.” The LDA did not evade attention either: Home Secretary Lord John Russell was questioned in the House of Commons about their planned demonstration of 6 May. The Lord Mayor subsequently banned the “Great Day”, as the *London Democrat* had termed the event.

With repression mounting Harney argued in the Convention they should move to Manchester where they would have the support of “250,000 men who would be determined to defend their liberties”, he expected the Government to “commence the attack and they should be in a situation to meet the attack”. It would also be the North that could be used as a launch pad for Harney’s idea of a march on London. No decision was taken, Lovett and the moderates favoured staying in London, they could see the revolutionary consequences of the latter measures, and they wished to avoid such a clash. Writing in the *London Democrat* Coombe furiously wrote of the “moral-force humbugs” and that “yes, the time is coming when something must be done, and the traitors wish to get out of it — they shall get out of it, never to be admitted again”. With or without a decision in the Convention the agitation continued with high expectations. Undeterred by the ban the LDA defied fate and continued to organise their May demonstrations as planned.

1968 FORD MACHINIST STRIKE

“We brought the Ford Empire to its knees”

BY BECKY CROCKER

In June 1968 women sewing machinists in the Ford car plant in Dagenham took a stand for equal pay in a strike that stopped production for three weeks. They succeeded in getting abolished their lower “women’s rate” of pay and precipitated wider action: there were other equal pay strikes that year and the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women’s Equal Rights (NJACCWER) was formed by women trade unionists, who organised a demonstration for equal pay in 1969. Without the Ford women, there would have been no Equal Pay Act of 1970.

Equal pay had been a confused aspiration for the trade union movement since the mid nineteenth century when women’s work was seen as a threat to male employment and bans on married women working were supported by trade unions.

When unemployment rose during the 1930s, increased female employment (from 27% of the total workforce in 1923 to 30% in 1939) fuelled the fear of a female threat and unions renewed their call for marriage bans or a wider gap between male and female wages. The idea of a male breadwinner bringing in a “family wage” institutionalised women’s low pay and influenced the labour movement. The welfare state was established around a conception of society in family units. Beverage said, “The attitude of the housewife to gainful employment outside the home should not be the same as that of the single woman. She has other duties...”

It was down to women’s organising to defy these attitudes and fight for a wage that would not allow women to be used as cheap labour to bring down wages as a whole.

The demand of the Ford women in 1968 was originally to re-grade their jobs from unskilled B grade to semi-skilled grade C. This demand was not won until another strike in 1984. Ironically, the Ford women had not been able to use the Equal Pay Act that they precipitated to win their re-grading, as they could not compare themselves to a man in their role; they could only claim that their skill level matched some men. The real cause of the pay gap between men and women was and remains women’s segregation into underpaid and devalued jobs. Just as the Ford women had to fight to prove their worth, fights in low-paid industries such as cleaning are happening and are necessary today.

This is the story of the Ford Sewing Machinists’ struggle for equal pay, with extracts from interviews (conducted by the TUC) with the women and trade unionists who took part.

THE JOB

The sewing machinists at Ford made the car seat covers. It was a skilled job. Assessors inspected them on the job. Sheila Douglas, one of the women involved in the dispute said, “I had to do 30 seat covers an hour, we were watched over and timed”. At Ford there was a skilled male rate, a semi-skilled male rate, an unskilled male rate and a women’s rate, which was only 87% of the unskilled male rate. With the obvious injustice of the ‘women’s rate’ and the devaluation of the skill they brought to the job, there was a strong feeling, as expressed by Violet Dawson, from the dispute, that, “We wanted C grade, we wanted equal pay”.

The women put up with harsh working conditions. The company expanded its premises at the River Plant in Dagenham into an asbestos air craft hanger with holes in the roof. Sheila Douglas recalled, “We used to stuff the seats with wadding. The building was two-thirds brick and above that asbestos. All these little holes used to get drafts in. We used to stuff holes in the ceiling with wadding to keep warm”. Machinists worked without guards on the needles and injuries were common. It was said that you weren’t accepted as a proper machinist until you’d been caught by the machine.

The wage was small. On grade B, women earned eight or nine pounds. Sheila Douglas admitted it “seemed like a lot of money, because... I’d been on piece work... if I didn’t work, I didn’t earn. When we went to Fords we was on time work so whatever you done you got some wage each week...” But the money was already spoken for. Sheila was “living at home, I had to give my mum money and she needed anything I could give up.” Vera Sime, a fellow striker, said, “I gave my sister half my wages. She looked after my children so we had half each, that’s how we worked it”. Violet agreed, “It went in the home didn’t it, and on the children”.



Grievances about the women’s rate and their devalued skill were raised through company procedures with no success. The company feared upsetting its entire grading structure and causing resentment amongst male workers. Bernie Passington, convenor for the T & G union who fought for the women at the car plant, said, “They got ignored. I went up with two stewardesses with thirteen pieces for a head rest and said to the company man, ‘Put them together’. He said, ‘Well, what are they?’ I said, ‘You should know. 13 pieces. Give them to a production girl and she knows what to do with them. That girl don’t put all those bits in a jig or anything. All she knows is she’s got to put all those bits together so at the end of it there’s a neat rolled head rest’. I said, ‘Who else does that? Nobody... She has to use her mind’. But you still couldn’t get anywhere with the company...”

Sheila recalled, “That’s how it was all sort of kicking off really. About the C grade and for equal rights it ended up. But originally it was for the C grade we were fighting”.

Bernie said, “And in the end, like any group of workers, if they’re going to take no notice, better do something what makes them take notice”.

THE STRIKE

Sheila Douglas remembered, “We had a meeting on the shop floor and we had a meeting in the employment exchange to vote whether we would strike or not. And that’s how it happened. I don’t think it was unanimous but it was more for than against obviously because we came out on strike.” The strike by the women sewing machinists brought production at the Ford motor company to a standstill.

The impact was huge, especially when the Ford Halewood Plant in Liverpool joined the action. Bernie said “It shook them to the core. And being women, the mighty Ford motor company got women in dispute... It was something new. It shut the place down, they were laying people off”.

Sheila: “It wasn’t the done thing at the time.”

Violet: “It frightened them.”

Sheila: “We didn’t think we were that strong.”

Violet: “We didn’t think we could bring Ford to a standstill.”

Sheila: “It was a surprise to us as well as everybody else. We didn’t think we were going to fetch the whole Ford Empire to its knees, as you might say, but that’s what happened eventually. And it was all down to us, us ladies. And we were ladies, whatever anybody else may say.”

Bernie recalled how they faced opposition from some within the T & G, “Some of our national officials weren’t all that agreed with what we were doing. They didn’t think it was right.” The women strikers received angry letters from the public and faced opposition in the home: while Sheila’s father and Vera’s husband supported the strike, Violet’s husband opposed it. Sheila: “You did get a lot of people saying ‘What are you doing this for? You only come to work for pin money, women’.”

With Ford production stopped, the dispute was of national significance and Barbara Castle, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, intervened. A meeting between ministers, the union and the company agreed that the company would raise wages to 100% of grade B rate over two years. The union were satisfied with this abolition of the women’s rate, and felt that the re-grading was too much to ask from the company.

But the women were not satisfied. Sheila: “There was a meeting at the labour exchange. It was put to the vote we’d get an extra 7 pence an hour on our wages and

would we accept this? The union recommended we accept. Some of us argued that we came out for C grade. I voted against, but I was in a minority, so we came back to work for an extra 7 pence an hour”.

Sheila: “The union worked it that some now and again got C grade. But the whole of the women never got C grade until they came out in 1984. I was really annoyed that what we came out for originally was swept under the carpet. I suppose you could say that we started off equal pay but it wasn’t equal pay really.”

The strike had illustrated the widespread injustice in the employment market between male and female rates of pay. To tackle these abuses, The Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1970. This legislation armed employees with the right to go to an industrial tribunal for equal pay with men in the same employment — but only if they were doing “like work” or if their job had been rated as equivalent but was paid at a different rate. The 1970 legislation did not give the Ford women the tools to fight for the re-grading that they originally demanded, as the only people they were doing “like work” to was themselves.

1984

By 1984, women at the Ford car plant still experienced harsh conditions, with no guards on the needles and damage to hearing by machinery noise. All the women were in the union, as there was a strong woman rep who backed them up.

In 1983, the “Equal Value Amendment Regulations” passed as an amendment to the Equal Pay Act. The European Court of Justice had found that UK legislation was not sufficient to provide for equal work for equal value for all employees. The new legislation gave women the right to go to an employment tribunal on a new ground: that they felt their work was of equal value to men in the same organisation. The women at Ford used this to challenge Ford’s discriminatory job evaluation scheme, but the employment tribunal ruled against them and turned down their appeal in 1984. With their renewed hopes once again unfulfilled by the law, the women at Ford took strike action in December 1984.

There was a meeting in the canteen to decide on the action. Geraldine Dear, a woman involved in the 1984 action recalled, “We shocked management. They thought we’d all walk out of that canteen and walk back into work.”

Management tried to undermine their strike by smuggling their work out through back fences, which the women organised to prevent. The women’s action was helped by solidarity from their male colleagues. Dora said, “They had train loads (of work) coming in. But the men wouldn’t do it. Give ‘em their due. They did stand by us.” Geraldine admitted, “We did feel awful. A lot of men were very upset. They had families as well and they got laid off. But we had to stick up for what we thought was right.”

The women organised pickets. Another striker, Pamela Brown, said, “We mainly did nights.” Geraldine added, “My husband worked for British Rail so he knew what it was all about. I had him to look after my little one during the night.” They set up a big tent, sang and listened to the radio through the night. They had a chant: “Ford sewing machinists are like mushrooms: kept in the dark and fed shit.” The women stayed out for nine weeks.

Their strike stopped production and, with nobody working, delayed the year’s pay claim. Trade unions wanted a quick resolution. The women found themselves against both the unions and management.

They were brought into arbitration through ACAS, who set up a panel to examine the grading system at Ford. All the male C grade jobs were evaluated and compared to the sewing jobs. They looked at the many inbuilt discriminatory features of the job evaluation scheme, which awarded points for features of men’s jobs, while not recognising features of women’s jobs. The panel ruled that women’s speed and dexterity was unequalled in the company and that it had been significantly undervalued. Their ability to fix their own sewing machines and piece new designs together without training was finally acknowledged. The panel ruled that the sewing machinists’ job should be graded as grade C.

Management had the audacity to call the women to a meeting and announce that they were awarding the new grade almost like a gift. The women felt that this was an insult to the two strikes and almost twenty year wait they had endured to win this. Their job had not changed. They had simply received acknowledgement of their worth, which they had known all along.

LEON TROTSKY

Centrism, sectarianism and the Fourth International

“Why does everything come down to Trotsky — what Trotsky said, what he did...?” A comment not long ago from a renegade socialist, one of those free-spirited, “clever”, emancipated ex-Marxists who thought up the “Euston Manifesto”. The truth of course is that nothing at all “comes down” to Trotsky — or Marx, or Lenin, or Rosa Luxemburg, or anyone else.

For Marxists, what everything “comes down to” is reality, the analysis of reality, the working out of what socialists should do and say in order to change the reality of exploitative class society and move things in the direction of workers’ power and socialism.

It is only in relation to that that anything “comes down” to Marx or any of the other thinkers who, addressing the social realities of their own time, did what we try to do — understand social reality and work out what to do about it. They offer models of how to do that, examples in action of their method of doing it, and the results of their work in analysing antecedent realities out of which our realities have developed.

They offer, too, accounts and analyses of the experience of the working class and attempts, which may or may not still, for us, be valid, to codify that experience into general precepts.

One of the best accounts of Marxism is Lenin’s “State and Revolution”, written when he was forced into hiding in the middle of 1917. It is both demonstration and exposition of what living Marxism is.

The book is an argument that the leaders of the pre-1914 socialist movement had falsified the ideas of Marx and Engels on the state, and an attempt by analysis of texts to re-establish what they really thought. An exercise in arid scholasticism? Scholasticism, it is not. It is the opposite of that.

Lenin analyses the old texts to discern and establish what they really said. He traces the development of their opinions on the state towards the conclusions they drew from the experience of the Paris Commune, in 1871, namely, that the revolutionary working class could not simply take over the old bureaucratic state machine — the civil service, the army — and make it serve them: the workers would, following the example of the Communards, have to break it up and replace it by a “Commune state”, self-administering working class democracy, without a permanent state bureaucracy; a self-armed people instead of a standing army. Lenin relates the views of Marx and Engels, and the way their views evolved from point to point, to the experience that shaped those views. He assesses and judges their views in the light of those experiences and uses their method to shed light on his own situation.

For instance, Marx had thought that there could be a peaceful revolution in Britain and America — and perhaps, Holland, about which he felt he knew too little to judge. To the view put forward by Karl Kautsky, effectively, that that settled it — Marx thought there could and therefore there could be a peaceful revolution in those countries. Lenin counter-poses Marx’s method, his way of arriving at that conclusion, to Marx’s conclusion, by way of examining what had happened in those countries since.

Why, he asks, did they think what they did then? Britain and the USA then, Marx had observed, had nothing like the typical state bureaucracy of the European countries, had small armies, and no great military-bureaucratic apparatus of state. He asks: is that still true? From the facts, he establishes, from the changes in the British and US states since Marx, that it is not.

Nobody who takes this seriously, applying Lenin’s way of approaching the work of Marx and Engels to Lenin himself could be a consistent “Leninist” and a “Leninolator”, (or any other sort of “olator”). Consistent Lenin-olatory would carry its own antidote and thereby be its own negation!

Within Marxism there is forever a tension between the empirical/scientific/sociological basis and the extrapolations and pre-figurations spun from them, which, of course, when they seem desirable, come to encompass our strong hopes and feelings and our lives.

At which point might an extrapolation or projection need to be revised in the light of subsequent experience? At which point might key ideas about the nature of social reality have to be abandoned? At which point might some or all extrapolations need to be jettisoned? What role would jettisoning some or all of the basic ideas, or the extrapolations, play in the contemporary class struggle? These are questions in the realm of judgment, opinion, argument: there is no one answer at a given time; people of equally good faith can arrive at different answers; and

times continue to change...

Eduard Bernstein concluded in the late 1890s that, though the labour movement could win reforms, the whole notion of proletarian revolution, of a socialist negating of capitalism, had been invalidated by experience: “the movement”, he summed up his conclusions, is everything, the goal nothing.

Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, George Plekhanov, and many others, rejected that conclusion. They argued that Bernstein worked with a vulgar notion of evolution: real evolution necessarily includes revolutionary breaks; Bernstein based himself on too limited an experience; that he was making an invalid induction...

In the Europe of two decades later, and greatly more so three decades later, as Bernstein was reaching the end of his life and Hitler was on the eve of taking control of Germany, Bernstein’s thesis was unsustainable. Sixty years later it seemed valid again.

The point is that real Marxism is rooted in the necessary evolution of capitalist society. What is “Marxist” at a given time can only be established by argument and, ultimately by the test of experience.

There is, however, more than that for us in the written work of Trotsky and Lenin and the Russian Marxists. In terms of history, the Russian working class, its movement and its Marxists went from the great “spontaneous” strikes of the 1890s to the creation of the first soviet — workers’ council — in 1905, to semi-legal trade unions after the 1905 revolution was defeated, to the revolutions of 1917, to the civil war in which much of the old working class was killed or dispersed as a class, to the Stalinist totalitarian system that would, after 1927, hold it in a frozen grip for more than six decades. The work of the Russian Marxists in the first two decades of the 20th century, social analysis, theoretical disputes is enormously rich. And within a comparatively short time, history in the 1917 revolution delivered its verdict — its pro-tem verdict — on these disputes. We know what it all came down to.

The rear-guard Bolsheviks, fighting the Stalinist anti-working class revolution, from 1922-23 to Trotsky’s death in 1940, and afterwards, continued that Marxism — that experience and tradition.

Trotsky’s work in his last 20 years, dealt with working class and socialist experience in tremendous and tremendously concentrated events — the rise of Stalinism, of Nazism, the Spanish revolution and the civil war, the French general strike of the mid-30s, the British general strike of 1926. These twenty years were a great crucible of class struggle. We can only appropriate that experience now — make it part of our own movement — by way of writings such as Trotsky’s about the events of that 20 year crucible. The tradition thus created is tremendously important.

The working class in successive defeats can lose its historical memory. It loses awareness it once had, is thrown back to political conditions it had once gone far beyond... Generations change, traditions die. Layers of the British working class, which fought tremendous strikes in the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s will now have to learn again how to organise a strike... Writings such as these of Trotsky are rich historical time-capsules, by way of which we can learn by precept what we would otherwise only learn from raw experience, at great cost, including defeats.

It is not less true for having become a bit of a cliché that those who do not learn from history are likely to wind up repeating it. These writings cannot think for us, tell us concretely about their relevance or lack of it for situations and problems we face. That can only be done by way of the analysis and conclusions we make for ourselves.

Sean Matgamna

It would be absurd to deny the presence of sectarian tendencies in our midst. They have been laid bare by an entire series of discussions and splits. Indeed, how could an element of sectarianism have failed to manifest itself in an ideological movement which stands irreconcilably opposed to all the dominant organisations in the working class, and which is subjected to monstrous, absolutely unprecedented persecution all over the world? Reformists and centrists readily seize upon every occasion to point a finger at our “sectarianism”; and, most of the time, they have in mind not our weak but our strong side: our serious attitude towards theory; our effort to plumb every political situation to the bottom, and to advance clear-cut slogans; our hostility to “easy” and “comfortable” decisions which deliver from cares today, but prepare a catastrophe on the morrow. Coming from opportunists, the accusation of sectarianism is most often a compliment.

Curiously enough, however, we are often accused of sectarianism not only by reformists and centrists but by opponents from the “left” — the notorious sectarians, who

might well be placed as exhibits in any museum. The basis for their dissatisfaction with us lies in our irreconcilability to themselves, in our striving to purge ourselves of the infantile sectarian diseases, and to rise to a higher level.

To a superficial mind it may seem that such words as sectarian, centrist, and so on, are merely polemical expressions exchanged by opponents for lack of other and more appropriate epithets. Yet the concept of sectarianism as well as the concept of centrism has a precise meaning in a Marxian dictionary. Marxism has built a scientific programme upon the laws that govern the movement of capitalist society, which were discovered by it. This is a colossal conquest. However, it is not enough to create a correct programme. It is necessary that the working class accept it. But the sectarian, in the nature of things, comes to a full stop upon the first half of the task. Active intervention in the actual struggle of the working masses is supplanted, for him, by an abstract propaganda for a Marxist programme.

Every working-class party, every faction, passes through its initial stages through a period of pure propaganda — that is, the training of its cadres. The period of existence as a Marxist circle ingrafts, invariably, habits of an abstract approach to the problems of the workers’ movement. He who is unable to step in time over the confines of this circumscribed existence becomes transformed into a conservative sectarian. The sectarian looks upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion, the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank around his rostrum — then the task would be solved.

Though he swears by Marxism in every sentence, the sectarian is a direct negation of dialectical materialism, which takes experience as its point of departure and always returns to it. A sectarian does not understand the dialectical interaction between a finished programme and a living (that is to say, imperfect and unfinished) mass struggle. The sectarian’s method of thinking is that of a rationalist, a formalist and an enlightener. During a certain stage of development rationalism is progressive, being directed critically against blind beliefs and superstitions (the eighteenth century!) The progressive stage of rationalism is repeated in every great emancipatory movement. But rationalism (abstract propagandism) becomes a reactionary factor the moment it is directed against the dialectic. Sectarianism is hostile to dialectics (not in words but in action) in the sense that it turns its back upon the actual development of the working class.

The sectarian lives in a sphere of ready-made formulae. As a rule, life passes him by without noticing him; but now and then he receives in passing such a fillip as makes him turn 180 degrees around his axis, and often makes him continue on his straight path, but in the opposite direction! Discord with reality engenders in the sectarian the need constantly to render his formulae more precise. This goes under the name of “discussion”. To a Marxist, discussion is all important but a functional instrument in the class struggle. To the sectarian it is a goal in itself. However, the more that he discusses, all the more do the actual tasks escape him. He is like a man who satisfies his thirst with salt water: the more he drinks, the thirstier he becomes. Hence the constant irritability of the sectarian. Who slipped him the salt? Assuredly, the “capitulators” of the International Secretariat! The sectarian sees an enemy in everyone who to explain to him that an active participation in the workers’ movement demands a constant study of objective conditions, and not haughty bulldozing from the sectarian rostrum. For analysis of reality the sectarian substitutes intrigue, gossip and hysteria.

Centrism is in a certain sense the polar opposite of sectarianism; it abhors precise formulae, seeks routes to reality outside of theory. But despite Stalin’s famous formula, “antipodes” often turn out to be “twins”. A formula detached from life is hollow.

Living reality cannot be grasped without theory. Thus, both of them, the sectarian and the centrist, depart in the end with empty hands and join together in their feelings of animosity towards the genuine Marxist.

How many times have we met a smug centrist who reckons himself a “realist” merely because he sets out to swim without any ideological baggage whatever, and is tossed by every vagrant current. He is unable to understand that principles are not dead ballast but a lifeline for a revolutionary swimmer. The sectarian, on the other hand, generally does not want to go swimming at all, in order not to wet his principles. He sits on the shore and reads lectures on morality to the flood of the class struggle. But sometimes a desperate sectarian leaps headlong into the water, seizes hold of the centrist and helps him drown. So it was; so it will be.

In our epoch of disintegration and dispersal there are to be found a good many circles in various countries who have acquired a Marxist programme, most often by borrowing it from the Bolsheviks, and who have then turned their ideological baggage into a greater or lesser degree of ossification.

Let us take, for example, the best specimen of this type, the Belgian group led by Comrade Vereecken. On August 10 *The Spartakus*, the organ of this group, announced its adherence to the Fourth International. This announcement was to be welcomed. But at the same time it is necessary to state beforehand that the Fourth International would be doomed if it made concessions to sectarian tendencies.

VEREECKEN

Vereecken was in his own time an irreconcilable opponent of the entry of the Communist League of France into the Socialist Party. There is no crime in this. The question was a new one, differences were entirely permissible. In a certain sense, equally permissible, or at any rate unavoidable, were exaggerations in the ideological struggle. Thus, Vereecken predicted the inevitable ruin of the international organisation of the Bolshevik-Leninists as a result of its "dissolution" into the Second International. We would advise Vereecken to reprint today, in *The Spartakus*, his prophetic documents of yesterday. But this is not the chief evil. Worse yet is the fact that in its present declaration *The Spartakus* confines itself to pointing out evasively that the French Section remained true to its principles "in a considerable, we may even say a large, measure". If Vereecken behaved as a Marxist politician should, he would have stated clearly and definitely wherein our French Section departed from its principles, and he would have given a direct and an open answer to the question of who proved to be right: the advocates or the opponents of entry?

Vereecken is even more incorrect in his attitude towards our Belgian Section that entered the reformist Labour Party. Instead of studying the experiences relating to and resulting from the work carried on under new conditions, and criticising the actual steps taken, if they merit criticism, Vereecken keeps on complaining about the conditions of the discussion in which he suffered defeat. The discussion, you see, was incomplete, inadequate and disloyal: Vereecken failed to satisfy his thirst with salt water. There is no "real" democratic centralism in the League! In relation to the opponents of entry the League evinced...

"sectarianism". It is clear that Comrade Vereecken has a liberal and not a Marxian conception of sectarianism: in this he obviously draws close to the centrists. It is not true that the discussion was inadequate: it was carried on for several months, orally and in the press, and on an international scale besides. After Vereecken had failed to convince others that marking time in one place is the best revolutionary policy, he refused to abide by the decisions of the national and international organisations. The representatives of the majority told Vereecken on more than one occasion that if experience proved that the step taken was incorrect, we would rectify the mistake jointly. Is it really possible that after the 12-year struggle of the Bolshevik-Leninists, you lack sufficient confidence in your own organisations to preserve discipline of action even in case of tactical disagreements? Vereecken paid no heed to comradely and conciliating arguments. After the entry of the majority of the Belgian Section into the Labour Party, the Vereecken group naturally found itself outside our ranks. The blame for this falls entirely upon its own shoulders.

If we return to the gist of the question, then Comrade Vereecken's sectarianism stands out in all its dogmatic uncouthness. "What's this?" cried Vereecken in indignation. "Lenin spoke of breaking with reformists, but the Belgian Bolshevik-Leninists enter a reformist Party!" But Lenin had in mind a break with the reformists as the inevitable consequence of a struggle against them, and not as an act of salvation regardless of time and place. He required a split with the social-patriots, not in order to save his own soul, but in order to tear the masses away from social patriotism. In Belgium the trade unionists are fused with the Party: the Belgian Party is essentially the organised working class. To be sure, the entry of revolutionists into the Labour Party of Belgium not only opened up possibilities but also imposed restrictions. In propagating Marxian ideas it is necessary to take into account not only the legalities of the bourgeois state but also the legalities of a reformist Party (both these legalities, it may be added, coincide in a large measure!) Generally speaking, adaptation to an alien "legality" carries with it an indubitable danger. But this did not prevent the Bolsheviks from utilising even czarist legality: for many years the Bolsheviks were compelled to call themselves, at trade union meetings and in the legal press, not Social Democrats but "consistent Democrats". True, this did not pass scot-free; a considerable number of elements adhered to Bolshevism who were more or less consistent democrats, but not at all international socialists! However, by supplementing legal with illegal activity, Bolshevism overcame the difficulties. Of course, the "legality" of Vandervelde, de Man, Spaak and other flunkies of the Belgian plutocracy imposes very onerous restrictions on the Marxists, and thus engenders dangers. But Marxists, who are not as yet sufficiently strong to create their own Party, have their own methods for the struggle against the dangers of reformist captivity; a clear-cut

programme, constant factional ties, international criticism, and so forth. The activity of a revolutionary wing in a reformist Party can be judged correctly only by evaluating the dynamics of development. Vereecken does not do this, either in regard to the faction Action Socialiste Revolutionnaire (Left Wing in the Belgian Labour Party), or the *Verite* group. Had he done so, he would have been compelled to admit that the ASR has made a serious forward development in the recent period. What the final balance will be it is impossible to forecast as yet. But the entry into the Labour Party of Belgium is already justified by experience.

Extending and generalising his mistake, Vereecken asserts that the existence of isolated small groups, which split away at different stages from our international organisation, is proof of our sectarian methods. Thus, the actual relationships are stood on their head. As a matter of fact, into the ranks of the Bolshevik-Leninists there came, during the initial stages, a considerable number of anarchistic and individualist elements generally incapable of organisational discipline, and occasionally a mere failure who did not make his career in the Comintern. These elements viewed the struggle against "bureaucratism" in approximately the following manner: no decisions must ever be arrived at but, instead, "discussion" is to be installed as a permanent occupation. We can say with complete justification that the Bolshevik-Leninists manifested a good deal, perhaps even a good deal too much, of patience towards such types of individuals and grouplets. Only since an international core has been consolidated that has begun to assist the national sections in purging their ranks of internal sabotage, has there begun an actual and systematic growth of our organisation.

Let us take a few examples of groups that split from our international organisation at various stages of its development.

The French periodical *Que Faire?* is an instructive specimen of a combination of sectarianism with eclecticism. On the most important questions this periodical expounds the views of the Bolshevik-Leninists, changing a few commas, and directing severely critical remarks at us. At the same time this periodical permits with impunity a defence of social-patriotic garbage, under the guise of "discussion" and under cover of "defending the USSR". The internationalists of *Que Faire?* are themselves unable to explain how and why they happen to cohabit peacefully with social-patriots after breaking with Bolsheviks. It is clear, however, that with such eclecticism *Que Faire?* is least capable of replying to the question: *que faire?* (what is to be done?) The "Internationalists" and the social-patriots are agreed on only one thing: never the Fourth International! Why? One must not "break away" from the Communist workers. We have heard the self-same argument from the SAP: we must not "break away" from the Social Democratic workers. In this instance, too, antipodes turn out twins. The peculiar thing, however, is that *Que Faire?* is not connected, and, by its very nature, cannot be connected, with any workers.

There is even less to be said about such groups as *Internationale* or *Proletaire*. They also abstract their views from the latest issues of *La Verite*, with admixture of critical improvisations. They have no perspectives at all of revolutionary growth... but they manage to get along without perspectives. Instead of trying to learn within the framework of a more serious organisation (to learn is difficult) these abhorers of discipline and very pretentious "leaders" desire to teach the working class (this appears to them to be easier). In moments of sober reflection, they must themselves realise that their very existence as "independent" organisations is a sheer misunderstanding.

FIELD AND WEISBORD

In the United States we might mention the Field and Weisbord groups. Field—in his entire political make-up—is a bourgeois Radical who has acquired the economic views of Marxism. To have become a revolutionist, Field would have had to work for a number of years as a disciplined soldier in a revolutionary proletarian organisation: but he began by deciding to create a workers' movement of "his own". Assuming a position to our "left" (where else?), Field shortly entered into fraternal relations with the SAP. As we see, the anecdotal incident that befell Bauer was not at all accidental. The urge to stand to the left of Marxism leads fatally to the centrist swamp.

Weisbord is indubitably closer to a revolutionary type than Field. But at the same time he represents the purest example of a sectarian. He is utterly incapable of preserving proportions either in ideas or in actions. Every principle he turns into a sectarian caricature. That is why even correct ideas become in his hands instruments for disorganising his own ranks.

There is no need to dwell upon similar groups in other countries. They split from us not because we are intolerant or intolerable but because they themselves did not and could not go forward. Since the time of the split they have succeeded only in exposing their incapacity. Their attempts to unite with each other, on a national or an international scale, produced no results in any single case: peculiar to sectarianism is only the power of mutual repulsion.

Some crank has computed the number of "splits" we have had and arrived at the sum of about a score. He saw



in this annihilating evidence of our bad regime. The peculiar thing is that in the SAP [German "centrist" organisation], which has triumphantly published these computations, there occurred, during the few years of its existence, more rifts and splits than in all our Sections taken together. Taken by itself, however, this fact is meaningless. It is necessary to take not the bald *statistics of splits* but the *dialectics of development*. After all its splits, the SAP remained an extremely heterogeneous organisation which will be unable to withstand the first onset of great events. This applies, even to a larger measure, to the "London Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity", which is being torn asunder by irreconcilable contradictions; its "tomorrow" will consist not of "unity" but *only of splits*. Meanwhile the organisation of the Bolshevik-Leninists, after purging itself of sectarian and centrist tendencies, not only grew numerically, not only strengthened its international ties, but also found the road to fusion with organisations akin to it in spirit (Holland, United States). The attempts to blow up the Dutch Party (from the right, through Molinar!) and the American Party (from the left, through Bauer!) have only led to internal consolidation of both these Parties. We can predict with assurance that, parallel with the disintegration of the London Bureau, there will proceed an ever more rapid growth of the organisations of the Fourth International.

THE ROAD TO THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

How the new International will take form, through what stages it will pass, what final shape it will assume—this no one can foretell today; and, indeed, there is no need to do so: historical events will show. But it is necessary to begin by proclaiming a programme that meets the tasks of our epoch. On the basis of this programme it is necessary to mobilise the co-thinkers, the pioneers of the new International. No other road is possible.

The *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels, directly aimed against all types of utopian-sectarian socialism, forcefully points out that communists do not oppose themselves to the actual workers' movements, but participate in them its a vanguard. At the same time the *Manifesto* was the programme of a *new Party*, national and international. The sectarian is content with a programme as a recipe of salvation. The centrist glides himself by the famous (essentially meaningless) formula of Eduard Bernstein [German social democratic, "revisionist" of Marxism], "the movement is everything, the final goal—nothing". The Marxist draws his scientific programme from the movement taken as a whole, in order to apply this programme to every concrete stage of the movement.

On the one side, the initial steps of the new International are made more difficult by the old organisations and splinters from them: on the other side, they are facilitated by the colossal experience from the past. The process of crystallisation, which is very difficult and full of torments during the first stages, will assume in the future an impetuous and rapid character. Recent international events are of incommensurate significance for the formation of the revolutionary vanguard. In his own fashion, Mussolini—and this should be recognised—has "aided" the cause of the Fourth International. Great conflicts sweep away all that is half-way and artificial and, on the other hand, give strength to all that is viable. War leaves room only for two tendencies in the ranks of the workers' movement: social patriotism, which does not stop at any betrayal, and revolutionary internationalism, that is bold and capable of going to the end. It is precisely for this reason that centrists, fearful of impending events, are waging a rabid struggle against the Fourth International. They are correct, in their own fashion: in the rear of great convulsions, only that organisation will be able to survive and develop which has not cleansed its ranks of sectarianism, but which has systematically trained them in the spirit of despising all ideological vacillation and cowardice.

IRAQ

No support for reactionary “anti-imperialists”

In *Solidarity* 3-134 we published an assessment of the current US government's medium-term, or perhaps long-term, plan for a military relationship with Iraq. This has prompted some debate on our website. Martin Thomas answers some of that debate (see www.workersliberty.org/node/10769).

THE CASE-BY-CASE POLICY

In reference to Iraq, Bill J of the Permanent Revolution group asks: “How is it possible to militarily support the Islamicists?” [sic: I take it he means Islamists].

“It should be obvious. If the Islamists are attacking an American tank they should be supported. If they are attacking a trade union they should not. Straightforward, huh?”

All too straightforward. Who needs Marxism? If the police are helping old ladies across the road, we should support them. If they are attacking picket lines we should oppose them. When the British in India were building railways and trying to suppress suttee, they should have been supported; when they were carrying out the Amritsar massacre, they should have been opposed. If your boss is friendly and in a generous mood, you support him; if he is hostile today, you oppose him.

With the approach Bill suggests, socialists' attitude to everything in the world would depend on the morning's news, on the “politics of the last atrocity” or of the last benevolent act.

It might make sense if the socialist movement were something like the US imperialist dreams of a “rapid deployment force”, a compact, speedy, and punchy military unit able to zoom Superman-like into any situation, helping these Islamists against that US tank here and the next minute zapping the same Islamists when they attack trade unionists.

But the socialist movement is not, and cannot be, like that.

What we can do is not the Superman role, but the task of helping the working class learn class-consciousness; helping it to develop its own stable assessment of other forces in politics and assert itself as an independent force.

As Trotsky put it: “Our tasks... we realize not through the medium of bourgeois governments [nor through the medium of imaginary military rapid-deployment units] but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow. [This] cannot give immediate miraculous results. But we do not even pretend to be miracle workers. As things stand, we are a revolutionary minority. Our work must be directed so that the workers on whom we have influence should correctly appraise events, not permit themselves to be caught unawares, and prepare the general sentiment of their own class for the revolutionary solution of the tasks confronting us”.

Bill's approach is, I fear, the same as the approach of what would become the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, dissected by Rosa Luxemburg in her article “Either/Or”. The future Independents had voted against war credits in the German parliament on the grounds that now Germany's borders were safe and Germany's war was one of aggression; the implication was that a change in the fortunes of war could make the same war by the same German government “defensive” and justify support for war credits.

“These are not tactics based on principle”, explained Luxemburg, “but a policy of speculation tailored to the momentary situation in the theatre of war, the famous case-by-case policy, the old opportunistic see-saw upon which the party performed magnificently on August 4th, 1914”.

A “case-by-case policy” will not suffice for the clerical-fascist movements in Iraq, either.

In fact I don't believe the real attitude of Bill and the Permanent Revolution group is a case-by-case one. Their journal does not alternate between articles supporting the Islamist militias in Iraq and articles denouncing them. It supports them pretty steadily. Bill's “case-by-case” argument is more a fobbing-off device: he supports the militias



Aftermath of a car bomb attack in Baghdad: Islamists are not just attacking American tanks

because they attack American tanks, and if they attack trade-unionists, then, in principle, if PR can find the time for such secondary details, they can denounce that.

BASIC ASSESSMENT

Bill and his friends have a basic assessment of the clerical-fascist militias, that they are national-liberation forces, and a secondary line of criticising the militias' attacks on trade unionists (and women, and gays, and students, and gypsies, I suppose).

Is that basic assessment accurate? It is not. I shall argue that it is based on glossing over most of the realities of the clerical-fascist militias; depending on the bare fact that they are “anti-American”; and surmising, inaccurately, that anything “anti-American” must be essentially pro-national-liberation.

Does anyone seriously believe that one or another of the clerical-fascist militias being able to strike big enough blows to the US military to force it out of Iraq would actually lead to national emancipation for Iraq (or least for Arab Iraq)? That it would not lead to full-scale civil war, the intervention of neighbouring states, and the chopping up of Iraq into sectarian statelets?

I've never read anyone argue such a case in any detail. I have read hard-nosed US-imperialist strategists arguing that US withdrawal and ensuing civil war is a better option for US imperialism than the present morass — whatever governments emerged from the civil war would still have to sell their oil, and might well still value US assistance against neighbouring states — but that is a different matter.

The pro-militia stance usually depends on a suggestion (never argued in detail) that US withdrawal would automatically “end the war”, or that we are duty bound to champion whatever we think worst for the USA, whatever the consequences for the workers and peoples of Iraq.

The Sunni clerical-fascist militias cannot possibly lead a national liberation struggle, any more than the UDA and the UVF could ever have led a national liberation struggle in Ireland. They are based on a historically-dominant minority. They fight the Americans — when they do fight the Americans, rather than carrying out sectarian attacks on the Shia — in the cause of trying to regain hegemony for that minority.

So far as I can gather, the thinking of some of the Sunni militias has been that realistically they can't win, but they can prevent the stabilisation of power for the Shia-Kurdish coalition of the type which has led the various Baghdad governments since early 2005, and thus push the Americans into engineering a political system for Iraq giving a better deal to the Sunni Arabs. Some of the Sunni

militias which thought that way have latterly been collaborating with the Americans, though they still have an uneasy relationship with the Baghdad government.

The Sunni Arab “ultras”, like al-Qaeda, may really believe that the Shia are only a minority in Arab Iraq, or that Allah will bring them victory whatever the balance of forces. Their cast of mind is aptly enough illustrated by the declaration of an al-Qaeda leader in May favouring a US attack on Iran (on the grounds that, bad though the US is, the main thing is to get the Shia infidels zapped).

The Shia clerical-fascist militias have not attacked American tanks much. The Badr Corps, the militia of SCIRI/ISCI, has more or less collaborated with the Americans since 2003. The Mahdi Army has had clashes with the Americans, but only episodically and usually on US initiative.

They cannot possibly unify Iraq, either, because their fundamental aim is clerical rule, which means rule by Shia clerics.

To explain the clerical-fascist militias in Jason's terms, as a purely instinctive reaction to the occupation — “when the occupation is attacking schools, houses, hospitals, forcibly looting industries and the oilfields then many workers quite rightly are angry and want to take up arms” — is false.

I'm sure the brutality and arrogance of the American military have driven many Iraqis into the arms of the clerical-fascist militias. The character of such movements is not determined by the exasperated and inchoate rank and file, but by the leadership — and especially so in militarised movements. The militias have their own political character, which is not merely a mechanical reaction against the Americans.

The Sunni clerical-fascist militias emerged very early after March 2003, when most Shia had a “wait and see” attitude to the Americans; former Ba'athist military officers played a large part in them; they started sectarian attacks from very early on. The Shia clerical-fascist movements have an even longer history, back to the late 1950s when their first nuclei were formed as a rearguard action against the tide of secularism, democracy, and socialistic politics in Iraq at the time, and through extensive sponsorship by the Iranian regime.

Attacking schools? What about when the clerical-fascist militias were threatening school teachers with death if they made Saturday as well as Friday a holiday for schoolkids, because to do so would be a “Jewish” and “Zionist” move? Don't you think some workers would have been “quite rightly angry” then too?

The clerical-fascist militias are not only forces hostile to the Iraqi labour movement and to women's, gay, and

democratic rights in Iraq, but also destructive of the possibilities of self-determination for Arab Iraq. Their triumph would mean the bloody tearing-apart of Iraq into sectarian statelets.

That the clerical-fascist militias cannot win self-determination does not in the least imply, as Bill J would have us "claim", "that self determination will be arrived at through imperialist occupation". Sorry about the length of my original article, but it really isn't possible to understand what is happening in Iraq without being willing to read at least articles of a couple of thousand words long, and maybe occasionally whole books too. If Bill had read the article, or even its opening paragraph, he will know that most of it was a dissection of the USA sitting on Iraq militarily — as I put it, like a toad.

There are other options besides the clerical fascists and the Americans. There already exists an Iraqi labour movement, weak and harassed, but real and committed to unity across the sectarian divides. Prospects for it do not look good at present, but it is not at all ruled out that a more-or-less bourgeois-democratic, anti-sectarian movement for self-determination should arise in Iraq.

(In fact: something more or less like the Guomintang... Contrary to what Arthur suggests in the web discussion on my article, the Left Opposition never contested the necessity for the Chinese CP seeking alliances with the Guomintang against Japanese imperialism. The Opposition denounced only political subordination to the Guomintang. A basic consideration in the assessment of the Guomintang was that it sought — and with some success — to bring China out of the "warlord period" and to unify it. Trotsky wrote that "the revolution now unfolding under the leadership of the Guomintang is a bourgeois-national revolution"; and when denouncing the reactionary acts of the Guomintang, he referred to them as "the attempts of the nationalist-liberal bourgeoisie, by using the Guomintang as a tool").

THE SAME AS CLASSIC "HIGH IMPERIALISM"?

To equate the US in Iraq now with classic "high imperialism" - say, the Japanese in China in the 1930s - and the clerical-fascist militias with the Guomintang is, it seems to me, like equating a plain with a forest because the plain also has some trees similar to those in the forest.

I'm against the USA having permanent military bases in Iraq. I'm also against the USA having permanent military bases in Britain, but those bases do not prove Britain to be a US colony. History shows that the post-1945 USA having permanent military bases in a country, even large ones in a poor country, is not the same as that country becoming a colony in the sense of the old "high imperialism" which dominated the late 19th century and most of the 20th century but ended in the West in 1975 with the Portuguese retreat from Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau.

Japan has had huge US military bases since the end of World War Two — and moreover has been forced to pay for them — and was extremely poor compared to the USA. South Korea has had huge US military bases since the Korean war. The Philippines had gigantic US bases until 1992, and still has sizeable ones.

All of these countries have been broadly in the "US sphere of influence" - but then so were most non-Stalinist countries until 1991, and so have been almost all countries in the world since 1991.

They are not especially economically subordinate to the USA. When Japanese manufactured exports started to out-compete US manufacturers in the US market in the 1960s, and South Korean manufactured exports more recently, the US military bases in those countries were of no help to the hard-pressed producers. None has a particularly high proportion of US ownership in its economy.

The Philippines, instructively, opened up to foreign investment at the same time — in the early 90s — as its government forced out most of the huge US bases there. Although the US still has bases there, the US holds only 22% of foreign direct investment there, while Japan holds 23% and various European powers over 26% (2002 fig-

ures).

None of them was especially responsive when the US called in favours from all its friends in 2003 and after for its invasion of Iraq. None contributed to the US effort more than token numbers of soldiers, in non-frontline posts, often quickly withdrawn: when sending its troops, the South Korean government rather touchingly stipulated that they should not be sent anywhere dangerous.

When Germany refused to support the invasion of Iraq, the US responded by threatening to *withdraw* US troops from Germany (where, despite a reduction from 248,600 US troops stationed there in 1989 to 66,400 in 2005, the US bases are still important economic factors in some areas).

In sum, the US aspires to be, and largely is, the world's policeman, through a military apparatus and a network of bases vastly bigger than any other country's. It also works at being, and largely is, the centre and keystone of what Ellen Wood calls the "empire of capital" and what we in *Workers' Liberty* have called "the imperialism of free trade" — an economic world order adapted to the drives and greeds of the world's big multinational corporations and financial institutions, a large proportion of which are headquartered in the USA. It is the weightiest voice in the political conclaves of world capital (United Nations, G8, etc.), and works to keep that position. As we argued in *Workers' Liberty* 2/3, this is a world of US hegemony, and the conventional story of "relative decline of the USA" is largely untrue.

But this is not the same as the old "high imperialism". There is not, and the USA has consistently not tried to implement, a direct one-to-one correspondence between military deployment and economic and political domination, such as characterised the old "high imperialism". US capital is playing a bigger game. It knows from the experience of the old European empires that in the era when most so-called Third World countries are substantially urbanised, literate, and instilled with nationalist consciousness, to try to maintain old-style governor-general domination is very expensive financially, politically, and militarily - and, moreover, not necessary.

The Bush administration was attempting a bigger game when it invaded Iraq. It did not want to make Iraq a new US colony. It wanted to use the forced transformation of Iraq as a lever to transform the whole Middle East into a world-market-friendly — and therefore, in the long run, it calculates, US-capital-friendly — configuration.

Events have shown a large measure of neo-con hubris in Bush's scheme. But making Iraq a new US colony is not a plausible fallback policy. Even with 150,000 troops there, the US is not able to get a government in Iraq suitable to it. My best guess is that the US hopes to hold out long enough, and "harden" a new Iraqi army sufficiently, that it can engineer a "deniable" soft military coup in Iraq which will ensure a more or less friendly, world-market-compliant regime there for a sizeable period to come as Iraqi society eventually convalesces from 28 years of unbroken horror since Saddam Hussein launched war against Iran in 1980. It also wants to get as many cards in its hand as it can now — thus its overweening demands in the negotiations over the "State of Forces Agreement".

But for now the situation is epitomised by the fact the Baker-Hamilton report of late 2006 - produced by a group which included Robert Gates, now Bush's Defense Secretary and tipped to be Obama's Defence Secretary too if Obama becomes president — seriously proposed that the US should knock the Iraqi government into shape by threatening to *withdraw* US troops. Some US ruling-class commentators remonstrated that, yes, the Baghdad ministers might be whipped along by fear of their country collapsing into chaos, but that chaos would not do the US any good; some "hard-headed" neo-con types argue that chaos is a better option for US imperialism than the current costly policy, since whatever Iraqi governments emerge at the end of a civil war will still have to do deals on the world market; no-one said that the US troops could just be used directly to get the Baghdad ministers to do what the US wants.

As regards oil, by the way, some 20 deals with foreign oil companies have so far been signed in Iraq. Only one is with a US company; the others are with companies based in such countries as Russia, India, Korea, Canada, Norway...

If the US moving to old-style colonial-type rule of Iraq was ever a possibility, it is not now. No-one in the US ruling class thinks it is feasible financially, politically, or diplomatically to keep in Iraq indefinitely as many troops as would be necessary to ensure direct and effective US rule there, presumably at least 200,000, maybe 300,000.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM TODAY MAY MEAN ANTI-MODERNIST REACTION, NOT NATIONAL EMANCIPATION

Precise assessment here is not pedantry, and still less is it pedantry to suggest that the US's world rule is "not as bad as you might think". The assessment of world structure is important for a clear assessment of "anti-imperialist" forces today.

We wrote back in 1982, as part of the debate with the Permanent Revolution group's political forerunners and others who wanted to side positively with the Argentine



Moqtada al-Sadr: ally for Iraqi workers?

military junta in the British-Argentine war of that year: "The notion that what Trotsky wrote in a very different world (dominated by colonial imperialism, for example) about countries like China can provide us directly with answers to the Argentine war is ridiculous. The principles, methods and ways of looking at the world remain what they were when Trotsky wrote, but to conclude that the texts embodying their results when applied to working through a concrete problem can directly offer us guidelines now, the comrades would have to establish that similar or roughly similar conditions exist..."

In the era of high imperialism, of rule by governors-general over weaker nations which systematically blocked their democratic development, it was almost automatic that rebellions against the colonial-imperial powers would have a national-liberation character — that their conflict with the colonial-imperial power would be primarily *about* national liberation, whatever the secondary factors.

It is not at all true that "anti-imperialism" today — in the sense of hostility to the "imperialism of free trade" - has any emancipatory character. It is often *reactionary* "anti-imperialism". Its most militant form is a drive for withdrawal from the world economy, which has an entirely different import to withdrawal from a political empire. Consider North Korea, Burma, the Taliban's Afghanistan, Mugabe's Zimbabwe: what was or is in the least emancipatory or progressive about their "anti-imperialism"?

"Anti-imperialism" is often the cover for regional paleo-imperialism: Serbia in former Kosova; Saddam Hussein's Iraq in Kurdistan and Kuwait and (Saddam hoped) chunks of Iran; Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas...

Movements which are primarily about the democratic cause of national liberation should still be supported; but it is not at all to be assumed that the negative definition, "anti-imperialism", implies that positive progressive content.


In Iraq, the "anti-imperialism" of the Sunni-Arab clerical-fascist militias is not a liberation struggle, but a drive to reassert the domination of a traditional elite over the majority of the population, Shias, Kurds, and others.

Among the Shia-Arab clerical-fascists, too, "anti-imperialism" or "anti-Americanism" is by no means an ideology of emancipation. Nir Rosen's book *In the Belly of the Green Bird* shows that when they denounce America, they mean, more or less interchangeably, "the Jews", secularism, Israel, "the Masons", or "Zionism".

As Gilles Kepel puts it in *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, "the Islamist intelligentsia's role was to gloss over [the] clash of social agendas [between the devout bourgeoisie and the urban poor] and reconcile the two groups to the shared pursuit of power. The intellectuals did this by concentrating on the moral and cultural dimensions of religion. They won the broadest base of support... when they mobilised both the young urban poor and the devout bourgeoisie with an ideology that offered a vague social agenda but a sharp focus on morality".

The "anti-Americanism" of the clerical-fascist militias is turned much more firmly against workers' rights, women's rights, and democracy of any sort, than against the USA's plans for toad-like politico-military squatting on Iraq, let alone against the world-market-capitalist incursions which are the major substance of imperialism today.

And to repeat, there are other options besides the clerical fascists and the Americans. It is those other options — the "Third Camp" — that we should support.



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WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

Support local government strike

Fighting poverty pay



By a UNISON MEMBER

Hundreds of thousand of local government workers are due out on strike on 16 and 17 July in a dispute over pay. Both Unison, the largest local government union, and Unite are taking action. Members of PCS (civil servants) from the Driving Standards Agency, Home Office and Passport Agency will also be taking action on the same day. Unfortunately the other large union, the GMB, have accepted the deal currently on offer of 2.45% not because they think it's a good deal, they say, but because members cannot afford to take strike action.

But the current offer is just over half the rate of inflation which now stands at 4.3% representing a significant pay cut for members in the next year with inflation likely to rise higher.

For once Unison have put a lot of central effort into building the action and Dave Prentis, the general secretary, has promised Unison will take the lead in breaking the governments pay limit for the public sector.

The current action does not involve Scotland but a separate ballot is now underway and is likely to lead to action. In Scotland the offer is a slightly better 2.5% but the unions are claiming 5% or £1,000 to make up for below inflation rises in previous years. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland Unison's claim has been 6% or 50p an hour.

Local government is the worst paid part of the public sector with 250,000 of the 600,000 balloted by Unison earning less than £6.50 an hour and 75% of them women. This is the very group who are most severely hit by increasing inflation in fuel, food and housing costs. The *New Statesman* estimates that a single-parent council worker on such a pay rate, with one school-aged child and needing a couple of hours' cheap childcare a day, would at current pay

levels be entitled to roughly £5,000 in Working Tax Credit a year highlighting the dependence of many workers on additional benefits to survive.

This is a fight to maintain an already impoverished standard of living and to keep up with prices. Yet the government which claims to prioritise tackling poverty have been quick to condemn the strikers. Once again they have said public sector pay rises will fuel inflation. Many economists and the TUC agree there is no truth in that and its often profiteering by the big oil, energy and food companies that are responsible for the price hikes.

With further threats to pay and job security via cost cutting "efficiency drives" and the imposition of Single Status Agreements that again drive down wages, local government workers need to see through this fight to a successful conclusion.

The initial two day action will need to be followed up with selective strikes and further all out strike days. Ongoing local strike committees will be needed to keep workers informed and the momentum for action going. Unison should learn the lessons of recent disputes including the pensions strike and not abandon action for the promise of talks or the lure of a legal route. The membership of our union mobilised remains its core strength and they should be able to hold the leadership to a course of struggle that may mean escalating action through the summer months.

The cost of failure would not just be the loss of wages but a further loss of confidence in collective action and the need for union organisation. After the summer there is a real possibility of linking up with other unions in joint action across the public sector. The NUT is likely to ballot again over pay, and the civil servants are due to strike. In the NHS, Unison say they will seek to reopen pay negotiations in light of rising inflation and are prepared to take industrial action to back up their claim. That would be a hugely significant shift from the leader-

ship, from their position of only a few months ago when they told health workers they were getting a good deal and forced through acceptance.

The chances of all this coming together in a general strike of public sector workers to beat the pay cuts is still small. But the growing movement of anger in workplaces can be organised to press the individual leadership of the different unions to make real their talk of unity. Local activists can create the basis for such co-ordination through the creation of Local Public Sector Alliances which in some places have been in existence for over a year already.

On 16 and 17 July there is a need for other unions not directly involved in the dispute to demonstrate their solidarity by sending delegations and banners to the rallies and marches that are being held throughout the country.

In local government branches the opportunity is to make the strike days as active as possible, getting strong picket lines and demonstrations of support from the membership. Moving quickly afterwards branches should call activists and stewards meetings to engage those active in building the action into ongoing strike committees that can start to formulate the next steps in the fight.

For details of local activity and how you can get involved see the main Unison website: www.unison.org.uk.

STOP the BNP's Red, White & Blue festival

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Watch the website <http://nobnrfestival.wordpress.com> for up to the minute details of where to go, as details may alter nearer the time.

Protest and mass picket from 9am
Rally Codnor centre at 12.30pm (TBC)
Map and further details on website

Organised by Notts Stop the BNP

Supported by the National RMT, Midlands TUC, FBU East Midlands Region, UCU East Midlands Region, Notts Division NUT, South Notts NUT, Central Notts NUT, Notts Unison, Derby UAF and Notts Refugee Forum and numerous other trade unions organisations and other anti-racist campaigns throughout the country.

for further info email nobnrfestival@riseup.net

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