

**An injury to one is an injury to all**

# Solidarity

**& WORKERS' LIBERTY**

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# Mail bosses want to smash union

**BY AMINA SADDIQ**

**W**ITH the announcement of new strike dates by the Communication Workers' Union (all out on 5, 6, 8 and 9 October, with rolling action after that), the Royal Mail bosses have decided to go for broke — for instance by announcing a drastic attack on postal workers' pensions.

According to *The Times* (24 September):

*Royal Mail plans to close its final-salary pension scheme to all employees...*

*Royal Mail is expected to write to employees soon to outline sweeping changes to the pension scheme, including raising the retirement age by five years.*

*Its move to close the final-salary scheme for existing employees, along with new ones, is almost unprecedented... Usually companies that change pension schemes pull down the shutters on final-salary arrangements to new employees only.*

*The move to end the scheme comes days after Royal Mail denied that it had any such plans...*

*In February Royal Mail announced the closure of the final-salary pension scheme to new employees. Then Mr Crozier said: "It is important we safeguard the future of the pension fund for our people, who regard a final-salary pension scheme as a key benefit of working for Royal Mail."*

*The retirement age is to be lifted from 60, which is enjoyed by many public sector workers, to 65. A spokesman for Royal Mail said that he could not comment on proposals before employees are informed.*

Meanwhile, Royal Mail is also going for broke on other fronts — for instance by announcing the closure of the Mail Centres in Oxford and Reading, a centre of militancy which saw protracted wildcat strikes over victimisations in August

Royal Mail management seem to have decided to fight war as war. The question is how the postal workers' union CWU will respond.

Inside: *Solidarity* speaks to two London CWU activists, see page 2

**Build solidarity with the  
postal workers!**

# Migrants are not the problem

BY MIKE ROWLEY

**J**ULIE Spence, the head of Cambridgeshire Police, launched a vitriolic attack in early September on the numbers of Eastern European migrants working in the county. They cause crime, she says; they carry knives and drink-drive; they don't know how to behave in peaceful, law-abiding, bucolic thatched-cottage Britain. She was widely praised in the media for her realistic attitude and for "breaking a taboo" by revealing uncomfortable truths about the latest wave of immigration.

Meanwhile, two Polish workers were beaten up and hospitalised in Wisbech, a small town on Ms. Spence's beat, by a gang of ten white youths. At their recent court appearance the racists were describes as acting "like a pack of animals hunting down prey". Ms Spence made no comment on this incident, or on any of the many like it that have been perpetrated across Britain by gangs of anti-immigrant thugs.

The Home Office has responded to calls from Spence and two other police chiefs by asking for the extension of EU movement restrictions on Bulgarian and Romanian citizens by "at least" another year, allegedly in order to relieve pressure on public services.

Yet the Institute for Public Policy Research has found, "Studies show it is social networks that propel migrants here. The numbers of Bulgarians and Romanians in Britain are so small there are no social networks to attract them." Furthermore, about 380,000 people leave Britain each year and many migrant workers stay only a year or two, so there is no real "pressure" at all.

The real problem, as regards both crime and public services, comes from the situation in which migrants all too often find themselves. Britain has a flourishing twilight economy in which corrupt "gangmasters" find it easy to exploit migrants with few rights and unsure even of those. In these circumstances, the risk of industrial injury and even death is greatly increased, as the tragedy of the Chinese cockle-pickers who drowned in Morecambe Bay unforgettably demonstrates.

Migrants who are forced into prostitution by criminal migration racketeers cannot escape because immigration law treats them as the criminals, and public services have to pick up the pieces — if the migrants in question are lucky. If they're not, they spend months in a detention centre, going slowly mad, before being deported to a country they may have fled because of persecution, torture and the murder of their families.

Politicians, however, act as if they are concerned only with gutter-press hysteria and the prejudices that exist against migrants.

As Rick Muir of the IPPR sums it up: "Social disadvantage... creates an environment in which low-income families are forced to compete for scarce resources, such as jobs, childcare and affordable housing. Issues of material scarcity, and perceptions of unfairness in how such scarce goods are distributed, play an important role in generating the current atmosphere of hostility towards asylum seekers and migrants more generally."

Workers made redundant to be replaced by migrants on lower wages and with less rights, such as those last week at the Tulip food packing plant in Thetford, can come to feel hostility towards the workers who replace them.

The only answer to this is working-class solidarity. Workers' struggles for universal rights, for higher wages and better conditions for everyone, can unite workers across artificially fostered divides with remarkable strength — as with this year's Irish ferry workers' strike securing equal rights for their Polish colleagues.

# Royal Mail goes for broke

INTERVIEWS BY SACHA ISMAIL

**G**REG Charles is branch secretary of South West London Postal Communication Workers' Union. **SI:** With the attacks on pensions, Royal Mail management seems to be stepping up the fight.

GC: Once new dates for action were announced, we knew this would happen — the intensity of our action in October has obviously alarmed management, and they are striking back. They have retaliated not just through the attack on our pensions, but with executive action to push us harder on a number of fronts — start times, night duties, workload and so on.

**What's the CWU's response? Is it adequate?**

Yes, the union is getting ready. The four days at the start of October will hit hard, making it easier to tip management off balance when the rolling programme kicks in. So on that score things are in hand. Of course, we need to fight more politically — to get our message out the wider community, and put political as well as industrial pressure on PostComm and the Government.

**The CWU delegation at Labour Party conference has just voted for Brown's proposal to remove the right of unions and CLPs to send motions. What do you make of that?**

I haven't kept fully abreast of the Labour Party stuff, so it's difficult to form an opinion straight away. But the move was clearly marked out by Gordon Brown from the time he became leader, or even before then. I'm totally opposed to it. It was the unions that formed the Labour Party, but this is just another move to take it in a totally different direction, away from the working-class. It means denying our unions a voice in politics. If what you say is right, I'm disgusted, but I'll have to look into it. I'm sure it will be taken up in the union.

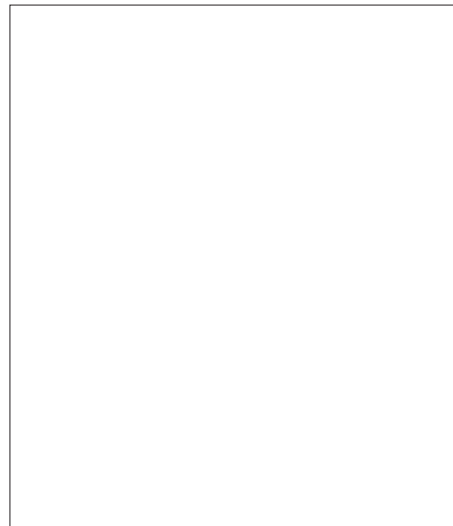
**Some have compared this dispute to the FBU's strike over pay in 2002-3: which began well, but then petered out as the leadership got cold feet. Do you think that's fair?**

No, I don't. Clearly we've had a period of calm, while talks were going on. It was right to suspend the action to make clear that we were willing to talk. And another good thing about the talks is that we can now see even more clearly management's intentions in terms of pensions, pay, flexibility — their plans for our entire terms and conditions.

Now that there's no agreement, the action is not petering out. If anything it's getting harder. We've got four days coming up, over a whole weekend, in the October period when things are getting really busy. We're in this to win.

**What about other public sector unions striking alongside the CWU?**

Well, we have our own dispute and we want to win through our own industrial strength —



Alan Leighton: up for a scrap

but of course joining together with other disputes can make a vital difference. In the rank-and-file, I think there's a willingness to do it, but the general secretaries are a different matter — of course.

**P**ETE Firmin is branch vice-chair and political officer of London West End Amalgamated CWU.

**SI:** With the attacks on pensions, Royal Mail management seems to be stepping up the fight.

PF: From the start it was clear they were on the offensive. The union's response to this has been inadequate; the CWU leadership hasn't understood the significance of all this in the same way that management has. Management have come out with things like "it'll be as bloody as the miners' strike" and "we can sit out six months of strikes", and the union has not taken that on board.

**But with the announcement of new strike dates, aren't things getting back on track?**

It's taken us an awfully long time to get round to it. The previous dithering is also a sign that things could be called off again at any moment.

**What do you think about the rolling programme?**

It has good and bad sides. The good side, obviously, is that we cause maximum disruption for minimum loss to us — we can cause four days of chaos while only losing one day's pay each. It creates huge backlogs.

The downsides are two-fold. It frees up managers to move around and do different jobs, which obviously wouldn't be the case if we were all out; and because different sections are out at different times, it means people delivering and so on to places that are currently on strike.

The instruction from the union nationally is to cross picketlines, but for obvious reasons people don't want to do that. That's what caused the huge wildcats in Scotland, Liverpool and so on, when people were

victimised for refusing to cross. So it's a mess, and one that will continue.

Some people have said all out now, and to a certain extent that's my view. But I'm really not sure the members are there yet, that postal workers are willing to lose that much in a bid for victory. So it's a real dilemma. But part of the problem is that the leadership aren't even having that debate.

**Some have compared this dispute to the FBU's strike over pay in 2002-3...**

I think that's a very good comparison. If the leadership do try to call things off, there's no structure in the union to hold people accountable and get it back on, no rank-and-file movement as such. There's *Postal Worker* [run by the SWP], which has a very wide readership: I've been trying to get it to call a national meeting of supporters since early August, and there may be one in October, but they're obviously not keen.

*Postal Worker* has an alliance with certain members of the PEC [the CWU's postal executive], and as a result has in the past prevaricated and even advocated a vote for job-cutting deals.

As in the FBU, the leadership are out of their depth, industrially and politically. They should be making the issue about whether it's the workforce or the bosses who pay for change in the industry, but instead the CWU is saying: ok, we'll pay, but not that much.

Over the question of job losses, the union says it doesn't object to job losses providing those that remain benefit. But firstly, what about those who lose their jobs — and secondly, with 40,000 job losses we'll all be working harder! The policy is contradictory because the leadership aren't really challenging the framework of liberalisation.

As in the FBU, the members are being wheeled out like a stage army, with potentially disastrous consequences.

**You're speaking to me from Bournemouth, where the CWU delegation to Labour Party has just voted for Brown's proposal to disenfranchise the unions and CLPs. What are your thoughts?**

When it becomes known among the activists, it will massively increase the pressure for disaffiliation. People will say, there's no ability, even theoretically, to put things to the conference, so why be in the party anyway? Our argument, opposition to both disaffiliation and capitulation, will be even more difficult to make. But most of those advocating disaffiliation will not be putting forward a political alternative — that's another similarity with the FBU — so it's an argument we have to have.

**Will other public sector unions strike alongside the CWU?**

I'm not convinced that the leaderships are really up for it. Look at the example of PCS, which has a live ballot mandate but has failed to use it. The CWU can't hold off waiting for others. Joint days of action would be great and should be fought for, but we can't rely on them or wait.

## NO SWEAT ANNUAL GATHERING 2007

The anti-capitalist workers' rights campaign No Sweat is holding its Annual Gathering on the weekend of 1-2 December, with the theme "beating big brand exploitation".

The event will feature not only sessions on fighting against sweatshop labour, but also organising migrant workers in this country, combating privatisation, the human rights of workers involved in preparations for the Beijing Olympics, and a host of other workers' struggles around the world. The Sunday will be an activist training day, with workshops on campaign skills, street theatre and direct action techniques.

The gathering is being held all day on Saturday 1-Sunday 2 December, at the Unite/T&G building, Theobalds Road, London WC1 (Holborn tube). Tickets for one day cost £6/£3 concs., or for the whole weekend £10/£5. Please visit [www.nosweat.org.uk](http://www.nosweat.org.uk), where you can buy tickets, or find out more information and more details on the agenda.

# Why did union leaders vote to end Labour democracy? An open letter to Tony Woodley

Dear Tony Woodley,

WE hear that at a fringe meeting at Labour Party conference in Bournemouth (23-27 September), you invited a mild critic of your knee-bending before Gordon Brown to "come outside and say that!"

Your offer to punch your critic at least shows some fighting spirit — but, Tony, isn't it the wrong sort of fight, and isn't it misdirected? Evidently you have a bad political conscience? So you should!

Your decision, and that of the other "left" and not-so-left trade union leaders, not to oppose Gordon Brown's moves to abolish Labour Party conference is astounding. Abolition is what it effectively is, Tony.

Motions on current political affairs from unions or local Labour Parties will be banned.

Your willingness to go along with Brown and his cronies in driving the trade unions, the organised working class, out of politics.

That is what the decision is, coming on top of all the changes of the last 13 years.

Future historians of the labour movement will rightly bracket you and the other trade union general secretary surrender-merchants with people such as Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour leader and prime minister who went over to the Tories; Jimmy Thomas, the ex trade union leader who went with him; and, earlier, John Burns, the once-Marxist "Labour" MP who stayed with the Liberals and refused to join Keir Hardie in standing alone in the Commons and building a union-based Labour Party.

That's too harsh a thing to say about a man who is trying to do his best in an unfavourable situation? It is arguably too mild and charitable. You are letting the New Labour political careerists destroy the work of 100 years — the political labour movement.

You are letting the trade unions be reduced to a pressure group in the New Labour machine — and machine is what it is, not a party in any sense labour movement activists over the last hundred and more years, or you yourself all your political life so far, would describe as a political party.

You are letting the unions be reduced to broadly the same relationship that that United Auto Workers of the USA has with the Democratic Party, and the British unions had with the old Liberal Party before the foundation of the Labour Party.

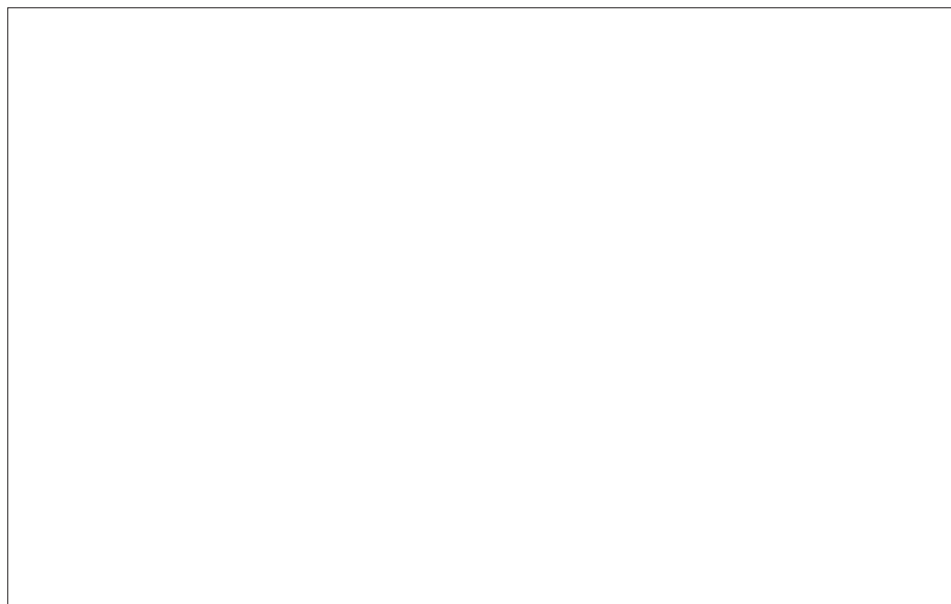
It is worse, in fact, because your union and others continues to give large sums of trade unionists' money to the New Labour machine, to spend as it will, whereas before the creation of the Labour Party the unions financed only their own sponsored small block of Labour candidates and MPs who stood on the Liberal ticket — the so-called Lib-Labs.

IS that where you are leading the labour movement — to reducing labour representation to a small block of union-loyal New Labour MPs? The horrible truth, Tony, is that a solid group of union-loyal, working-class-loyal MPs in the New Labour machine might be an improvement on how things are now in "New Labour", with its swarm of careerist MPs who have neither experience of, concern with, nor loyalty to the working class and its trade union movement.

Here too, things are worse than the old situation with the Liberals: they at least abolished the disabling legal consequences of the Taff Vale court judgement (which made the unions financially liable for employers' losses caused by strikes) soon after coming to power in 1906.

The great mystery is what you and the other union leaders think you gain.

On 12 September you told the *Times* that there was "not a chance" that the unions would support the banning of Labour conference motions. Paul Kenny of the GMB said: "No



MPs line up behind Brown at Labour Conference. Shame on the union leaders for lining up too

one in the GMB is up for changing the constitution".

Derek Simpson, who serves alongside you as joint general secretary of the Amicus-TGWU amalgamation, Unite, had told BBC News on 9 September that, "proposals to reduce the union's policy-making role would be resisted..."

Your idea of opposing Brown's plan was, we understand, to persuade Brown to change his mind. He refused; you fell on your political knees in front of him, in abject surrender.

If Brown were determined, what else could you do? Campaign in the labour movement? Take it to a fight at Labour Party conference? Good god, no! Why not? You'd antagonise Brown!

YOUR entire approach here, Tony, and that of the other union leaders, has been that of the humble courtier, petitioning the all-powerful prince. Hasn't it? Not for you and the others the ringing declaration of the Internationale — "No faith have we in prince or peer/ Our own right hand the chains must shiver/ Chains of hatred, greed and fear".

It isn't even that you have faith in Prince Gordon to serve your interests, is it? On vast swathes of issues, including the anti-union laws, legislation to protect workers from fly-by-night capitalists and make it harder to sack workers, or privatisation, you know very well that he won't. You just don't want to offend him?

Can the movement fall lower? Has it fallen lower than this in a hundred years?

Even the old right-wing trade union leaders, people with a deservedly bad reputation on the left, would have fought the Brown-Blair gang, and this, their latest outrage against the labour movement. Faced with the slice-by-slice destruction of the old working-class character of the Labour Party, faced with the effective disenfranchisement of the working class (for, without our own party, the vote is vastly diminished as a democratic instrument), even they would have fought back.

Your right-wing predecessors as general secretaries of the old TGWU — Ernie Bevin, Arthur Deakin — even they would have fought against the power of the unions in the Labour Party being reduced to that of one humble pressure group amongst others. Wouldn't they? You know they would.

And you and the other union leaders? Why in the name of common sense not?

At most you buy off the extra hostility Brown would perhaps feel against you if you fought him. But if Brown is judged by what he does and does not do, he is a bitter enemy of the labour movement already.

You didn't want to cause ructions in the Labour Party on what may be the eve of a general election? But New Labour is indistin-

guishable from the Tories! Brown's invitation to Thatcher — the most execrable creature in modern British history from any working-class point of view — was maybe calculated to win over old Tories to New Labour, but there was nothing false in the symbolism of the visit. Gordon Brown, like Tony Blair, is one of Margaret Thatcher's political children.

He knows it. Obviously she knows it. Anybody with an ounce of political awareness knows it! And you? You don't? (Incidentally, when was the last time a trade union leader was invited to Downing Street?)

**What are you settling for?  
The trade unions as a  
pressure group, roped to a  
New Labour election-winning  
machine...**

THE traditional anti-Toryism of the labour movement was always, even when there were real differences between Labour and the Tories, an inadequate and poverty-stricken political outlook. It was anti-Toryism that led the labour movement, from the 1980s — long before the Blair-Brown coup — into allowing the Labour Party to be inched slowly on to Tory ground, until today the Labour Party is arguably to the right not only of the Liberal-Democrats (that's old news) but even of Cameron's Tories. Today Labour minister John Hutton attacks the Tories for "downplaying the importance of business" and says: "we want to be the natural party of business" (*Financial Times*, 3 July). That too was symbolised by Thatcher and Brown at the door of 10 Downing Street.

Of course, Cameron is a politically flimsy blatherskite and demagogue on whom no one can rely. *Solidarity* will in the next general election call for a vote for New Labour where there is no socialist candidate, because it will still be backed by the unions. Even so, it is difficult to see how the Tories in power would, on any level, be worse for the labour movement and the working class than Brown's New Labour. The distinctions are more and more meaningless.

You, Tony Woodley, whatever you tell yourself you are doing, are selling out the trade unions and the working class. Yes, that's what you are doing! You.

But more. You and your colleagues in positions of trade union leadership are selling out

democracy. Marxists call what we have bourgeois democracy, because at its best it is only shallow, one-dimensional, political democracy. Even bourgeois democracy is important; but without effective political parties, democracy cannot be exercised by working-class people.

Without political parties, there is no system through which we can decide what we want and hope to act within the political system to achieve it. Even powerful trade unions, financiers of the Labour Party like your own, are reduced to the role of humble advisers and lobbyists to an incumbent all-powerful Prince.

Isn't that true? By letting the New Labour careerists destroy the Labour Party, you are surrendering a great part of the political power that the vote supposedly gives to workers. It is part of an atrophying, a bureaucratisation, of politics that is not at all confined to the Labour Party.

Careerist-driven political machines are replacing the living political parties at the centre of British politics. British politics is being Americanised. Politics becomes a career, like lawyering or huckstering. Careerists view for control of the state; political parties are election-winning mechanisms, saying what the leaders think will win; rich people buy influence openly or covertly; "personality" and "image", projected by expensive advertising techniques, replace concern with policy. Politics becomes almost a brand of show business. Democracy is gutted, most of the time, of much of its substance.

YOU yourself, and the other union leaders, did the same sort of thing in refusing even to consult the union rank and file on your support for Brown's rule changes. Up until a few days before, you told your members there was "no chance" that the union would accept the rule changes; then, without any vote or mandate, you decided to back Brown.

The Labour Party was founded to give the trade unions and the working class a direct voice in Parliament. Today, what are you settling for? The trade unions as a pressure group, roped to a New Labour election-winning machine whose policies, in government and out, are decided by a few people at the top on the basis of focus groups and opinion polls, and handed down to "the party"; a system where you dare not offend the Prince by opposing him, even when he is robbing you of your political birthright, as with the abolition of Labour conference.

You think the changes don't matter, because the Labour Party conference has been a sham for a decade? Why fight over an explicit, formal, proclaimed version of what Labour conference has been de facto for a decade, something that has no say in Labour decision-making?

But the unions have been able at least to proclaim, and even to pass, their favoured policies at the conference. You think that counted for nothing? If so, only because you and the other leaders made it count for nothing by making no complaint when Blair and Brown ignored the conference decisions.

Finally, Brother Woodley, where do you and the other trade union leaders get the right to let Brown abolish Labour Party conference?

Where do you get the right to deprive your members of the right to have their say and decide what their union will do?

As incumbents, you evidently can do what you have done — but morally, as well as politically and democratically, you have no right to do it. You should be, and will be, called to account at the union conferences next year. The decision to abolish the trade-union voice in politics can still be reversed, and we will fight to reverse it!

*Solidarity*

## HEALTH SERVICE

## 3 November demo

BY A HEALTH WORKER

THE long awaited national demonstration in defence of the NHS will take place on 3 November. It's now 18 months since the decision to call a demo was made at UNISON's health conference, but it has been an ongoing battle to make it happen. This despite the widespread popularity of such an idea with many hundreds of thousands taking part in local actions.

Local campaigns have had great successes in stopping closures and saving jobs. But it's been widely understood that local cuts are only symptoms of the national decisions made to further privatise the health service. We needed a national response, focused against the government, to call a halt to these moves.

The unions have unfortunately tried to sideline the community campaigns, such as Keep Our NHS Public, and have organised separately as NHS Together. A national day of action on 3 March was very patchy and overall the impact was less than a national demo could have delivered. Even on the 3 November demonstration the publicity highlights limited aims — to celebrate and demonstrate our solidarity with the NHS. There is no clear demand to halt and reverse privatisation. Yet this is a popular demand with majority support!

We need to organise now to get people on the demo, booking transport and selling tickets. That can start to develop a different mood for the day that can challenge the low expectations of the organisers and be the launchpad of an ongoing national campaign, cohered around the principle of a publicly funded, publicly controlled and free health service for all.

Provisional details are: 11am, assemble at Temple Place, Victoria Embankment, London. Noon, march through Westminster for a 1pm rally in Trafalgar Square.

Over the next few weeks we'll be carrying more info on the demonstration and how to build for it. Please let us know how things are going in your area and reports of any local campaigns.

## Karen Reissmann

MANCHESTER mental health workers have held a second three day strike to protest against the victimisation of their UNISON steward, Karen Reissmann. Karen was suspended in June for supposedly bringing the health trust she works for into disrepute after leading a previous strike against cut jobs and making public plans to cut services.

Workers have decided to take two day strike action again from Wednesday 26 September.

Patients bussed as far away as Darlington returned to their usual hospitals following the second strike but it is unclear whether that means that management has accepted the union's offer to provide emergency cover.

Send donations payable to "Manchester Community and Mental Health Branch Unison". Messages of support and requests for speakers to

## Build local solidarity!

BY MIKE FENWICK, UNISON

A T TUC conference motions were passed calling for coordinated action, and use was even found for the old slogan that "unity is strength". But behind the scenes union leaders were singing a different tune...

Unison's Health group ballot on pay got a 2 to 1 vote for accepting a staged 2.5% deal. This followed efforts by full time officers to close down any campaign for a no vote. A majority of NHS workers in England will now get a rise of 1.9% this year, half of even the most conservative inflation figure.

The setback was used to try and pressure Unison's Local Government Executive to back down from their call for a strike ballot. Fortunately that failed and the vote will be held soon. Two days of strikes are already planned for November.

We can now expect local government workers, possibly to be joined by teachers, postal workers and civil servants to take action in the next few months. (The executive of the civil service union PCS has decided on a further "consultative ballot on national industrial

action". The ballot will start on 28 September and close on 22 October.)

With mortgage rates rising the squeeze on wages becomes tighter. Brown will be more determined to keep the lid on pay at 2%. To breakthrough that limit will need coordinated action across the public sector to maximise the impact of each individual action. Organising action cannot be left to the general secretaries alone.

Right now words are being turned into action only at a local level, with some revival in the activity of local trade councils which can help co-ordinated local unions. In some areas more direct contact has been established between public sector union branches, creating Public Sector Alliances. Weekly meetings to plan action, share information and discuss a joint strategy are exactly what the general secretaries should be doing. But they will have to respond to the growing number of local networks delivering solidarity on the ground.

Activists now need to:

- Organise local networks of trade union activists in support of those in struggle, and bring the idea of "solidarity" back into every-

day use. The Public Sector Alliances in Leeds and Luton with teachers, local government, postal workers, civil servants, etc., coming together are good examples.

- Continue to pressurise the union leaders to make joint action a reality.
- Develop "rank and file" structures to keep disputes under local democratic control, set up strike committees and hold officials to account.
- Twin branches not yet in action with those who are, particularly in Unison where the confidence and lead of those in local government could spread and trigger wider disputes.
- Link up with broader campaigns, like Keep Our NHS Public, in local communities and the broader labour movement. Many current struggles such as in the post are in big part about privatisation; we need to make the links between pay cuts and privatisation explicit.
- Maintain a public profile with stalls and petitions to win the support of those who use public services.
- For regular updates, news and downloads on the public sector pay campaign, see <http://unionsfightback.wordpress.com>

Union office, Chorlton House, 70 Manchester Road, M21 9UN. Send protests to: Chief executive Sheila Foley, [sheila.foley@mhsc.nhs.uk](mailto:sheila.foley@mhsc.nhs.uk) and copy to [unison@zen.co.uk](mailto:unison@zen.co.uk)

## CIVIL SERVICE

## DWP pay dispute

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

FOLLOWING their rejection of a three year pay offer that will see 27% of staff in the Department of Work and Pensions staff get consolidated rises of 2% in year 1, 40% get 0% in year 2 and 49% get 1% in year 3, PCS and Prospect have met with DWP bosses for further talks.

Another meeting is taking place as we go to press, with the PCS DWP executive meeting on 27 September "to receive a report of these talks and take decisions on the next stage of our campaign." (The Retail Price Index rate of inflation — PCS's preferred measure — rose to from 3.8% in July to 4.1% in August.)

It is not clear yet what will come out of negotiations and, if this is unacceptable, what action the union's DWP executive will call.

Some senior managers, already on annual salaries of up to £63,510, are set to receive bonuses for performance of £1,785 whilst the majority of admin staff and first line managers on salaries between £12,340 and £23,510 get annual bonuses of between £115 and £200.

Not only are civil servants falling behind other groups of public sector workers, pay in the DWP compares badly with other government departments. The maximum an Administrative Officer can earn in 2010 will be £17,780. Yet in Revenue and Customs AOs now can earn up to £18,305. This rises to £23,534 in the Ministry of Defence.

This graphically illustrates why one of the national union's campaign demands is so important, a return to national pay bargaining and a driving up to the best rates in the civil service.

Which brings us to the national campaign. The National Executive have just concluded a consultation exercise where members stated we need more action to achieve our demands. It is likely that the NEC will call another one day strike before the end of the year, possibly around some political event, such as the Queen's speech on 6 November. The NEC are keen to link up with other unions in dispute. Now that local government workers are being balloted for a two day strike in November, there are possibilities of joint action. Despite having a legal mandate to call further action, PCS is calling another consultative ballot.

It seems that the NEC have held the consultation exercise and now the ballot to fill in the gaps between the one day strikes (the last strike was held on 1 May, some five months ago). Independent left supporters have called for selective action in key areas such as DWP contact centres, passport offices etc. to be funded by a national levy of all members to fill in the gaps between the national strikes.

Sporadic one day protest strikes as a strategy are unlikely to win our demands.

## Tube workers debate election campaign

LAST month the Camden No 3 (London Underground) branch of the RMT rail workers' union passed a motion advocating the union run a slate of candidates in the 2008 London mayoral and Greater London Assembly elections.

More recently the same branch passed an amendment to its own motion which broadens out the proposal, and Neasden branch passed a longer version with a preamble (see below). All should be discussed at the RMT's London Transport Regional Council on 27 September.

These motions will be opposed by people from the group around Bob Crow who want to create a purely-RMT slate focussing solely on the issue of Tube privatisation, and by the SWP, who do not want anything to get in the way of Respect. We'll see what happens.

Meanwhile, activists in other unions, anti-cuts campaigns, left groups and so on must begin to raise similar demands in their own

organisations. A broad working-class challenge in the London elections, backed by the RMT, would be a step forward for winning an effective working-class voice in politics.

*Preamble passed by Neasden branch*

This branch believes that changes in both the policy and internal structures of the Labour Party over the last decade and a half have been a major set back for working-class political representation in this country; and that in this situation, it is left to the unions to begin to reconstruct a working-class political force. We therefore advocate that the RMT takes the initiative in the creation of a slate of independent working-class candidates in the upcoming GLA and London Mayoral elections, to give working-class Londoners a chance to express their opposition to the various political representatives of business and vote for a positive alternative.

*Section passed by both Neasden and*

*Camden No 3*

To be effective, such a slate would need to:

- a) Draw in, or at least attempt to draw in, broader forces than just the RMT, by approaching other unions, anti-privatisation and cuts campaigns, tenants' organisations, socialist groups and so on.

- b) Develop a manifesto which speaks to the many different issues facing workers, working-class communities and oppressed groups in London, such as education, the health service, housing, a living wage and trade union rights — while of course making the demand for a 100% publicly owned, democratically controlled, integrated and cheap public transport system central. A broad focus will make the challenge stronger.

This branch therefore asks that the union issue a call for such a slate of candidates and approach other unions and campaign groups in London.

## FREMANTLE

## More strikes

200 careworkers at the Fremantle Trust, which holds the contracts for care homes in Barnet, North London, took their fourth day of strike action on Thursday 20 September as part of an ongoing fight against drastic cuts in their pay and conditions. Protesting outside the company HQ, workers held up signs spelling out the words "Dismantle Fremantle" and "We will not be silenced".

The dispute started in April when the bosses announced that there would be a new regime of longer hours, slashed annual leave and sick pay, along with pay cuts of up to 30%. The Barnet Unison website ([www.barnetunison.blogspot.com](http://www.barnetunison.blogspot.com)) gives the example of one worker who as a Barnet Council employee used to earn £6,300 a year before tax for working 26 weekends and 8 bank holidays, but under Fremantle will now receive just £4,500. When privatisation was introduced terms and conditions were "protected" — those guarantees have now proven to be hollow.

Despite the victimisation of Unison steward Andrew Rogers and Fremantle's successful bid to have the Labourstart solidarity website taken down, the campaign is still going strong, and workers are hoping to link up with other public sector employees with the upcoming Unison Local Government strike ballot. Labourstart has sidestepped the bosses' manoeuvre by setting up a new address ([www.wewillnotbesilenced.org](http://www.wewillnotbesilenced.org)), which, along with the Barnet Unison blog, has up-to-date news on the dispute.

## Apology

In *Solidarity* 3/117, we reported that the National Union of Teachers had signed up to help Tory leader David Cameron develop his plan for a national volunteering service for young people. Our NUT comrades tell us that this is not true, but simply a piece of Tory spin. We therefore apologise to the NUT.

Rally for trade union freedom  
18 OCTOBER

Demonstration 4pm outside Parliament, followed by meeting in Committee room 14, House of Commons, at 5.30pm  
Called in support of the Trade Union Freedom Bill

# Crisis of the New Financial Order

Continued from back page

## IS THIS all connected to the rise of the "private equity" bandits?

Yes. It has become vastly easier for getting capitalists to raise enormous sums of credit, so long as they promise big repayments. As journalist Martin Wolf puts it: "With the vast size of the new private equity funds and the scale of the bond financing arranged by the big banks, even the largest and most established companies are potentially for sale and break-up... [This] has greatly increased the power of owners (shareholders) over that of incumbent management... The new financial capitalist represents the triumph of the trader in assets over the long-term producer".

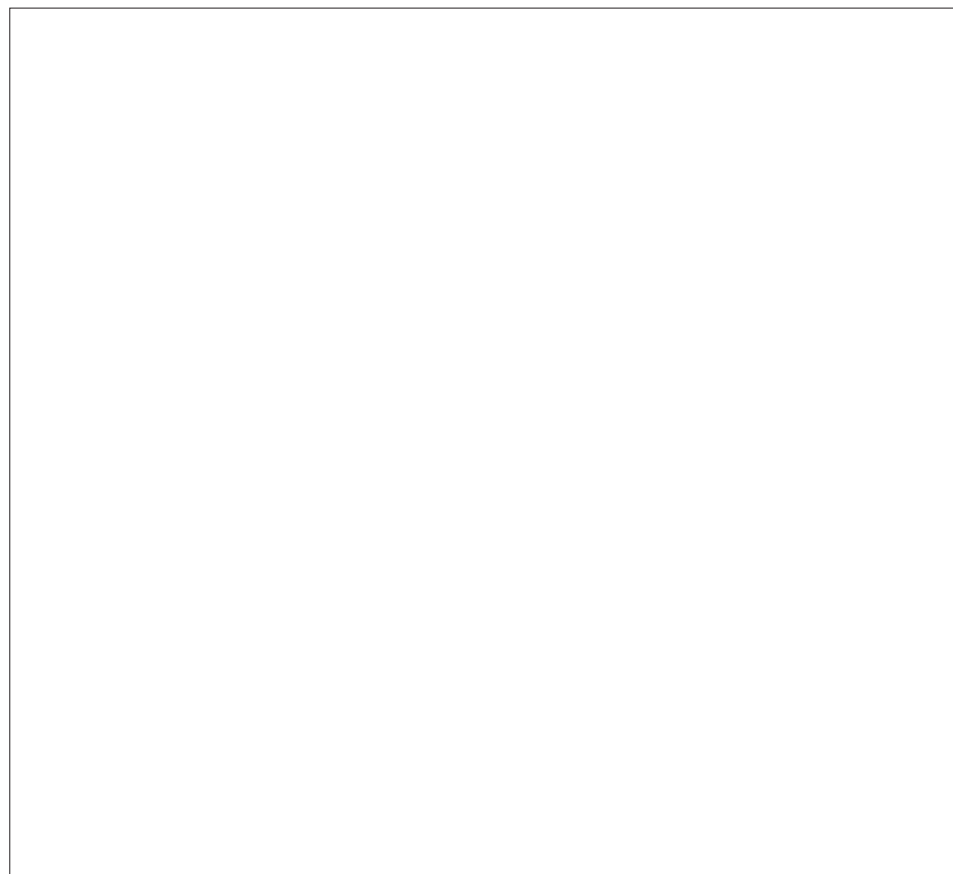
Although corporations are still getting bigger, this centralisation of capital goes together with *sharper*, not muted, capitalist competition. And that cuts most sharply against the working class.

Even the conservative Wolf writes: "Across the globe there has been a sizeable shift in income from labour to capital. Newly 'incentivised' managers, free from inhibitions, feel entitled to earn vast multiples of their employees' wages. Financial speculators earn billions of dollars, not over a lifetime but in a single year..."

"Democratic politics, which gives power to the majority, is sure to react against the new concentrations of wealth and income". Which is, though Wolf doesn't say so, why democracy has been systematically shrivelled by the new wave of neo-liberal social democrats, Blair, Brown, Ségolène Royal, Schröder, Rudd, and the rest.

## Has the government done the right thing over Northern Rock?

It's good that ordinary savers have their deposits insured. Chancellor Alistair Darling protests that he is not seeking to compensate the bosses and shareholders for their financial mistakes. Inevitably, though, that is in large part what he is doing. He has set things up so that banks have a government guarantee to cover their obligations to their depositors, but very little government control over what they



Alistair Darling compensates bosses

do with the money the depositors hand over to them.

The proper answer to the whirl of the new global finance-capitalism is nationalisation — or multinational public ownership — under democratic control of the banks and financial institutions. That way, savings and pensions can be secured, and funds can be invested on social criteria.

But to get that we will need, not just demands on the present "New Labour" government, but a revolutionisation of the labour movement to fit it to create a workers' government.

## Gordon Brown preens himself on ten years of uninterrupted economic growth. Doesn't that show that he's good on economics, if nothing else?

Well, it's also ten years of uninterrupted growth of inequality. Mostly, UK capitalism has benefited from more benign conditions in world capitalist markets. The UK has an advantage over other European Union economies in being more oriented to the US market, which has been expanding fairly steadily, and in London (mostly by reasons of historical chance) having become the world's biggest financial centre, at a time of huge growth of the world finance "industry".

## Who is irrational? Reflections of a Northern Rock saver

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

WHILE the crisis was going on I had most of my savings in Northern Rock, so I spent a lot of time thinking about what to do. My initial feeling (rightly as it turned out) was to sit tight as the government would be forced to do something because of a possible threat to the banking system as a whole and the likely political fallout in "Middle England". But by Monday 18th, I was wavering and had decided to join the queues so that I wouldn't face major (well by my standards, major) losses if the bank did go under.

Darling's guarantee meant that wasn't necessary. But I got very angry about reports in the media, painting those trying to get their money out as "irrational", panicking, and following "herd psychology".

It is obviously not irrational to want to prevent a bank swallowing your money because of decisions taken by its managers and the markets. It is impossible to generalise about who the savers were — they probably ranged from the rich (but not the very rich who have better advice on these things) to the small savers dependent on what they had to maintain an average lifestyle.

Under the compensation scheme set up by the banks, anyone who had more than £2,000 stood to lose, with those with over £35,000 losing everything above that limit if the bank went under (OK, not the poorest in society, but that's still only 1/40 of the NR

Chief Executive's annual salary, and means a chunk out of many people's life savings).

So in the face of repeated statements that the bank was "solvent" and that the Bank of England's offer to lend would cover any gaps in NR's balance sheet, it really came down to whether you accepted that that meant that all of the savers' cash was safe — or, in other words whether you trusted the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Governor of the Bank of England, and the banking regulation system.

There were good reasons not to once you looked at things in detail. The Bank of England can only act as "lender of last resort" against collateral and, in the case of Northern Rock, that consists of the mortgages it has lent money for. Given that NR was lending more than the value of the houses bought and up to six times annual income, it is unclear how many of these are "sub-prime" and how they would be valued by the Bank. As actual details of the agreement between the Bank of England and NR were kept secret, nobody could be sure that the Bank of England's offer to lend would cover all the deposits by savers. BBC journalist Robert Peston calculated that they just about would but it was a fine line. Plus the Governor of the Bank of England was at the same giving signals that he opposed any bail-out.

Obviously Darling and all the others who spent time talking up NR's solvency knew all this. So what was going on was an attempt to convince people it was all under control in the hope that this would restore confidence and enable everything to get back to normal.

The people in the queues called his bluff. Does that make them irrational? Or were they acting according to the rational self-interest that is valued when shown by entrepreneurs and bankers?

There is a stark contrast in the way Northern Rock savers were treated compared with those who saved with Farepak, who lost much smaller sums saved for Christmas, or workers who lost when occupational pension schemes went bust. The difference lies in their potential impact on the financial system and money markets, which now play a dominant role in the British economy, and the likely consequences if the debt bubble burst (which it still may). Once it was clear that there was a run on Northern Rock, Darling could not afford to let the loss of confidence spread.

The crisis points to how the absence of good public provision for housing and old age — decent state pensions and care — forces more and more people into reliance on a speculative financial system over which they have absolutely no control to secure even their basic needs.

It is irrational that people's livelihoods, chances of a decent retirement and place to live should depend to on the invention of "new business models" which largely serve to make the rich richer and on gambling on whether you can convince others to buy dud loans by bundling them with good ones. But New Labour Chancellors couldn't admit that, could they? People would lose confidence in the system...

Yet when the Bank of England attempted international comparisons of profit rates in manufacturing, the UK came bottom, or nearly bottom, of the 13 countries surveyed. Only (high) oil profits and (middling) service-sector profits make the overall profit performance middling.

Gordon Brown actually has not much to boast about even as an administrator of capitalism.

## Will house prices crash?

In the USA housing starts have fallen by 42%, and could fall much further. Best guess is that house prices will drop between 15% and 50%. It's the only year-on-year drop in US house prices since the 1930s, and the bursting of an unprecedented house-price "bubble".

House prices had nearly doubled — relative to other prices in the USA — since 1997. The bubble was helped on by mortgages becoming much easier for people who were "poor credit risks". Eventually, a lot of those borrowers couldn't pay their mortgages, and the bubble burst.

A lot of people in the USA will lose their houses. A lot will see the market-value of their house collapse. This has snowball effects through the economy, especially as so much consumer spending these days is on credit. Since the USA is a big export market for the rest of the world, there are further snowball effects world-wide.

House-prices have "bubbled" in the UK too, and in other economies. The credit crisis makes a house-price slump, and at least some knock-on effects, likely in many countries.

## So the Northern Rock collapse is the first sign of a general crisis in trade and production?

Maybe, but probably not. Capitalism can get through quite large crises in the financial sector without a collapse in trade and production — as in 1987. This credit crisis comes at a time when capitalist growth and profit figures are mostly strong.

## Doesn't the well-known Marxist writer Robert Brenner say we're in a long-term "decrease in the dynamism of the advanced capitalist economies... rooted in a major drop of profitability"?

I don't think he's quite right on that. Figures for profitability are elusive: the official statisticians do not publish them as regular series of comparable figures.

But, for example, the latest figures on UK profitability of private non-financial corporations show a rate of 15.1% in 2007 quarter one and 15.2% in 2006 quarter 4 — the highest rates since 1965. (Profitability slumped in the 1970s, was slow to recover in the 1980s but has picked up since 1992 with a blip in 2001-2).

Figures for ratio of profits to assets of US corporations (calculated differently from the UK figures, and not comparable) stood at 4.1% in 2006, above not only the 1.6% of 2001 but also the best of the 90s, 3.7% in 1997. The share of corporate profits in US national income rose from 8.5% in 2001 to 13.3% in 2006 (above the 11.9% level of 1997).

## The UK economy is heavily finance-centred. Does that mean that it is bound to be hit hard by this crisis even if it remains a largely financial one?

Not necessarily. In a financial crisis, some outfits go bust, but some do well.

Brenner: *Guardian*, 26/09/07

Clever intermediaries: Martin Wolf, *Financial Times*, 04/09/07

Credit derivatives: Nouriel Roubini on [www.rgemonitor.com](http://www.rgemonitor.com), 19/09/07

Global financial assets: Wolf, *FT*, 18/06/07

House price bubbles world-wide: Wolf, *FT*, 11/09/07

International comparisons of profitability: *Economic Trends* 587, October 2002. (No studies since then).

UK profitability: [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk), series LRWW

US housing: Roubini, 25/09/07

US profits: Federal Reserve FFA 1995-2006, tables F.102, B.102, F.7

# Pakistan: wave of arrests

**Farooq Tariq is the General Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan. He explains how he has been caught up in the government's suppression of opposition parties.**

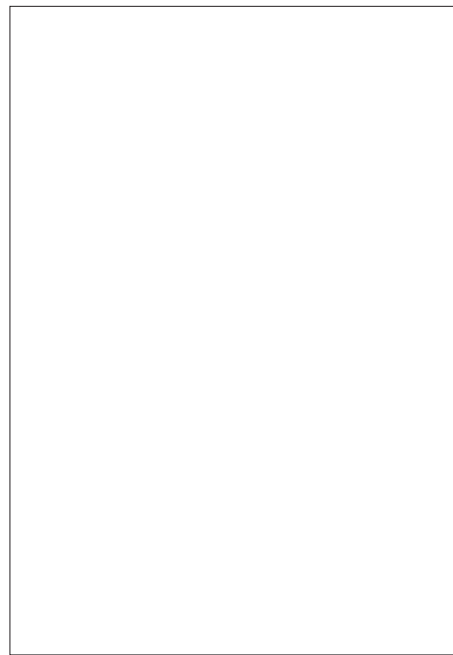
**I**AVOIDED another arrest on 23 September. I had just returned home at 11pm from Toba Tek Singh, a five hour drive from Lahore. I am planning to contest the general election for national parliament from Toba Tek Singh, my home city. When the bell rang, I was sure it was the police again. My partner Shahnaz asked me who it could be at this time of the night. Our children had just gone to sleep, but our daughter Mashal (14) got up as well, because the bell was ringing constantly. I asked Shahnaz to check who they are and if it was the police to tell that I am not at home. We had decided that I will not be easily arrested this time [Farooq was arrested in June this year]. If I am at home and the police come, they will have to break the doors to get me out. I was also sick and tired of the police knocking my door again and again.

Shahnaz went out and she was tricked by the

police into open the door. They said they were friends of Farooq. But when she opened the door, she found dozens of policemen in uniform and they asked where I am. Shahnaz who has now become used to police arrivals at our door step, told them courageously that he is not here, he is in Toba Tek Singh. My daughter Mashal was with her watching the drama.

They did not insist on entering our home instead they asked for my mobile number, which was given to them. The police officer phoned my number. It started ringing at home. Mashal immediately felt the danger and ran inside to stop the phone. This could have convinced the police officer that I was at home but he did not force himself inside the door and said thanks to Shahnaz.

Shahnaz closed the door but the police remained there for some time. I was afraid the police would climb the walls and break in. But it seems the police officer was just doing his duty and not really interested in going any further. It was the same police officer with his team who had arrested me last time.



Farooq Tariq

I then sent news to friends and them press informing that I had just avoided an arrest. Police are arresting most of the activists from the opposition parties, including the main leadership of the opposition parties. This is to avoid more demonstrations against General Musharraf, who wants to be reelected for the next five years from a parliament which elected him with the help of the religious fundamentalists in 2002. But this time the religious parties do not want him to be elected and have decided with other political parties to resign from the parliament instead of electing him.

The regime has arrested dozens of activists

and leaders of different political parties and is raiding houses of more activists like me.

Going to jail again and again is no good. Comrades and friends have made jokes — whenever, I meet a friend, he asks me when have you come out (of jail) or when are you going in?

My son Abdullah, who is seven, told me this morning that it now my turn to play the “find and hide” game with police. When he was only one year old, the police came to arrest me at my home. Shahnaz and myself were not at home. When Razia, the woman who was taking care of Abdullah, told the policeman that Farooq was not at home, he said okay, where is his son? I will take him with me and then Farooq will definitely come to be arrested — a normal practice by many police in Pakistan. He did not know that my son was only one year old.

Razia brought Abdullah outside and told the police officer in anger, “Yes, you can arrest him, he is son of Farooq”. Looking at Abdullah, the police officer was ashamed, said sorry, went back and did not come again for some time.

When I was living in a rented place, my house boss was arrested and my office boss was arrested instead of me when police were unable to find me at home and at the office. I went to one friend who was the editor of *Daily Jang* to help get the release of my home and office bosses. When he heard, he advised me to leave the buggers with police because at least I do not have to pay rent anymore.

I will attend the demonstration on 27 September and till then will try to stop the police getting hold of me.

So be ready for a new possible solidarity campaign please.

• [www.laborpakistan.org](http://www.laborpakistan.org)

## WORKERS' NEWS ROUND-UP

BY PABLO VELASCO

### Egypt: 15,000 workers strike and occupy

**S**OME 15,000 workers at the Ghazl el-Mahalla textile factory in Egypt went on strike on 23 September, occupying the Middle East's largest textile plant, despite the fear of state repression and condemnation from the government-run General Federation for Textile Workers.

According to the Arabawy blog ([www.arabist.net/arabawy](http://www.arabist.net/arabawy)), Mahalla workers have put out a list of eight demands - impeaching the company board chairman; impeaching the Factory Union Committee officials; linking the monthly incentives to a fixed percentage of the monthly basic salary; increasing the food allowance to match the increase in prices; raising the salaries to match the increase in prices; paying the workers 130 days' worth of annual profits shares; solving the transportation crisis; and paying the workers their housing allowances.

President Mubarak soon sent in the police to surround the occupied factory, and five of the strike's leaders were charged with “sabotage” and “inciting riots” - but then he was forced to release them again upon realizing that this merely poured fuel onto the fire of the workers' anger. Released from prison late in the evening of the 25th, the arrested activists received a heroes' welcome from striking workers.

Central Security Forces trucks have established a ring of steel around the factory, and the surrounding streets have been cleared out. There is a grave threat that they will storm the factory and evict the occupation. But the signs are that the workers are solid in their course, with the support of local residents and a sit-in solidarity demonstration by 5,000 workers on the 25th at another textile factory, Kafr el-Dawwar. At a Mahalla workers' rally on the morning of 26 September, union leaders who attempted to offer a compromise deal to end the strike were met with whistles and booing, since they were unable to explain to the militant rank-and-file exactly how they hoped to make sure that management kept to their ill-defined “promises”.

This action is just the latest in a series of strikes which have rocked Egypt and its despotic regime in 2007. The last six months alone have seen almost twice

as many strikes as in the whole of 2006. While the Egyptian media has suffocated news of the strike and western broadcasters have ignored it, preferring to present the Middle East simply as the playground of Islamist militias and US Marines, the Mahalla strike is the sign of the possibilities for working-class organisation and a resurgent labour movement in the region.

For extensive coverage and up-to-the-minute reports on the strike, along with photos and videos, see [www.arabist.net/arabawy](http://www.arabist.net/arabawy)

### Venezuela

BY MILTON D'LEÓN

**O**N AUGUST 15, Hugo Chávez announced his constitutional reform in the National Assembly after months of secrecy. It is important to emphasize that the constitutional reform has as one of its priorities increasing the concentration of power in the figure of Chávez.

In the reform, not only is the presidential term extended from 6 to 7 years, but it is defined that immediate re-election continues for as many times as [the President] wishes to submit to an election. The system of plebiscites accentuates the Bonapartist characteristics of a whole system of government.

In the case of the “Bolivarian armed forces,” according to the reform, Chávez takes the authority to promote officers in all ranks. He demands “supreme authority in the chain of command in all its entities, components and units.” Chávez does not need prior approval from the National Assembly for all his titles. In this way, all military-administrative power is concentrated in the figure of the President, and everything for any promotion depends on Chávez' approval. He talks about a “popular militia,” but this is only a change of name for the traditional national reserve, which is directly under Chávez's command.

Chávez is authorized to rule by decree for one more year; this authority can be renewed. With so many powers in the person of the President, many people will wonder, why have a National Assembly? With the reform, the President will have a free hand under a more and more Bonapartist regime and will be able to regiment his policies without being answerable even to the National Assembly.

And, as if it were a small matter, the President assumes control of the entire public treasury; the central bank and all the [currency] reserves will now be controlled by the President, as well as the already controlled economic stabilization fund, in addition to the complete control Chávez has now over PDVSA.

To conceal the new concentration of powers, Chávez talks about the “people's power,” raised to constitutional rank, of the communal councils, etc. But this is just a rip-off, since the already controlled communal councils will be directly dependent, politically and economically, on the President. If there were any autonomy in any communal council, they will lose all power on being co-opted and directly led by the state.

We have already seen how the government has tried to restrain the unions by limiting their independence by all means, with the aim of tying the hands of the workers' movement. Now it is trying to create “work councils” within the factories, spreading the tentacles of the state through these councils, as well as in all the popular neighbourhood organizations.

Abridged from the revolutionary socialist youth organisation JIR in Venezuela. See [www.ft-ci.org/articulo.php3?id\\_article=975](http://www.ft-ci.org/articulo.php3?id_article=975)

### International rights

**S**OME 144 trade unionists were murdered for defending workers' rights in 2006, an increase of some 25% compared to 2005, according to a new report by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), who also recorded nearly 5,000 arrests and more than 8,000 dismissals of workers for their trade union activities.

Colombia was again the most dangerous place in the world for union activity, with 78 killings, almost all of which were carried out by paramilitary death squads linked to government officials or acting at the behest of employers. Of 1,165 murders documented between 1994 and 2006, only 56 perpetrators have been brought to trial, and a total of 14 have been sentenced.

A wave of anti-union violence in the Philippines is also documented, with 33 unionists and worker-rights supporters murdered, in some cases by killers acting in collusion with the military and the police. Dictatorships and authoritarian governments in Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, North Korea and several Gulf countries maintained their suppression of independent trade unions, with more than 100 Chinese workers detained in prisons and forced labour camps in appalling conditions. The Zimbabwean government continued its violent repression of the country's trade union movement. Some 265 trade unionists were arrested by the authorities.

The survey reports growing government hostility to workers' rights in some industrialised countries, such as Australia, as well as the anti-union activities of multinational companies, including Coca Cola, Wal-Mart, Goodyear and Nestlé.

However the report also registered that there are now 168 million workers in 153 countries in independent trade unions.

• <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

# Organising fast food workers

**Mike Kyriazopoulos interviews Jared Phillips, a Unite Fast Food Organiser and Workers Party activist in New Zealand.**

**MK: How did Unite plan its organising in fast food?**

JP: The background is that Unite went from being an unemployed or community union to being a low paid workers' union. Inroads started in the hotels, Sky City Casino, etc. There were plans to unionise the café industry but the real companies dominant in the service sector are the large brands or chains in the fast food and café industry. The first real campaign here was the Burger King campaign in Auckland which kicked off around 2003/4. However, BK was the last company of the big five that we managed to get a deal with.

Unite organises in BK, McDonalds, Wendy's and Red Rooster as well as the cinemas. But with Starbucks what we're talking about is KFC, Pizza Hut and Starbucks which comprises Restaurant Brands Ltd NZ.

The general approach when going for the big chains had to be a mass one – you need quite a large campaign team routinely visiting sites and building a mass membership, rather than trying to get militants in the store who are "secret". I think Unite found that militancy came from the mass, not the other way around, as some suggest is the right way to organise in conditions of victimization.

**With Starbucks specifically, how much headway have you made?**

The structure of the company is you have an area manager with a cluster of five or six Starbucks. Within each store you have a manager, a few assistant managers or shift supervisors. So this is the same as the fast-food structure.

As with the other fast food stores, we negotiated an access protocol. With Restaurants Brands we can basically visit at any time except 12 - 2pm and 5.30 - 8am and 5 - 8pm. We talk to employees one-by-one.

With Starbucks, with some employees, there has been a problem of low wage affluence. Some of the employees see themselves as being above fast food workers because they make coffee. But their wages were

actually very low. Now, because of the activity of the union, they are actually getting something nearer to a living wage, if not a living wage. Also another trend in the last couple of years is that all the gas stations are now serving proper coffee, so the higher skill attitude of some of the barristas might start to go.

**How did the SupersizeMyPay campaign fit in?**

Supersize was a political campaign and an industrial campaign. The main demands were for a \$12/ hour minimum wage, abolish youth rates, and security of hours. We made inroads on all of those things. The organisers took those demands out everywhere. It did play a real unifying role in having an industry-wide campaign.

**What was the proportion of paid to unpaid organisers involved in getting the campaign off the ground?**

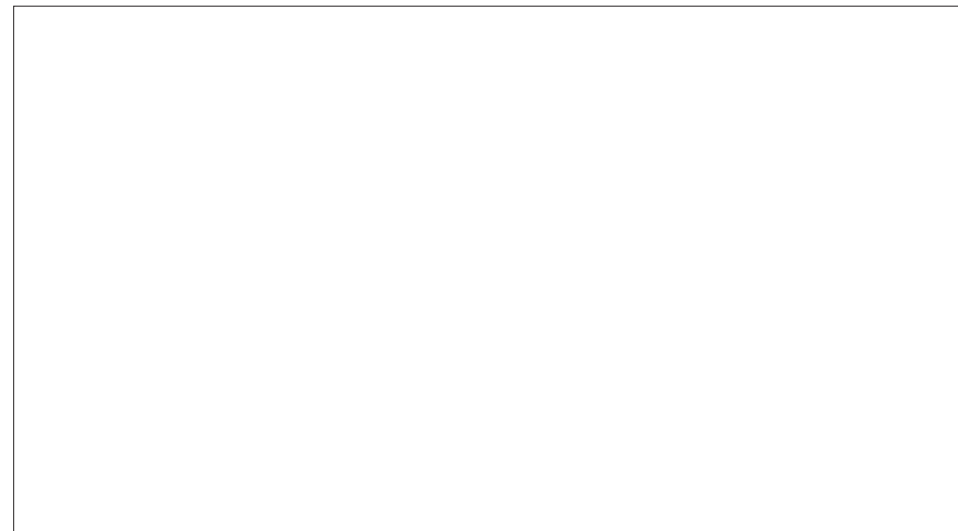
Most people in Auckland were getting some sort of pay. But it's only this year that we've been able to employ full time organisers in Wellington and Christchurch. At the start there was a lot of volunteer blood and sweat in setting up Unite. They started with nothing. They ran out of cash at one stage, and then a housekeeper who had left another union gave her redundancy to Unite. But there were a lot of semi-paid volunteers and volunteers in the early period.

**Who were the volunteers?**

Firstly rank and file militants who had been burnt by other unions, then socialists or communists and anarchists and also, quite importantly, some Maori Sovereignty activists. Also, quite importantly, the unite leadership was formerly involved in the social democratic Alliance Party.

**How long was it before you were able to establish delegate structures?**

We're still doing that! It's been a huge struggle, and we're still debating how best to do it. This is really a question of organising



in the new growth industries as well. You can't expect to see your delegate when you go on site to do your site visits, 'cos you turn up and there's like a one in 14 possibility that it's a shift that your delegate's on.

I personally advocate the setting up of committees of two-three-four people in each store. In principle they should be elected, but at this early stage, natural leaders just emerge. If we're trying to build for a really big Restaurant Workers Conference; we want about 175 people from the industry.

**How has the Employment Relations Act helped or hindered your organising?**

Strikes are illegal outside of the negotiating period. This is a very real shackle which forces us into grievance proceedings to deal with problems, and we are not strong enough to challenge the anti-strike legislation in a front-on way. There was a right to strike campaign a few years ago, but there wasn't the groundswell of struggle required to bring it through in any meaningful way.

Sometimes I get sick to fuck with people just parroting about the right to strike without addressing what are the problems caused by the inhibiting of strikes in the industry.

We are always dealing with casework. Every day, workers have hours stolen, time records adjusted, bullying is rife, incorrect pay, etc, all of this is just ongoing. My impression is that there is a much higher ratio of casework in this industry than the more traditional and secure industries. We get caught up in mediation with so-called "good faith" and so on.

Aside from the negotiating periods, in which there have been many lightning strikes (two to three hour strikes), there has been some other industrial action, for example, a wildcat strike we only found out about after the event. It was at a Starbucks store in fact. Four workers shut the store down for about five hours because of bullying. They just put a sign on the door saying "Closed because of strike action"! It was really awesome, cos these people were all really young – aged about 20 or younger – and they didn't have enough understanding of the Employment Relations Act, and the fact that the activity, being post-negotiation, was illegal. This really brought the issues to the fore much quicker than a personal grievance. We couldn't formally endorse that strike, but we did go out and handle their disciplinaries and gave them a whole bunch of t-shirts and badges and all the rest of it!

## Iranian unions under attack

**G**OVERNMENT repression of the emerging labour movement continues in Iran, with more arrests, charges and harassment. In August five members of the Tehran bus drivers' union were accused of acting against Iranian national security, after they visited the home of Mansour Ossanlou, himself jailed in July on similar charges. Although three had since been released, they still face a serious charge.

Ossanlou has apparently been sentenced to four years in prison for acting against national security, and to an additional year for disseminating propaganda against the country's Islamic system. Earlier this month Parvaneh Ossanloo, the wife of Mansour Ossanlou, and as his sister, were arrested after speaking with Nobel peace prize winner Shirin Ebadi about the case. They were bundled into cars by plainclothes police officers along with other women. Shortly after Ebadi protested vehemently and they were released.

What is needed is more international solidarity. After global protests on 9 August, Ossanlou was allowed to hold a meeting with his lawyers in Evin prison and call his wife, while another activist, Mahmoud Salehi, received medical treatment in a hospital outside Sanandaj prison.

## France: No divide and rule! Defend the right to strike!

**INTRODUCTION AND TRANSLATION BY JOAN TREVOR**

**F**RENCH president Nicolas Sarkozy has hit the ground running, hoping to capitalise on the apparent mood for change that saw him elected in May. He will need momentum to push through the changes that will make France more like Thatcherite Britain; that is, to bulldoze the working-class opposition that thwarted his predecessors.

He has already passed legislation to reduce public transport workers' right to strike, by establishing a minimum service level in rail and road transport, and announced that he wants to worsen railworkers' pension regime and drastically cut the number of civil servants.

He has also intensified his government's attacks on immigrants, making it harder for them to bring family to join them in France. Transport unions have called a day of action on 17 October to protest against the attacks on transport workers.

Below we publish a statement issued by the 16 September meeting of signatories to an appeal to defend the right to strike, "The right to strike is not negotiable". They stress the need for the whole working class to unite against Sarkozy's attacks. The appeal is available in French at <http://droitdegreve.wordpress.com/le-droit-de-greve-est-pas-negotiable/> and soon in English too on the Workers' Liberty website.

**S**ARKOZY AND [PRIME Minister] Fillon have announced that their offensive against the rights of all workers by means of destroying the so-called special pension regimes starts this autumn and will not wait until 2008.

If Sarkozy wants to do that, it is in order to attack all workers, lower wages, impose the "new work contract" wanted by the Medef [French equivalent of the CBI] instead of the permanent contracts [Contrat à durée indéterminée (CDI)], facilitate redundancies, and in the area of pensions force us all to work more than 40 years to get a full pension...

The workers affected by the so-called special regimes are not privileged: leaving aside the higher level of their contributions, the level of their pension and their entitlement after 37.5 years are all that remains of the common right of all, destroyed by the pernicious legislation of Balladur in 1993, Juppé in 1995 and Fillon in 2003.

An initial anti-strike law, which they want to extend to all workers, has been adopted this summer by the UMP [Sarkozy's governing party] parliamentary majority, which establishes a state of exception on public rail and road transport. This law has not yet been tested on the ground: in order to break the pensions and the terms and conditions of the railworkers, it is going to be tested.

The only way that Sarkozy can beat the

railworkers is if they are isolated. The whole working class, all wage-earners, all young people, are implicated. In 2006 the unanimous rejection of the special first-job contract [Contrat première embauche (CPE)] by all the trade union federations, and their refusal to "negotiate", played a decisive role in the victorious mobilisation.

The trade union organisations should not take part in any multiple negotiations or dialogues which transport organisations must henceforward undertake in order to implement the "minimum service", that is, indicate the categories of workers compelled to announce strikes 48 hours in advance, nor in any pseudo-negotiations on the "social dialogue" envisaged by the law... The unions are not mandated by the bosses and the government to carry out their plans, but by the workers to fight for their demands.

To block Sarkozy's offensive we must organise a resistance of the whole working class against the government and the whole of its policy, and, on the question of pensions, fight for the return to 37.5 years for everyone.

Therefore we call for:

- people to sign the appeal "The right to strike is not negotiable";
- the repeal of the [anti-strike] law;
- united mobilisation in defence of the right to strike, against Sarkozy; and
- local committees to prepare a united fight.

# 1889: the great turning point

Cathy Nugent continues a series on the life and times of Tom Mann with an account of the London dock strike of 1889.

TODAY the trading and industrial activities of the port of London are a shadow of what they once were. The areas where docks and wharves once heaved with cargo, boats, ships and people, are now sites for skyscraper office blocks, exclusive apartments, trendy studios and pricey restaurants — a product of Thatcher's demolish and "develop" project for the docklands in the 1980s.

Go to the London Docklands Museum (located between two bistros and opposite a smart marina) and you will find out how working-class people fought to stop their communities being smashed up, scattered and pushed out of the docklands. London's great dock strike of 1889 — which forged solidarity between desperately poor people — helps us understand why people wanted to save the docklands communities.

The port of London was built up haphazardly to accommodate the 18th century's growth in trade. By 1850 the congestion of ships, boats, people and goods coming in and out of the port's sprawling system of docks and wharves would have been immense. The main docks — West India (Limehouse), East India (Blackwall) London and St Katherine's (Wapping), Royal Victoria and Royal Albert (West and East Ham) and Surrey (south of the river) — were in the control of five companies. Alongside the docks were a complex of wharves spread out along the river, which by the mid-century handled the bulk of trade.

This complex and busy industry created a highly differentiated workforce with many separate and specialised trades and jobs. A multitude of other workers serviced the port trade (carmen, rope makers, engineers etc, etc). But the biggest segment were relatively unskilled and casually employed — these were the ordinary dock worker. In his *Memoirs* Tom Mann described their importance to Victorian capitalism:

*"There has long been no more than a dogged acquiescence in the conditions insisted upon by the employers, more particularly on the part of those classed as unskilled labourers. Skilled and unskilled alike were dominated over by their employers; and at the same time the unskilled, not being yet organised, were in many instances subject to further dictation and domination by the organised skilled men.*

*The industrial system was (as it still is, with some modification) creating an army of surplus workers, who, never having been decently paid for their work, had never been decently fed; every occupation had its proportion of the surplus.*

*Irregularity of work, coupled with liability to arduous and dangerous toil when employed, characterised the dock workers in an exceptional degree; and although dock labour was classed as unskilled, in grim reality it often required a considerable amount of skill...*

*Nevertheless in the struggle against death by starvation, a larger percentage of worn-out men*

*(cast-offs from other occupations) made their way to compete for casual labour at the docks and wharves of London, than to any other place or to any similar occupation."*

Historical accounts tell us much more about the dock worker. He may not have lived in London for long, if he was a cast-off of Britain's declining agricultural economy. He may have been an Irish migrant or the son of an Irish migrant. Although some ordinary dockers were permanent employees, most were employed by a dock company or by a "ganger". He was the nineteenth century zero-hours contract worker — hired for a day or just part of a day.

The amount of work fluctuated wildly from season to season. When sailing ships ruled the waves, changes of wind and weather added to the instability of employment. Indeed these conditions were used by bosses to justify casual employment. Being employed part-time, for short times and unpredictable times, the docker could never get enough wages. He and his family would always be close to entering the workhouse or even starvation.

By the late 1880s two long-term changes were happening in the port. The rise of the wharf business had resulted in huge competition within the port. There had also been a tailing off of the rate of overall increase of trade in the port. A squeeze on profits followed, and that led to squeeze on an already deeply impoverished and underemployed workforce.

THE hourly rate of wages (usually 5d an hour) was supplemented by a piece-work system, an extra payment called "the plus". This was calculated on a tonnage basis but the company never disclosed the scales on which the plus was based. In the late 1880s the scales were revised downwards.

At some docks the work was let out to small contractors (at the London Dock there were 250-odd contractors!) who of course would employ as few dockers as possible and worked them as hard as possible. By the late 80s the contractors were getting less money for the contract, and so they put the squeeze on the men.

These abuses came on top of daily humiliation at the Call On — the practice at some docks of choosing the casual workers. A contemporary report in the *Times* describes the proceedings.

*"The news that ships are due in any particular dock soon spreads and the gates of that dock are besieged in the morning. The struggle varies in intensity according to the system pursued in engaging the men.*

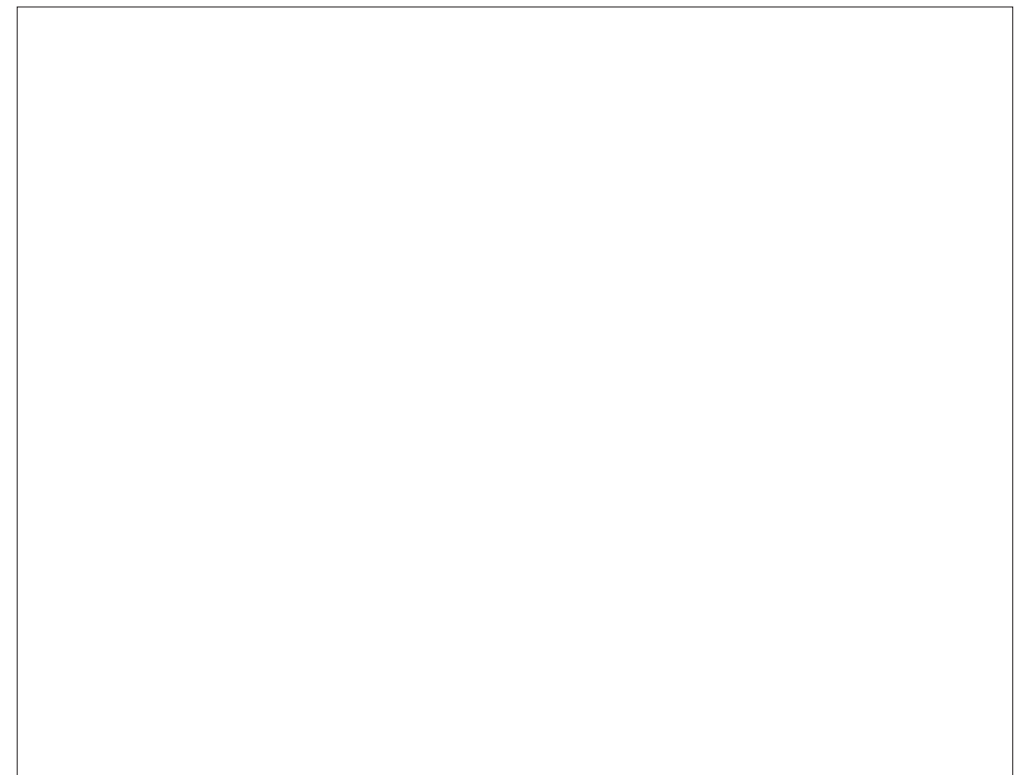
*"The first thing, says a witness just fresh from the struggle, 'is this, that there is a chain put up right across the entrance to the docks, and the contractors are on one side the chain and the men the other. You can imagine for a moment from 1,500 to 2,000 men crowded together, the front men forced up against the chain: the back men are climbing over the heads of those in front, and the contractor behind the chain is picking out the men, generally his own favourites of somebody recommended by his own favourites.*

*I myself had had eight or ten men upon my shoulders and my head, and I have been hurt several times in a struggle for employment like that."*

Ben Tillet, the main dock union leader in 1889, described how the contractor delighted in the wretched condition of the dockers: "As a brute would throw scraps to hungry wolves to delight in the exhibition of the savage struggle for existence, with beasts tearing each other to pieces, so these creatures would delight in the spectacle, which, while it imbruted the victims of such a tragedy, impeached and cursed society."

Although conditions of life would have made these men restless, pugnacious and properly disrespectful of the niceties of Victorian morality, that did not make them mere objects of pity, a "submerged class" as some middle class observers would have it, suitable only for herding into the soup kitchen and church. Dockers, just like anyone else tried to lead a normal life.

One room in an East London slum may have been the home; family life, for women and children too, may have been spent eking out an existence... it was, nonetheless home and family. When the match-makers struck and the gas workers organised, the dockers, who were their relatives, neighbours and friends, did not look on



*The stevedores and their float*

with indifference, but with hope and a definite perception that it was "our turn next".

STRIKES had sporadically broken out on London's docks right back to the 18th century. In the early 1870s a nationwide unionising drive impacted on London's docks. Socialists involved in the Land and Labour League built a dock workers' union and led a strike in 1872. This was an important precursor, remembered by many dockers in 89, particularly

## The stevedores were not natural allies of the dockers. The impetus for their solidarity was the bosses' employment of scabs in the docks.

on the south side of the Thames.

The 1870s union fell apart during a slump and in the face of the tremendous difficulties of organising among such a differentiated workforce. But the stevedores (the men who load and unload on board ships) managed to create permanent organisation — in two unions!

In 1887 Ben Tillet, then a member of the Socialist Democratic Federation (and life-long friend of Tom Mann) instigated a new port workers' union, the Tea Operatives and General Labourer's Union. Tillet described the difficulties in his memoirs: "It was almost impossible to obtain a hearing... Insult, physical violence, and filthy refuse, stones... were thrown at us. Contractors... hired their boozed bullies to break up our meetings." In 1889 the union had just a few thousand members, next to no funds and had not yet recovered from a crippling defeat at the new docks in Tilbury, where Tillet himself worked. But the success of the gasworkers' struggles, in which Tillet participated, encouraged him to begin again.

At the beginning of August there was a mood for action on the docks. Associates of Will Thorne organised meetings for dockers in Canning Town and at the South West India dock in order to set up another new union. This prompted Tillet (who had a competitive relationship with Thorne) to get behind the moves for strikes.

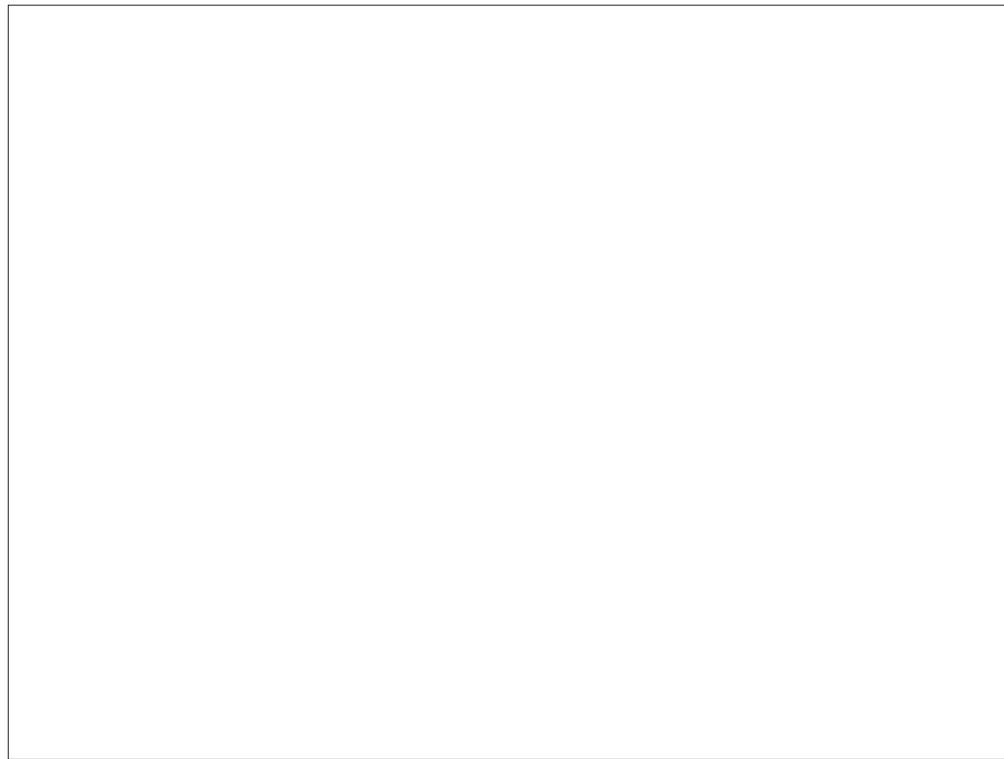
And so Tillet found himself at West India Docks on 13 August talking to the men who upset about the way their "plus" was being paid on their job on the ship *Lady Armstrong*. The men wanted to strike instantly.

Tillet persuaded them not to but instead to write a letter to the dock authorities about pay and conditions demanding an answer by the next day. But the next day the South East India dock was empty of men and the strike looked set to spread.

Tillet quickly contacted his socialist trade union friends, Tom Mann and John Burns, asking for help. Mann recalls "I was at the office of the *Labour Elector*... on 14 August...when about midday I received a wire from Ben Tillet asking me to make my way to the South West India dock. I went at once. There was no difficulty in finding the men, for Ben was with them and they were about to hold a meeting... Serious discussion must have taken place prior to the *Lady Armstrong* difficulty, because almost immediately it was proposed that now they were out, they should insist in the future on an established minimum of sixpence per hour for ordinary time and eight pence an hour for overtime." (*Memoirs*).

When Mann arrived the men who would be the other stalwarts of the strike were already there — the Tea Operatives' most important organiser, Harry Orbell, and stevedores leader Tom McCarthy. Other socialists joined in the organising work. Along with John Burns, there was SDFer Harry Quelch. Eleanor Marx, who was a great friend of Will Thorne and organiser of women workers in his union, also came to help, immersing herself in detailed administrative work.





*A show of hands at West India dock begins the strike*

Tom McCarthy, as Secretary of the Amalgamated Stevedores, had already brought out his members in solidarity. He did this precipitately, without the agreement of his own Executive! But he won them over and, after a fight, the other stevedore union too.

The stevedores were not natural allies of the dockers. They were socially isolated from the ordinary dockers. The impetus for their solidarity was the bosses' employment of scabs in the docks. A well-established union culture and inbred hostility to strike breaking brought the stevedores out. But their support was vital to the ultimate success of the dispute in three ways.

First, their action encouraged other port workers to join the strike: seamen, firemen, lightermen and watermen.

Second, their well-organised strike committee formed the basis for an expanded committee including Tillet's dockers and other groups of workers as they came out.

Third, the stevedores were a powerful group of workers whose strike action could bring work at the docks to a halt.

After the first couple of days up to 20,000 men were on strike. By the 20 August the entire docks was out.

The strike committee was in almost permanent session. Its headquarters were the Wade's Arms (with landlady Mrs Hickey keeping unruly customers in check).

**F**ROM early on, marches along a particular route — West India Dock Road, Commercial Road, Fenchurch Street, Gracechurch Street, Leadenhall street and the dock directors' headquarters — were organised. Crowds followed behind brass bands, colourful banners, effigies of the bosses on poles, and improvised floats displaying the different trades of the dockers. The favourite songs were the *Marseillaise* and *Rule Britannia!* It was a London Port Workers' Spectacular which served to galvanise the strikers and take the cause out to the people of London.

The dockers relied heavily on the money made from collections on the marches. The southside dockers organised their own marches through New Cross, Bermondsey and Peckham. They had their own union and later on their own strike

committee. Tom Mann was sent to liaise with the south side dockers — a difficult task because they felt themselves to be and were isolated from the rest of the strike.

Funds were very short at the beginning and middle. They only eased up when big donations came through from Australia (where over £30,000 was raised). The lack of "strike pay" could have broken the strike quite early on had the strike committee not begun to issue shilling food tickets which were accepted by local shopkeepers.

The situation — desperate men and women and few resources — got pretty hair-raising. Tom Mann's special skills of persuasion were welcome here:

"On the last day at Wroot's [up to end of August, the strike headquarters] Tom Mann took the relief work in hand... There was a crowd of nearly 4,000 men waiting outside. Mann pledged them his word that every man should get his ticket if he would take his turn and bide his time; then planting himself in the doorway, his back jammed against one side of the frame, his foot up against the other, he allowed the men to creep in, one at a time, under his leg.

"Hour after hour went by, while Tom Mann stripped to the waist, stuck to his post, forcing the men down as they came up, to him, chatting, persuading, remonstrating, whenever the swaying men of dockers got out of control, until at last the street was cleared." Smith and Nash, *The Story of the Dock Strike 1889*.

The women of the docks organised a rent strike:

"The weekly rents fall due today from the labourers, but it is expected there will be some difficulty in collecting them... A banner hangs at the top of Star Street, Commercial Road, inscribed as follows:

"Our husbands are on strike; for the wives it is not honey,

And we all think it is right not to pay the landlord's money,

Everyone is on strike, so landlords do not be offended;

The rent that's due we'll pay you when the strike is ended." (*Evening News and Post*, 26 August).

The strike committee organised mass meet-

ings. The socialists, particularly John Burns, were always there and were very popular. They used the meetings to underline the case for striking and refute the arguments being used against the strikers. They preached class struggle rather than socialism. Did this represent a shift in orientation?

For John Burns it may have been a shift towards respectability. Mann — who was once or twice accused of being immoderate in the dispute — was trying to build strong organisation. Then again, the idea of "socialism" was not necessarily popular with the dockers. An account from the *Times* of a meeting at Tower Hill is probably accurate enough: "During the speeches a Socialist flag was brought to the ground, whereupon the greater number of those present demanded that it be taken down, saying they did not want Socialism brought into the strike."

There were many attempts by the bosses to divide the strikers and bring in scab labour. The dock companies got in touch with a "scab herder", William Coulson, who described himself as the "Apostle of Free Labour". Financially supported by Randolph Churchill and other Tories, Collison had built up an organisation of scabs, who were used prior to 1889 to break up strikes.

So pickets, sometimes mass pickets, were organised. In most, but not all of the docks, the pickets were successful. Harry Orbell ran an intelligence system from inside the docks at Tilbury. Men posing as blacklegs would spot ships coming in with (often unwitting) men from Liverpool or Newcastle.

**T**HE dock strike inspired a rash of other strikes in the general dock areas north and south of the Thames. (Indeed some say the strike is best seen as part of a strike wave in London). Strikers included: printers, export iron mongers, millers, Pickfords workers, jam factory workers, young women rope makers, iron workers, Bryant and May workers (again), coal depot workers, brewery workers, sea-going engineers (although other engineers at the port did not come out), carpenters, shipwrights, Peak Frean biscuits, Billingsgate, cutlery works, ordinary engineers, builders at Woolwich Arsenal, laundry workers. At the beginning of September Jewish tailors, cigar and cigarette makers and book finishers went out on strike. The all-important gas workers too were also at one point considering striking. It was not a general strike, but it

## A plan was hatched to call out London's workers on a general strike.

was an extraordinarily broad class movement.

There was a potential for a breakdown in the old order, the smooth running of factories and sweatshops, the buzzing activity of trade; at least that is how it was perceived. "If it goes on a few days longer, all London will be on holiday. The great machine by which five millions of people are fed and clothed will come to a dead stop, and what is to be the end of it all? The proverbial small spark has kindled a great fire which threatens to envelop the whole metropolis." (*The Times*)

Because of the increased demand for relief funds, the strike committee felt obliged to put the brakes on the action, by refusing to pay out to "men engaged in any trade or occupation who come out on strike without our authority."

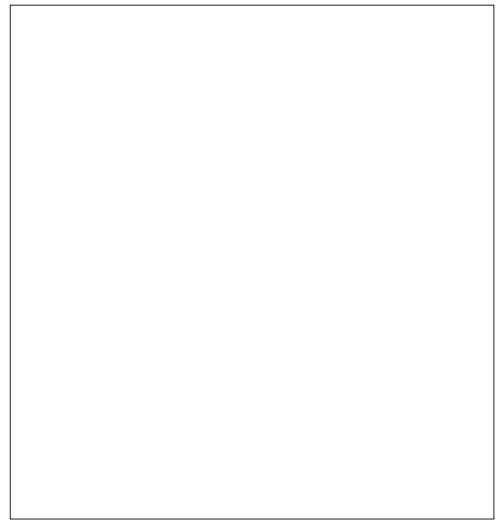
**A**T the end of August, in the face of continued intransigence by the dock companies, some strike leaders were thinking about how to "up the ante". A plan was hatched to call out London's workers on a general strike. Tom Mann was probably the main architect of the plan.

On 29 August a "No-Work" manifesto was drafted. Twenty-four hours later, doubts set in (even with Tom Mann) about the popularity of such a move and the manifesto was withdrawn, a counter manifesto issued.

In the meantime — and very fortunately for the dockers — news of significant funds from Australia arrived.

Perhaps if there were more, stronger "new unions" among London's less skilled workers a general strike could have happened. If it had happened it would have taken the dockers into a bitter conflict with the leaders of London's older, craft unions.

The strike came to an successful end when the ship owners put pressure on the dock companies and a section of the wharf owners moved the settle with the strikers. But not before the intervention of the Lord Mayor and the Catholic bishop of Westminster, Cardinal Manning! Manning, a reactionary in theological matters,



*Many groups of workers came out in the summer of 1889. Leaflets from the Jewish tailors' strike*

was very interested in civilising the "labouring classes". According to one of his friends, he wanted to "retain civilised labour for the Church." After the strike — in one of the strangest periods of Mann's life — Manning almost persuaded Mann (a committed Christian) to become a clergyman!

Manning helped bring about negotiations which succeeded in securing for the dockers their 6d an hour and negotiations on an end to the "plus" and contract system of employment. A secondary dispute immediately broke out over when the wage increase would be granted. Eventually that was fixed for November 1889. It was a tremendous victory for the most downtrodden group of workers.

**T**HE great London docks strike was an enormously important turning point in the history of the British labour movement for many reasons.

Another new union had been born — the Dock Wharf Riverside and General Workers Union — which at the end of the strike had 18,000 members. It was a union of the unskilled and hitherto unorganised, but unlike Thorne's gas workers union it was not to be a *general* union — a distinction that would re-emerge as a controversy in the early years of the twentieth century.

Mann and Tillet wrote a polemic defending the new unions. They saw them as centres for educating workers and creating a collective culture, representing a new, inclusive workers' movement: "the basis of action now is altruistic, a willingness and a desire to be of use, striving to work for the general good, trying to avoid sectionalism and narrowness, and to work on lines that shall conduce to the general welfare..."

Mann carried through his perception of the new unions into his work as President of the new dockers' union. He attempted to centralise the union, which was probably a mistake in the complex conditions on London's docks. Sporadic strike action by small groups of workers was probably inevitable.

Mann tried to bring the strike action under the control of the union and though there is no evidence he wanted to quash it, there was a contradiction between his aims — disciplined, class organisation — and the "natural" shape of the dock workers class struggle.

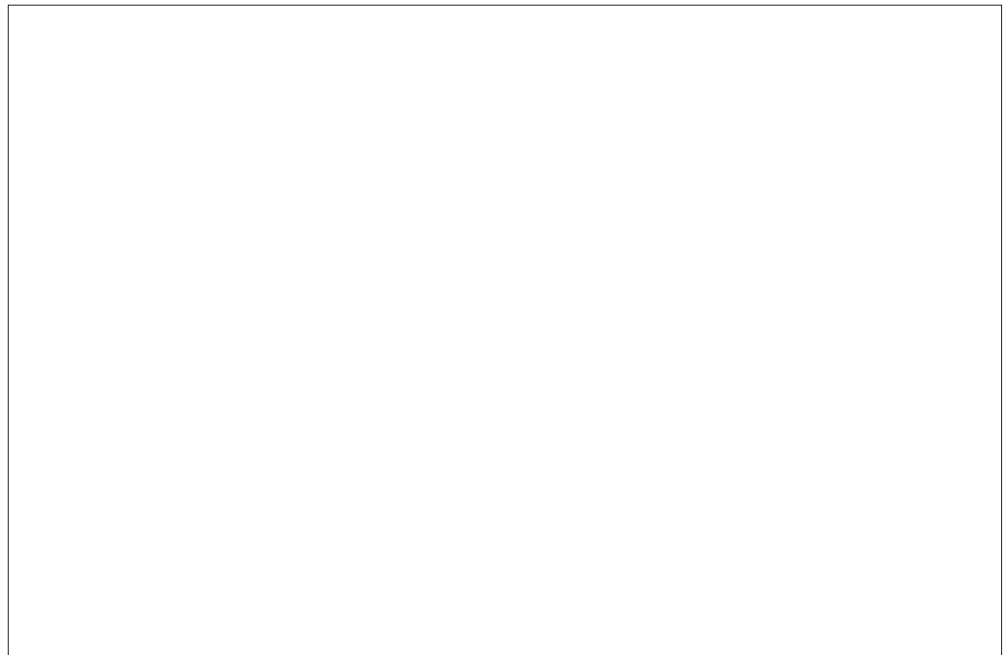
Mann was right to favour solid organisation, because the new dockers' union had to deal with an increasingly belligerent set of bosses. Shipowners were building up a scabbing operations. Dock employers were trying to undermine the unions' attempts to set up a quasi-closed shop.

By April 1890 Mann felt under personal threat by the hired thugs of the bosses: "I am obliged to carry a revolver. They threaten all kinds of nice things, going to make a soup of me and so on but I reckon, I'll come out all right."

Mann was looking for ways in which dock workers could assume more *control* over the industry — for instance he devised a set of proposals, a Port of London for the People of London, an alternative plan for the organisation of the trade so that dockers could get regular employment. The union tried to organise agricultural workers, as their migration into London caused a glut of workers which the bosses used to undermine the regular employment of dockers.

Ideas about workers' control, would become a theme of Mann's later political development, when he became an advocate of syndicalism twenty five years later. But it would be a mistake to see a straight line from "new unionism" to "syndicalism" either in the British labour movement or Mann's own political career.

Before Mann arrived at syndicalism he had to spend some time exploring and getting involved in the labour movement's attempts to establish a "party of labour". The experience of new union-



*Dockers, so desperate for work, auction themselves off for the lowest wage*

## INTERNATIONAL

## Algerian Trotskyists recover forces

FROM 5 to 7 September the first summer school of the PST [Socialist Workers' Party of Algeria] took place in Algiers, with about 200 activists and sympathisers taking part, from 19 regions. One third were young people, one quarter women.

The PST saw its forces and its activities collapse, like those of most left movements, during the terrible years of the armed struggle by the Islamists. Recently it has seen a revival, with meetings of several hundred people.

More than 2000 people have joined this party, which proclaims itself in political solidarity with the LCR [of France] and the Fourth International, even though its activist groups are much weaker...

Abridged from *Rouge*, 20/09/07. PST website (poorly updated); www.pst-dz.org.

## Al Quds counter-demo

ON 7 October, supporters of the Iranian regime are organising an "Al Quds Day" demonstration in London (assembling 12:30 at Marble Arch).

This year, the march is backed not only by the Muslim Association of Britain, George Galloway, Yvonne Ridley, Hizbut Tahrir, etc., but also by Respect and the 1990 Trust (in which Ken Livingstone's adviser Lee Jasper is prominent).

Below is an (abridged) text from the committee which has organised counter-demonstrations against similar marches in Berlin.

*In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini called for an annual event on the last Friday of the Islamic fast month of Ramadan to demonstrate for the "liberation" of Jerusalem and the destruction of Israel. Since then, the so-called Al Quds-Day, a state-organized propaganda demonstration, has been held annually in Tehran, a Hezbollah military parade has been held in Beirut and demonstrations have been held worldwide...*

*We the undersigned have different opinions on the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. But we join in rejecting all attacks on the rights of Israel to exist and we stand up for a peaceful, two-state solution acceptable to both sides. The Iranian regime is doing everything it can to prevent such a solution. It not only verbally calls for the destruction of Israel but supports and finances suicide attacks against Israelis and arms Hezbollah with rockets. The Iranian regime shamelessly instrumentalises the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the backs of the Palestinian people, in order to stabilise its own dictatorship and build an international basis of power.*

*We stand with those Iranians who long for democracy and human rights and who want to live in peace with the world community.*

*We also oppose all discrimination against people of Muslim belief or immigrant background...*

March:

www.ihrc.org.uk/show.php?id=2890

Berlin: www.gegen-al-quds-tag.de/.

# Inside the crisis of Respect

Andy Newman is a former Socialist Alliance activist who has followed developments in Respect closely. Martin Thomas interviewed him.

**B**oth sides of the row are saying that Respect is in a bad way, yet you've chosen this time to rejoin. Why?

I'm not sure that both sides are saying that it is in a bad way. The SWP's line now is that it is business as usual.

One of the biggest problems we had in the early days of the Socialist Alliance, and the early days of Respect, is that both were dominated by the particular form of democratic centralism associated with the SWP and the Socialist Party, not participatory democracy.

What's happening in Respect now is that it seems to be opening up. If all there was in Respect was George Galloway and the SWP, you could leave them to fight it out between them. But there are many independent socialists in Respect. With them you can fight for a better Respect, and even if you fail in that, assemble the forces for something better.

*Independent socialists in Respect? Not very many, and fewer than there used to be. The figures that have come out recently show the membership has dropped by a third.*

We are where we are. Had it not been for the opening up of the debate by George Galloway, and subsequently by others such as Salma Yaqoob and people round her, there would not be many prospects.

But Salma Yaqoob's document is very good, and I endorse it. There is room there for opening things up.

The left is not in a good position anywhere - not in the Labour Party, not anywhere. It's a question of finding a way through the mess.

*Which of the measures adopted by the Respect council on 22 September do you think are important for opening things up?*

The appointment of a national organiser independent of the current office staff is a key confidence-building measure. As I understand it, the Respect council group in Tower Hamlets, George Galloway, and Salma Yaqoob do not believe that progress is possible with the current factional operation of the Respect office.

There is beginning to be a real debate about the way forward, and of course the SWP itself is not a monolith.

*Can we really believe that George Galloway is making a stand for democracy? Whatever you say about the SWP, it does have conferences and elected committees. Every political operation George Galloway has ever run has been one based on his personal authority.*

I wouldn't overvalue those committees and conferences in the SWP. But if it were just a question of George Galloway, then there would be very little to play for. There's a wider group than Galloway involved, not necessarily all saying the same thing as him.

And the electoral base of Respect, and its local groups where it has them, are not something to be walked away from lightly.

If genuine debate is opening up, then, however ironic some of the bedfellows we find ourselves with, it's a better result than if we walk away.

Those of us who left Respect in 2005 because we felt there was no possibility of its lack of democracy changing now see things opening up.

*I can't see that any of the measures decided by the Respect council do anything to open up things for the ordinary members.*

If the proposals decided by the council were the end of the matter, then we would be dead in the water. But it's the opening up of a process.

There will be debates over the coming weeks, up to the Respect conference [on 17-18 November].

*What do you make of the SWP's charge that the Respect group on Tower Hamlets council has been operating so as to represent "a narrow and conservative trend" to the white working class and secular Bengalis?*

This is a bit of an opportunist argument from the SWP. They have been defending the

approach for the last two or three years, and now they're agreeing with people they'd previously call "Islamophobes".

There may well be problems about the accountability of Respect's elected representatives. But the SWP have been trying to deal with the problem by diktat, because the central SWP people here have no experience of operating in wider labour movement bodies, like the Labour Party.

If Respect had a more open, democratic approach to its policy formation, rather than ideas appearing from John Rees's head, then it would be more difficult for elected representatives to defy their mandate.

*Galloway seems to be attacking SWP for wanting Respect to have union-oriented activity and a public profile in support of lesbian and gay rights.*

I don't think that everything is exactly what it seems with what either George Galloway or the SWP have put forward. The Organising for Fighting Unions initiative has not been that constructive. We saw this with SWP and Respect having a vanishingly small profile at the Shop Stewards' Network conference in July.

It's reasonable to question whether OFFU was less about Respect being active in the unions, and more about the SWP using the Respect hat to do what they wanted to do anyway in the unions.

As for the charge that Galloway wants to retreat into a Muslims-only organisation, I think that's nonsense. Birmingham Respect has taken part in Pride.

The SWP, in a corner, has reached for weapons to use against Galloway which had been crafted by others to attack Respect.

The details of George Galloway's attacks on the SWP are factional, too.

*What do you think Galloway is aiming for?*

I don't know what George Galloway's

motives are. I wouldn't like to speculate, because I don't have enough evidence. In terms of his own prestige, he doesn't want to see Respect blow up.

*For some media or diplomatic career options he may have in mind, it could positively help him to be seen to do down "the Trots"*

Well, there are not many votes in attacking the SWP. If Galloway is serious about continuing his political career, then Respect is the vehicle he's doing that through. If Respect is not working well as a political vehicle, that harms him.

It's not normal in the labour movement for a National Secretary to be openly factional in a selection process, as John Rees has been. Salma Yaqoob says that after she had a tactical disagreement with John Rees — just a tactical disagreement — he stopped talking to her. I don't think we need look beyond things like that for an explanation.

*Do you think Respect will split?*

It's hard to see from the language being used on both sides how they can stay in the same organisation. But how it will pan out, I don't know. It's possible that part of the SWP will withdraw from Respect. But it is hard to see how the SWP can win in this situation. Without Galloway, and with a big public split with Galloway, they can't get anywhere. But it's not easy for the SWP to leave Respect, either. With the way they function, it's difficult for them to make a sharp turn.

Can I see everyone in Respect being happy chums by the time of the general election? No, I can't. But there are people in Respect who want to build something with a more participatory democracy, and more of an approach of reaching out.

There is an interest now in what's going on from people who were never in Respect. They might prefer to have the Socialist Alliance, but Respect is what they've got.

**T**HE Respect coalition was set up in January 2004 by the Socialist Workers' Party, using George Galloway MP, expelled by the Labour Party in October 2003, as a front person.

Galloway had never been particularly left-wing in the Labour Party; he was discredited among socialists by his past close links with the Saddam regime in Iraq, the Saudi monarchy, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistani governments; and he had taken no-one with him when expelled from Labour.

But the SWP had puffed him as a "leading figure" on the big demonstrations in 2002-3 against the US/UK invasion of Iraq, and hoped by hitching up with him to draw votes, and maybe new activists, from Muslim and other youth angry with Blair and Bush.

To clear the way for Respect, the SWP trashed the Socialist Alliance, an unprecedentedly broad coalition of socialist groups which in the 2001 general election had made a start, though a very flawed one, at building up a socialist electoral alternative to New Labour.

Four years on, Respect is in trouble. Its nominal membership, two thousand, is only one fifth of what the SWP claimed for its own numbers in the 1990s.

Galloway won re-election on the Respect ticket in Bethnal Green (part of Tower Hamlets), but is no more a socialist voice in Parliament than when he was on the Labour ticket. Generally, Respect has had poor votes except where it can trade on presenting Galloway and its other candidates as "fighters for Muslims". Meanwhile, the SWP's profile as a distinctly socialist organisation has drastically declined.

Now Galloway — backed by a few others, several of them ex-SWP or formerly close to the SWP — has chosen to denounce details of the SWP's running of Respect, in a letter which he must have known would become public. At a Respect National Council on 22 September the SWP conceded some detailed changes proposed by Galloway, but the two camps are still bitterly at odds.

Has Galloway seen another career option, and decided that a public shrugging-off of the SWP will help him in it? Or does he think that by cowing the SWP he can encourage the residue of British Stalinism, the rump Communist Party of Britain, to enter Respect and give him more congenial allies there?

We do not know. Either way, in our view, the only gain out of this will be if some of the many good-hearted socialists in the SWP ask questions about how they got into this mess, and look for a way out towards an independent working-class stance.

# The General Strike as it was lived

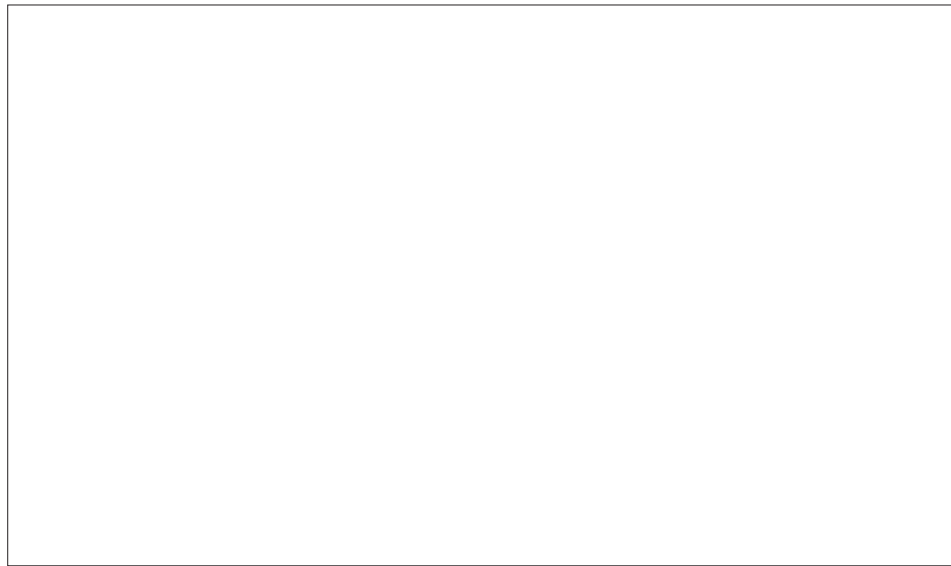
**SACHA ISMAIL REVIEWS A PLAY ABOUT THE GENERAL STRIKE, PRODUCED BY NEW FACTORY OF THE ECCENTRIC ACTOR**

A COUPLE of months ago I went to see a play at the Globe Theatre about the Chartists, called  *Holding Fire!* It was disappointing despite some interesting elements and the basic thrill of seeing one of the major dramas of British working-class history acted out on stage.

On 22 September, I got a similar thrill, but much more satisfaction and lasting enjoyment, from a play at Conway Hall about the 1926 General Strike.

The play was free, clearly attempting to match its appeal to its message by opening up to low-income, activist and perhaps not-usually theatre-going people like myself. (As to whether they succeeded, I'm not sure: the audience seemed fairly mixed, but we didn't sell many copies of *Soldarity* at the end!) This is because the "New Factory of the Eccentric Actor", which produced it, is a consciously political and leftist troupe whose next play  *Heroines of Revolution*, for instance, is about the Russian Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai.

The producer-actors' political commitment was evident in every scene. There seems to be a tendency in theatre and television to present historical class struggles as simply a stormy/colourful background against which working-class characters ignorantly play out their — inevitable — fate. This play, by contrast, presented the British working class as struggling, thinking, arguing political actors, defeated because their movement was led by cowards and collaborators and not



*Seeing to ourselves. A soup kitchen set up during the strike*

because we automatically "always lose".

Thus we have scenes not only at 10 Downing Street and the TUC General Council, but on picket lines, workers' demonstrations and in the local "Councils of Action" which in some places started to assume soviet-like characteristics during the course of the strike. And in these settings the characters to a certain extent argue out their political differences, with mention of the Independent Labour Party, Communist Party, National Minority Movement and so on. The writers were well enough informed to make Shapurji Saklatvala, the now little-known Communist MP for Battersea who was the first person to be arrested during the strike, a fairly important

character. (The producers also hint at political sympathies by having Harry Wicks, later one of the first British Trotskyists, as a CP speaker at a rally.)

My criticism would be that this refreshing emphasis on politics was not always taken far enough. There were some very moving scenes about the support the strike received from workers in the Soviet Union (support which the British trade union leaders, afraid of looking "red" in front of public opinion, turned down!) But there was nothing about the negative role the growing Soviet bureaucracy, through its uncritical relationship with the TUC leaders through the Anglo-Russian Committee, played in helping the TUC demo-

bilise the strike — and the role this defeat played in helping consolidate Stalinism.

On the whole though, the play was a good introduction to the General Strike. In addition, it was extremely well staged. In fact, there was no stage as such, with no chairs and much of the action taking place in the middle of the (standing) audience. Cleverly, while the picket lines, demos etc took place in this setting, what would normally be the stage was used for the meetings of the TUC General Council, while the government met high above in the gallery. The wheeling, varied action meant that standing up for more than two and a half hours didn't seem long at all.

At the end, one of the actors read out words from a striker who is still alive, explaining the hatred she still feels for the rail workers' leader Jimmy Thomas, who after helping to undermine the strike went on to become a right-wing politician in the 1930s.

The message was hammered home that we will not always lose, but that we need to remake the labour movement if we are to avoid losing when struggles like 1926 happen again. It is an important message after twenty years of defeat has brought us a labour movement led by the likes of Dave Prentis and Tony Woodley.

• For a special issue of *Workers' Liberty* on the General Strike, see [www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/532](http://www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/532). Or you can order a physical copy by emailing [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org)

• *Heroines of Revolution* will be playing on Friday 26, Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 October. For more information, call 020 7586 4633.

## "We did the only thing we could"

**STEVE COHEN CONTINUES A SERIES ABOUT IMPORTANT SOCIALIST NOVELS, LOOKING AT RING LARDNER JR AND THE BACKGROUND TO HIS NOVEL THE ECSTASY OF EDWIN MUIR**

RING Lardner Jr. was one of the Hollywood Ten — the ten screenwriters who went to prison for refusing in 1947 to testify before the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Today he is best remembered, if at all, for his response to the question as to whether he was or had ever been a member of the Communist Party — "I could answer the question exactly the way you want, but if I did I would hate myself in the morning".

Though HUAC is forever identified with senator Joe McCarthy, the anti-communist witch hunter, it was never actually chaired by him (his Congressional base was the Senate Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations). The main witch hunter on HUAC was Richard Nixon, and the chair was John Parnell Thomas.

According to Lardner's daughter Kate (in her autobiography  *Shut up he explained — the memoirs of a blacklisted kid*) throughout the hearings Thomas sat on a District of Columbia telephone directory and a red silk cushion in order to appear taller for the TV cameras. Lardner was to meet Thomas again — when they were both prisoners in the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut. The HUAC Chair had been brought to trial for putting nonexistent workers on the government payroll and appropriating their salaries for himself.

Whilst in prison Thomas was given the role of custodian of the chicken yard. Lester Cole, another of the Hollywood Ten (who subsequently to the blacklist was to script the hit movie  *Born Free*), greeted the weary, perspiring Thomas with "Still pushing the shit around?"

Lardner spent his year in prison researching for his first novel, *The Ecstasy of Edwin Muir*, a black, political comedy. Research was neces-

sary as the novel has at its centre an expose of Catholic theology, an expose which sees Edwin Muir shift step by step from a position of liberal, pacifist atheism to becoming a right-wing, warmongering Trappist monk.

The background story within the book was the McCarthyite inquisition — and its sub-categories of racism and anti-semitism (in objecting to his sister marrying a Jew, Edwin's mother explains "Because he's Jewish and she isn't. People ought to leave other kinds of people alone... If we're going to be tolerant, they have to, too"). This background cleverly interweaves fiction (with one of the characters denouncing his mother as a communist) with fact (such as the Paul Robeson concert at Peekskill where the spectators were viciously assaulted by hundreds of right wing thugs with the encouragement and participation of the local police).

In his 1997 Preface to the book (first printed in 1954) Lardner says how all USA publishers effectively blacklisted the novel ("one editor at a very large firm told me the content made it unacceptable there because it meant their entire textbook division would be boycotted in parochial schools nationwide"). Eventually it was published in the UK by Jonathan Cape, who realised capitalism can cash in on anything and that the possible notoriety of the novel "may be of some publicity value in selling your book".

Prior to being blacklisted Lardner was probably the best paid screenwriter in Hollywood. His breakthrough had come in 1942 with the script for George Stevens's  *Woman Of The Year* (1942). This was not so much a "communist" movie (as the McCarthyites would claim) as a proto-feminist one about the love-hate marriage of a sophisticated political columnist and a plain-speaking sports journalist.

It was based on the relationship between the writer Dorothy Parker and Lardner's father, Ring Lardner Sr, who was himself a famous sports columnist and writer. It was the first and maybe the best of the nine Katherine Hepburn-Spencer Tracy films.

The feminist angle was watered down with an ending rewritten by Michael Kanin, in which Hepburn's character submits to domesticity, by cooking her husband's breakfast, to keep the man she loves. This was because the producer Louis B. Mayer (of MGM and along with the other movie moguls a staunch supporter of the subsequent blacklist) had objected to Lardner making Spencer Tracy's character tell Hepburn to "just be yourself". Nonetheless Lardner (along with Kanin) was given his first Oscar for best original screenplay. Following the blacklist he used it as a doorstop.

During the blacklist Lardner's main income was derived, writing under a necessary pseudo-

**He picketed the hand that fed him, as when Warner Brothers gates were opened in friendship to the son of Mussolini.**

nym, from the emerging television medium. He often wrote the script for *The Adventures Of Robin Hood* — the famous 1950s series on which the children of the 60s were raised and which starred Richard Greene. The series hired others on the blacklist, and in 1990 there was released the movie *Fellow Traveller* which very cleverly depicted McCarthyism through the Robin Hood story — with the Sheriff of Nottingham being the McCarthy figure.

With the lifting of the blacklist Lardner eventually and deservedly won another Oscar for the screenplay for *MASH*. In his own autobiography (appropriately titled *I'd Hate Myself In The Morning*) he wrote about how in 1997, a half century after HUAC first met to condemn him, there was a ceremony to honour him at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Also honoured were other blacklisted directors, actors and screenwriters — including

the screenwriter Paul Jarrico.

Jarrico had been invited to another similar ceremony the following day but half way through the event it was announced that, overcome with both sleep and elation, he had crashed his car and was dead. Lardner though used the party at the Academy to read out in full the prepared speech that Parnell Thomas had fifty years previously prevented him making before HUAC.

Lardner died in 2000 — the last surviving member of the Ten. Since joining up in 1937, he had lived much of the time as a Stalinist. Unlike many others he seems never to have formally quit the Party, but simply let his membership lapse.

He was a member of most of the Party "front organisations" active in Hollywood — the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, the Citizens Committee for the Defence of Mexican-American Youth, the Hollywood Writers Mobilisation Against the War and the board of the Screen Writers Guild. As a member of the latter he allowed himself to be duped by the Party into appearing to become, or indeed actually, becoming, a martyr — not by refusing to name names, but by refusing to see and denounce the reactionary nature of the Party.

However inasmuch as individuals can be understood outside of the Party in which they operated, there is much to be said in Lardner's favour politically. He picketed the hand that fed him, as when Warner Brothers gates were opened in friendship to the son of Mussolini. And sometimes he stood up to studio moguls against the reactionary junk being readied for the screen, i.e., trying to coax David O. Selznick not to make *Gone With the Wind* because the book was pro-KKK!

And in the end he was very modest about his own martyrdom in refusing to testify before HUAC, saying "But from time to time I try to suggest that we weren't as heroic as people make us out to be. It would be more analytically precise... to say we did the only thing we could ... short of behaving like complete shits."

*The Ecstasy of Edwin Muir* exposes the shits.

## INSIDE THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

# Welcome back: student loan interest rates rise to 5%

BY SOFIE BUCKLAND, NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

AT the start of the summer, there was a little noticed news item about the dull sounding subject of interest rates of student loans. Of course, for the great majority of graduates and students with an eye on the future, this subject is not dull at all, but highly alarming.

The Student Loans Company, which sets its interest rates for the year every autumn, has just doubled the rate from 2.4% to 4.8%, the highest it has been since 1992. This in the context of average student debt multiplying five-fold since 1994, reaching more than £13,000 and predicted to reach £17,000 by 2010. (It actually decreased very slightly this year, but is expected to shoot up as the impact of top-up fees kicks in.) If you want to go to university, you can, over your life term, expect in effect to work for a year without any pay.

Higher Education minister Bill Rammell has responded by arguing that rises in line with inflation simply help the loan keep its original value - hardly much of a comfort to

to those having to repay it, and reminiscent to Gordon Brown's arguments for giving public sector workers sub-inflation pay rises.

(They're getting a pay rise, after all! What do they care about inflation? For public sector workers with student debt, of course, this simply adds to the burden of their pay cut.)

A big chunk of the debt on student loans has been sold from the Student Loan Company to fully private contractors.

High interest rates on student loans is only a tiny part of the avalanche of debt now engulfing most students, but it is symbolic of how the system is set up to ratchet out the maximum possible payment. NUS doesn't seem to have responded - unsurprisingly, since it does not in practice oppose students having to take out loans or companies making a profit out of student debt.

For socialists in the student movement, our answer is clear: while immediately opposing punitive interest rates, we want to end the whole system of student debt by cutting through the tangle of multiple fees, loans, grants and bursaries with free education and living grant for every single student.

• [www.free-education.org.uk](http://www.free-education.org.uk)

## Feminism's not dead!

BACK for a second year, the Feminist Fightback activist conference is organised by a group of socialist feminists, including the Education Not for Sale student network. It aims to bring together feminists from a wide range of perspectives to debate ideas and develop practical strategies for fighting women's oppression and exploitation.

Fightback 07 will build on the success of last year's conference, attended by over 220 people, which gave rise to several activist initiatives, including the March 3 2007 Torch-Lit March for Abortion Rights.

This year we will continue our campaign to defend and extend abortion rights and our discussions will include...

- Is sexy always sexist? Feminism, lads mags and pornography
- Ecofeminism
- Feminists against borders
- Islamic feminism

- Race, sex and class
- The gender pay gap, low pay and the class struggle
- Darfur
- Campaigning for abortion rights
- Women against sweatshops
- Introduction to socialist feminism

Plus film showings...

- Love, Honour and Disobey, a film by Southall Black Sisters
- A Place of Rage: women in the black civil rights movement

Feminist Fightback's supporters include the National Union of Students Women's Campaign, the RMT Women's Committee and the International Union of Sex Workers.

The conference will be held at the University of East London Docklands campus (Cyprus DLR). For more information, or to register, ring 07890 209 479, or email [feminist.fightback@gmail.com](mailto:feminist.fightback@gmail.com)

## Burmese solidarity

SINCE early September thousands of people have taken to the streets in Rangoon, the capital of Burma. When protesters last marched in 1988, the military massacred 3,000. As we go to press a crack-down looks imminent.

Buddhist monks and nuns have been leading the marches, and so far, this and the fact that, unlike in '88, information about the opposition has been widely publicised via the internet, has inhibited the regime's response.

The recent demonstrations come in the wake of economic meltdown, a massive rise in fuel prices and consequently months of protests and campaigns, including some by labour activists and students. Two newly re-emerged independent organisations — the All Burma Federation of Students Unions (ABFSU) and All Burma Buddhist Monks' Association — have been calling on the military regime to stop repression, release all detainees, begin serious dialogue with opposition parties, and make way for democracy. In this the opposition is extraordinarily brave. They know what happened in 1988 and they know there is a very good chance the military will move soon to stamp out their protests.

Labour movement activists should urgently raise the issue of solidarity in their organisations. Further information and ideas can be found at the websites below.

**Burma Labour Solidarity Organization**  
[www.burmasolidarity.org](http://www.burmasolidarity.org)

Information on the history of independent workers' organisation in Burma and the struggle for free trade unions and freedom of

speech. Also features reports on the conditions of the Burmese working-class, Burmese factories and the difficulties of migrant workers in Thailand

**Rebound 88**

[www.rebound88.net](http://www.rebound88.net)

Detailed up-to-date English-language reports on the pro-democracy movement in Burma, the current protests and the campaign to free Aung San Suu Kyi

**Project Maje**

[www.projectmaje.org](http://www.projectmaje.org)

Information project whose website features research into human rights violations in Burma, the position of women in Burmese society, and environmental destruction committed by the regime.

**International Labour Organization**

[www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb273/myanmar.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb273/myanmar.htm)

Dossier on forced labour in Burma and other abuses of human rights carried out in the commercial interests of the ruling elite.

**New Zealand Council of Trade Unions - Burma campaign**

<http://union.org.nz/campaigns/burma.html>

Trade union solidarity with Burma's working class and the fight against the military dictatorship, including the report of an NZCTU delegation to Thailand examining the conditions of Burmese migrant workers.

## WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

against the bosses.

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

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

**WE STAND FOR:**

- Independent working-class representation in politics.

- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.

- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.

- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.

- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

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

# Civil rights, civil war, and the British army

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

**R**ECENTLY the British army in Northern Ireland was withdrawn to where it was in relation to Northern Ireland society before 14 August 1969, when it was put on the streets to be an emergency scaffolding for a state and society that had begun to break down into Protestant/Catholic civil war. After 38 years, it has been returned to barracks.

In those 38 years, nearly 4000 people have died violently in Northern Ireland. To get the equivalent for the population of the UK you have to multiply by forty — over 150,000 people.

Under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which has taken nearly a decade to make operational, intricately-structured bureaucratic inter-sectarian political structures have replaced the Army — and, very belatedly, the Orange/ Protestant majority sectarian rule that existed for the 50 years before it broke down in 1969.

It is a good time to look at the political crisis into which the deployment of British troops to a central role in Northern Ireland threw a section of the British left in 1969, specifically, the SWP's predecessor organisation, the International Socialists (IS). It was an important and in some respects a shaping experience for the revolutionary left.

Above all, it raised central questions of political principle and approach. It has light to thrown on the proper attitude to take to the British troops in Iraq today. And it is one of the most widely misunderstood and misrepresented episodes in the history of the British left.

The writer was centrally involved in the disputes on the left. In dealing with the history of events and debates in which I was involved, I have the choice either of speaking in the first person, as a participant, or of the "Arthur Scargill" mode, repeatedly referring to myself, by name, in the third person. I would find that ridiculous and risible.

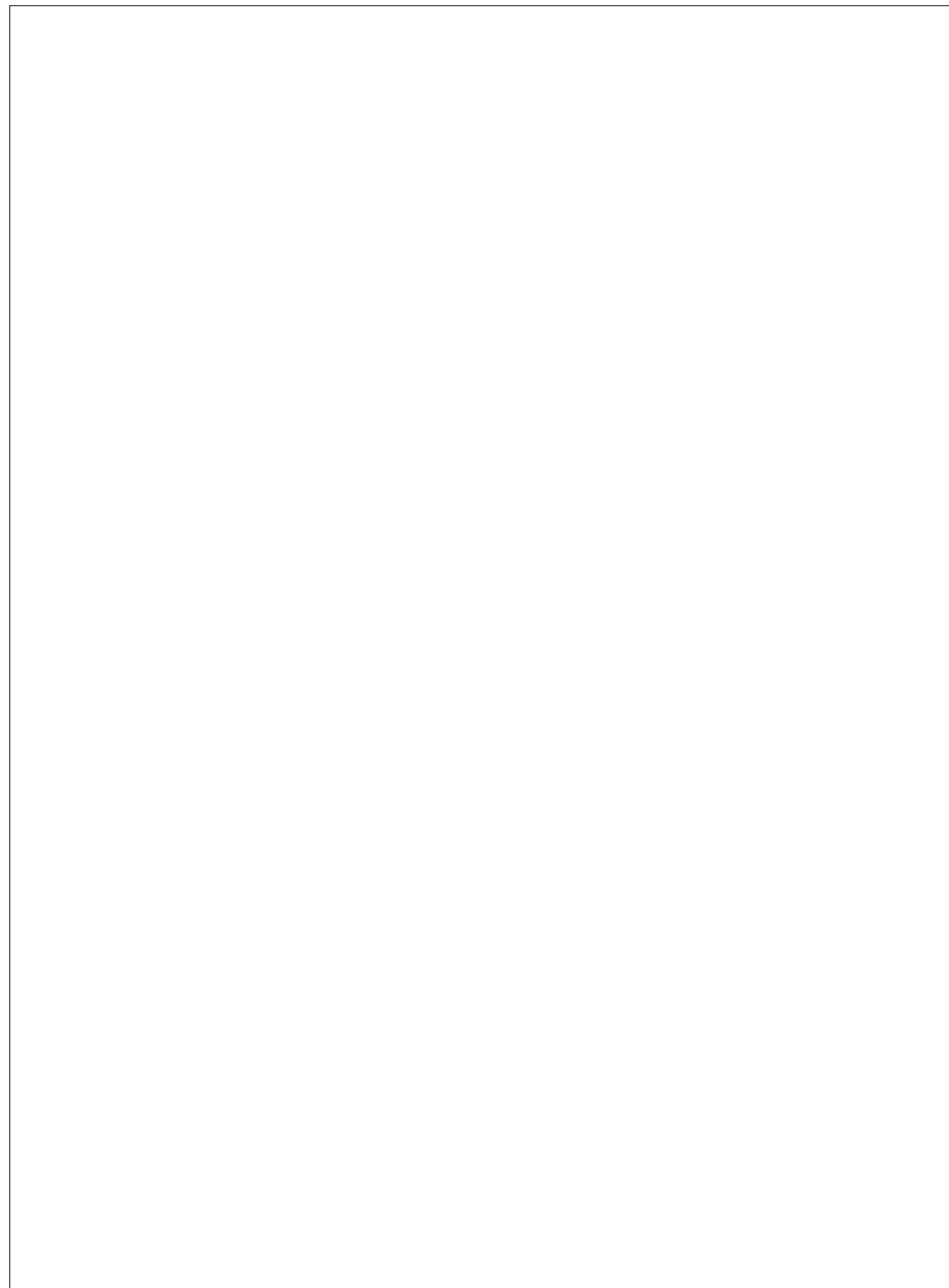
I will tell the story as a participant in it, and combine that with citing documents and minutes as much as possible. This is being written in haste, and I may add further citations and references to the version of this series of articles that will be published on the AWL website.

**I**RELAND and England have been intertwined since the first Anglo-Norman conquest in 1169 — by 1969, for exactly 800 years. Irish-Scottish entwinement went back into the Dark Ages, and included a small kingdom, Dalriada, that stretched from north-east Ulster across the straits to include part of Scotland.

It was as late as 1922 that what is now the 26 County Republic of Ireland attained an at first circumscribed independence from the United Kingdom. At the same time, Britain set up a separate state in north-east Ulster, with a Parliament of its own in Belfast, having limited powers of Home Rule subordinate to Westminster.

In fact Westminster left the Six Counties government, controlled uninterruptedly for five decades by the Protestant-sectarian Unionist Party, to do more or less what it liked "at home". There was one-party sectarian Protestant rule in Belfast, based on the Protestant two-thirds of the population. The big Catholic minority were second-class citizens. That is how things remained from the beginning until the early mid 1960s.

For four years or so before 1968 Northern



*Queen's students stage a sit-down in protest against police brutality on 5 October*

Ireland had been shaken up and destabilised. In October 1968, when Northern Ireland's police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary attacked peaceful demonstrators in Derry City, it blew up.

Privately and openly the British Labour government had been putting pressure on the Protestant sectarian regime in Belfast to stop being blatantly sectarian, to stop institutionalised discrimination against Catholics. To many it seemed that the British government no longer considered the partition of Ireland to be in Britain's interest, or the Orange-Unionists to be its allies and clients. Essentially, that was true.

Relations between Britain and the 26 Counties were better than for 30 years. The Southern Irish economy was in its best shape in a quarter century. In 1965 an Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement was signed. In the same year the British government had the bones of the Irish nationalist Roger Casement dug up out of their grave at Pentonville jail, where Casement had been buried after they hanged him in 1916, and sent them to Ireland with much ceremony. In practical moves to closer cooperation and, using Casement's bones, symbolically, Dublin and London were trying to lay the ghosts of past conflicts.

Six County Prime Minister Terence O'Neill

visited Dublin, and Taoiseach Sean Lemass visited Belfast. These were the first such visits in the half-century history of the two Irish states.

The prospects ahead seemed to be that Britain and Ireland would both soon join the European Union (as they did in 1972), grow even closer together, and at some time in the middle-distance future agree to a reunification of Ireland, probably on some federal basis.

On the surface it was a time of amicable cooperation, readjustment and moves towards rational reconstruction. The future looked good.

The contradiction that changed these prospects so dramatically lay in Northern Ireland itself. They proved beyond the power of Britain — or of Britain, the Unionist Northern Ireland political Establishment and the Southern Irish bourgeoisie together — to control.

**F**OR 50 years Northern Ireland had been ruled as a "Protestant state for a Protestant people", as long-time Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Sir Basil Brooke (later Lord Brookeborough) had once expressed it. The problem with that idea and the social and political realities it gave rise to in the 50 years before the system broke down in low-level civil war was that there was in Northern Ireland a

big and growing Catholic minority — a hostile minority chronically dissatisfied with their condition; a hostile minority, big enough to be seen and treated as a threat to "the Protestant State".

Moreover, in nearly half the territory of the state, they were not a minority but the majority — and in territory along the border beyond which was the Republic of Ireland, with which Northern Ireland's Catholic minority felt themselves to have a common nationality, religion and history. They were the big majority in Derry City, the state's second city, situated only two miles outside of the Republic. There was a big Catholic minority in Belfast.

The Catholic-Nationalists in the territory adjoining the other Irish state had been kept in the Six Counties against their will and controlled by active repression when the 6-County state was set up in 1921-22. The Protestants repressed the Catholics, and had a special sectarian part-time wing of the police, the B-Specials, to do so. Against the Catholic-nationalists the Six County State was armed with a permanent police Special Powers Act, and often the right of indefinite imprisonment (internment) without charge or trial.

Chronic antagonism was therefore built into the foundations of the Six Counties state.

Northern Ireland was ruled by the Unionist Party from 1921 to the abolition of the Protestant-majority-controlled Belfast Parliament in 1972. That party was based on a solid Protestant bloc, involving all classes from slum Protestants to Protestant-Unionist capitalists and country-gentry "horse Protestants". Fear of the Catholic minority and of the 26 County State kept the bloc together. Partly for political reasons, but also because there was great scarcity and poverty, even in the years of general UK prosperity, they systematically discriminated against Catholics.

Politics was largely communal-sectarian politics — Catholic against Protestant. In the system that grew up, Catholics were cheated of local democracy: the system long discarded in Britain of giving business people one vote for every business premises continued in Northern Ireland, where it hit the poorer Catholic community. Areas with big Catholic majorities — Derry City for example — were blatantly gerrymandered to give the Protestant/ Unionist minority control of the local council. Because votes went with houses, Catholic housing was among the worst in Western Europe.

More Catholics were unemployed than Protestants: run-down areas where unemployment never dropped below the Great Depression level, even during the years of the boom in the 40s, 50s and 60s, tended to be Catholic areas.

There was systematic anti-Catholic discrimination in employment. The Harland and Wolff shipyard, and the big engineering works, employed practically no Catholics. The Sirocco Engineering Works in East Belfast, standing in the Catholic enclave of the Short Strand where there was 70% unemployment, had four Catholics out of 600 workers in the mid-70s. As a direct consequence of this, the composition of the trade unions was titled heavily against the Catholics.

**T**HE unions remained united on day-to-day trade unionism, wages and conditions — but on a basis of accepting discrimination against some trade union members. Unity rested on tacit agreement not to raise discrimination, political questions, or the "constitutional position" of the Six Counties — the relationship with Britain. Trade union unity was unity of the marginally privileged

With the oppressed on the terms laid down by the privileged — the status quo in industry and on the Six Counties' constitutional position.

At the top of the unions, prominent people often were leftists, had a left-wing past, or were Stalinists. For example, the Stalinist Betty Sinclair, a 1930s graduate of the "Lenin School" in Moscow, was Secretary of the Belfast Trades Council.

Trade unions and trades councils could sometimes be got to pass "progressive" or liberal, or Stalinist-friendly foreign affairs resolutions, but those decisions were, usually, not representative of the Orange-Unionist majority of the Northern Ireland labour movement. Unity in the Northern Ireland trade unions was a fragile, and to a serious extent a fraudulent, thing. The threat of a split on "the constitutional questions" was always present, staved off by political paralysis and tacit agreement to avoid issues.

The situation was much the same with the political labour movement. In the 1960s the Northern Ireland Labour Party had a socialist left wing in Derry and Belfast. But it was a Unionist, that is a fundamentally Protestant, party.

Time and again, throughout its history, it had been disrupted by conflicting positions on "the constitutional question". Always for the status quo, it attempted to broaden its support, sometimes by playing down its Unionist character, sometimes by trickery. In the 1940s, for example, the NILP agitated in the Falls Road under the Irish tricolour; in the Shankill Road under the Union Jack; and in the city centre under the Red Flag! Inevitably this party fell apart, repeatedly.

The Protestant workers were a privileged layer. Their privileges were pitifully small, indeed marginal — but nevertheless in the social context of Northern Ireland they were big privileges. Leon Trotsky once remarked that the greatest possible privilege is to have a crust of bread when everybody else is starving. To have, as part of the Protestant ruling bloc, a considerably better chance of a job amongst mass unemployment, was no small privilege.

Yet it would be stupid to explain the attitudes of the Northern Ireland Protestant workers in terms of a vulgar materialism which reduces everything to the defence of privilege in crude economic terms. They had a conception of their own identity, that they were British and Protestant; they had a conception of their own history as the history of heroic defence of their own traditions of religious and civil liberty against "Papist" encroachment.

It was as strong an identity as the Catholics' self-identity, and the Catholics' tradition rooted in centuries of resisting terrible oppression and trying to gain the right to freely practise their religion, which had been outlawed with varying degrees of severity for hundreds of years. For the Catholics, those centuries of oppression were not a thing of history only, but continued in what they, as second class citizens in the "Protestant State" were still suffering.

There was truth in both traditions, and both were deeply felt.

**T**HE pamphlet *IS and Ireland*, published by the Trotskyist Tendency of IS (a predecessor of Solidarity) during the 1969 debate on Ireland in IS, put it like this:

"The evolution of capitalism and Ireland's peculiar 'combined and uneven' relationship with British capitalism, had produced in the Island of Ireland something more like two nations than one."

The Northern Ireland State could not be a "Protestant State for a Protestant people" except on terms unacceptable to its Catholic minority. The Six Counties could not, as the Catholic Nationalists wanted, become part of an all-Ireland state, without the willing agreement of the 6-County Protestant-Unionist majority.

Britain's reforming drive in the mid 60s, and the "Civil Rights" agitation it stimulated and encouraged, led, in the late 60s and early 70s to Northern Ireland splitting along the lines of its internal communal-national divide. The two communities, traditions, or national identities split not horizontally along the lines of class, but vertically.

They had never been united, but now the division widened and soon assumed nascent civil war proportions. This process accelerated dramatically after 5 October 1968.

Why did things go like that? Where the upper-class Orange and Unionist political leaders were willing to make timid moves in the

direction of reform, the Protestant working class ranks became very alarmed that reform would be at their expense, and at the expense of their freedom from Catholic domination. They became alarmed that they were going to be "sold out" and find themselves in a Catholic majority all-Ireland state.

At first this disintegration of the Unionist bloc was a slow process. Around 1966, Ian Paisley, the most vocal representative of that alarm, still seemed an archaic crank. But already the first killings occurred in 1966, when a Protestant secret army, the Ulster Volunteer Force killed a Catholic barman suspected by them of having connections with an IRA which in real terms scarcely still existed.

At first, in the mid-60s, the Protestant backlash was limited. It seemed it could easily be contained. The Catholic agitation that now got under way, to add pressure from below to the British government's pressure for reform from above, turned it into a powerful mass movement.

The Catholics began to agitate for "civil rights" — one man (sic) one job, one man one house, one man one vote.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was formed in 1967. It was a broad coalition led by Republicans who had renounced the gun — at least for the moment — green nationalist politicians, Stalinists, and socialists of various sorts. The broad political mobilisations which it brought about were the first such mobilisations in the history of the state.

It is possible that the "civil rights" demands could have been acceptable to most Protestants. The civil rights movement was not only a Catholic affair. It had Protestants in it — Protestant student activists and even such future Unionist politicians as John Taylor (presently Lord Taylor). It had a lot of sympathy in the trade union movement, and not only among Catholics.

But many Protestants feared that any Catholic mobilisation would threaten the existence of the Northern Ireland state. Those fears, spurring on the Protestant ultras, inflamed the political situation and increased the Catholic-Protestant polarisation. Home Secretary William Craig and others helped what they

### Most of the Catholics saw themselves as akin to the US blacks, and so did the leaders of the civil rights movement.

feared into vehement existence by their attempts to pre-empt it.

The implications of the Catholic movement did go way beyond what they demanded by way of the civil rights movement. The fundamental civil right the Catholics lacked was the right of self-determination. They were an artificial minority within an artificial state, carved out against the will of the big majority of the people of Ireland and of a very big minority in the Six Counties.

The discrimination and repression in the Orange sectarian state all flowed from that basic situation.

It was not just ultra-sensitive Unionist politicians like Stormont Home Secretary, William Craig, who saw that the logic of any such mainly-Catholic movement would lead it straight to the question of Northern Ireland's constitutional status. The leaders of the Republicans, who were heavily involved in the civil rights agitation, saw it as the first stage in a mass mobilisation that would, when the time was ripe, raise "the national question". (The Republicans would split at the end of 1969. The "Provisional" IRA would separate from the Stalinist-influenced segment, thereafter called the "Official Republican Movement").

Against them, at the beginning, stood the very widely accepted belief that the UK welfare state — which was qualitatively more generous than that of the Republic, and on which Catholics, in proportion to their levels of unemployment, depended more than the Protestant Unionist population did — had reconciled the Northern Ireland Catholic-nationalists to partition. At the start, it had reconciled many of them.

**H**OME Secretary-William Craig banned the 5 October 1968 civil rights demonstration in Derry. When the ban was defied, the police enforced it by way of baton

charges against a peaceful crowd.

World TV audiences saw the Republican Labour MP for West Belfast, Gerry Fitt, with blood streaming from a head wound caused by a police baton. Most importantly, people in Britain saw it.

From that moment on, the Unionist government at Stormont Castle, on the edge of Belfast, was on the defensive. Northern Ireland was world headline news. The pressure for reform intensified.

One of the most important responses in Northern Ireland to the bloody events in Derry was the creation of a powerful movement of students to agitate for civil rights — People's Democracy. PD was based on Queen's University, Belfast, and initially had many Protestant members.

They were influenced by the world-wide student radicalisation of that time, which elsewhere focused on organising protests and solidarity with the Vietnamese against the USA. Many of the leaders of PD were Marxist socialists.

Beginning with a "Long March" from Belfast to Derry through "Protestant territory", which ended in a police riot in Derry, PD agitated and marched — often very provocatively — for civil rights.

After October 1968, the half-century of the Orange-Unionist majority treating their "Taigs" as roughly as necessary to keep them "in their place", and being able to do it with little "outsider" awareness and concern, was over.

It was the global television age, with its instant transmission of images across the world. An uncensored stream of horror footage from Vietnam and the US war there had poured daily onto TV screens across the world. So, throughout the 1960s, had the struggles of US black people against discrimination and second-class citizenship — its mass demonstrations, police violence, strutting racist local officials.

Now the UK's quasi-police-state backyard was erupting. Its one-sectarian-party rule for half a century, its institutionalised discrimination, were on show.

The UK media were universally sympathetic to the Catholic-nationalists. So was the British Labour government. It had already attempted to modify the sectarian political system in the artificial state.

Many of the Catholics saw themselves as akin to the US blacks, and so did the leaders of the civil rights movement, including those like Michael Farrell who were (loosely) affiliated to the International Socialist organisation in Britain.

Some Catholic-nationalist demonstrators sang civil rights songs. In the writer's observation, in Derry the following year, a film about the US Black Panthers was very popular among militant young Republicans and incipient Republicans, those who would be the soldiers of the IRA war which would begin early in 1971).

The unwonted media attention to the police assault on the peaceful (police-prohibited) march in Derry on 5 October had been aroused also as a result of the work of Northern Ireland politicians such as Gerry Fitt, a "Labour Republican". Fitt had been elected to Westminster from West Belfast in 1966, and tirelessly brought Northern Ireland affairs to Westminster in defiance of the previous convention that they were not discussed.

Media attention now became an autonomous factor. It changed everything.

**W**ILLIAM Craig was sacked from the Stormont government. The Protestant working class became increasingly alarmed at the prospect of being "sold out". The Protestant backlash grew bigger and began to reflect itself inside the ruling Unionist Party.

Central to what happened in the progressive breakdown of the 6-County State was the incapacity of the Unionist upper-class elite to carry the Protestant working class with them on reform. Every Catholic, or pro-Catholic, action stirred up and agitated the Protestant ranks, feeding the backlash. The elite could control neither the one nor the other, and the system was ground to bits between the two.

O'Neill resigned in early 1969, to be replaced by another ex-Army man, his cousin Chichester-Clark. In January 1969 police rioted in Derry's Bogside, the Catholic slum area built outside the walls of the one-time Protestant City of Londonderry, and beat a Bogsider, Samuel Devenney, to death in his house. The Catholics erected barricades to keep them out.

Serious rioting occurred in July. Then in August the upper class Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, staged their annual

but now very provocative march on the walls overlooking the Catholic slums. Big clashes developed between the police, the sectarian B-Special constables and assorted ultra-Protestants, "the Paisleyites", on the one side, and the Catholics of the Bogside on the other.

Barricades were set up, and the Bogside held off the forces of the state using stones and petrol-bombs. Protestant bigots attacked Catholic areas in West Belfast and burned out dozens of Catholic families. Barricades went up there too.

The Dublin prime minister felt obliged to say publicly that the South could not "stand idly by". The Southern state's soldiers were moved up to the border, where they did "stand idly by", leaving it to the British army to control the erupting sectarian civil war.

On 14 August the British Army was moved onto the streets to stop the state falling apart. It quickly took control in Belfast and Derry.

The Catholics welcomed the Army as saviours, famously plying them with friendly cups of tea — but they didn't take their barricades down. The Catholics of Derry and Belfast had seceded from the Northern Ireland state, for the moment. The barricades would stay up, patrolled on the outside by the British Army armed with machine guns and rifles, and on the inside by Catholics armed with hurleys (like hockey sticks), until, after the British government announced it would accept all the reforms demanded by the civil rights movement, and more, the Catholics agreed to take them down in October.

**T**HAT was the first crucial turning point. The Northern Ireland state had shown itself to be unreformable. It had been designed to serve the Protestant majority and they had a built-in majority against any change they didn't want.

The Labour government had to decide what to do. As well as sending in the army, it sent in a bevy of civil servants to oversee the chief Northern Ireland civil servants, thus seriously curtailing the independence of the Northern Ireland government. That's all the British Labour government did.

As our pamphlet *IS and Ireland* put it: *The cement had fallen out of the rickety Northern Ireland state, and its sponsors. The successors of the master builders who created the monstrous structure in the first place, had to act quickly. Direct intervention from London was the result....*

*The taking of physical control through the army was the result. A tight military scaffolding was quickly erected to prevent a collapse into chaos. This was the role of the troops. Their meaning was essentially that, though the state structure of the UK had begun to break up from internal contradictions at one of its extremities, the system was still powerful enough at the centre to prevent chaos....*

*With the steel fingers of the army, Britain quickly got a grip on the situation, and begun a controlled demolition on certain parts of the Northern Ireland set up....*

That it would take them 38 years to restore anything like normal government in Northern Ireland — and the present system can not be said to be firmly entrenched or stable yet — that, no one at the time could guess, or even imagine.

Instead of recognising that the system had to be radically dismantled and restructured, the British labour government left it essentially in being, tinkering with it. But a process had begun that would end with the abolition of Stormont in March 1972, thus depriving the Protestant majority, whose right to self-determination the Six County state allegedly gives expression to, of the right to exercise that majority in any local political structures.

The events of August-October 1969 set Northern Ireland on a new trajectory. That was not clear at the time. The youth in the Catholic areas who had been roused up and radicalised, were deflated and disappointed when the barricades came down in October 1969. An anti-climactic normality — except for the British Army now having a central role in controlling the two hostile peoples — set in for a while.

The crisis in the Unionist Party continued, under pressure on one side from the British government to reform and on the other from the Protestant population against "selling them out" to the Catholics or "Dublin". Chichester-Clark resigned in 1970, to be replaced by the tougher, less genteel and altogether less effete Brian Faulkner.

**P**ARADOXICALLY this period — 1968-1970 — saw the high point of socialism in Northern Ireland. Most of the prominent Catholic activists or representatives were socialists. The exceptions were middle-class civil rights people like John Hume, and even they allied with socialists like Gerry Fitt, MP for West Belfast, and called the party they set up in 1970 the Social Democratic and Labour Party. (Mainly Catholic, it then included some Protestants, like Ivan Cooper MP).

People's Democracy ceased to be an amorphous student movement in late 1969 and started agitating for socialism and on social questions. PD appealed to Protestant workers to see that socially they had a common interest with Catholic workers. The PD-associated MP for Mid-Ulster, Bernadette Devlin, elected in 1969, was a revolutionary socialist who worked closely in Britain with groups like IS (SWP) and, later the SLL (WRP). (Today she is hardly distinguishable from a Republican).

All the leading activists in Derry were socialists, with the leading role falling to the Derry Labour Party, led by Eamonn McCann. In Derry almost all the Republicans were socialists, and some were influenced by Trotskyism. Most of these socialists appealed on social questions to both Catholic and Protestant workers. They all carefully tried to avoid appearing as Catholics or traditional Republicans.

For example, a PD leader, Cyril Toman, who was then a sort of Trotskyist, a sympathiser with IS, tried to get himself a hearing from Protestant workers by erecting a Union Flag over his "soapbox" platform. (Toman would be a Sinn Féin Parliamentary candidate in the early 1980s).

Most of the socialists denounced the idea that there could be a non-socialist united Ireland. Only in a socialist Ireland could the Protestants' legitimate fears that Home Rule would be Rome Rule be allayed.

They roundly abused the 'Green Tory' Republic, and marched across the border waving condoms — then banned in the Catholic South — in the faces of the 26 Counties police.

By contrast, the Republicans were eclipsed. Shamed and split by their inability to defend the Catholic areas in August 1969, they seemed to count for little — and anyway the main body of Republicans were, they said, socialists too.

The high point for this Northern Ireland socialism was, perhaps, the Westminster General Election of June 1970. The Northern Ireland Labour Party refused to endorse Eamonn McCann as a candidate, and he stood with the backing of the Derry and Coleraine Labour Parties.

He advocated working-class socialism, which he defined as nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. Mc Cann got 8,000 votes.

**S**O there were lots of socialists, many of them Trotskyists of one sort or another. The problem was that they were largely confined to the Catholic community.

There were, of course, also individual Protestants who were for equality for Catholics, and were socialists. Though the big student Protestant support for civil rights fell away very quickly, some stayed. For example, Ronnie Bunting, son of a prominent associate of Ian Paisley, joined PD and was reputed to be "Chief of Staff" of the Irish National Liberation Army when he was murdered in 1981.

But those were individuals. The Protestant working class remained impervious to appeals.

Sections of it were 'radicalising' and separating off from the traditional Unionist leaders. But, as the old all-class Unionist bloc broke up, the Protestant workers turned to Paisleyism. Their radicalism was diffuse, sectional, fuelled in part by fear of the Catholics in the Six Counties, and defined against them.

Class feeling was strictly confined within their communal framework. If they recognised similar people in similar conditions to their own across the communal divide, they did not go on to conclude that there was a common interest. Communalism shaped and limited everything.

Northern Ireland's society split vertically along communal lines in 1969 and after. When the Protestant community split horizontally, it had no positive significance for class politics. It was an affair internal to the Protestant community.

That would be the basic tragedy of Northern Ireland for the rest of the twentieth century, and so far in the 21st: that the Unionist workers' disillusionment with the Orange bosses served only to build the Paisley Democratic Unionist

Party.

The Catholics and their representatives — in the first place the socialists — could, and did, propose working class unity. But they could not impose it on the Protestant workers.

Many activists agreed that "socialism was the only road", but there can be no socialism without the working class — in this case, crucially, the Protestant working class — so that road was not open.

The consequence for the radicalised Catholic youth was isolation from the main body of the working class and working-class movement, and impotence. The ground was prepared for the Provisionals' campaign by the impotence, and by the attempts of the socialists to avoid the national question.

**A**S we saw, all the socialists, including the socialist Republicans, steered clear of the national question or renounced it (some of the Republicans hypocritically, tactically). That left the national question and "anti-imperialism" entirely in the hands of the Provisionals, on one side, and the Unionists on the other.

No socialists, Marxist or other, attempted to work out a democratic programme that would allow workers on both sides to unite on an agreement to oppose oppression and the threat of oppression on both sides.

At the end of the 1940s, the tiny Irish Trotskyist group — which had links with the "heterodox" Trotskyist of the US Workers' Party (Shachtman) — had raised the idea of a federal united Ireland. But that was long forgotten.

The Republican movement had come out of World War Two, in which it had allied with Germany, pulverised and seemingly defunct. It made a principle of physical force and of boycotting the various parliaments (Dublin, Belfast, London) and apart from that was "non-political". In fact it reflected the right-wing, cold-war atmosphere of Catholic Ireland in the 40s and 50s.

It revived slowly, and in 1956 launched a military campaign of small guerilla actions on the Border. That soon petered out. In 1962, a formal "ceasefire" was declared.

Trying to learn from their experience, some of the leading activists turned "left" and began to talk of using social agitation to gain support for "the national struggle". They drew on half-forgotten experiences of left-wing Republicanism in the 30s, when left-moving traditional Republicans met the right-moving Stalinised Communist Party of Ireland and together they created a sort of populist Republicanism.

The immediate task was to win national independence ("the Republic"; for the Stalinists, "the bourgeois-democratic revolution"); then socialism would come at the next stage.

The events of August 1969 changed the direction of the IRA too. They were largely irrelevant during the fighting. "Chief of Staff" Cathal Goulding was reduced to making idle public threats. Militants were told that the problem was that the IRA had lent its guns to the Free Wales Army!

In December 1969 and January 1970 the Republican movement split. The break-aways were traditionalists. Many, like David O'Connell, were veterans of what little action there had been in the 50s. Others, like Joe Cahill — sentenced to death in 1942 but reprieved because of his age, while 19-year old Tom Williams was hanged — went back even further. They denounced the "communism" of the mainstream Republicans, though they too called themselves socialists, "democratic socialists".

The Provisionals' prospects did not seem very bright: for example, J Bowyer Bell, the author of a learned academic study of the IRA published in 1970, dismissed them as a moribund relic of the past who could not keep up with the development of the mainstream.

In fact the Provos grew with astonishing speed. They recruited rapidly from the disillusioned Catholic youth.

Fianna Fail money helped launch the Provos (Fianna Fail was then as now the governing party in the Republic), but to explain the development of their movement as a result of ruling class divide-and-rule is self-evidently inadequate, and no more than a conspiracy theory of history. As well to explain the Russian Revolution as a German plot because the German general staff allowed Lenin to cross Germany in a sealed train.

Fianna Fail wanted to split and stop the left-

wing Republican movement. They did not want what the Provos very rapidly became.

Eamonn McCann has graphically described the Provos' appeal like this: whereas everyone talked about socialism and "imperialism", but had nothing to suggest doing about it in the circumstances, the Provos could point to the British soldier standing at the local street corner and say: "There, that's imperialism. Shoot it."

The determined avoidance of the national question by the left and the official Republicans — who consigned it to the distant future, together with a socialism that had to wait on the Protestant workers — ensured that the national question, which lay at the heart of the subordinate and oppressed position of the Catholics, was raised, when it inevitably forced its way to the front, in the Provos' initially right-wing version.

The Provos could, of course, also draw on the Catholic-Republican culture — songs, history, ingrained loyalties — with which the Catholic community was saturated. In late 1969 a staunch old-style Republican like ex-internee Sean Keenan seemed a respected anachronism; within a year or 18 months, people like that were the centre of a powerful movement which had taken in many of the radicalised youth eager to "shoot imperialism".

One consequence of this was that the Provisional Republican movement would itself

## The crisis in Northern Ireland brought to public attention in Britain by the events of 5 October in Derry, made Northern Ireland a major question of British politics

become radicalised, especially in Belfast and Derry — though its radicalism was within the limits of one community.

**T**HERE are not many areas of political or social life in which Trotskyist groups have had the possibility of playing a decisive role and where they played a major role in large-scale struggle.

There are two examples in the British Trotskyist movement. One is Militant, when it led the Labour council in Liverpool after 1984. The other is IS in relation to Ireland.

The leaders of PD, which played a central and driving role up to August 1969, and an important, if a lesser one, after that were supporters of IS, and collaborated closely with the British organisation. Regular consultations took place.

This relationship, which formally ended only in 1971, after the Provisional IRA war got going, is something that is deeply buried in the much-mythologised history of the tendency. Tony Cliff, in his autobiography, dealt with it to a considerable extent, but very strangely. We will later see what he has to say.

The crisis in Northern Ireland brought to public attention in Britain by the events of 5 October in Derry, made Northern Ireland a major question of British politics.

That was the situation in which IS turned its attention to the Irish question — not for the first time in the history of the tendency, as we'll see, but anew.

Irish emigration, mostly to the UK, had run at about a thousand a week for decades (out of a population of not quite three million), and there were massive Irish populations in British cities — about a million in London alone.

We integrated easily, in conditions of full employment, and all the more so in that there were long-established Irish communities in British cities, and a vast layer of second and third generation Irish already settled. In a Connolly Association pamphlet in 1955, the organisation's secretary reported that discrimination against Irish people in jobs and housing had largely ended after the beginning of full employment at the start of World War Two. It was the Connolly Association's business to agitate against such discrimination, and, with the Communist Party and Labour Party networks to which the Connolly Association was connected, they would have known about it.

Even at the height of the IRA bombing campaign in Britain, in the 1970s, there was no general backlash against Irish people.

Politically the Irish immigrants in London and the other cities were generally Labour —

the "town labourers" from the small Irish towns, the surplus sons and daughters of small farmers who, under the system in which all the father's property went to one child, the father's choice, had nothing to inherit.

In Liverpool, where Orange-Green, Protestant-Catholic sectarianism remained a force well into the 1960s, the Labour Party was heavily based on Irish Catholic-nationalist immigrants and their descendants.

In terms of Irish politics, all Catholic migrants from Ireland brought with them some variant of Irish nationalism tied to the memory, the history, and the legends of Ireland's long oppression by England. From 26 Counties schools and from older relatives, they would have a picture of Partition as something imposed by British, and only the dimmest awareness of the rootedness of Partition in the distinctions of history and identity (as well as of the religion that was one strong expression of that identity) among the Irish.

Catholics from the Six Counties would bring with them bitter memories of their second-class citizenship, and the conviction that the Irish-English conflict did not end with the establishment of the 26 Counties state in 1922.

The events of October 1968 naturally aroused the interest and influenced the natural partisanship of Catholic-nationalist Irish people in Britain. For IS it was an issue to which the young student membership, radicalised by the Vietnam war and by such things as the US civil rights movement, could be turned.

The Irish question had the advantage, politically, that Irish immigrants were workers. The newest arrivals were heavily concentrated in the building industry, but the whole large and continually growing Irish population was scattered right across British industry. Many, many such people had long been integrated into the British unions, as shop stewards, militants, or officials.

It was a great opportunity. But IS had first to sort out its "line".

Could it simply endorse the nationalist political consciousness, soft or hardened version, of the Irish immigrants to which it turned? What would it say about Partition? What would it stay to Protestant Irish workers?

Anti-Partition had — since 1949: it can be dated exactly — been a greatly influential staple of agitation by the Communist Party and its Irish front, the Connolly Association, which influenced layers of the labour movement way beyond the CP; and there were earlier traditions of Anti-Partitionism in the labour movement too.

IS first formally established its "line" on Ireland, and the political basis of the campaign on Ireland it simultaneously decided to launch, at its National Committee meeting at the beginning of January 1969. In fact the "line" had already appeared in Socialist Worker, in an article that was the basis of the committee discussion.

The *Socialist Worker* article concluded with the demands on which IS was to campaign: "In this campaign, the best thing British socialists can do is demand:

(1) The withdrawal of all British troops from Ireland;

(2) An end to the supply of British military equipment to the Northern Irish Tory Party and paramilitary Black Hundreds, the B-Specials;

(3) Stop British subsidies to the Tory police state of Northern Ireland".

In its text, the article explicitly eschewed a united Ireland, rejecting both "Thames and Tiber" — London and Rome — London, the Mecca of the Orangeists, and Rome, which (it was implied) controlled the Catholic 26 Counties.

The third demand was a strange and rare one, and mystifying to many IS members. But most striking was what was absent from the list of demands.

There were vaguely socialist ideas in the article, and the demand about troop withdrawal had nationalist implications. But self-determination for Ireland? Support for a Workers' Republic and those fighting for it? Neither! Why?

The discussion at the January 1969 committee meeting was the beginning of a wider discussion in the organisation that would last 18 months and establish that these omissions were not sloppiness, but choice. The IS leaders would defend the omissions vehemently, and oppose any additions. The main leaders of IS would vote at that committee meeting against supporting self-determination for Ireland, and against IS agitating for a Workers' Republic! IS's response to the Northern Ireland crisis was a Unionist-Partitionist response!



# workers' liberty & Solidarity

## Unions vote for political hari-kiri

Labour Party conference was effectively closed down this week, and some of the last vestiges of democracy eliminated. The left must now recognise that, even more than ever before, we need to re-establish the closest links to the wide range of struggles in our communities, from trade union fights to social movements, campaigning on issues from climate change to asylum rights. In this way we can build a progressive socialist force which in turn can effect a reclamation of the Labour Party.

John McDonnell MP

THERE is clearly a mood at conference that it is necessary to show loyalty to Gordon Brown to ensure electoral victory. However, the price has been not just to close down democracy at this year's conference, but democracy at future conferences. It must be highly unlikely that the trade unions will be able to take back their votes in two years' time, and of course that means not just that the block vote for the trade unions no longer exists, but that no CLP can any longer vote at conference to say what they want done.

The next step is to organise around policy but also to make sure that we have our voices heard in the party. We need to have democratic left forums within the party.

We need to rise to the political challenges of dealing with the proposed pay freezes, the future of Royal Mail, attacks on abortion rights, and make sure the Agency Workers' Bill and the Trade Union Freedom Bill become realities. It is only by victories that the left will gain confidence in the Labour Party and be able to be a strong voice for working class people.

Katy Clark MP

ON 23 September the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth voted to ban unions and local Labour Parties from putting motions on current political issues to any future Labour Party conference.

Labour Party policy-making will now be supervised by the Parliamentary-leadership-controlled "Joint Policy Committee", and ratified by occasional take-it-or-leave-it referendums of the membership.

Union leaders had said as late as 12 September before that there was "no chance" of them supporting such rule changes. A few days before the conference, though, they all buckled.

Eighty per cent of the union votes were cast for banning motions, only 20% against - and most if not all of that 20% due to the Unison delegation voting the

right way *by mistake*.

The cowed and depleted local Labour Parties voted 82%-18% to ban themselves and the unions from putting motions.

A meeting in London on 19 September, called under the auspices of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), started a fightback in the unions. It initiated an LRC leaflet opposing the rule changes, distributed in Bournemouth; it called for a further organising meeting on 3 November to rally trade unionists to call their leaders to account and fight for 2008 union conferences to mandate a union push to restore their political rights. (The ban is officially due for review at the 2009 Labour Party conference).

There will be further debate about this fightback at the LRC conference on 17 November.

• [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk)

### Open letter to Tony Woodley

see page 3

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## Lessons of Northern Rock's collapse

RHODRI EVANS PRESENTS SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*Why did Northern Rock collapse?*

NOT directly because people couldn't meet their mortgage payments, but because of the knock-on effects from the US mortgage bubble bursting. Those knock-on effects are as wide-ranging and unpredictable as they are because of the dramatic, historic expansion and restructuring of global financial markets in the last two decades or so.

The rich do a lot more trading of bits of paper representing (ultimately) entitlements to future profits or interest payments than they used to, and they do it more globally. The ratio of global financial assets to annual world output rose from 109% in 1980 to 316% in 2005 (and 405% in the USA).

The processes are more complicated and opaque. A new sort of bit of paper, called "credit derivatives", has expanded from zero ten years ago to \$26 trillion today.

The mortgage lenders do not just hold on to your mortgage agreement and wait for your repayments. They convert a bundle of mortgage agreements into a "financial asset" and sell it on, thus getting their cash quicker.

This is the world, as journalist Martin Wolf puts it, of the "clever intermediaries, who persuaded [some people] to borrow what they could not afford, and [others] to invest in what they did not understand".

Northern Rock had expanded its mortgage borrowing quickly by not waiting for depositors to put in savings, but instead going out to borrow cash on the wild and wacky edges of the financial markets.

There are a lot of financial bits of paper out there now whose real value no-one really knows. When an edge of the credit system starts collapsing, no-one quite knows which bits of paper are affected. So many other areas of credit tighten up, too. That is what brought down Northern Rock.

As a reaction to the crises of the 1930s, up to the 1970s credit and banking was quite closely regulated in the big capitalist economies. That was the era of "managed capitalism", the era when social-democrats smugly imagined that capitalism was becoming more and more "socialistic" every year.

The crises of the 1970s produced the opposite reaction to those of the 1930s. Economies were deregulated and privatised — initially, mostly, as a ploy to meet more intense global competition and to turn the blade of that competition against the working class.

Those measures "worked", as slicker credit set-up generally does for capital, to make the system more flexible and agile. But they also store up vast instabilities.

The greatest of those is the huge US trade deficit, covered by inflows from Asian and other capitalists buying US stocks and bonds.

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