

An injury to one is an injury to all

Solidarity

& WORKERS' LIBERTY

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Help French workers beat their Thatcher!

What the French left says, page 9
German railworkers' strike, page 2

**KATE PALLAS REPORTS FROM PARIS,
20 NOVEMBER**

TENS of thousands of striking public sector workers, railway workers and students took to the streets today to protest against Sarkozy's attacks on their pensions, education, and health service. The beginning of the public sector fightback coincides with the seventh day of the transport workers' national strike and the continued strikes and occupations at thirty seven French universities.

Across France many hundreds of thousands mobilised to declare that their livelihoods, their right to organise as workers and their right to a non-privatised university education would not be sacrificed on the altar of the government's ferocious attempts to "liberalise" the French economy.

By the time the Paris demonstration set off from the Place d'Italie, the air was thick with

the smoke of protesters' flares, their enthusiasm showing no sign of being dampened by the rain — doubtlessly buoyed by the signs of increased mobilisation among RATP and SNCF rail workers that morning. Although a wide range of unions, individual workplaces — such as hospitals and schools — and universities were represented, they were overshadowed by the massive presence of members of the CGT (Confederation Générale du Travail).

Despite certain right-wing CGT bureaucrats' attempts to quash grassroots strike organising in the fear that railway workers will make the union look unruly — even before the 13th CGT head Bernard Thibault is reported to have said that the strike should be cut short — workers from both the public and private sectors were in the streets in solidarity with their fellow striking workers and students. Parisian workers and students had clearly recognised that although Sarkozy's reforms affect them differently in the short

term, they represent an attack on all workers and therefore must be met with a broad, united response.

CGT officials used vans to block the road so that the railworkers' contingent on the demonstrations was marching separately from, and out of sight of, the students. But workers and students met up at the final rally.

CGT workers from health, education, energy and transport sectors marched under the banner "Les services publics: un bien commun à défendre" ("Public services: a common good to be defended"). However, there was a noticeable absence of the banners of railway workers' strike committees.

Self-organised strike committees at the biggest Parisian train stations have been calling General Assemblies all week and have determinedly maintained the momentum of the strike, much to union bureaucrats' dismay.

Having been sold out by their own union

— UNEF accepted the government's university "autonomy" bill without protest — the thousands of students at the demonstration did not march under official union paraphernalia, nor were the majority visibly divided into individual universities.

Ironically, one lonely UNEF balloon floated above the students' block as they called for young people to get into the streets and Sarkozy to get out of their universities. University students were joined by sixth form (lycée) and younger (college) students, some of whom were barely in their teens. Shamefully, and despite mass student organising to rival the anti-CPE mobilisation of 2005-06, the majority of university lecturers and professors have not organised in solidarity with their students.

One strikingly grotesque placard that attracted much attention showed Sarkozy's and Margaret Thatcher's faces mangled together. French workers know what's at stake!

German rail strike will smash sweetheart deals

BY MATT HEANEY, IN BERLIN

FAR from being only a footnote to the French strike, the rail workers' strike on 14-17 November — about union recognition and pay — is an important struggle.

In 1994, the former East German Reichsbahn was merged with the West German Bundesbahn, and the new company, Deutsche Bahn, became a "private" company, albeit owned entirely by the state. Since the fall of the Wall, 400,000 jobs on the German railways have been destroyed, yet the new company has only made a profit since 2005.

The major union, Transnet, part of the German TUC, supports a planned sell-off, and Transnet's leader Norbert Hansen has a strong, public friendship with DB boss Mehndorn. However the German Social Democrats do not support the complete sale of DB, and this has left Transnet isolated.

Transnet agreed with DB a 4.5% pay

increase; that was intended to guarantee both Transnet's position as the major recognised union, and also the union's pro-privatisation position. However the demands of train drivers and crew have got in the way of the union-company partnership.

Since 1994 workers have suffered longer hours, unpaid overtime, irregular shift patterns. Many are only informed of their shifts the day before. Such working conditions were agreed by Transnet.

Around 80% of drivers, and an increasing number of train crew have been looked for alternative representation — in the smaller, but older, union GDL.

The German media has been confused by this "English-style" (!) trade unionism — workers' leaders wearing leather jackets, not pin-stripe suits, who are "in tow" to their members... talk of indefinite strikes, and the headline demand for 31%. This is a misnomer, put around by DB bosses to discredit the GDL

along with their attempts to recruit 1000 new drivers and to find strike breakers abroad. However, opinion polls consistently show — even during and after recent strikes — majority support for the GDL and lay the blame for the dispute at the door of DB management.

Court decisions which banned the GDL from taking action — as strikes "would affect the economy" (!) — were eventually overturned, leading to the most recent stoppages, in freight, inter-city and local rail transport. It seems that the GDL will get recognition and achieve a better deal for its members, improving the 4.5% Transnet agreement.

Companies who use "just-in-time" methods have been badly affected by the strikes — car production came to a halt in Brussels, for example. The employer's lobby will put DB under pressure to end the dispute.

While industrial unions (like Transnet) may be correct in principle, it is no surprise that groups of well-organised workers who have

seen few gains and worsening conditions decide to organise themselves elsewhere. It is therefore a disgrace that the GDL has so far received next to no official support from other union leaders or even minor bureaucrats — especially when the DGB union Verdi have profited well from dissatisfied ex-Transnet members (and organisers) joining them.

Even the "official" Communist Party, the DKP, has refused to support and has criticised the dispute, and the "Left Party" leadership is badly split on the issue. Staff who have "Beamten"-status (civil servants) who are not allowed to strike (but who do not have to cross picket lines) worked in place of GDL members on strike days. Some trains were replaced by bus services run by DB regional bus companies. Most of the workers in both cases would have been members of Transnet.

Picket lines are so rare in Germany that the idea of "never crossing" one clearly needs to be relearned.

Keeping people scared

BY RAY MORRIS

THE government wants to extend the time for which terrorism suspects can be detained without charge from 28 to 56 days. A final vote in Parliament on this is expected by the beginning of December.

Gordon Brown refuses to say for what exact period he thinks the police should be able to hold people, but insists that whatever that period is, it is absolutely necessary.

Meanwhile, counter-terrorism officials at the Home Office are proposing to combat terrorism by changing the language of their press releases. "We haven't got the message right", one said a couple of days ago; young Muslims will be less likely to sympathise with al-Qaeda if the government talks about a "struggle" against terrorists rather than a

"battle". Subjecting them to police harassment and detention without charge is nothing to do with it, then?

This hardly gives us confidence that the people who want to lock people up for two months without accusing them of any crime have a clue what they're doing.

The lack of information coming out of the government is in stark contrast to the amount they want going in. They want identity cards and a "national identity register". Under the Orwellianly-misnamed "Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act" information on government databases, including intercepted emails and phone calls, can be shared between departments, the police, social services, local councils and several hundred other bodies without the knowledge from the individual. And get lost by TNT transporting the informa-

tion from place to place!

The government wants to log credit card transactions and all travel ticket purchases as part of its "E-borders" scheme to keep out migrants, and subject people to random searches by police at railway stations, airports and shopping centres. All this activity will be focussed on people with dark skins.

This whole gamut of measures to give the state more control over every aspect of our lives is rendered politically possible by one tactic: keep the people scared. Gordon Brown said recently in a Parliamentary debate on detention without charge that he wanted to avoid exaggerating the threat and giving terrorists the "oxygen of publicity" — but he's going a funny way about it.

The constant repetition of the idea that "Britain", "British jobs" and the "British way of life" are under threat from terrorists, migrants or whoever is the best way the government and the right-wing press have of muffling a movement of solidarity to cut through all this garbage and unite people of all nationalities and ethnicities as workers.

Conversely, only such a movement, united and militant, can put a stop to the illiberal tide that depends on, at the same time as it creates, insecurity and division.

"Lyrical terrorist" found guilty

BY JACK STAUNTON

A HEATHROW shop assistant who wrote poems glorifying terrorism on WHSmith till roll and possessed "terrorist handbooks" has been convicted under the 2000 Terrorism Act.

Samina Malik was found guilty of collecting on her computer such titles as the Al Qaeda manual, the Mujahideen poisons handbook and various firearms manuals deemed "useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism".

While the documents in her possession might have been "useful" to a terrorist, she committed no act of terrorism", nor was she actually involved in jihadist organisations, nor did she have the means (weapons, plans, associates) to carry out any terrorist attack. She was convicted not for anything she had done, but for what she believed.

Malik's beliefs are, of course, repulsive to socialists and anyone with a modicum of humanist feeling. Quotes from the self-proclaimed "Lyrical Terrorist"'s poems include "Kafirs [non-believers] your time will come soon, and no one will save you from your doom", "Let us make jihad/Move to the front line/To chop, chop head off kafir swine", or, in the piece *How to behead*, "It's not as hard as some may think/It's all about the flow of the wrist".

However we are opposed to Malik's conviction and the jail threat which hangs over her. We do not trust the bourgeois state to determine which views are "acceptable". Today they may be now trying to silence the (largely private) rants of a deluded young woman with stupid pretensions to terrorist grandeur, tomorrow the bourgeois state could move to censor the revolutionary left and workers' movement.

We are for the open discussion of — and if necessary ideological offensive against — all ideas. While we do not want people to stir up hatred and injury by their words, that is not the reason Malik has been prosecuted. To simply shut up by way of bans or jailings those who spout reactionary sentiment buttresses their antagonism to democratic norms. We are for free and full democratic debates in society, which means opposing thought-crime legislation.

SNP plays long game

ACCORDING to SNP leader and Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, Scotland will be independent by 2017.

Salmond's claim follows earlier SNP predictions which came and went but left the Union unscathed. The SNP's best known prognostication was its slogan of the early 1990s: "Scotland Free by 93." As the then Scottish Labour Party leader, Donald Dewar, commented in a rare moment of humour: "It's a good slogan. It rhymes, and they can revive it every ten years."

Salmond is certainly correct not to see independence as something lurking round the corner. Recent opinion polls have consistently shown support for independence running at less than 25%. In late 2006, on the other hand, an opinion poll found 52% in favour of independence.

The contrast in these figures probably has more to do with the unreliability of opinion polls. However, there appears to be a decline in support for independence in recent months — it is backed by well under 50% of the population.

That support for independence should have declined while support for the party of independence — the SNP — has increased over the same period is paradoxical only at first sight.

Since coming to power the SNP has implemented a variety of populist measures. Its first budget froze council tax levels, for example — albeit in combination with backtracking on manifesto commitments, cutting funding for higher education, and planning to cut public spending in Scotland by 2%.

In general, however, the SNP is still seen as an administration committed to reversing the failures of its predecessors at Holyrood. Hence, support for it has grown.

But the fact that the SNP has been somewhat successful tends to weaken the argument in favour of independence. After all, if council tax levels can be frozen, school sizes cut, and prescription charges abolished within the framework of the Union, then why take a leap into the unknown?

Even if support for independence begins to increase again, it is unlikely to reach 50% by 2011, the year in which the SNP is committed to attempting to stage a referendum on the question.

But even the holding of a referendum in 2011, never mind the SNP winning it, is unlikely. Unless they were to undergo a sudden change in line, the combined ranks of Labour, Lib-Dems and Tories in Holyrood would scupper a referendum, by voting down the proposal.

In this context, Salmond's prediction

makes some degree of sense. His calculation appears to be:

The SNP will be returned with an increased majority in the 2011 Holyrood elections (partly on the basis of its record during its first term of office, and partly due to a backlash against the other parties for denying Scotland the right to stage a referendum); the SNP's record during its second term in office will win it even greater support and credibility; by 2015 it will be popular and trusted enough to hold and win a referendum; after a couple of years of negotiations, Scotland achieves independence.

Whatever else might be said about Salmond's calculations — which might be wrong, but cannot be said to be irrational — they underline the extent to which the SNP's demand for independence for Scotland is a political project for making Scotland an independent unit of capital accumulation in the globalised world economy.

Salmond's vision of an independent Scotland is a very material one — that of a low-tax, high-profit "Celtic tiger" economy. His basic problem is whether he can convince a majority of the Scottish electorate that Scottish capitalism is better than Unionist capitalism.

Northern Rock and the case for nationalising the City

THE Liberal Democrats are calling on the Government to nationalise the failed bank Northern Rock, and denouncing New Labour from being held back from this course by "ideological preoccupations".

Such are the weird convolutions produced in British politics by the Blair-Brown counter-revolution in the Labour Party. Lib Dem economic spokesperson Vincent Cable, a man solidly on the pale-Thatcherite right wing of the Lib Dems, denounces the Labour Party leadership for having "ideological preoccupations" against public ownership (*Guardian*, 20 November 2007)!

Cable, of course, only wants "the government to take the bank over temporarily. It can thereby stabilise the position, avoid being held to ransom by fortune hunters in the City or the shareholders. Public ownership would also create time for an orderly sale".

Philip Richards, boss of one of the big investment fund with shares in Northern Rock, goes part of the way with Cable. He too wants the Government to delay getting Northern Rock sold off, though he thinks the delay can be done without nationalisation.

Otherwise, says Richards, the whole operation will simply enrich some "vulture capitalist".

The Government has extended about £40 billion of credit to Northern Rock, £24 billion in loans and £18 billion in guarantees for people who have their savings in the bank. The amount is bigger than Britain's annual military budget, and nearly 40% of the annual health service budget — all going to prop up one fairly small bank.

The former Northern Rock bosses have resigned, without personally losing anything. The huge credit guarantee from the Government sets the scene for a group of financiers to buy the bank cheaply, chop it about, siphon off huge salaries and bonuses, and then sell the business at a huge gain a couple of years later.

The Government, Richards put it, will be "channelling money from 140,000 small shareholders into the hands of a vulture capitalist".

The precedent is the purchase of Japan's collapsed Long Term Credit Bank in 2000 by an American financial group. The financiers snapped up the bank for \$1 billion; four years later they floated the chopped-about business on the stock exchange at a value of \$10 billion. According to another American financier: "This may [have been] the most profitable private-equity deal of all time".

The way to cut out the vultures is for Northern Rock to be nationalised — for good — and the rest of high finance to be taken into public ownership too, with no compensation except for small shareholders.

We would need a different sort of government from the present one to be able to "demand" such a measure from the government. But if we had a workers' government — a government accountable and responsive to the organised working class — that is what it would do.

Some would tell us that this is unthinkable. "Financial and business services" now account for an unbelievable 30% of GDP in Britain. A great deal of the financial froth-swilling in the City would implode immediately on nationalisation. Fees charged by City firms on the financial dealings which they manage are a huge part of Britain's "exports" (about £20 billion).

Yes, it is true that many of the people now working in the City would have to be retrained and redeployed to other jobs; but why should the smartest brains in the country be devoted to high-class gambling rather than something socially constructive?

Yes, Britain would lose out relative to other

countries if high finance were toppled from its perch: but do we really want Britain's income to be sustained by fees on the debt-management of poorer countries?

The secret of the last 20 or 25 years is not, as it appears to be, that capital has gone into the financial sphere rather than into production. It is that financial manipulations have allowed what Marx called "fictitious capital" to double and treble.

Marx wrote in *Capital* volume 3: "The same piece of money can be used... for various loans... It represents in the various loans various capitals in succession... The number of capitals which it actually represents depends on the number of times that it functions as the value-form of various commodity-capitals... Everything in this credit system is doubled and trebled and transformed into a mere phantom of the imagination".

The financial manipulations have expanded enormously since Marx's time, and especially in the last 25 years. The proportion of world financial assets to world output has trebled since 1980.

Its apologists say that this vast multiplication of credit has allowed new productive enterprise to get started more easily. In fact, in the USA, the greatest centre of self-escalating high finance, research and development expenditure has lagged since 2002 (in large part because government-financed research has dwindled).

Productive investment has been sluggish, compared to profits. The UK's huge concentration of high finance does not make its research spending particularly high.

Meanwhile, the escalation of high finance has made the chopping-up and asset-stripping of productive enterprise much easier. "Private equity" groups raise cash in the financial markets, take over companies, and ruthlessly chop them up with a view to quick gains and tax benefits.

As the *Observer* put it (11 February 2007): "Private equity works on the basis of making at least a 20 per cent return on investment in a three-to-seven-year timeframe. Savage cuts to workforces and asset disposals — particularly property — are the preferred route...."

Today British firms controlled by private equity generate total sales of £424 billion, export £48 billion and, according to the British Venture Capital Association, account for 2.8 million jobs, equal to 19 per cent of private-sector employees.

At the AA, which is jointly owned by [private equity group] CVC and its industry rival Permira... hours have been extended and intense pressure and the casualisation of labour have stoked a climate of fear".

Most of the growth of high finance is nothing to do with banks lending more to productive enterprise, but rather with banks and financial groups sloshing round funds more among them-

selves.

Financiers cannot, in the last analysis, live by taking in each others' loans, any more than a community can live by everyone taking in each other's washing. The profits and the bonuses and the new office towers we can see in the centres of high finance are revenue siphoned off from the efforts of productive labour elsewhere in the economy.

This is also one of the reasons why in 1987, 1991-2, and 2001-2, huge crises could develop in high finance in the big capitalist economies with relatively small effect on trade and production. Financial crises do have "real" effects: even if the current credit crisis, originating in the US mortgage market, goes no further, it will mean up two million people in the USA losing their houses, and a big slump in the construction industry. But the real effects can *sometimes* be limited because the financial dealings are so far removed from production.

Taking the financial sector into public ownership — preferably international, or at least Europe-wide, public ownership — would enable us to make the choices for where investment goes transparent and democratically accountable. It would vastly increase the resources going into socially constructive purposes, at the expense of fees, bonuses, and pay-offs for "vulture capitalists".

FIRE SERVICE

FBU pensions fight

IN July 2007 three retired firefighters were told by the Fire Authority in London (LFEPA) that their pensions would stop. This arose because of changes to the rules of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. The three were told that, because they were still capable of performing some duties, specifically, because they were still fit to do a desk job, they were not eligible to receive a pension.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has launched court action because they believe that it now be virtually impossible for any firefighter to take early retirement due to ill health in future.

Martin Marrion, one of the three, worked for London Fire Brigade for 27 years until his career ended prematurely in January 2006, due to hearing loss. He says he was refused a desk job and was therefore given an ill-health pension. After he appealed over the size of his pension, the Appeal Board decided to take it away completely!

Martin Marrion is now out of work, because his employer put him out of work, but without a pension.

Reasonably, the FBU argues ill-health pensions are crucial because the job is so dangerous.

The union has also called for a political and industrial campaign aimed at reversing these government changes to the pension scheme. The FBU's London regional committee (LRC) has passed a resolution, which makes it clear that any such campaign must include a ballot for national strike action. London branches are now voting on that resolution.

RAIL

Cleaners' strike due in New Year

THE RMT's campaign to organise cleaners on the underground is gaining strength, and more and more, it is being directed by the cleaners themselves. Last month, the RMT cleaners elected a committee of cleaners who will run their organising campaign — a real step towards the cleaners taking control of their own organisation.

New cleaner reps have been trained, with a sound grasp of industrial issues, and how to fight cases. A successful cleaners' recruitment week last month signed up station staff as well as cleaners. Their determination to go out and organise is setting an example that drivers and station staff across the rest of the RMT would do well to follow.

The support of members on the stations and trains is still essential, however. A major problem is the lack of cleaning staff, leaving cleaners to work as many as six stations in one shift. Local RMT branches are starting to build links between local reps and cleaner activists. If local reps push their management on issues such as the cleanliness of the stations, they will be part of the fight for more cleaning staff. They will also encourage resistance amongst the cleaners, by being ready to support cleaners who refuse to do their excessive workload.

Plans for a cleaners strike in the new year are still going ahead. Both unions that organise cleaners, the T&G and the RMT, have written to all the cleaning companies, demanding £7.20 an hour, sick pay, and a travel allowance. When the cleaning companies refuse, as they will almost certainly do, the unions will be in official dispute. Many cleaners are hungry for the chance to take

Postal workers' deal: vote NO!

THE ballot on whether postal workers will accept the deal brokered between the Communication Workers' Union and Royal Mail closes on 27 November. Despite the difficulty of restarting action after such a prolonged lull, and the heavy pressure in favour of the deal from both the union leadership and management, CWU activists say the ballot could be close.

Activists met last month and launched a "CWU Rank and File" group to campaign against the deal and create the embryo of a rank-and-file network on the post — something that has been sorely missing over the years, with militancy not matched by political organisation and thus easily manipulated by the union bureaucracy. About 30 branches, a third of all CWU postal branches, have recommended that their members vote no.

In response, the leadership has issued a podcast to all members (available on the union website). In it, deputy general secretary and chief postal negotiator Dave Ward argues that the deal "is the best that can be achieved in the circumstances".

PAY, FLEXIBILITY, PENSIONS

WARD, Hayes et al argue that in terms of pay the deal represents a significant improvement on Royal Mail's original offer. The reality is that postal workers are still being offered a real terms pay cut. The original offer was 2.5 per cent. Now Royal Mail is offering 5.4 per cent over two years, beginning in October not April. 1.5 per cent next year will be dependent on accepting increased "flexibility", which will mean further reductions in pay. So much for the figure of 6.9 per cent banded about in the press!

In terms of flexibility, the leadership has accepted the key elements of Royal Mail's demands. New working practices, including the later start times the imposition of which sparked so much wildcat action over the summer, will mean not only further de facto cuts in pay and an even more back-breaking

action and prove how essential their undervalued work really is. 18 November was the 20th anniversary of the Kings Cross fire, largely caused by a build-up of litter. When cleaners strike, other grades will hopefully show solidarity by closing stations and refusing to drive trains on health and safety grounds. The Underground is not safe to run without cleaners.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Careworkers strike

AT the time of writing, 270 day-centre workers employed by Glasgow City Council are beginning their sixth week of all-out indefinite strike action.

The workers, members of Unison, work in twelve centres across Glasgow, providing support and care to people with varying degrees of physical and learning disabilities, as well as providing assistance to their families and carers. It is a difficult job and carries a high degree of responsibility.

Like the strike by the social care workers during the summer, this strike has been trig-

gered by the Council's Pay and Benefits Review. In theory, by implementing the "Single Status Agreement", this review is meant to eliminate the pay inequalities suffered by women employees. In practice, the Council is trying to use it as an excuse to deskill jobs and cut pay.

To add insult to injury, most day-centre workers are women. In other words, a review which was meant to benefit women workers would, if implemented, result in wage cuts for a predominantly female sector of the Council workforce of between £3,000 and £6,000 a year.

The Council is also intent on cutting services for day-centre users.

Almost simultaneously with the start of the strike, the Council announced a review of the future of day-centres. It appears that the Council's intention is to shut down most of the day-centres, axe around 50 of the jobs, transfer the services previously provided in the centres to "hubs", and focus on getting service-users into education and employment.

To date, the Council has taken a hard line both in response to the strike and also in conducting (or, more accurately, not conducting) consultation on its review of day-centres, which, it has claimed, will be completed by Christmas.

The Council has refused to attempt to negotiate a settlement to the strike with the strikers unless Unison agrees to its "modernisation" programme. And it has also refused to engage in consultation about "modernisa-

tion" unless the strike is called off.

In order to force the Council to back down, the strikers, who voted over eight to one in favour of strike action, have been running a high profile campaign.

Strikers have staged demonstrations outside Glasgow City Chambers, the former Fruitmarket (when the result of Glasgow's bid to host the Commonwealth Games was announced), and the Scottish Parliament (where SNP MSPs told strikers that they had their sympathy, but financing a settlement of the dispute was a matter for Westminster rather than Holyrood).

On Saturday 17 November a well-attended rally and demonstration took place in Glasgow city centre, with delegations from Unison branches in Edinburgh, Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire.

Street collections, workplace collections, and union branch donations have already raised £17,000 for the strikers, reflecting the broad support enjoyed by the strikers not just in the trade union movement but also among the public as well.

While financial support for the strikers needs to be maintained, it is equally important that other potential disputes arising out of the Pay and Benefits Review are brought forward, so that the Council is not left able to take on one group of workers at a time.

• Send messages of support and donations to: Glasgow UNISON, 18 Albion Street, Glasgow G1.

• cwurankandfile.wordpress.com

RESTART THE ACTION!

A MAJORITY voting no will not, of course, mean that the action restarts automatically. But it is the first step in that battle. A no vote will allow those activists who have organised against the deal to massively up the pressure on the Postal Exec and the union leadership to get the strikes back on, with the maximum possible participation and decisions made by elected strike committees, not by relatively unaccountable union bureaucrats.

At the same time, the way in which Hayes, Ward and their supporters have cynically and undemocratically manipulated members, turning the action on and off with little accountability, poses the need for root-and-branch change in the CWU. (So does the fact that only five Postal Exec members voted against the deal!)

That means a fight to remake the union so that it fights consistently for its members' interests, instead of seeking to act as an intermediary between workers and management, the Labour Party leadership and the government.

This should be the direction in which CWU Rank and File develops.

When "aid" means evictions

BY RICHARD WHITTLE

Even with Labour and the Conservatives outdoing each other to be the party of big business and wealth, some poor people are still popular at Westminster — that is poor people in other countries. Laments for the scale of global poverty and a stern faced insistence on the need to do something about it are becoming the favoured recourse of every politician, most obviously Gordon Brown.

Soundbites like "when conscience is joined to conscience, moral force to moral force, think how much our power to do good can achieve" (Brown on his recent trip to America) are lapped up by the press as testimony to the ethical fibre of this vicar's son. Brown is able to back up his words with the recent announcement that Britain has become the world's second largest overseas aid donor, thanks to a 12% increase in spending (an £808 million rise to £7.5 billion) in the past year.

That's a lot of money, and it is money that, in contrast to other government spending (on, say, the health service) is assumed to be going to the right places and people. To an extent not enjoyed by any other ministry, the Department for International Development (DFID) avoids any serious critical scrutiny.

This is unfortunate. The DFID's actions and policies have far reaching consequences and they come from the same sheet as the rest of New Labour's policies. However, shrouded as they are by the cod profundity which spews out of politicians, businessmen, celebrities and other sometime baby-kissers, a web of multilateral institutions like the World Bank, northern government departments like our own Department for International Development and a range of NGOs, companies and consultancies for the most part escape censure. Reports such as those by War on Want and Action Aid showing how much of UK aid money is given to corporate consultancies may get the third slot on *Newsnight*, but this information rarely influences future reporting on the subject.

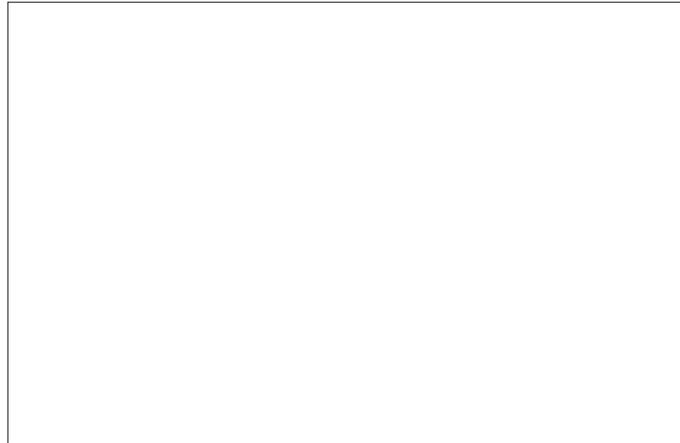
DFID both runs projects itself and funds those of other development organisations such as the World Bank Group and NGOs. It therefore makes sense to look, not just at what DFID itself is doing, but also where its money is going.

The NGOs chosen to benefit from the development largesse have to conform to a certain way of doing things. If you cite, say, colonialism and ongoing resource extraction by multinationals as cause of poverty and a hindrance in the fight against it, you're unlikely to receive much from a department like DFID.

If however, you encourage "market" solutions to problems and call people who live in slums "frustrated entrepreneurs and consumers", the funds are more likely to flow in your direction. The consequences of the schemes that result from this kind of thinking are predictably contemptuous of the "beneficiaries" they purport to help, and the results would be familiar in type to anybody who has experienced the Conservative and New Labour reforms in England.

Take the attitude of DFID and the rest of the development industry to housing issues. Lack of secure housing, or even any housing, is one of the main problems faced by the world's poor, especially in cities. As the American urbanist Mike Davis says in his book *Planet of Slums*: "...everywhere in the Third World, housing choice is a hard calculus of confusing trade-offs... The urban poor have to solve a complex equation as they try to optimize housing cost, tenure security, quality of shelter, journey to work, and sometimes, personal safety. For some people, including many pavement dwellers, a location near a job — say, in a produce market or train station — is even more important than a roof. For others, free or nearly free land is worth epic commutes from the edge to the centre. And for everyone the worst situation is a bad, expensive location without municipal services or security of tenure."

The development industry's favoured method to sort this out is to bring in the ubiquitous panacea: the public-private partnership.



A Delhi slum

Sometimes given the evocative title "land sharing", this essentially involves handing over at least half of the land area of a slum to a private builder who can use it for commercial purposes in exchange for constructing group housing.

Land sharing is currently being presented, by the national and state government, as the solution to slum housing problems in Bangalore, where I've just been living. Two local activists, Issac Amrutharaj and Eshwarappa M, were wary of the benefits that were being promised by their politicians and bureaucrats for the city's slums — and living in a slum in a city striving to make itself more amenable for the purposes of multinationals would make you somewhat sceptical about supposedly visionary schemes involving land — so they went to Mumbai to find out what had gone in the five years since land sharing had become government policy.

What they found was that, for the most part, land sharing's success had not been in ameliorating the lives of people in slums but in filling the pockets of the real estate developers who got the gig as the "private" side of the partnership. Indeed, the former Chief Secretary of

This land was so plum that often it made more sense for the builders to move the people out of the area altogether and relocate them to the outskirts of town...

Maharashtra, who headed a state level committee to review the land sharing experiment in Mumbai, summed up his 900 page report in nine words: "for the builder, of the builder, by the builder".

The dynamics of land sharing and how it was implemented, like so many other public-private partnerships, soon became dictated by the private side of the partnership: the real estate lobby. The slums chosen in Mumbai were mostly those in plum real estate locations in the centre of the city. After the land was "shared", its original residents were nowhere to be seen.

This land was so plum that often it made more sense for the builders to move the people out of the area altogether and relocate them to the outskirts of town, leaving the developers with all the land for whatever commercial purposes they fancied (they showed a fetish for malls and kitsch apartment blocks).

The people who used to live in the slums were supposed to be given secure, modern, developed housing, but when the original residents of these areas have been provided houses by the building companies it has been on the outskirts of the city, on land to which they are not given tenure rights, in mostly multi-storey flats. Regardless of the quality of the flats this

has stripped many people of their livelihoods: many people living in slums make their living as, for example, cobblers or as vendors outside their front doors. It's difficult to make a living like this if your front door is ten flights of stairs up.

To make things more difficult, although the builders may have sometimes provided these multi-storey flats, they rarely maintained services for them. As it was often the weaker members of the slums who were consigned to the upper floors, one of the consequences was elderly widows having to walk down eleven flights of stairs and out of the building to get water (as there was no working water supply in the building), walk a mile back to the building and then walk up eleven flights of stairs again with a full pot, as the lift was not working due to lack of electricity.

It's difficult to call schemes like this voluntary or participatory, in contrast to the claims made for it being participatory and "people led". The builders showed themselves remarkably adept at securing the services of local thugs, who phrased the question a little more forcefully. "If you don't choose to move we'll break your legs" was the choice offered to residents of the Kandivali area.

They had lived there since 1992 but as they did not have records proving they had lived on the land before 1995 they were not even given any new housing. Some of the residents had their legs broken for having the temerity to say they'd like to stay where they had lived for their whole lives, and they are now left to fend for themselves on the streets.

This has become the Indian central government's main policy on housing and, with DFID chipping in funds along with other northern government development departments, this model is spreading around the country. All the slums in Bangalore that have been chosen as pilot projects in the city are in prime areas.

They have all been there for many years. People have been told by government officials that to benefit from this land sharing they will have to move from these areas to the outskirts of the city.

The proposals are being glossed up of course: residents of the Anandapuram slum in the west of the city have been promised (but not guaranteed) a swimming pool in their multi-storey apartments.

Issac Amrutharaj, who is a resident of the LR Nagar slum in the centre of Bangalore, where residents are mounting protests against the sharing proposed for the land they have lived on their whole lives, summarised the reasons for scepticism:

"First, we will not get land rights through this 'land sharing'. If we live in one of these multi-storey buildings even for fifty years we will not get the rights to the land.

"Second, if we have to move from our homes, in which we have lived our whole lives, we lose part of our history and our present livelihood. If we choose this, fine, but we don't want to be forced to do this.

"Third, at the same time as the government is saying it does not have enough land to provide space for individual, ground level houses, it gives 800 acres of land to Infosys [an Indian IT services multinational]. Seventy-five families from slums can live in one acre so don't say there is not enough land for the people from slums.

"Fourth, we don't want a swimming pool, we don't want high-rise housing. Give us a 10x10 foot plot of land and we'll manage. We know how to construct a house; we know how to maintain a house. People from slums have built much of the city and people from slums continue to maintain it. We can build our own houses".

It seems a little odd that experiments such as that of Mumbai are being taken as "best practice models" by the development industry, to be exported around the world. At the forefront of this is "Cities Alliance" which, according to its website, is a "global coalition of cities and their development partners committed to scaling up successful approaches to poverty reduction." These partners include the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, USAid, DFID and various other northern governments. Funded in part by money from DFID, it is bringing its dubious expertise to help governments to encourage public-private partnerships, not just in land but basic amenities such as water provision.

Such schemes, which are making the lives of people in poverty more difficult and less secure than they already were, gain legitimacy and insulation from criticism so easily because they function under the banner of development, garlanded by talk of conscience and moral force. There's a lot of political capital to be made out of bemoaning the problems of the world's poor and, with the public-private ideology holding sway, there's a lot of money to be made out of addressing them. That's a leg breaking combination.

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My life as a "precarious worker"

BY A BAR WORKER FROM SHEFFIELD

I'M a second year university student working part-time in a service-sector job (a nightclub). Having the job means I never have to choose between buying books or buying lunch.

Although elements of the job are enjoyable and positive (interaction with customers is sometimes very rewarding, and benefits such as free tickets to events held in the club are worth having as a student) the amount of casual and not-so-casual exploitation that takes place is outrageous. It's nothing unique, though; it's endemic right across the service-sector and particularly in workplaces employing high numbers of young and student workers.

Management's lack of concern for the welfare of its staff seems to pervade almost everything they do. CCTV cameras point toward our tills, spying on us to make sure we're not stealing, rather than towards the bar to monitor customer behaviour and protect us from the abuse we routinely receive. Despite agreeing that I would only work two shifts a week during term-time, to allow me to stay on top of my studies, I have ended up working three shifts several times, on occasion putting in up to 30 hours of work in one week.

Staff have also been given stern talking-tos from management at various times for "falling standards", in which we are lambasted for not smiling enough and not looking like we're enjoying ourselves. I was recently personally disciplined (and in fact threatened with dismissal) because of "complaints" management had received about my "lack of effort".

When I pressed my boss, he explained that my failings amounted to "being slow on your feet behind the bar". After I pointed out that working up to three ten or eleven hour shifts in a single week while also trying to study for a degree will tend to take the spring out of your step, my boss replied that "that's just the business we're in. You can't be tired. You can't have bags under your eyes."

Because we have no formal contracts of employment (just a couple of sheets of paper detailing various aspects of workplace protocol — stuff like who to ring if you're sick and so on), bosses are pretty much free to summarily sack whoever they want, whenever they want, for whatever they want.

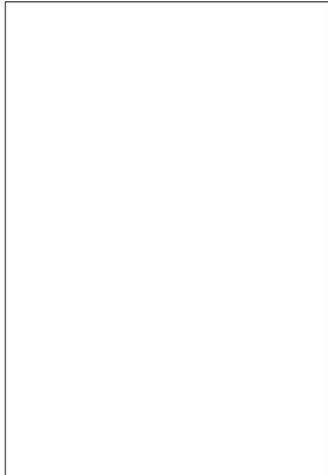
Other exploitative and dangerous elements of the job include being made to pick up broken glass without any protection, and sift through rubbish bags (also potentially containing broken glass) in order to separate glass (which we recycle) from other waste. This recycling policy is relatively new in our workplace. While I'm all in favour of workplaces trying to "green" themselves, I don't think workers should suffer as a result!

Workers are also expected to help with set-up before club-nights, which often includes heavy lifting and handling electrical equipment left over from gigs that take place before the club-nights. Management provides no training for this. Bar-workers are sometimes also used as makeshift door-staff, despite not being capable of dealing with the situations that security workers are trained to deal with.

Although management insists that it allows workers to take breaks (under British law, all workers are entitled to 15 minutes paid break for every six hours worked), the reality is somewhat different. Workers must request breaks from a supervisor and as most club-nights are constantly busy (from 10.30pm-2.30am), there is rarely a convenient time to take one.

As the bars are normally staffed at the bare minimum level necessary to keep them functioning, taking the breaks to which we are legally entitled would mean massively increasing the workload for fellow workers.

Perhaps the most outrageous example of casual exploitation is management's practice towards the end of clean-up (which can take



Bar-work is popular with students but the "fun" atmosphere masks massive exploitation

several hours, meaning that after an "all-nighter" event finishing at 6am, workers will not be able to sign out until 8am or later). Most of the main exits are locked as soon as the club closes (a blatant safety hazard), and only one or two managers have the keys. This means that after workers have signed out, they cannot actually leave until a manager with a key can be found to let them out.

I have remained at work, unpaid, for almost an hour after finishing a shift because the manager was "too busy" to open the door.

Low-level sexual harassment is also endemic, with male managers routinely making "laddish", sexist remarks to female workers. When I've spoken to my women colleagues about this, they've said that it's probably "just banter" and they don't want to make a fuss. Our workplace is not an environment in which workers feel confident about standing up to their bosses.

I'm a member of the GMB trade union, and although I try to speak to my colleagues about workplace issues and workers' rights, it's pretty difficult. Most people's attitude is that, given that none of us are planning to make a "career" out of bar-work and that we only work a few nights a week, there's no point causing any real trouble over the way we're treated.

Most workers are reluctant to pay out from their meagre wages (we're paid £5.35 an hour, and even "supervisors", who have huge responsibility but no real managerial authority, are only paid £5.70) for trade union dues. If my union, or at least my union branch, was prepared to put some effort and resources into organisation campaigns amongst young workers in workplaces like mine, I'd feel more confident about trying to build the union.

But my branch is run by inert old men and few unions in Britain seem ready to learn the lessons of campaigns like "Supersize My Pay" from Australia and New Zealand, "Hotel Workers Rising" from America and various campaigns launched by syndicalist unions like the IWW in workplaces like Starbucks.

Although my situation is pretty grim, campaigns like those show that it is possible to organise young, hyper-exploited workers in precarious jobs and help them secure real gains. There are signs that some trade unions in the UK are beginning to think along the right lines; Unite (formerly TGWU and Amicus) is slowly expanding organisation campaigns around student-workers, albeit in a fairly bureaucratic fashion.

Hopefully I can use my experience as a precarious, low-paid worker to agitate in my union and the labour movement broadly to get British unions moving in the right direction.

Scaremongering

BY DAVID LANDAU

THIS autumn immigration issues have once again been centre stage, starting with the publication of a report by the Office of National Statistics on 23 October 2007 and then some revisions of Government figures.

The ONS report estimated that the population of the UK was projected to increase by 4.4 million to 65 million by 2016. It also made a projection of a net increase of 190,000 migrants a year which would account for nearly two million over that period. The total figure is also based on a projected greater birth-rate amongst migrant families as compared to the current "average family". Overall then, they suggested that immigration might be responsible for over half the projected increase.

However statistical projections are based on extrapolations of trends and they are adjusted to reflect the latest shifts in these trends. The ONS says:

"The assumptions underlying national projections are demographic trend based. They are not forecasts. They do not attempt to predict the impact that future government policies, changing economic circumstances or other factors might have on demographic behaviour."

What they don't do is to identify the factors, or how these factors themselves will change in determining these trends which, if understood, might lead to a dramatically different prediction.

One of the principal drivers behind migration is economic. Indeed "economic migrant" has become a dirty word used by people opposed to migration. But it follows from this that if the opportunities of employment dry up so these migrants will stop coming and many people will leave the country to seek job opportunities elsewhere.

Ironically immigration controls distort this labour market saturation effect. The creation

of a pool of workers who are deemed illegal, or whose rights are reduced compared to British citizens means that they are liable suffer worse wages and conditions. But the extent to which this is true does not reflect badly upon migrants but reflects badly on unscrupulous employers, the Government and the inequalities built into the immigration system. If people are allowed here on sufferance then it is harder for them to fight for their rights. If they are deemed "illegal" they can be super exploited. What is needed is a level playing field across the world for everyone, regardless of where they were born.

But even taking these inequalities into account, the dynamics of the labour market are likely to act to reduce the number of economic migrants which should depress the actual figures compared to the projections.

Also many migrant workers are without families — either single or sending remittances back to their families. Therefore the birth-rate factor might well not be as significant as the ONS statistics imply.

CONSIDERABLE publicity has been made about the prediction that the population will exceed 75 million by 2051 by Professor David Coleman of Migration Watch. Migration Watch are always putting out scary statements. They claim that they are not concerned with issues of race but with issues of population and the effect of migration on population and population density in this country.

However, Professor David Coleman is a prominent member of the Galton Institute. The Galton Institute used to be called the Eugenics Society until after the Holocaust. Eugenics is all about seeing human and social development as genetically determined and encouraging social and racial trends by "breeding" certain traits in and out, sterilisation and worse. Eugenicians see all kinds of individual, social and cultural trends as being specific to racial groups.

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about migrants

There have been extravagant claims about the impact this projected population would have. One newspaper talked about the addition of the population of London, two Londons the next day and three Londons by the end of the week! This has led to concerns about the environment. Even if the projections are correct people need to note:

- The amount of unused property and land in our towns and cities which could be brought into use if the issue of ownership was not dominant.
- The profligate use of space in private developments which have spread around the country in recent years. Socially necessary housing on a different scale should take over from this.
- The amount of brownfield land which can be developed

On the other hand the labour market is not the only driver of migrant labour. Persecution, wars and so forth create refugees. A new factor which is becoming increasingly important is global warming and the consequent climate chaos. This leads to desertification of some parts and flooding of others. People can no longer survive in these

increasingly harsh conditions and flee to more temperate climes.

These climatic factors also create conflicts about water and arable land which leads to more wars. We see this in Darfur.

Already there is an increase of migration from Africa across the Mediterranean. Hundreds of people are drowned every year trying to reach Europe. This has been met with increased maritime immigration patrols. Avoiding these is making the journey more hazardous adding to the casualties.

If the global warming is allowed to continue, or not reduced enough, the pressure to come to places like Europe will become stronger and stronger. If the demand were to be met it would not be a comfortable situation for anyone. But the demand is justified. If the wealthier countries generate more greenhouse gases so they must live with the consequences. We have to look at the global human perspective as opposed to the narrow nationalistic one.

MUCH has been made of the upward revision of figures regarding migrant labour. It is now said that the number of "foreign workers" in the UK has increased

by 1.1 million over the last ten years as opposed to the previous government figure of 800,000 (approximately). A related revision is that 52% of new jobs created over the last 10 years have been taken by 'foreign workers' (as opposed to the previously stated 40%).

This is viewed as scandalous in some quarters. But it ought not to be seen as a scandal.

Unemployment tends to come in cycles that are not determined by migration — booms and slumps which are more or less sharp or frequent according to government economic policies. History does not show a correlation between high unemployment and high levels of migration. When lots of migrant workers come to fill jobs it is when there are more jobs around. When unemployment is on the increase, people are unlikely to come for work reasons, and many will leave, as will British born workers, although people might come for other reasons.

"Foreign" workers are often treated unequally by employers. This can work in opposite directions. Discrimination can keep them out of the labour market. Super-exploitation — low wages and conditions, can mean that they are preferred workers for some employers.

British born workers should not be considered more worthy or needy than other workers and, conversely, British born workers should be able to travel and work elsewhere in the world, and they do.

There are many jobs which secure British residents do not want to do. These are often filled by migrant workers. We would not want to argue that this is intrinsically good — there ought not to be second class citizens who just do the dirty jobs — but it means that the idea of "foreign workers" taking "British jobs" does not represent the reality.

The extent that workers from abroad are

Migrant workers demonstrate in London, October 2006

34,000 building workers strike in UAE

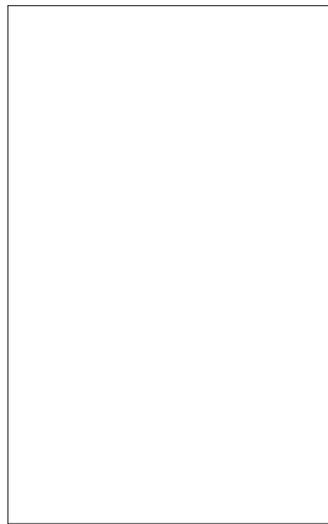
BY MIKE ROWLEY

34,000 blue-collar construction workers employed by "Arabtec" in the "United Arab Emirates" are said to have returned to work after a three-week strike (14 November). However, the only sources for this are the company they work for and the UAE regime's official press agency... Either way this was an extremely important strike by a group of low-paid migrant workers.

The workers are working on a variety of construction projects including "Burj Dubai", the tallest building in the world, being built by a consortium of the Dubai-based "Arabtec" and Belgian and South Korean companies. The low-paid workers had been demanding a pay rise variously reported as 28% and 70%; the employers said they were offering 14%. All sources of information in the UAE are subject to stringent censorship.

The "United Arab Emirates" is an historical anomaly: a collection of feudal statelets preserved in aspic by British "protection" lasting from the mid-nineteenth century until 1971. Gaining control of their own economy after the departure of the British Army, the emirs became rich on oil royalties and diversified into tourism and banking. Now the UAE, still under absolute dictatorship, is engaged in the largest construction project in the world, a series of artificial islands in novelty shapes to provide holiday homes for foreign capitalists.

To extract oil, build luxury hotels and villas, and service the super-rich, the UAE, a small and sparsely-populated country, requires cheap migrant labour. Migrant workers, mainly from the Indian subcontinent but also including significant number



Burj Dubai tower: halfway to becoming the tallest ever, and built by low-paid workers

from Iran, the Philippines, sub-Saharan Africa and from other Arab countries, now constitute between 75 and 80 percent of the population, the highest figure in the world by far (no-one really knows the exact figure because many workers are working "illegally"). 5% of the entire population are domestic servants, many others clean the banks and hotels, and huge numbers work in construction, hired and fired whenever their employers like.

"Illegal" workers, many of them domestic servants, are paid even less than "legal"

workers and have no security at all. This is found convenient by employers wanting to save money. A new police crackdown has just been announced to arrest domestic workers. If they are caught these workers face fines and "administration fees" amounting to between three and fifteen months pay even for a relatively well-paid migrant worker — so determined is the UAE state to squeeze the last drop out of them.

The reaction of the middle class to this beggars belief. "Residents, especially those families whose spouses are both employed, said that they are finding it extremely difficult to adjust with the sudden decision on the part of the domestic helpers [i.e. to work at night to avoid being arrested]". "The domestic help who comes to work for us twice a week is a Sri Lankan. We pay him 200 dirhams a month which is far cheaper than sponsoring a proper maid. It works for us and him as well," was the comment of one callous rich housewife.

These workers are not entitled to become citizens or to many civil rights. They are paid a fraction of what the fifth of the population who are counted as "Emirians" earn. They live in special quarters of grossly overcrowded and substandard housing (many in barracks) positioned miles from the districts inhabited by the "Emirians", European and American professionals, tourists and wealthy foreigners. The striking workers are housed in 36 company-run "labour camps" (sic — that really is what they are called) across the UAE.

Human Rights Watch has recently condemned "abusive labour practices" in the UAE and describes the working conditions of migrants as "less than human". Health and safety precautions are non-existent, especially in the construction industry: last

Thursday at least seven migrant workers were killed and at least thirty-six injured when a bridge they were working on collapsed. The country is so dependent on migrant labour and the living standards of the "Emirians" and wealthy foreign residents so dependent on the virtual slave-labour conditions of four-fifths of the population that the situation in the UAE today is directly comparable to apartheid South Africa.

Of course there are no "race laws" in the UAE, but the regime makes sure migrant workers, however long they have lived there, have no chance of becoming citizens with full civil rights.

Really the "United Arab Emirates" is not a "country" at all and certainly not "Arab" (probably more than half the total population is Indian) but a cartel for importing migrant labour, with the powers of a state to set their terms and conditions of work, repress resistance, and ensure their labour remains dirt cheap. However, migrant workers in the UAE are fighting for their rights in every way possible.

Strikes and unions are illegal, but this huge strike is the culmination of a number of self-organised migrant workers' actions including riots of over 2,500 workers in March last year and a series of construction strikes last month involving thousands of workers. In response to both these waves of action, the regime has "urged" construction companies to "review" their rates of pay (!) and enacted improvements in working conditions which have not, however, been enforced.

The workers fighting for their most basic rights against this monstrous and outmoded feudal dictatorship and its many capitalist partners in crime need our support!

Trade unionists jailed in Musharraf clampdown

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

At the time of writing it is three weeks into General Pervez Musharraf's full-scale "emergency" military rule in Pakistan. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of lawyers, civil and human rights activists and trade unionists remain in jail.

Under new powers these people can be tried in military courts. With sources of political protests battered down, Musharraf has set up a "caretaker" government and replaced uppity supreme court judges with ones loyal to him. Those judges have now rubber-stamped Musharraf's (illegal) election as President last October.

With his continuing political role secure, Musharraf says he will now stand down as head of the military and make way for his chosen successor, former spy chief Lt. General Ashfaq Kiyani.

Musharraf's brutal manoeuvring has been watched, and worried about, but scarcely protested against, by Pakistan's multi-billion dollar benefactor — the US government. For Bush, it seems to be a case of better the devil he knows. If the Pakistani military had organised a coup against Musharraf and it seems that a strong motivating factor behind Musharraf's recent actions was to head off such a coup) then the general might have been replaced by someone, who is not prepared to play lip service to the US "war or terror".

Musharraf has said there will be fresh elections in the New Year. But according to Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid few believe him, and in any case no independent political

party will back any government set up as a result of those elections, elections which will be, to a greater or lesser extent, rigged.

The US-backed power-sharing deal made between Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto's party is now in tatters — especially since she has spent time under house arrest!. Yet Musharraf

Privatisations and downsizing have lost Pakistani workers thousands of jobs and plunged them deeper into poverty.

has no political base beyond the coterie of politicians and bureaucrats he has bought off and brought into his cabal.

Meanwhile there has been serious fighting between the army and Taliban-jihadist forces in the areas bordering Afghanistan. Again according to Rashid, Taliban and jihadist action is likely to be stepped up in the coming months. Musharraf's military successor may find himself under immediate pressure, not least from within the military itself.

International campaigning pressure and media attention has focussed on Imran Khan who, as leader of a tiny quasi-Islamist/populist party, has been locked up by the government. Less attention has been given to the plight of trade unionists who have been arrested.

The coup took place at a time of renewed

struggles by Pakistani workers and, for these reasons, has had the support of Pakistani bosses. A statement from the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation explains the situation for the workers:

"There is an upsurge in labour struggles, particularly among the workers of water and power, telecommunications, railways, the garment industry and others. In recent months, different segments of the Pakistani population have been in motion in opposing the dictatorship, a most worrisome prospect for Musharraf and his US backers. Pakistan has a history as a client state since the formation of the country in 1947; its rulers have been an indispensable part of imperialist policy in the region.

"Privatisations and downsizing have lost Pakistani workers thousands of jobs and plunged them deeper into poverty. Indicating his priorities, in his proclamation of the necessity of emergency rule, Musharraf made reference to: 'constant interference in economic policy, price controls, the downsizing of corporations.

"On November 14, 2007 APTUF observed 'Black Day' all over the Pakistan and held protest gate meetings. Workers wore black badges and bands, shouted slogans against the government...

"Workers wanted to hold protests outside the factory gates, but heavy contingents of police and intelligence agents stopped the workers from coming out from the factories. Police also threatened to go inside the factories, charging with batons and throwing tear gas.

"To prevent confrontations, the office bearers of the trade unions told workers to hold meeting inside the factory premises. Some employers in different provinces issued charge sheets to the office bearers who held protest meetings in the factory premises..."

Trade union leaders who have been locked up include Farid Awan, the Assistant General Secretary of the APTUF. He was among several activists arrested in Karachi on 4 and 5 November. Trade union activist Liaquat Ali Sahi, who one of the leaders of the solidarity campaign for the Karachi Pearl Continental Hotel Trade Union, was locked up on 5 November and charged with treason — an offence which carries the death penalty.

Appeals for these comrades can be found on LabourStart: www.labourstart.org/pakistan

Eureka flag

"Industrial police" ban the flag

ON 23 November, the day before Australia's federal election, trade unionists in Melbourne will demonstrate against the latest excess of the Australian Building and Construction Commission, the special police force for the construction industry set up by John Howard's conservative government.

The ABCC has banned the display of Australian flags on building sites, claiming that it amounts to "intimidation".

Which Australian flag? That's the problem for the ABCC. Like Ireland with its Starry Plough, Australia has an alternative "workers'" national flag, the Eureka Flag.

The Eureka Flag was first flown at the Eureka Stockade, a gold miners' rebellion against police and colonial government officials in 1854 led by Peter Lalor, younger brother of the Irish radical James Fintan Lalor.

Although there are arguments about how much, historically, the Eureka Stockade was a democratic and working-class rebellion, and how much a small proprietors' revolt — and right-wing Australian nationalists have sometimes used the Eureka Flag as a symbol — today the Eureka Flag is the emblem of the combative wing of the Australian trade union movement.

Building workers, in particular, often wear the Eureka Flag on union t-shirts. That is what the ABCC deems "intimidating".

The ABCC has drastic powers, including a penalty of six months' jail for any trade-unionist who refuses to answer questions at an ABCC hearing about industrial disputes.

Under Kevin Rudd's leadership, the Australian Labor Party, likely to win the 24 November election, has watered down its opposition to the ABCC to the point where a Labor government will keep the ABCC until at least 2010, and then replace it with an "ABCC-lite".

• Federal election: debate, page 16

US writers "down pencils"

BY CLIVE BRADLEY

ON Monday November 5, the Writers' Guild of America went on strike for the first time in nearly twenty years. Last minute negotiations with the employers' organisation, the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) failed to reach a deal. The WGA (which for perverse historical reasons is actually two unions, the WGA west and the WGA east) "downed pencils". This followed, for example, a mass meeting of the WGA west in which 3,000 writers voted 90% in favour of strike action.

It's a strike of writers who work in television and film production — including the staff of major TV shows from *Desperate Housewives* to *Heroes*, but also including the gag writers for *Letterman*, etc.

The issues in dispute are mainly to do with "residuals" from DVD sales and internet downloads. Currently, writers get 0.3% (of what the studios are paid). They are demanding 0.6% — which would be an average increase of 4 to 8 cents for every \$15 DVD sold. The current deal, and therefore demand, is the same for paid internet downloads. For free internet downloads, the studios are insisting that writers should be paid nothing, claiming they are "promotional" only; the Writers' Guild points out that the studios make money from advertising even on free downloads, and so are demanding their 0.6% of that, too.

The WGA strike has had widespread support from the Screen Actors Guild (whose contract with the AMPTP, along with the Directors' Guild, is up for renewal in June). A major step in the run-up to the strike was a statement of support by all the leading television "showrunners". These are writers, and so WGA members, but because of the way American TV series work they are also producers (and sometimes directors, too). The studios evidently hadn't expected the showrunners to be so solidly behind the strike.

The studios have already been playing very dirty: the American press is full of cartoons and other propaganda portraying the writers as rich, privileged, and selfish, and their action — which is gradually bringing all the major TV shows to a halt — as destructive of all the other people (from electricians to truck drivers, etc.) whose livelihoods depend on those shows.

A small minority of screenwriters are very highly paid (though only a very few on a scale comparable to the top studio execs). Most — when they are in work — are paid well, because the WGA has been able to enforce decent minimum standards in the past. Like actors, though, writers can spend long periods out of work, when residuals (basically, royalties) are their main income.

And in any case, all they are demanding is a share of the profits the production companies make.

The Writers' Guild has a strong (craft) trade union culture. Unlike in Britain, film and television writing in the USA is close to being a closed shop; and there is a much stronger sense of collective trade union identity than there is here. It is a condition of membership, for example, that a writer undertakes 20 hours picket duty a week... So far the strike is very solid.

For more information, see for instance <http://unitedhollywood.blogspot.com>, an unofficial blog by a group of "strike captains" on the west coast.

Railworkers lead the fight back

BY ED MALTBY

AT the time of writing (16 November), six days into their strike, French transport workers are refusing to back down. In spite of constant attacks in the press, and union leaders trying to weasel their way out of a fight, rail workers are keeping up the pressure and the leading the public sector fightback against Sarkozy's reforms.

The strike is being directed by mass meetings in workplaces, who are now electing strike committees to carry out their decisions independently of the big rail unions. Rail workers are going to talk to mass meetings of students, and representatives of other workers from the public sector, in particular teaching staff, in an attempt to link up the various struggles and prevent any one industry from becoming isolated.

I met up with some train workers from the Gare Montparnasse (one of the major Paris train stations). I asked them about the precise demands that the railway workers are making. "We have three demands," said one of them. "First, we want to defend the Special Regimes [for pensions] — we don't want them to be cut. Secondly, we want everyone to get a full pension after 37.5 years of contributions [that's how the French retirement age is calculated], public and private sector. We want this pension to be calculated based on wages, not on prices [see below]. And the third demand is that if someone leaves the job, they shouldn't lose all the money in their pension pot that had been built up."

In 1993, a large portion of private sector transport workers had their pension payments changed: from that point on, their pension entitlements were to be calculated on 1993 prices,

and not on workers' wages, which rose with inflation. As a result, these private sector workers have lost 20% of their pensions in real terms since 1993. The state rail workers and other public sector workers are aware that if they lose this current battle over their special regimes, this model could be extended to them as well. They are also aware that members of the French bosses' union, MEDEF, have said that they would like to extend the period of pension contribution from 37.5 years to 45 years.

"They're keeping quiet about that during the negotiations now", one worker told me, "but you can find it on the internet, they said it a couple of weeks ago."

The rail strike is taking a heavy toll. An older activist pointed out, "Sarkozy has taken a beating. He knows that the railway workers are solid, and he can't beat them in a straight fight. So he's taking a back seat for the time being, and putting the spotlight on the unions, trying to put pressure on them to control the grassroots for him."

The union bureaucrats, taking their lead from Sarkozy, are doing everything in their power to rein the strikers in, in an attempt to keep control as the principal negotiators in the strike.

François Hollande, leader of the Parti Socialiste, has weighed in too, saying that "the strike must end". The CGT union's leader, Bernard Thibault, is trying to cultivate a respectable appearance, saying "We're not strike-mad [nous ne sommes pas des gréviculteurs]". The leadership of the rightwing union CFTD has said that they will withdraw their support for the strike and demonstrations on the 20th if there are any irregularities — the union tops warned workers against trying to "link up" different disputes!

But the rail workers are keeping the strike up.

"The daily General Assemblies at Gare Montparnasse haven't got any smaller since day one. We've been having about 200 people along every day to vote on the strike. It's always just about unanimously in favour of carrying on, although not all of us can take part in the strike. It's been a week, and some people are really caught by the throat financially. They have to work because they can't lose the hours, but they strike for a few hours at a time during a shift."

Management have been trying to demoralise the strikers, but without much success: "They spread disinformation internally and externally. About 60% of railway drivers struck to begin with, and now it's fallen back a bit — management say that it's down to 30%, but anyone can see from the General Assemblies that the real figure is much higher. They're also telling people that votes to continue the strike are being won by tiny minorities, but that's clearly a lie, too. They're trying to break the strike by using young office workers as scabs, but they can only keep a very limited service going."

All over France, and in all the big stations in Paris, striking workers have started to elect

strike committees, as they did in 1995. "It became clear that the big unions didn't want to carry the fight through right to the end", said one, "so we started electing committees of people from the big morning meetings to carry out our decisions. They write pamphlets to communicate our point of view to passengers and other workers, and organise leafleting sessions. They organise delegations to go to other workers' meetings, and to talk to the students. The strike committees also organise discussion meetings of workers after the General Assemblies to talk over politics and educate each other about the situation in a more detailed way. The union leadership would prefer us members not to do all this, and to just hand out official union leaflets, not stuff we've written ourselves. They just want to stay in control of the direction of the movement. That's why strike committees are necessary if we want to get this stuff done!"

These committees have been met with hostility by both union chiefs and rail bosses, who refused to admit a representative of the strike committees to negotiations for the Paris region.

What the French left are saying

Right to fight back

From *Lutte Ouvrière*, 16 November. By Arlette Laguiller, translated by Darren Bedford

USING the pretext that these [public sector] workers were the last to enter into the already-existing pension scheme, the government is calling them "privileged". But those who call these workers — many of whom have pensions of less than 1,000 euros [per month] — "privileged" are the same people who applauded the 15 million euros in tax breaks handed out to some of the wealthiest families in France. They are the same people who consider it acceptable that the President sanctioned a 172% increase of his own wages!

The strikers are right to defend themselves. All workers must struggle in solidarity with each other and should be hoping for a huge strike to follow.

The government is trying to use this strike as a showdown with workers in the existing "special regime" pension scheme. But this showdown does not only pit the government against those 500,000 workers; it pits the government and the bosses against workers as a whole. It is in order to devote more money to big business that the government wants these cutbacks in pensions, health insurance, public services and indeed on everything that is useful — even essential — for the majority of the population.

On the question of pensions, the government is in the front line. But it acts entirely in the interests of the bosses, carrying out a ceaseless war against workers by freezing wages while prices sky-rocket. When prices increase, so do profits. And yet wage increases remain blocked. If the government

wins this battle, the entire working class stands to lose out. The retirement age would increase even further and pensions would become even more meagre.

So we say — whatever our job, whatever our sector; this strike concerns us all. If we do not want poverty imposed on us, we must sooner or later enter the struggle. We will have to wage a sufficiently determined and powerful fight that the bosses will fear that the movement may threaten their profits and, worse still, that workers might threaten their very control over factories, banks and commercial business.

The monopolistic control of the economy by large financial and industrial groups is a catastrophe for the majority of the population, and indeed for the whole of society. There is no inherent reason why workers should be condemned to work for longer, see their purchasing power eroded [by rising prices] and — once they finally reach retirement — be subjected to abject poverty. And all so that corporations can make high profits and a few financial groups are found in charge of unimaginable sums of money that even they don't know what to do with.

By calling a strike of "special regime" workers for 14 November, and other public sector workers for the 20th, the trade unions' bureaucratic leaders have chosen to scatter the labour movement's forces. To win, workers must be united against bosses and the government around common demands. Fortunately, in the past workers have often showed that their own militancy can undermine the excuses of union bureaucrats and force them into action. It is in the interests of all workers that this should happen again.

www.lutte-ouvriere-journal.org

Continued on page 10

Sarkozy and Thatcher

THE place of president Nicolas Sarkozy in French politics is similar to that of Margaret Thatcher (Tory prime minister from 1979 to 1994) in British politics in three ways.

Sarkozy declares himself out to "liquidate the heritage of May 1968" (the great general strike), just as Thatcher said she would get rid of "socialism".

Like Thatcher (the "Iron Lady", "not for turning") Sarkozy talks tough ("we will not concede, and we will not retreat", he said on 20 November), while often quietly being pragmatic.

And, like Thatcher, he is not quite of the old Establishment. His cronies "are not generally from the so-called 'meritocratic' state bourgeoisie: ENA, Grandes Ecoles" (i.e. the traditional political elite of France); rather, they are "heirs of large fortunes or 'self-made men'."

Like Thatcher, he makes a populist appeal to certain sections of the working class. For example, his hallmark claim to stand for "the France that gets up early in the morning" comes from words spoken to him by workers at a factory he visited who complained they had low wages although they had to rise early.

However, Sarkozy is not a free-market fanatic: he has said that the State has "not a right, but a duty" to aid industry. He is "pro-European" where Thatcher was not.

The impression that Sarkozy faces a labour movement much more combative than in Britain is not quite accurate. The average number of strike days, in proportion to workforce, is actually lower in France than in Britain even today, let alone Britain in 1979. (There are

many more minority strikes in France than in Britain).

Perhaps because of that, Sarkozy has been able to cultivate some elements of the soft left — for example Fadéla Amara, former leader of the feminist group Ni Putes Ni Soumises, someone close to the Socialist Party, is in his government — where Thatcher sharply terminated cosy union-government relations.

Sarkozy is out to shackle the unions, as Thatcher did. Maybe also in many steps, as Thatcher did: the first one is a law (coming into effect in January 2008) compelling transport workers to guarantee a "minimum service" even during industrial action.

Privatisation, which Thatcher started in Britain, is already in full swing in France. Sarkozy wants to cut welfare, as in England; thus the current moves to cut pensions for those groups of workers who still retain pre-1993 conditions. A report published on 3 November suggests he will move later to require 41 (or more) years of pension contributions (in place of the current 40) for all workers.

Sarkozy's equivalent of Thatcher's (and Blair's) high-handedness with their Cabinets is a reassertion of the power of the French presidency, reversing the tendency of recent decades for France to drift back to a more parliamentary regime.

He is "restructuring" the state: part of his election appeal was a promise to "clean up" crime-ridden poor suburbs "with a Kärcher" (industrial cleaner). In the current student protests, against a law which is the first step to privatising universities, police have come in to smash up occupations more often than before.

From page 9

Right to fight back

IT'S in the name of "fairness" that Sarkozy, [Prime Minister] Fillon and their allies are waging the struggle against "special" pension regimes. But no one can help but notice that having voted through 15 billion euros' tax cuts for the rich and given himself a 206% pay (or is that pocket money?) rise, having ignored the fraudulent profits of his mate Lagardère who got rid of tens of thousands of jobs at Airbus, President Sarkozy and his government have nothing much to do with "fairness". And it's a bit of a swindle when they tell us "work more to earn more!"

Train drivers, RATP [Paris transport network] workers, electricians and gas-workers don't need telling that Sarkozy wants them to work more and earn less. All other workers understand that they are also in the firing line of this attack. Not only because after taking on "special deals" the government will mount a fresh fight against all pensions, demanding 41 or 42 years' worth of pension fund contributions — in fact cutting pensions. But also because this government is preparing new measures to make redundancies easier, push down salaries, cut unemployment benefits and attack free healthcare.

"Fairness" would be a return to 37 and a half years' worth of pension fund contributions, like before Balladur's private sector reforms. Why should it be that the huge economic growth of the last few decades is translated into the need to work for longer and the impoverishment of workers and retired people? How come bosses and shareholders can still get rich anyway?

"Fairness" would mean dividing up wealth differently, first off setting a minimum wage of 300 euros a week for everyone. That would just be to meet increases in the cost of living, which are felt particularly sharply in basic necessities like food, petrol, rent and bills. "Fairness" would mean banning lay-offs, in particular in enterprises which are making profits. It would mean getting rid of casual contracts.

The government is looking for a test of strength, but it might also try offering crap "concessions" to the unions in order to dampen the conflict.

All those taking strike action and demonstrating in the streets are right — it's the only way of stopping [Sarkozy] press-ganging the whole working class into even deeper poverty.

The government would love to force the workers who were on strike in the days leading up to 20 November to give in. It fears that they will join up with public sector workers as well as a certain number in the private sector. It knows that if the movement broadens it will become an irresistible force and it will have to back down. So, all together now! Our future depends on it, as does that of our children — including many of the students fighting against the university reforms in order than education is not placed even more at the service of capital and even more unequal.

Sarkozy and his government hope, with the support of certain union leaders — who have until now done everything possible to keep the struggles separate — to avoid having to face a united movement. The Parti Socialiste politicians themselves want to stop the strikes. They support us no more than right-wingers do, and all of them proclaim that they would make the same "reforms", even if they say they'd use different methods to put them in place. But nothing proves that these stooges will be able to put the lid on the movement without cost.

It's time for all the unions to follow the example of the rank-and-file train drivers who in their general assemblies last week showed that they would not bend down in

front of anyone else's decisions. We can't count on anything but our struggle, and we must be in charge of it ourselves.

www.convergencesrevolutionnaires.org

We're off!

From the 15 November edition of *Rouge, paper of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* by Basile Pot.

The transport strike on 18 October was a first warning, which showed the power of railway workers to mobilise and, for a significant portion of them, to organise a reconductible strike. But, without unity between the unions, the strike ended after several days, with the idea that we had to get back out on strike again "soon". Since then, the pressure in favour of striking has grown. Certainly, the chances of repeating the record numbers of strikers of the 18 October (75%) are slim, but this strike will be big.

Sarkozy's posturing during a visit to a railway depot to do some of his usual provocation, has again convinced some of the necessity of shutting up and putting up. What's more, his statements on the "décote" [cuts in pension if you leave SNCF before retirement age] have shown that he doesn't know anything about the "special regimes"...What's more, looking at the 4-page letter sent out to all railway workers by the CEO of the SNCF, Anne-Marie Idrac, which says that the strike will endanger rail freight, anyone can see that it's the SNCF bosses who have been sabotaging the freight system for years, she's not one to talk!

As for the preparations for the strike, everyone has been closely following the disputes outside the SNCF: the stewards' and hostesses' strike at Air France, the fishermen, the students. The video of a fisherman insulting Sarkozy that has circulated on mobile phones and the internet discredited him, pointing out that he has just increased his own salary by 172%...

One of the arguments put forward by the CGT in defence of their decision to stop the strike in October was that the rail workers were alone, and that we had to strive at all costs to link up with other sectors, in order not to be isolated by the government. But the strike of the 14th [it started on the evening of the 13th] November was only a strike by members of the "special regimes" and it didn't have the same capacity to rally together workers from other sectors as had the 18th October strike — because other public sector workers are already going on strike a week later, on 20 November, and it is on 20 November that other strikes, notably of private sector workers will try to join in.

In short, what this means is that in order to ensure that the rail workers can link up with other strikers, the rail workers will have to maintain their strike until the 20 November, deflecting the blows struck by the government and the SNCF bosses until then. These attacks from above will quite possibly involve holding scabs back until the second day of the strike, weakening attempts to continue the stoppage beyond the first day. Until the 20th of November, the mobilised workers will have to hold on tight. We have to co-ordinate all workers in struggle, in the metro, in energy, on the rails, and amongst the students.

As for the unions, the mood is not one of confidence! The corporatist union FGAAC has already started supping with the devil, and isn't calling for a strike. And the other unions aren't necessarily much better. Here and there we are hearing bureaucrats explain that "winning 37.5-year pension schemes is basically impossible". That kind of talk only serves to justify a speedy capitulation. The government is also looking for a test of strength, but it might also try offering crap "concessions" to the unions in order to dampen the conflict, and it seems that there will be a race between the unions to see who can surrender first.

It is possible to win, but, for that, the self-organisation of workers is a necessity. Only with massive general assemblies making the decisions, driving a strong strike, can we hope to stop bureaucrats negotiating behind workers' backs.

<http://tinyurl.com/25x7sr>

LRC balks at new start, but debate will go on

BY CHRIS FORD

“The LRC meets at a time when socialists within the Labour Party, trade unions, left groups and many progressive campaigns are being forced to face up to a number of hard truths in reassessing their future”, read the National Committee statement to the Labour Representation conference on 17 November. Around 250 attended the conference, slightly down on last year. The theme of the conference was Next Steps for the Left.

The National Committee rightly pointed out that in the current situation the: “potential for the left is therefore immense and the LRC could play a pivotal role because of its strategic positioning within the Labour Party and in the wider socialist and progressive movement”.

This view is shared by the AWL; the LRC has six national unions affiliated, eight union regions, sixty-two union branches, sixteen socialist groups and campaigns, and revealingly ten Constituency Labour Parties. No other socialist initiative can boast such a range of support, but it is a fragile base and the LRC cannot afford to take it for granted.

To turn this into a meaningful force requires a serious change of direction in the LRC. Certainly this is what John McDonnell has and the National Committee statement were encouraging the membership to face up to — but it is clear from the conference there remains a woeful poverty of ambition that needs to be overcome.

There were a series of motions focused on perspectives, from the Scottish Campaign for Socialism, which stated that after the failed electoral campaigns and Bournemouth Labour Party conference decision “we cannot pretend it is business as usual”:

“As currently constituted the Labour Party is no longer a vehicle for promoting progressive or socialist ideas. We need to re-found Labour as a party of radical change.... To do this the LRC must become a campaigning organisation that can reach beyond the Labour Party Left and create the basis of a mass Labour Party committed to social justice and equality in the UK and internationally”.

The means of achieving this being — to get more involved in campaigns. Islington North CLP and the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups focused on a campaign to increase Labour Party membership and restore democracy.

The major argument on the way forward for the LRC became focused on the motion from the Alliance for Workers Liberty. Our motion offered a realistic way forward for the LRC by which it could strengthen its current base of support and achieve significant growth in the coming period. Our argument recognised that the LRC is in a prime position to become an axis to bring about re-composition in the socialist and labour movement. To become a broader Workers Representation Committee with a goal of the widest possible unity under the banner of working class political representation. To achieve this goal the LRC should issue an appeal to all socialists and trade unionists to join our project, to enter into discussions with those socialist organisations, trade union broad lefts/rank and files to secure their affiliation. We should seek to establish local workers representation committee based on the broadest possible unity, and flexibility of tactics to achieve working class representation.

Such a call for serious socialist unity from the LRC headed by a respected leader like McDonnell could carry immense weight amongst the thousands of activists desperate

for an alternative. Such an organisational framework could begin to overcome the sectarian fragmentation which has retarded so many initiatives. But instead the LRC conference failed grasp this historic possibility placed before it refused to “face up to the hard truths”. The debate became focused not on achieving socialist unity or finding ways to overcome what divides the left but the line in our resolution which stated: “Local committee will be encouraged to adopt a flexible approach utilising whatever means available, to secure working-class political representation”.

The fact this could mean the united forces in a local committee intervening in a coordinated way to get workers representatives selected through local Labour Parties was not considered. It was the option that where we cannot, component parts of the LRC need the freedom to utilise other tactics, including electoral challenges, that was seen as the problem.

The opponents of the AWL motions ranged from Socialist Appeal, that the Labour Party remains “the mass party of the working class”, with no consideration of the changes underway since Kinnock, to Labour Briefing who presented a series of arguments which were incredibly contradictory, that “we need a new party of labour”, “that party is the Labour Party” but “it may take generations to create a new party of labour”. Will our great grandchildren ever forgive us!

All of these arguments against the AWL were shamefully hypocritical by conveniently ignoring the fact that affiliated bodies of the LRC have long been standing candidates against the official Labour Party, such as unions backing Livingstone's Mayoral challenge and numerous RMT challenges. Of course if John McDonnell or Jeremy Corbyn were prevented from standing again by New Labour would it be wrong to support them mounting such a challenge. Similarly for the conference to welcome the affiliation of Stalinist nutters from the New Communist Party but reject actively seeking the affiliation of the Scottish Socialist Party or Socialist Party in England is a staggering contradiction.

For all the talk of breaking out of the ghetto and linking up with undefined new forces there were many in the LRC unable to face up to the bold changes necessary achieve such a goal. The motion for a workers representation committee was defeated with a significant number of abstentions. In stark contradiction, in the afternoon the conference gave a rapturous reception to PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka who made exactly the same arguments as presented in support of the AWL motion.

It would be wrong to say that there were no steps forward at the LRC conference, structures have become better organised in terms of the elected National Committee, a series of good policy motions were passed setting a campaigning agenda and the Constitution was changes to facilitate non-Labour Party members being equal to Labour Party members and the building of regional and local structures.

There is still every opportunity for the LRC to realise its potential, it will just take longer having squandered a window of opportunity. Many of the old positions are being undermined by ongoing events. If the new National Committee must now implement the policies to draw in wider forces which in reality means initiatives to achieve greater left unity.

The affiliated unions such as the RMT and FBU also need to take a more pro-active approach in shaping the LRC into the body that meets the needs of organised labour.

SWP-Respect: Turn to the left!

THE SWP-Respect conference at Westminster University on 17 November was essentially an SWP event — extra observers were turned away “for lack of space”. One observer from the CPGB who did get in told us that around 400 people attended and practically no direct discussion actually about the split in Respect took place! The leadership essentially put on a show of business as usual, with bland motions amounting to a rally.

The following text is from the leaflet we distributed to the conference.

THE SWP and those close to it have now broken with George Galloway. The recent SWP national meeting declared itself against the “opportunistic electoral politics [which] began to dominate Respect... For such people their model of politics was that increasingly used by the Labour Party in ethnically and religiously mixed inner city areas — promising favours to people who posed as the ‘community leaders’ of particular ethnic or religious groupings if they would use their influence to deliver votes.

“This is what is known as Tammany Hall politics in US cities, or ‘vote bloc’ or ‘communal’ politics when practiced by all the pro-capitalist parties in the Indian subcontinent. It is something the left has always tried to resist. We seek people’s support because they want to fight against oppression and for a better world, not because they stand for one group...”

That is good. Or, at least, it will be good if the Respect remainder turns back to the left, and builds the broad coalitions which surely are desirable with other socialists rather than with the businessman element in the old Respect and with George Galloway.

The Socialist Green Unity Coalition has operated since the old Socialist Alliance was trashed, bringing together the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, the Socialist Party, and the Alliance for Green Socialism, and running more candidates in the 2005 general election than Respect did.

The Labour Representation Committee, at its conference... [see separate report], is discussing motions which state that it can no longer be “business as usual” in the Labour Party. “As

currently constituted the Labour Party is no longer a vehicle for promoting progressive or socialist ideas”. The LRC, another motion states, should “start to work as a broader Workers’ Representation Committee... appeal to all socialists and trade unionists to join [the] project”.

The RMT London Transport Regional Council recently voted for the RMT to initiate an independent working-class slate, on broad working-class policies, for the London mayor/ GLA elections — though, unfortunately, the RMT Executive decided that there wasn’t enough momentum to do it.

Those are the forces a respect-worthy Respect should turn to.

CONDEMN “opportunistic electoral politics” and “communal politics”? Good! But then some accounting and self-criticism are called for.

The “opportunistic electoral politics” and “communal politics” are not things which crept into the old Respect recently and unexpectedly.

“Some Tribune of the People!”, the recent SWP national meeting’s resolution said about Galloway. “He achieved the dubious record of being the fifth highest earning MP, after Hague,

Blunkett, Widdecombe and Boris Johnson, with £300,000 a year”.

Galloway had already told the *Scotsman* newspaper, in a sneering comment on the Scottish Socialist Party’s campaigning slogan for workers’ representatives on a workers’ wage, that he “couldn’t live on three workers’ wages” and “need[ed] £150,000 a year to function properly as a leading figure in a part of the British political system” (*Scotsman*, 19 May 2003).

And when asked to summarise his politics briefly in an interview with the *Independent on Sunday* (5 April 2004), Galloway replied: “Socialist. Although I’m not as left wing as you think...” He hadn’t been asked about abortion rights, but chose to make that the one specific issue he mentioned when asked for a general summary of his views.

“I’m strongly against abortion. I believe life begins at conception, and therefore unborn babies have rights. I think abortion is immoral”. He claimed to have unshakable “faith in God”.

The sudden switch from Gorgeous George to Godly Galloway quickly brought a press release from the Muslim Association of Britain:

“These comments [on abortion], as well as his statements on faith and God in the same interview, will surely be welcomed by British Muslims who see Respect as a real alternative.”

In 2004, Respect circulated a leaflet in London boosting Galloway as a “fighter for Muslims”. It described Respect as “The Party for Muslims”, and claims that “George Galloway has been recognised by the Muslim world for his 30 years of struggle for the people of Palestine, Iraq and Pakistan. Married to a Palestinian doctor, he has deep religious principles [and is] teetotal.”

Way down in the small print the leaflet mentioned “low-cost public housing” and so on, but its basic pitch was that Galloway and Respect spoke for Muslims as Muslims. “Tony Blair wants to see George Galloway silenced. We, as Muslims, want to see him continue to speak out for us”.

It was grotesquely hypocritical even in its own terms. Take Galloway’s “struggle for the people of Pakistan”, for example.

In the *Mail on Sunday* (17 October 1999), Galloway supported the military coup that installed the present government there. “In poor third world countries like Pakistan, politics is too important to be left to petty squabbling politicians... Only the armed forces can really be counted on to hold such a country together. General Musharraf seems an upright sort to me and he should be given a chance to put Pakistan’s house in order. Democracy is a means, not an end in itself”.

In the mid 1990s, Galloway ran a newspaper called *East* which was financed by previous Pakistani governments in order to promote their politics on Kashmir among British Asians. (See the article by Saeed Shah, a former journalist on East, in *The Independent*, 23 April 2003)...

As well as being hypocritical, the leaflet’s appeal was sectarian, divisive, and calculated to tie Muslim workers and youth to their imams and community notables rather than uniting them with other workers and youth, Hindu, Christian, or atheist.

It was no less reactionary than appealing to Catholics to vote as Catholics for a candidate claiming to “speak out for Catholics”, or Protestants to vote as Protestants for “a fighter for Protestants”...

Debate: support SWP side in the Respect split?

AS against George Galloway and his close friends, our sympathies in the split now taking place in Respect cannot but be with the SWP. We protested when the SWP trashed its alliance with other socialists, in 2003, rallying its members behind the demagogue Galloway... We can’t be other than glad that the SWP is now breaking that alliance, so discrediting for the whole socialist left.

To do the job properly the SWP CC would have to tell the truth about Galloway... But to do that the SWP CC would have to condemn itself. Instead it has conducted the struggle against Galloway by appeals to SWP loyalty...

So to SWP members and sympathisers, and socialists in Respect, we say: break with Galloway. But also: do it politically! Then settle accounts properly with the SWP leaders who drew you into this destructive mess!

Martin Thomas

I don’t agree with the supportive stance towards the SWP — at least, to its leadership. They have lain down with dogs, got up with fleas, and are now complaining about itching.

The SWP leadership knew exactly what it was doing when it got into bed with The Gorgeous One. It threw a shedload of socialist principles out of the window, from women’s rights to secularism. And don’t forget that when we said the things about Galloway that they are saying now, they called us racists!

It is faintly absurd to suggest that an appeal to their better natures will bring them back onto the road of principled Marxism. No chance.

Janine Booth

JANINE Booth rightly censures the SWP for allying with Galloway. Agreed. But are Galloway and the SWP the same? The original article concludes by calling on SWP members to “settle accounts properly with the SWP leaders who drew you into this demoralising, destructive mess!”

Obviously this is not suggesting that an appeal to the better nature of the SWP leaders will bring them back to principled Marxism.

Martin Thomas

CALLING for the SWP rank and file to “settle accounts” is a futile demand. It would be less futile if three things existed; one, a critical, open, democratic culture; two, an educated, solid cadre of revolutionary socialists... three, a genuinely democratic centralist organisation... But we know that none of those exist and have not existed for a long while...

How do we win SWPers? Do we encourage them to wage a fight, a fight that not only will they lose but in all probability demoralise them? I know from my first-hand experience that the line is given by the CC to the district organisers, who then feed it on the local cadre; those who support the new line are pushed and encouraged; those who disagree with the new line are sidelined and demoted.

Chris Leary

WHAT do we say to an SWPer, or Respect supporter, who is not yet ready to agree with us on the big range of quite complex questions (quite complex, anyway, if you start looking at them from the angle of having had your first “induction” into what socialism and Marxism mean from the SWP) which define AWL against SWP? But who has to take a decision now, today, on which side they take in the Respect split, and can’t wait to do so until they have sorted out all those questions?

Do we assent to what must be the “natural” inclination of many critical-minded people — to side with the Gallowayites on grounds of the hamfisted bureaucracy of the SWP’s methods? Or do we say that there are much bigger fish to fry here? I’d say the latter.

Martin Thomas

More: www.workersliberty.org/node/9504

A toxic mix

BY SACHA ISMAIL

ABOUT an hour and a half into the “Respect Renewal” conference held by George Galloway and his allies on 17 September (at which point I left), there were about 200 people present. So the widely cited figure of 250 is probably about right.

“The hall was packed out with a genuinely diverse crowd — young and old, men and women, black and white, Asian, Muslim, Christian and those of no faith, plus trade unionists and socialists from different traditions,” enthused the next day’s *Morning Star*.

There were certainly a variety of people there. However, my impression of the mix was rather different. In contrast to the SWP-Respect conference which we had leafleted earlier that morning, the audience was overwhelmingly late middle-aged and overwhelmingly male. (There was, however, a fair degree of ethnic diversity, with many participants who looked Bengali.) And politically, the mix was toxic.

Outside, in addition to the eager opportunists of the International Socialist Group, were sellers of the *Morning Star*, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, and various other Stalinist journals. Best of all, I recognised at least six members of *Socialist Action*, evidently attracted to the event like rats to a polluted water source.

There was also a small, but only very small, smattering of ex-Socialist Alliance-type leftists, so desperate for a political home not linked to an organised tendency that they have flung themselves into Galloway’s icky embrace. I’m not sure how many ex-SWPers were present, but I did see a few familiar faces that were

pointedly not distributing the (very poor, totally apolitical) SWP/official Respect materials calling for unity.

The conference was, in fact, more of a rally, with long lists of speakers in each session; there was no space for motions or elections and, although I left almost as soon as Galloway had finished speaking, I can’t imagine the “plenty of time for questions or contributions from the floor” amounted to much. *Socialist Worker* reports that a committee to run the organisation, including expelled SWPers Nick Wrack, Kevin Ovenden and Rob Hoveman, was simply announced.

It’s tempting to discuss Galloway’s speech at length, but not really worth it. Suffice to say that, while he scored a number of points against the SWP with regards to their anti-democratic behaviour and political dishonesty, every blow he landed was doubly an indictment of himself. The whole thing was dressed up with liberal helpings of his typical demagoguery and self-aggrandisement. (“Would the ordinary man or woman on the street call George Galloway right-wing? Would the US Senate? Would the anti-war movement?”)

The other notable thing was the ISG’s announcement, now confirmed on their website, that they will be handing over their monthly paper for the new organisation’s use. For a self-styled revolutionary socialist organisation to ally with Galloway is bad enough; but to hand over — freely, enthusiastically, with nothing in return — their public mouthpiece is qualitatively worse.

Goodness knows how Respect Renewal will develop, but the constituent elements mean that, whatever the result, it will not be good.

Peter Burton outlines his personal choices of documentary films worth viewing, from the earliest days of film-making to the recent past.

THE following films are not necessarily the best documentary films ever made, and by no means the only films that have changed the course of events in the real world. But they have been either innovative in some aspect of film technique or led to changes in the way filmmakers represented the "creative treatment of reality" (John Grierson). All of the films have been highly influential.



Nanook of the North (1922) combined the editing techniques and dramatic structure of fiction film with real life characters, Inuit Eskimos, to try and represent and establish a common humanity across cultural differences. These fiction techniques allowed the filmmaker Robert Flaherty to create tension and expectation in any given scene amidst the overall narrative question of whether the Inuit would survive. This was an original way of making documentary films.

Walter Ruttmann's *Symphony of a City* (1927) began a trend of films about cities around the world — poetic "City Symphonies". German-born Ruttmann had been highly influenced by Viking Eggeling — a Dadaist. Ruttmann combined Eggeling's techniques with those of Dziga Vertov to create a rhythmic plot-less representation of dawn to dusk in Weimar Berlin.

Film critic Siegfried Kracauer and film maker Vsevolod Pudovkin criticised *Symphony of a City* for not capturing the mood of growing crises in Weimar Germany. However the film was revolutionary in its form.

The Russian film maker Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* has the revelatory capacity of unscripted documentary footage at its heart, but combined these with montage and film technique. Vertov's goal was the classical Marxist one of unity of form and content. Centrally his was to be a cinema about facts — footage of real people in real life situations preferably filmed without their knowledge using film technology that was superior to the human eye — its ability to see long distances, slow down or speed up motion. Editing provided further liberation from the confines of time and space.

In the pursuit of a deeper level of truth Vertov and his "Kinoks" [a 1920s collective of



NIGHTMAIL and *Song of Ceylon* were products of the GPO film unit. Nightmail showed director John Grierson's desire "to bring the Post Office alive". Following the journey of the Post Office sorting train it was, in fact, an attempt to explore the role of communication in Britain with the skill and role of the workforce as central themes.

Alberto Cavalcanti experimented with sound in the film, the narration was written by the poet WH Auden and the music scored by Benjamin Brittain — to great public acclaim. The poetic rhythmic soundtrack was infectious and many documentary filmmakers tried to imitate the style.

Russian film makers, kinoks means "cinema-eyes"] experimented with everything — freeze frames, multiple frames, animation, telescopic and microscopic lenses, multiple exposures, subliminal cuts of one or two frames, slow motion, fast motion, cameras in plains, hand held and in cars. Vertov also theorised about the use of contrapuntal sound long before it became technically feasible.

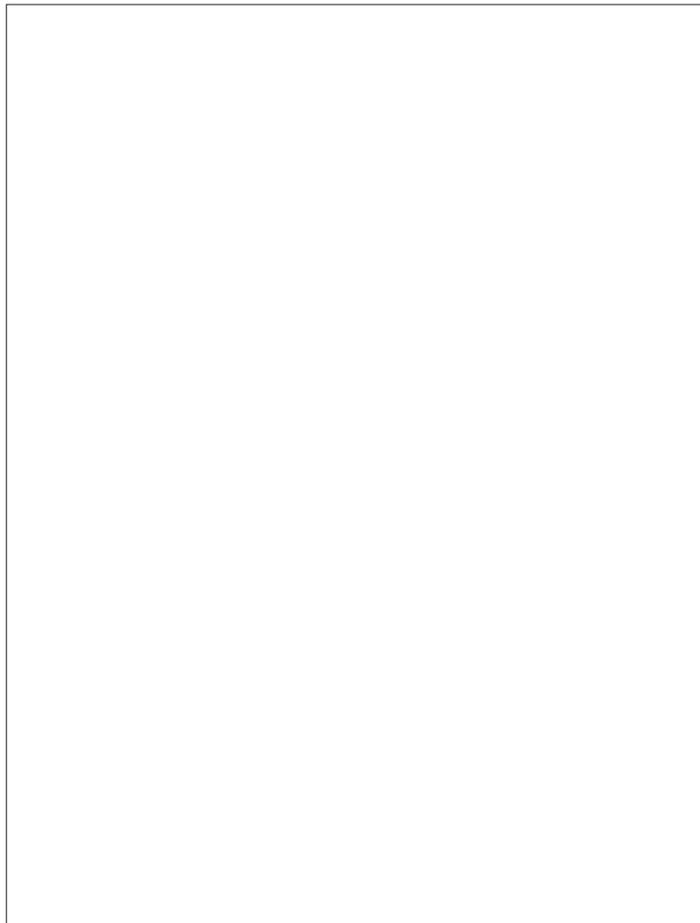
On seeing Vertov's first sound film *Enthusiasm*, Charlie Chaplin described him as a "master" who should be "learned from instead of criticised".

Esther Shub was the most brilliant woman filmmaker of her times. Alone Shub brought to the world an awareness of how important archive footage could be in its cultural and material value- an awareness that led in time to the establishment of the first film archives. She edited home movie footage to create compila-

tions of films that told the story of Russia from 1900 to 1928 and combined Vertov's and Eisenstein's montage techniques with a firm narrative sense to create radical, sympathetic and humanistic films. Her film *Spain* (1939) is a very powerful film about the Spanish Civil War.

Night and Fog (*Nuit et Brouillard*) directed by Alan Resnais in 1955 is still regarded by many as the most powerful documentary about the Holocaust. In 1990 when Le Pen achieved 12% in French opinion polls, all five French TV channels cancelled their evening's schedules and showed the *Night and Fog* repeatedly.

The narration is by Auschwitz survivor Jean Cayrol and the music is by Hans Eisler, Bertold Brecht's old collaborator. Serene landscape, sealed boxcars, and barbed wire are juxtaposed, a deep distant monotonous voice narration contrasts with images of newsreel



footage, documentary still images and movement between black and white and colour. The camera glides along as the full horrors of Auschwitz are exposed both visibly and audibly but without the narration ever trying to explain the images. Violent images contrast with gentle music. The narrator asks "Who is responsible?" going on to say that the executioners are still in our midst.

Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* was banned in France until 1981. It didn't fit into the Gaullist image of nation united in resistance against the Nazis in World War Two France.

There are Resistance heroes in the film but as one of them says "People thought we were fools" — most French people tried to stay out of trouble. This did not suit De Gaul's goals in the post-war period as he sought to unify France on the basis of a mythologised version of heroic resistance.

Ophuls undermines the myth stylistically by contrasting a number of different interviewees contradicting each other when trying to recall events. The film is about memory, as words are illustrated with film clips and music and the latter is used ironically — Maurice Chevalier ending the film playing a rationalisation ditty on piano. He himself had opportunistically kept out the way during the war.

Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* represented an American miscarriage of justice and helped to promote legal reform. A cop is killed in Dallas and a man (Randall Adams) gets framed for the murder (with the actual killer as the prosecution's main witness). The style of the film complements a world of duplicity, false perception and endless ambiguous meanings — it is circular and obsessive, employing the repetition of motifs and a haunting score.

There are close ups of key words and a variety of photographic and text-based materials coupled with several witness re-enactments. This creates a compulsive Kennedy Conspiracy trance like representation of the nature of deception and self-deception. Authority figures — cops, the judge, the District Attorney and

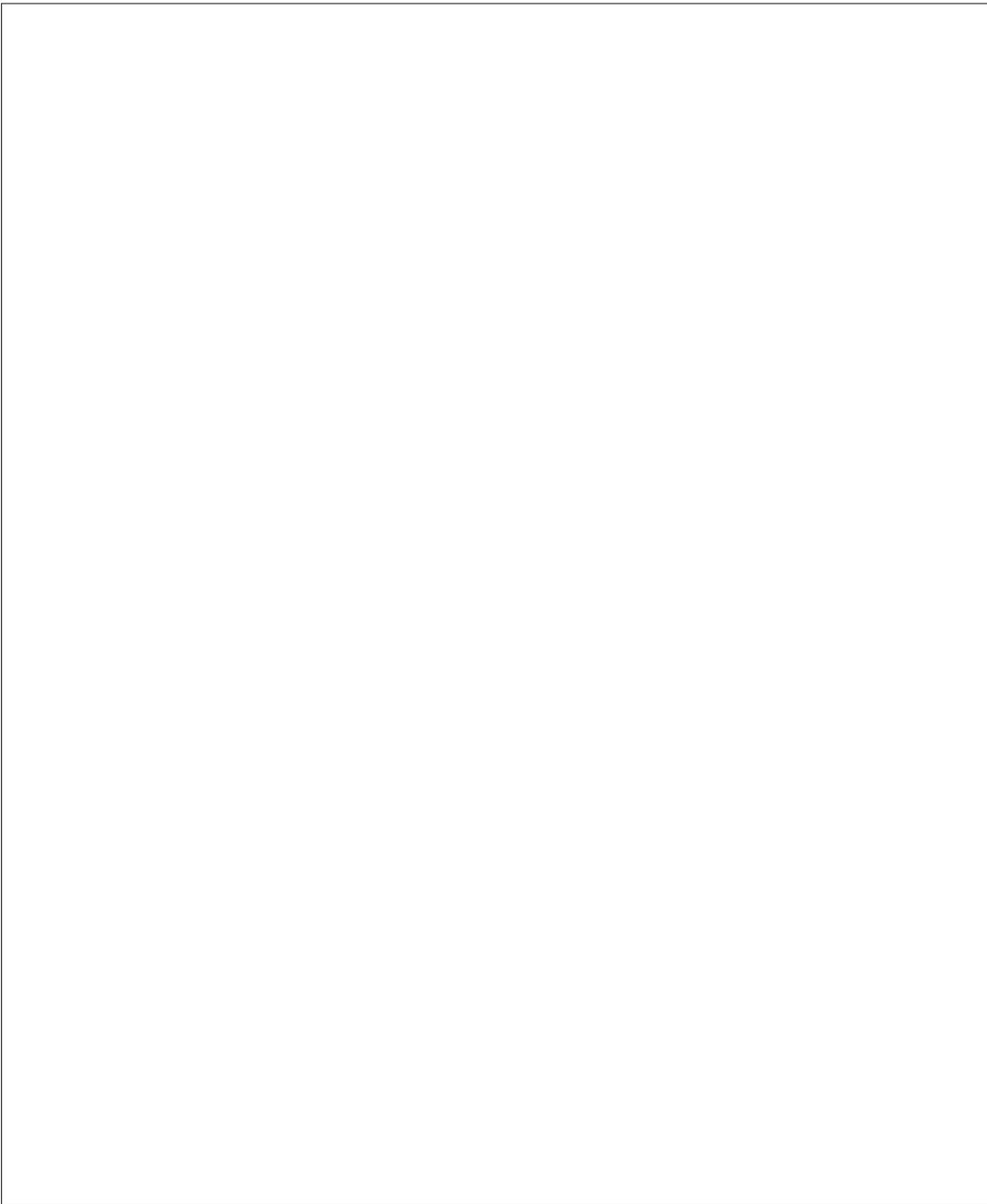


press are all implicated in a subtle exposure of a corrupt system.

Randall Adams was eventually released in 1989 partly as a result of the film and the direct testimony of Errol Morris.

SHOAH was made in 1985 by Claude Lanzmann. 350 hours of footage was cut to nine and a half hours. It is one of cinema's greatest achievements. In form it can seem repetitive moving back and forth between generalities and specifics, bombarding the viewer with details. It is non-linear and archive footage and narration are absent. Instead the film is constructed through contemporary testimony of survivors juxtaposed by shots of European landscapes bound together by the death trains — there are recurring images of a train going through countryside pulling into Treblinka station, a gaunt driver looking back to nothing.

Lanzmann interviews the railroad executive who planned the routes and scheduled the death trains to Poland. Elsewhere, he interviews the drivers who drove the trains and knew what they carried, the men who packed the victims into freight cars like cattle before slamming the doors, station masters who waved the death trains away, en route observers, camp guards who classified and processed the new arrivals, even the barbers who cut the hair before the gassing. Lanzmann



Barbara Kopple, dressed to go down a mine while filming Harlan County, her film about a 1976 Kentucky miners' strike

The power of documentary film



coaxes them on as they falter saying they owe it to history and their own peace. *Shoah* is another must see.

Monsoons, sets destroyed, massive over-expenditure, logistical nightmares, Martin Sheen being given first aid following a heart attack and a \$1 million dollar a week Marlon Brando wandering off scene while the cameras are still running, mumbling "and that's all the dialogue I can think of today". Just a few of the not so favourite things of Francis Ford Coppola as caught on film by his wife in the making of *Apocalypse Now*. (*Hearts of Darkness — A Film-makers' Apocalypse*, 1991)

Eleanor Coppola catches her husband's outbursts of despair unknown to him, alongside endless arguments with Brando about his lines and how much of him should be shot physically in darkness. Coppola struggles to keep Brando and Denis Hopper apart as he knows that if they ever actually meet the film is over.

The covert filming makes us feel we are, for once, truly witnessing how really difficult it is to create a great epic film.

Roger and Me (1989) launched Michael Moore's career. It is documentary as tragicomic revenge for American corporate greed. General Motors has closed eleven plants and laid off 33,000 workers in Moore's hometown of Flint. Moore engages in a futile ongoing narrative quest to interview the Chairman Roger Smith with a view to asking him to tour Flint with him to see the consequences of the closures and layoffs.

The revenge of the little guy takes the form of using the manipulative slick GM PR manoeuvres against them and going beyond it. Moore juxtaposes a "Flint Pride" parade that marches past boarded up store windows. We hear an enthusiastic PR man promote Auto World — an amusement park where Flint people can go and see Flint as it used to be before the closures. In a key scene Flint's Chairman addresses a Christmas TV hook-up, reading selections from Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* while Moore shows us deputies evicting an unemployed GM worker and throwing his Xmas tree into the gutter.

Unemployed GM workers hire themselves out as living statues standing around in costumes at a Great Gatsby charity benefit. Moore gets ejected from a Country Club, a yacht club and skyscraper offices by secretaries and bouncers who are well schooled in guarding the elite. The gloom and despair of Reagan's 80s America is here represented with great anger and humour.

Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County USA* (1976) and *American Dreams* (1990) deal more directly with American worker resistance in the face of increasing bosses' attacks — it is resistance as Greek tragedy.

Some other must sees would include: Luis Bunuel's *Les Hurdes*, *The Spanish Earth* by Joris Evens, Humphrey Jennings' *Fires were Started*, and the Cinema Vérité films of the Maysles brothers and Frederick Wiseman.

Pilgers *Death of a Nation* deftly exposed the corruption and ruthlessness of the Thatcher years as it sold arms to Indonesia knowing in advance the slaughter they would be used for in East Timor.

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www.documentary.org.uk

A life worth living

PAUL HAMPTON REVIEWS **JAMES P. CANNON AND THE ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY LEFT, 1890-1928**, BY **BRYAN D. PALMER (2007)**

JAMES P. Cannon (1890-1974) was a titanic figure in the history of Marxism, yet in spite of a long life devoted to socialism, he has until now eluded a decent biography. This book by Canadian Marxist Bryan Palmer has been long in gestation but has been worth the wait: at last Cannon's life — or at least the first 38 years of it — has been told.

Cannon's time is also very much the history of the revolutionary left in the United States, at least at its origins. First thrust into political activity in 1906 in defence of the miners' leaders like Bill Haywood, Cannon joined the Socialist Party in 1908, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1911, and was part of the socialist left that rallied to the Russian Revolution in 1917. Cannon was a founder of the Communist Party in the US and a central leader of the party until 1928, when he was expelled for Trotskyism. He was a frequent visitor to revolutionary Russia and a participant in the Communist International (Comintern), the cadres of the international revolutionary left whose work still carries lessons for today.

"A LIFE WORTH LIVING"

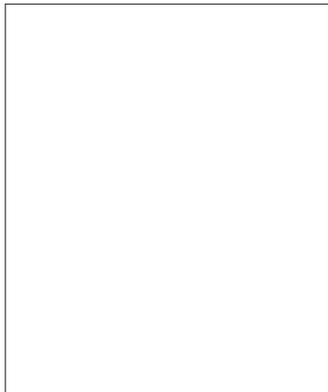
ONE of the many virtues of this biography is that it reveals much more about Cannon's personal life than has been in print before. Cannon was born on 11 February 1890 in the state of Kansas. His parents John Cannon and Ann Hackett were both of Irish extraction, but born near Bolton in the north-west of England. The young Jim was closest to his mother, who tried to instil her Catholicism every day and twice on Sunday. However she died in 1904 and her son went to work as a meatpacker, railworker, printer and clerk in the family firm.

His father was a supporter of the Irish Land League and for a while before the boy was born, active in the Knights of Labour union and a subscriber to the socialist press. However by the time his son was old enough to talk, Cannon senior was a notary public, estate agent, insurer and possibly even a local judge at some point — something his son did not mention when he talked of his origins. Palmer also argues that the young Cannon probably lost his thumb at home or in a prank, rather than at work as has previously been suggested.

Cannon junior went to high school, where he became active in the Rosedale Society of Debate, defending women's suffrage and industrial dispute resolution. It was at school that he met the teacher Lista Makimson, seven years his senior, who would become his first wife in 1913. They had two children, Carl (b. 1914) and Ruth (b. 1917), although their relationship barely lasted more than a decade — mainly because of Cannon's political commitments.

Cannon cut his teeth politically in the IWW, rapidly becoming one of the union's outstanding soapbox orators and hobo organisers, living off the proceeds of literature sales and jumping trains to get to industrial disputes. The IWW leader Vincent St John set Cannon on the road to becoming a professional revolutionary, involving him in its 1912 convention. This was also where he learned to write — turning out articles for the Wobbly paper *Solidarity*. It was in the IWW that he learned that socialism was "a creed that begins with solidarity and ends with freedom" (p.60).

Cannon was involved in some of the most bitter labour battles of the period, notably the Akron rubber workers strike. He threw himself wholeheartedly into the class struggle, "preaching the eight-hour day while working eighteen" in support of whatever workers' fight he was directed to go to. It was during this period that he got his first taste of prison and that he realised that a life worth living is "to at least have committed ones ownself to an effort to change it". (p.86)



James P. Cannon

"A WOBBLY WHO LEARNED SOMETHING"

Such frenetic activity seemed to have burned Cannon out and he began a more settled life with his young family, starting to study law three evenings a week and taking an office job. But then the Russian revolution changed his life forever. For Cannon, the actuality of a workers' revolution was earth shattering. But the real revelation was that it was not led by an all-inclusive militant industrial union but by "a party of selected revolutionaries united by a programme and bound by discipline" (p.91). The Bolsheviks had demonstrated direct action, but they had won because they had theory and an organised party. This simple truth was to shape the rest of his life.

Cannon joined the Socialist Party and took part in its left wing, which agreed to split from the party to found a Communist Party modelled on the Russian Bolsheviks. He took part in the underground and illegal United Communist Party and its successors, including the "shotgun marriage" of different communist organisations, the majority of them foreign-language federations that came over from the Socialist Party, in 1921. He chaired the founding conference of the Workers' Party, the legal Communist Party later that year. Although it rarely exceeded 10,000 members in the twenties, the party nevertheless brought together most of the finest worker militants who sincerely wanted to overthrow US capitalism and replace it with socialist democracy.

The early 1920s saw Cannon at the height of his power and influence. According to one communist, he was "a very eloquent orator, with a lot of emotion, a lot of feeling and even some poetry in his eloquence... a true revolutionary, one that a person could model himself after". (p.122) Cannon, a tobacco chewing, hard drinking, physical, authentic agitator who epitomised the indigenous working class that the Communist Party set out to win.

Cannon was instrumental in the development of the early Communist Party. In particular he led the struggle to establish the party on a legal basis, at first maintaining the parallel underground organisation but then becoming a full-fledged open party. Cannon was also pivotal in turning the party towards the organised working class, which in US conditions at the time meant working with the IWW to organise the unorganised as well as "boring from within" in the mainstream and largely craft AFL union centre. It was this conception of building the party on the logic of the class struggle — something the Bolsheviks had done successfully in Russia — which Cannon applied in the US and would prove to be his most important contribution to Marxism.

Politically Cannon stood head and shoulders above other communist leaders from the period: the vain administrator Charles Rutenberg, the chameleon functionary John Pepper and his bureaucrat protégé Jay Lovestone; even trade unionist William Z. Foster, with whom he was in

alliance for much of the 1920s. Much of the book is a detailed and well-documented description of the factional activity within the American Communist Party. Cannon himself was no lightweight in these affairs — his supporters apparently armed themselves for the fourth convention in 1925 (p.242) but the record shows that he tried to develop the kind of collective leadership necessary to build a functioning democratic centralist party capable of taking on the might US capital and its state. His own recollections on the period, published in the *First Ten Years of American Communism* (1962) is his best book, in part because it is a manual on how to develop a mass working class party. Cannon's greatest legacy was his party-building efforts and the period remains his best attempt to create a serious Marxist organisation rooted in the American working class.

A second legacy that repays attention was Cannon's efforts to build a non-partisan labour defence campaign for class war prisoners. Cannon was already intimately concerned with the party's trade union work, but it was in the International Labour Defense (ILD) organisation that he developed his united front approach. Cannon's protégé of this period, Max Shachtman argued that ILD was "the best non-party organisation created by the CP" (p.280) and this verdict stands up. The ILD, run by another Cannonite, Martin Abern, was able to organise high-profile solidarity with a host of socialist, anarchist and communist militants — most notably (though unsuccessfully) with Sacco and Vanzetti. The ILD paper, *The Labor Defender*, edited by Shachtman, utilised innovative photomontages and modern techniques to spread its message. It had a circulation of 22,000 — greater than the rest of the CP's press put together.

The book also charts Cannon's personal life, including the final breakdown of his relationship with Lista in 1923 when the CP centre moved from New York to Chicago. We also learn a great deal about Rose Karsner, a considerable revolutionary in her own right — particularly as the national secretary of the Friends of Soviet Russia — and who became Cannon's partner from this time and for the rest of his life.

"A CONVINCED COMINTERNIST"

IT is not possible to understand Cannon's life or the history of the American Communist Party during the 1920s without detailing the role of Comintern. The messages to and from Moscow gave rise to the well-known joke: why is the CP like the Brooklyn Bridge? Because it is suspended on cables [i.e. telegrams from Moscow!].

Palmer distinguishes his approach from the cold war histories that portray the CP as largely a foreign import, whose influence was almost entirely negative, and which led inexorably to Stalinism. Instead he is more nuanced, looking at the matter more concretely. For example the Comintern was right to insist in 1921 that the squabbling factions fuse and work together to build a united open party, since politically their differences were negligible.

Similarly, the Comintern role in pushing the Communists towards building a Labor Party was not all negative. Lenin's pamphlet *Left Wing Communism* dealt a blow at the sectarian, conspiratorial approach of many ultra-lefts and the united front approach formulated in 1921 pushed communists back towards the unions and towards efforts at building independent working-class political action. When John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor began agitating for a labor party in 1923, Cannon and others who had understood the Comintern's teachings supported the effort.

Although Pepper's influence and the Comintern's so-called "workers' and peasant parties" thesis undoubtedly contributed to the debacle at the "Farmer-Labor Party" convention, (which the CP packed with its own people) and the following year almost led them (including Cannon) to supporting the bourgeois third party candidate LaFollette, it was the intervention of the Comintern, on the advice of Trotsky, which pulled the party back into line.

Although the Comintern intervention towards particular party factions sometimes put the wrong people in positions that their capabilities or indigenous support did not warrant, it was also the Comintern that pushed the American Communists, albeit without much success (they recruited only 50 black members in the 1920s), towards the understanding of racism as a question of social oppression not reducible to working class exploitation, as most US Communists maintained.

Similarly, many have telescoped the period of Bolshevisation from 1924 with the latter Stalinisation of the American party, whereas the book distinguishes these phases of its development. Cannon ardently embraced Zinoviev's Bolshevisation plans, famously arguing for a "monolithic party hewn from one piece" and shorn of factions, tendencies and groups. (p.222) However Palmer argues convincingly that Cannon's practice in the 1920s and after, as well as numerous other statements do not suggest he held an essentially bureaucratic view of the party and was cognisant that a party without debate was more likely to be asleep than in good health. He interprets Cannon's support for Bolshevisation as much more about ending the dead-end factionalism of the American party and about putting it on a more systematic, professional footing than about proto-Stalinist bureaucratism.

Cannon himself remained a committed Cominternist and although Palmer argues that he "adapted rather easily and uncritically to Comintern directives" (p.228), it was of course his presence at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 that put Cannon, through his engagement with Trotskyism, firmly on the road back to revolutionary socialism.

Cannon distinguished himself within the leadership of the CP in the mid-1920s by refusing to rush to condemn Trotsky as the Stalinist smears percolated through the Comintern sections. However he did "go along for the ride", voting for resolutions up to 1928.

The book charts Cannon's activity after he got hold of a copy of Trotsky's Critique of the Draft Programme of the Communist International at the Sixth Congress. Palmer suggests that Stalin may well have allowed Trotsky's draft to circulate at the congress, in preparation for the move against Bukharin, the author of the Comintern programme — and also to smoke out any remaining Trotsky sympathisers.

Once back in the US, with the document, smuggled out in a teddy bear, Cannon went about convincing his closest supporters of the new course, starting with Karsner, Shachtman and Abern. Cannon was supported financially by Max Eastman, who published documents also secretly gotten out of Russia by Eleazer Solntsev, a Soviet trade attaché in New York who like many paid for his oppositionism with his life. The book contains an interesting description of the role of Antoinette Konikow, like Cannon a veteran of the earlier movements who had come to Trotskyism in 1926 after a trip to Russia and who alongside her revolutionary communist work was a passionate advocate of contraception and abortion rights. The expulsion of Cannon and his immediate coterie was supplemented by overzealous purging of others, which meant they had around 100 supporters by the end of 1928. Palmer also recounts the violence the pioneer Trotskyists faced as they were ostracised from the Communist Party.

The book's verdict on Cannon is rightly very positive, though not uncritical. Palmer points out his political weaknesses, particularly on gender and race as well as his personal foibles, of which alcohol was the most prominent.

Cannon remarked that "The mark of a man's life is his capacity to march to the music of his youth" (p.364), and he was alone among the early generation of communist leaders in retaining his commitment to working class revolution. Cannon was an outstanding representative of the Marxist tradition and the period covered by this book was his best time. Palmer has written a fantastic history of a pivotal figure in an exceptional era. But he also has an eye on the revival of revolutionary left in the present. Cannon has much to teach us and, in this book, we now have a valuable guide for training the militants of the

History as romantic mush

NINA CARLYLE REVIEWS ELIZABETH, THE GOLDEN AGE

I HAVE a lasting grievance against *Solidarity*. Why? Because on the recommendation of its review of the film *Elizabeth* (Elizabeth I to the new Elizabeth II so to speak) I went to see *Elizabeth, the Golden Age*. It was more than disappointment you expect from all such films.

Almost all “historical” drama is inaccurate. In history, satisfying dramatic moments like, for example, Trotsky at the Congress of Soviets shouting after the Mensheviks and others who walked out in protest at the greatest democratic revolution in history “go — to the dustbin of history”, are rare. They are, of course the very stuff of drama, so suitable “moments” are concocted.

Some historical dramas manipulate events and characters and imaginary confrontations to illustrate a vision of historical events which corresponds to the truth, as the author has it. A firm favourite in the many plays and films dealing with the reign of Elizabeth is to have Elizabeth and the first cousin she first imprisoned and then had beheaded, Mary Queen of Scots, confront each other. In fact they never met.

Some explore real history by way of a fiction set against a real historical background.

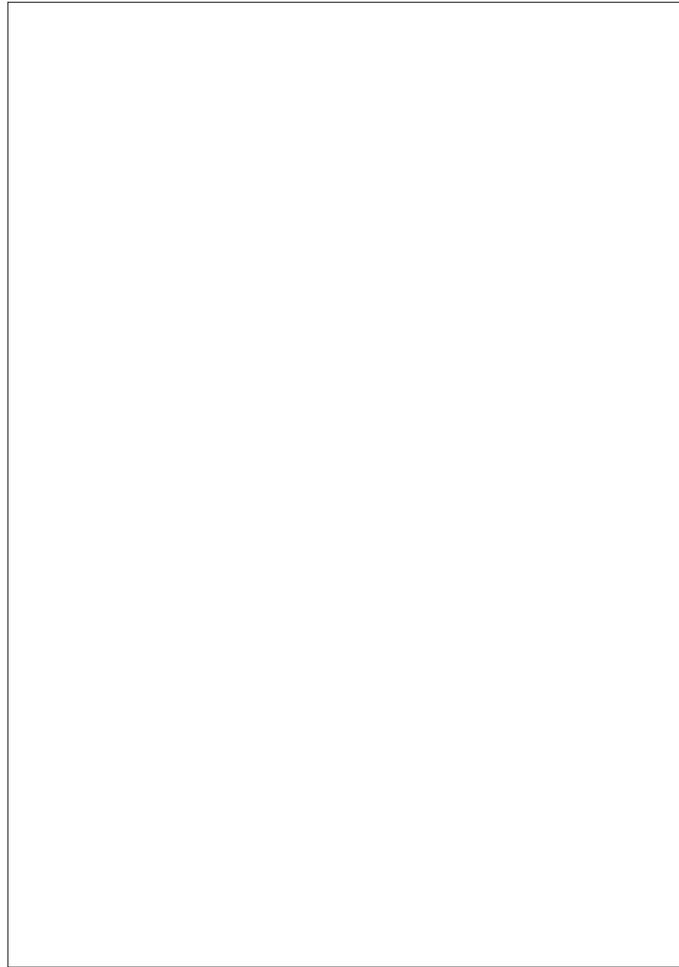
Some dance around a subject by putting real figures into illuminating relationships which in history they never had. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, a play and then a movie, focusses on an imaginary personal relationship between the Inca king Atahualpa and his Spanish captor, Francisco Pizarro.

Then there are Hollywood-type “historical” films, which is what *Elizabeth the Golden Age* is. These are historical fairy-tales. In this one Elizabeth and Mary don’t meet, but it is a rare nod to historical truth.

What annoyed me about the first film was not its portrayal of the Earl of Leicester, Elizabeth’s long time favourite and, perhaps, paramour, as one of the chief villains. What annoyed me was the film’s claim that, in an age of wars between Catholic and Protestant Europe, it presented Elizabeth as a ruler who found a tolerant middle way between “extreme” Catholics and “extreme” Protestants. It made her almost a modern *Guardian* liberal confronting political Islam, a liberal for our age of religious indifference.

This was Elizabeth I the monarch in whose reign not one but two genocidal wars were fought in Ireland — with religion, Catholic versus Elizabeth’s state church, a major element in both of them.

Munster was laid waste at the beginning of the 1580s and Ulster in the 1590s, during



Elizabeth’s last decade. This was systematic, deliberate butchery designed to kill off and “clear” the native inhabitants off the land.

Elizabeth did, I understand, once say that on religion she would “not make windows in men’s souls”, but that meant only that they could think what they liked so long as outwardly they accepted the state religion and discharged their obligations in regular worship and the payment of tithes to uphold the estab-

lished clergy. “Recusant” Catholics and others were fined for not attending the state church.

A modern, enlightened liberal, Elizabeth I was not. In real history she could not conceivably have been that then.

The same lie is there at the start of *Elizabeth the Golden Age*, which contrasts the enlightened Elizabeth with her one-time brother-in-law, King Phillip of Spain.

The centrepiece of the film is the Spanish

attempt to invade England in 1588 — the “Spanish Armada”. The drama of Mary Queen of Scots is a subordinate part of this story. Mary, who was French-bred, is here played by Samantha Morton (with a Scottish accent.) A young-like Elizabeth — the real one was in her middle-fifties — is shown in shining Angel Gabriel armour addressing her soldiers to prepare them to resist the expected invasion. For centuries a speech was supposed to have been made by Elizabeth at Tilbury on the eve of Armada, in which she famously told the soldiers, “we are no petty people”. Probably she never made it — but at least it was an impressive speech. In this film she makes a non-descript speech crafted for modern ears.

The real Armada was defeated by adverse winds which scattered the ships far and wide. Some of them were wrecked off the Irish coast; those sailors who survived were slaughtered en masse by the Queen’s servitors in Ireland.

Here Walter Raleigh, who in life and achievements was no “petty” man, does old-style swashbuckling Hollywood heroics. He rams a burning ship into the massed Spanish galleons and jumps into the water for his life. Errol Flynn stuff.

Sir Francis Drake, one of the commanders of the ships against the Armada, does not appear at all in the film.

In real history “good Queen Bess”, once the danger was gone, refused to pay the sailors who had gone against the Armada and many of them died of starvation.

The struggle of the savage English state which automatically tortured its prisoners against the Jesuit “terrorists” who stalked Elizabeth is, as in the first *Elizabeth*, a major strand in this one. The Pope excommunicated Elizabeth on the eve of the Armada and that meant that her life had a sort of fatwa on it. Catholics were assumed to be disloyal harbourers of outlawed priests and papal agents. Many were hostile to the heretic Queen. Many harboured priests. But the evidence now points to the serious involvement of the state in setting up famous but in fact half-imaginary conspiracies for its own manipulative purposes.

That state, after Elizabeth’s death seems to have largely concocted the infamous Guy Fawkes conspiracy to blow up the Houses of Parliament. At the very least state provocateurs played a major part in the affair. It justified and licensed repression.

Elizabeth the Golden Age conveys some idea of the ferocity of that state, and thus has some realistic notes, but these are sunk in the romantic, Elizabeth-glorifying mush.

Is it worth seeing? I found it dull: boring as well as insubstantial. So, dear reader, if you come out of it disappointed and disgruntled,

Walking back to happiness?

CATHY NUGENT REVIEWS INTO THE WILD

I LIKE to think I’m a pretty low-tech, non-materialistic kind of person. Apart from a few books, I’ve not accumulated much stuff over the years. My analogue radio is permanently tuned to the one BBC station that in spite of podcasts etc. hasn’t changed its format much in 30 years.

My mobile phone is the cheapest, is five or six years old and has a huge crack in it’s casing from when I dropped it in the gutter four years ago. I do not own an MP3 player.

If it’s cheap, it’s stood the test of time and it’s not broke, why fix it? Who needs more shiny tat? This is my basic attitude.

But I have never, ever, imagined or desired, even when younger and fitter, dropping out of human society, walking off into the wilderness, sleeping out in the

desert or living off the land. Why would anyone want to do that? *Into the Wild*, a true-story film of a north American best-selling book, helps us understand the drive.

Chris Candless was not a crazy man, or a loner who harboured bad feelings towards all human beings. He was a young, athletic, charming, straight-A student from a privileged background. But he was, as his sister’s narration tells us, a fragile, brittle person who had been deeply hurt and betrayed by his parents’ behaviour; their substantial lies, everyday hypocrisy and uninhibited violence towards each other.

Rejecting his parents’ values, their worldly ambition and materialism, Chris first plans, then sets out on a “big adventure”. He tramps the roads with just a tent, sleeping bag, water bottle, a few favourite books, a gun to shoot animals for food and a survivalist guide to roots and berries.

Chris wants a simpler existence. It might

be a journey of self-discovery, except Chris thinks he already knows who he is and what he wants. It is the idealistic chosen existence of other clever young people (or perhaps, often, young men) in history, especially some of the poets and writers Chris admires. Travelling to South Dakota, to Mexico, and then, finally, north to Alaska, Chris meets on the way other “drop outs”, outlaws and wounded individuals.

This is a beautifully-shot film with an interesting, perplexing, sad story to tell. Chris finds out that even when he rejects his old identity (he renames himself Alexander Supertramp) and cuts his ties (somewhat brutally) with the people he meets on the road, he cannot escape complications in life, and perhaps, after all, he does not want to escape from all other human beings.

Sean Penn’s script for the film (and

presumably also Jon Krakaur’s original book) has Chris reading Tolstoy at the end of his time in Alaska. Tolstoy talks about how to live a simple life among other human beings. All that matters, in the end, is to make oneself useful to other people and to humanity in general.

But neither Penn nor Krakaur could actually know that Chris was thinking along these lines because Chris died of starvation in Alaska; he was trapped in his wilderness, unable to return south, because he could not swim across a treacherous, fast-flowing river, swollen by ice melted in the spring sunshine. Nature, after all, did not exist in order for enlightened humans to live in harmony with it.

A stupid, crazy way to go? Certainly. But better this way than dropping dead of a heart attack after years spent stalking the mighty dollar on the thirtieth floor of a concrete box.

Australia: use Socialist and Green votes to send a message to unions and Labour leaders!

FOR Australia's federal election on 24 November, the ACTU (Australian TUC) is for the first time ever producing its own "how-to-vote" cards, suggesting a Green vote for the Senate.

The election is by Alternative Vote for the House of Representatives and STV for the Senate (the only house where the Greens are represented or likely to gain representation).

Left Labor-affiliated unions like the CFMEU are bolder, making donations to the Greens and the activist-left Socialist Alliance as well as to Labor. The ETU in Melbourne has a giant "vote Green" banner outside its offices.

Also unusually, the Greens and Labor have agreed to exchange second preferences everywhere except in Tasmania.

The background to this is the drastic anti-union laws introduced by the conservative government of John Howard; the trashing by Blair-model leader Kevin Rudd of most of Labor's pledges to repeal the laws; the Greens' strong and consistent stand for repeal... and the unions' failure to fight within the Labor Party.

Riki Lane outlines some conclusions from discussions among Australian Marxists.

Workers' Liberty sees the fight for union rights and against Work Choices as the decisive issue in the forthcoming Australian federal election. Howard and his gang of ruling class warriors have to be turfed out as dramatically as possible to drive home that workers will fight attacks on our ability to organise.

It is in workers' interests for a Labor Party (ALP) government to be elected. The unions still have substantial weight in the ALP and could use that to affect ALP policy, although they have bowed down to the parliamentarians in this campaign. However, the ALP's "me-too" campaign has adapted a long way towards Howard's industrial relations laws — AWAs [individual contracts, to replace collective bargaining] phased out over years and replaced by other sorts of individual contracts; the ABCC [a special police force for the construction industry] continues until 2010 and then is continued in another form; etc. etc. So while an ALP government is a far better result for workers than the Howard Coalition, it will mean only slightly lessened attacks.

Voting for Socialist candidates, e.g. from the

Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance, sends the clearest message that workers will stand up for our rights against an ALP government.

These parties, whatever their flaws, take a clear position of campaigning for the unions to organise and fight and call for an ALP government to be elected. One exception here is the Socialist Equality Party — which is completely hostile to the entire labour movement, unions included, and refuses to call for an ALP government. We can't support their candidates.

The Greens have excellent policy on workers' rights: rip up Work Choices immediately, for a right to strike, immediate abolition of the ABCC, etc. They have committed themselves to voting for such measures in parliament. If elected to the Senate, they could only improve the limited rollback of Work Choices that the ALP plans. They also have better policy than the ALP in all areas, but especially on climate change. Their leaders have been seen on major picket lines, e.g. in the MUA dispute.

Because the Greens do not have the same structural links to the unions as the ALP, some Workers' Liberty members are concerned that they are just a middle class party and voting for

them is abandoning the unions' struggle inside the ALP. However, a number of union officials are Green members and there has been a huge increase in financial and electoral support from unions for the Greens in this election.

There is an emerging approach by some of the best left unions to maintain ALP affiliation and give financial and electoral support to socialists and Greens.

A large working class vote for the Greens would: promote working class self-organisation and confidence; send a message to Rudd and the union leaders; and encourage the left union leaders to organise their ranks and to take up the fight inside and outside the ALP.

So Workers' Liberty argues: give your first preference to socialist candidates where you can; then to the Greens; then to the ALP. Put the Liberals and Nationals last, except where there are far right candidates running — e.g. Pauline Hanson, One Nation, Citizens' Electoral Council etc. The best result for maximising the working class capacity to fight is: an ALP government elected; the Coalition parties decimated; and a large vote for socialists and the Greens.

Missing the point on Palestine

I WAS disappointed by Rhodri Evans' response to Daniel Randall's article about the Palestinian trade union movement. While Daniel's piece displayed his support for the "third camp" of independent working-class forces in Palestine, the tone of Rhodri's letter ("Lacking a dimension on Israel-Palestine") was to emphasise our criticisms of initiatives to organise Palestinian workers rather than focussing on their vital role in opposing both Israeli expansionism and clerical-fascist Islamism forces.

Rhodri is right to say that we should not have illusions in the politics of the Stalinist leaders of the Workers' Advice Centre initiative — he cites their failure to adopt a "two states" position on Israel-Palestine as his greatest concern here. But Rhodri sidesteps any reference to Fatah-controlled trade unions which, although of course standing in favour of a "two-state" solution, are in tow to a bourgeois-nationalist party riddled with corruption.

He tells us that the "working-class movements can effect fundamental political change only when they have the policies to do so" — well, yes, of course there is more to working-class politics than day-to-day trade union activism. But "two states" — a slogan which I myself support as the only guarantee of self-determination for both nations — is a poor litmus test.

"Two states" could be taken up by any number of different political forces, including some sections of Hamas; we do not in any case propose that basic trade union activism plus good international politics equals a rounded workers' movement; and our support for independent working-class organisation is not conditional.

Indeed, neither Israel's racist Histadrut union nor Iraqi trade unions who, horror of horrors, call for the withdrawal of US-UK troops, are subject to equivalent disapproval in *Solidarity*. In both cases we recognise their potential to organise the working class as a class as central and not conditional on any given democratic question.

Of course, Rhodri denies any suggestion that our support for the Palestinian labour movement is subject to any conditions. But the way we portray the situation in Israel-Palestine and the enthusiasm of our support for workers' organisations there says something about our orientation and is furthermore, in a sense, part of our "solidarity" effort, exposing the way in which the international labour movement ignores Palestinian workers. We should — absolutely — not be afraid to be open about our disagreements with their politics. But our primary attitude is not one of criticism, which may risk clouding the class lines.

To illustrate the contradiction here, I recommend that comrades take a look at recent *Solidarity* pieces on Palestine such as the editorial in *Solidarity* 3/114 "The Palestinian Civil War" and Mark Osborn's letter "Help Fatah fight Hamas", which were both highly sympathetic to Fatah.

While Mark used vaguely sceptical formulations such as "David doesn't like the choice, Fatah or Hamas. I don't like it much myself", no specific problems with Fatah's programme were mentioned, which has the effect of blunting our criticisms and giving the impression that we do indeed tolerate their politics. In both pieces the fact that Fatah is a bourgeois party; its support for the "al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade"; and all of the reasons why Fatah has lost the confidence of the Palestinian masses, were ignored. Why is Fatah above criticism? Because it is for "two states", and better than Hamas?

So despite the AWL's "third campism", on the Palestinian question it seems that our solidarity

with the workers' movement is essentially secondary to interest in the fortunes of Fatah. We have no positive alternative to Hamas-Fatah feuding.

Indeed, the recent *Workers' Liberty* supplement entitled "How do we best help the Palestinians?" rightly opposed any academic boycott of Israel and argued for "two states" but failed to pose the question of positive solidarity with Palestinian workers — thus repeating one of the main mistakes of the "boycotters". While the arguments made on the national question were convincing, its pages did not in fact give us any clues as to "how we can best help the Palestinians", or deal with the question of agency. How might the organised working class grow as a real force in the region, and how can we practically help them? This should have been addressed.

For as socialists we know what we are for as well as what we are against. We do not let our opponents write our programmes for us.

Opposing Hamas should not mean that we support Fatah, any more than opposing a boycott of Israeli academia means we make no real attempt to build solidarity with the Palestinians, à la Engage. If the AWL is in favour of independent working-class politics, then how can supporting independent working-class organisations, however weak they are now, be anything other than our number one focus?

David Broder

No room for the BNP!

MIKE Rowley is right to stress "the fullest freedom of speech" under what he calls "normal circumstances", though it is not clear what these are, or whether they exist in the present climate. I have felt for many years that it is important that socialists — and others who share our views — should withdraw access to space for groups such as the BNP in property over which we have control or influence. They will always find space somewhere, but to withdraw access to public space is really important.

Ken Leech

LOOKING LEFT

Oxford union: vigil or demo?

AS reported in the last *Solidarity*, a lot is being done in Oxford by local unions, Labour branches, student unions and community groups to stop the Holocaust denial David Irving and the BNP leader Nick Griffin speaking at the Oxford Union student debating society on 26 November. However, the contribution of the Unite Against Fascism national office has been questionable.

At an organising meeting two weeks ago they were put in charge of negotiating with the police. Apparently they told the police we were organising not a mass picket of the Oxford Union building where the fascists would be speaking, but a "candlelit vigil" in another street altogether, to demonstrate that Oxford is a multicultural city, rather than demanding the fascists get out of the city or, heaven forbid, trying to force them out.

This is typical of the wishy-washy popular-front politics of one of UAF's predecessors, the

SWP-controlled second incarnation of the Anti-Nazi League; and indeed Weyman Bennett, the joint head of UAF and a prominent SWP member, is heavily involved. This tradition reduces anti-fascist politics to "don't vote nazi" so vote Tory, or UKIP, or anyone else instead. It rejects the idea of developing a political alternative to the racism and fear that attract working-class voters to the BNP.

When a National Front candidate stood in Bicester, near Oxford, in 2005 to exploit a proposal to build a refugee detention centre there, the SWP proposed appealing to the "soft racists" by organising a nimby campaign against the detention centre, in order to tell people not to vote for the fascist.

However, the latest communique from UAF refers to the action next Monday as a demo, not a "candlelit vigil", and says it will be outside the Oxford Union building; one of the many people who are fed up with the SWP's stance must have had a word with them.

Mike Rowley

No Hizbollah!

EVE Garrard has circulated the following on the activists' e-list of the lecturers' union UCU.

"Our union is affiliated to the Stop the War Coalition, which is holding a conference on 1 December. One of the speakers it has invited to this conference is Ibrahim Mousawi, the editor of al-Manar TV, Hizbullah's broadcasting

network. Al-Manar has circulated rumours that the attack on the World Trade Centre on 9/11 was a Zionist conspiracy, and has also broadcast soap opera episodes showing Jews killing Christian children in order to use their blood for ritual food. That is, it has been responsible for the peddling of very traditional anti-Semitic material which constitutes a direct incitement to racism.

Mousawi is the editor of a big budget, sophisticated, international media corporation, financed partly by the Iranian government, which produces antisemitic material in order to make people hate Jews. Mousawi has himself been reported as saying that Jews are a lesion on the forehead of history. Inviting him over here to speak is not supporting someone to speak for the oppressed, rather it is providing a platform for a purveyor of Jew-hatred to tell us about his views.

What does the UCU think we can learn from this person? Why would anyone value a critique of Zionism known to be based on a hatred of Jews? If the UCU thinks we should be opposing the "war on terror", does it want to do so by supporting representatives of terrorist organisations whose stated aim is to kill Jews and destroy?

The UCU should not be associated with the kind of poisonous racism that Al-Manar promulgates, and I would like to know what action it is going to take to dissociate itself from this connection.

The Ukrainian Revolution 1917-1921: Deciding the fate of European socialist revolution

On the ninetieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution it is important to recognise that it was more than a Russian event. It swept across the entire Russian Empire with the long oppressed nations making their bid for freedom. The most important challenge was in "Russia's Ireland" – Ukraine. To mark the anniversary of the proclamation of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic ninety years ago on November 22, 1917 this article by Chris Ford* examines the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-21, which was pivotal in deciding the fate not only of the Russian Revolution but the entire European socialist Revolution.

IN 1917 Ukraine was partitioned between the Austrian and Russian Empires, the majority having been held in a colonial position by Tsarist Russia for over two and a half centuries, exploited and subjected to policies of Russification. Capitalism did not develop organically but to suit the needs of Russian and European capital, shaped in a colonial framework. This impacted on the state, capital, labour relations.

The capitalist class was overwhelmingly non-Ukrainian, whilst the working class which amounted to 21 percent of the population, bore the stigmata of colonialism with a Russian upper layer.

Ukrainians were relegated to the low paid, flexible labour strata. The Russian and Russified element of the urban workers was the domain of the Russian socialist organisations; situated in Russified cities, this element was disconnected from the mass of Ukrainians in the rural districts, mostly classed as peasants. "Peasant" was synonymous with "Ukrainian".

Here the social and national questions were enmeshed in an explosive cocktail. Alongside the Russian state and church, the overlords of the impoverished peasants comprised a class of Russian and Polish gentry. In this context the Ukrainian Marxist Mykola Porsh had concluded that the:

"Ukrainian national movement will not be a bourgeois movement of triumphant capitalism, as in the case of the Czechs. It will be more like the Irish case, a proletarian and semi-proletarianised peasant movement."

THE SOCIAL AND NATIONAL REVOLUTION

FOLLOWING the fall of the Tsarist autocracy the Ukrainian revolution soon differentiated itself from the wider Russian Revolution, setting as its task the achievement of self-government. The movement was a bloc of the middle class, the peasantry and the Ukrainian section of the working class, centred in the Ukrainian Central Rada.

At its head was Mykhaylo Hrushevsky, Ukraine's greatest historian, elected on behalf of the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (UPSR), and the Marxist Volodymyr Vynnychenko, popular writer and a leader of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party (USDRP). The Central Rada was a mass assembly consisting of councils of peasants', soldiers' and workers' deputies elected at their respective congresses; it later expanded its constituency, drawing in the national minorities, with the pioneering organisation of Jewish national autonomy.

The Central Rada faced the burning questions of the world war, agrarian revolution,

spiralling economic crisis. But whilst all the leading parties identified themselves as socialists, there were fundamental differences in their conceptions of the revolution.

On the key issues the leaders prevaricated and lagged behind the pace of the popular movement, even on the national question with which it was preoccupied. Increasingly relations strained within the Central Rada, between its ruling circles drawn largely from the intelligentsia and the middle class, and the rank and file.

The prevailing opinion was that the creation of a sovereign state was the "precondition of the success of its struggle for political and social liberation". This corresponded with the dualist view, that there should be a socialist revolution in the west but in "backward" Russia it would be bourgeois democratic.

The opinion steadily grew in the Ukrainian socialist parties that the task was to "carry the bourgeois democratic revolution to its conclusion" and "carry out a social revolution". But what rapidly emerged as the salient feature of the revolution was a division between the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian section of the working class and the estrangement of the peasantry from the urban workers, resulting in the separation of the social and national dimensions.

In its popular base, there was growing feeling that the inactivity of the Central Rada in the social sphere could not be justified by the obstacle of the weak Russian Provisional Government.

The October revolution brought these contradictions to a head, sharply focusing the question of the nature of the revolution.

When the Central Rada seized power and declared the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR), a favourable conjuncture for a rapprochement between the divergent elements arose from two trends. The first was the growth in support in the USDRP and the UPSR for the radical socialist regeneration of the Central Rada. The second was the surge of support in the soviets recognising the UNR and seeking its re-election.

The cleavages on the social and national questions found its resolution encapsulated in the idea of an independent Ukraine based upon the organs of workers' and peasants' self-government. That this was a viable possibility can be seen from two short-lived initiatives.

In Kyiv the Bolsheviks and Central Rada co-operated to overthrow the Provisional Government united in a "National Committee for the defence of the revolution" composed of all revolutionary organisations in Kyiv and the socialist parties. Similarly a "Kharkiv Province Military Revolutionary Committee" was formed combining the soviets and the Free Ukrainian Rada.

The cry for workers' control, land seizures, and the anti-war mood of soldiers all pointed in one direction — a socialist transformation. But the forces that could bring this about did not combine and moved unevenly.

The Bolshevik leaders in Russia were tactless, taking no account of the Ukrainian peculiarities. The All-Ukrainian Congress of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies on 16 December 1917 was a lost opportunity. The event was ignited by a surprise ultimatum by Soviet Russia threatening war, without any consultation with Bolsheviks in Ukraine. The moderate leaders of the UNR denied proportional representation to the urban soviets and some USDRP leaders sabotaged their mandate to seek agreement with the Bolsheviks. In an atmosphere of recriminations the Congress overwhelmingly backed the Central Rada, but it was a pyrrhic victory.

The internal fragmentation produced two rival governments of the UNR, one in Kharkiv appointed by a smaller Congress of soviets, the other formed by the Central Rada in Kyiv. In the ensuing "fratricidal war" many Bolshevik workers abstained. The Central Rada also ran into trouble — many took a neutral position or defected. For all the efforts of the Russian Bolsheviks to make the war one of classes, it took the form of a national conflict, which paralyzed much of the Ukrainian left. The Kharkiv government of Bolsheviks and USD (Left) was largely ignored by Soviet Russia's troops, sections of whom indulged in chauvinist outrages.

The continuing war by Germany on Soviet Russia had deepened the malaise; through the substitution of internal elements by external forces, the revolution consumed itself. The Kyiv government of right-UPRS's entered a union with the Germany at Brest Litovsk. The Germans deposed the Kharkiv government then the Central Rada, as unreliable "left opportunists" establishing a client "Ukrainian State" under Hetman Skoropadsky.

Kharkiv protest

THE CONFLICT OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FORCES

WITH the end of the world war, the UNR was revived by the "November Ukrainian Revolution" in 1918. But it was Petlyura's militarists engaged in pogroms and indiscriminate repression who were the real power, not the democracy of 1917.

The popular movement directed their struggle towards a republic of soviets; this was represented by the most radical of the Ukrainian socialists, the Borotbisty, the left wing majority of the UPSR and the USDRP Independents (Nezalezhnyky). Energetic efforts by the left of the UNR to reform it from within proved impossible; in spring 1919 a broad based Red Army defeated Petlyura constituting the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The situation could not have been more favourable for internal reconciliation and a convergence between the Ukrainian and the Russian Revolutions. The creation of a republic with a plurality of pro-soviet parties was a viable possibility. Why was their conception of Ukraine not realised? An explanation can be found by the unresolved contradiction between the internal and the external of elements of the revolution.

The tendency of the internal forces was apparent in the struggle of the Central Rada, in the proclamation of the independent Ukrainian People's Republic; and in the striving for an independent Soviet Republic. In contrast, the tendency of the external forces was to subordinate Ukraine to Russia and as a result retarding the internal forces. The agency of the external "socialism-from-above" was the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

This overarching conflict fomented instability in the social revolution. Symptomatic of the Russian Communist approach was the unelected "Provisional Worker-Peasant Government of Ukraine" formed in Russia. By decision of Moscow Christian Rakovsky was placed at its head and he denied the very existence of Ukraine as a nation. These views, combined with Russophile and left-communist currents, were a disaster.

The far-reaching socialist policies announced in March 1919 were not implemented. Ukraine remained, and was considered by the government, a regional unit of Russia. There was an overall absence of self-

* Chris Ford is a member of the editorial committee of the Ukrainian Labour History Society and author of the Introduction to the new edition of Ivan Maistrenko's *Borotbism: a Chapter in the History of the Ukrainian Revolution*.

government; the republic was ruled through appointed revolutionary committees and the Ukrainian and Jewish socialist parties were sidelined by the regime. The administration gave greater prominence to the Russian middle class imbued with chauvinist prejudices. The USDRP Independents bemoaned:

"It is now two months since the soviet authorities occupied Kyiv, but we have yet to see real soviet power or the dictatorship of the proletariat. All we have is the dictatorship of the communist party."

This situation was compounded by the retarding of the agrarian revolution through excesses of grain requisitioning and the transplanting from Russia of an elitist land policy imposed from above. As opposed to positively transcending the social and national cleavages, the regime exacerbated them. This produced powerful centrifugal forces; engulfed by peasant unrest, the Ukrainian SSR descended into internecine conflict.

This crisis saw two distinct tendencies which have complicated historical analysis: on the one hand the attempted revolutionary mobilisation of society and on the other its antithesis — fragmentation and class decomposition. Indicative of the latter were pogroms, brigandage and warlord adventurers. No sides in the conflict escaped being tainted by the effects of this vortex.

The most popular demand was that of democratically elected soviets. An All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee sought to overthrow the government, forestall Petlyura and force the Russian Communists to agree to a truly Ukrainian soviet republic. With some exceptions the Borotbisty fought alongside the Bolsheviks and sought to curtail the internecine conflict.

THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION DECIDES THE FATE OF EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS

AMIDST meltdown the demand for the reconstitution of Soviet Ukraine received support from the Hungarian Soviet Republic founded in March 1919, soon followed by the Bavarian and Slovak Soviet republics. The resolution of the Ukrainian question was urgent, for it was from here that direct aid could be provided to the Hungarian and European revolution.

The Hungarian leaders sought to act as mediator, proposing an independent Ukraine with a government including the Nezaleznyky and Borotbisty. The Red Army commander Antonov, under orders to go on a westwards offensive echoed their demands. All their efforts were snubbed by Rakovsky. From Budapest Bela Kun wrote to Lenin that: "Forcing Rakovsky on the Ukrainians against their wishes, in my opinion, will be an irreparable mistake". The historic opportunity was lost. The Romanian and Polish Armies closed the road to Hungary.

The experience of this and preceding episodes brings into question the long accepted explanation for the fate of the Russian Revolution: the primary role of external factors in its degeneration and rise of Stalinism. Coupled with this assessment is the contention that unfavourable circumstances restricted the choices available to the Bolsheviks. Yet the idea that the one-party state in Russia arose from a lack of potential allies cannot explain events in Ukraine. Here the Borotbisty, unlike the Russian Left-SRs, did not go over to open revolt; indeed many of the others who did were in part pushed by a situation created by the Russian Communists themselves.

For the Bolsheviks, socialism could not be developed in a single, isolated, backward country without the aid of the more developed countries of Europe. Their project was predicated on extending the revolution westward. The entire approach of socialism-from-above in Ukraine contributed to undermining the very perspective on which the October Revolution was based.

In the summer of 1919 General Denikin's nationalist Russian Volunteer Army occupied Ukraine. Armed by Britain and France they instituted a reign of terror for Ukrainian Jews unparalleled until the the Nazis. Yet despite despair with the Bolsheviks, there was not a decline in support for the soviet idea. The Borotbisty, re-launched as the "Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbisty)" witnessed a surge in support. Hrushevsky notes that "under the slogan of a Ukrainian Republic

that would be independent yet Soviet and friendly toward the Bolsheviks and Soviet Russia, the masses flocked to their banner."

One explanation for this mobilisation is that it was based on a choice between restoration and resistance; this however does not fully explain Ukraine. These events also challenge those historians who argue whilst the contest remained an internal affair the pro-soviet groups lost to their moderate rivals.

The parties of the rump UNR did not gain hegemony of the popular resistance. This can be found in the progressive political degeneration of those claiming the title of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic. The UNR had disintegrated when the West Ukrainian leader Petrushevych placed the Galician Army at the service of Denikin, whilst Petlyura signed away Eastern Galicia in return for an alliance with Pilsudski's Poland.

The demand for the reconstitution of Soviet Ukraine received support from the Hungarian Soviet Republic founded in March 1919.

In contrast the Borotbisty, the USDRP Independents and the current amongst Ukrainian Bolsheviks represented by Mykola Skrypnyk and Vasyil Shakhrai were consistent advocates of independence. Their stance strengthened reciprocal recognition by the Bolshevik leadership who, despite their centralist outlook, did not retreat from accepting the necessity of a distinct Ukrainian republic.

It would be wrong to conclude from the above that the popularity of such parties can be explained solely by a reaction to the rule of Denikin and Petlyura. Such a view denigrates the fact that ordinary working people consciously engaged in an effort to transform society. Difficult as it is for some in our era of "post-modernism" to comprehend, revolutions are remarkable moments which radically change people as well as their surroundings; in 1917-1920 Ukraine experienced such a moment. It is astounding that though exhausted by world war, occupation and civil war Ukrainians retained the energy to be driven by such ideals. Yet such was the scale of insurgency ranging from the Borotbisty to Makhno's anarchists that Denikin committed as many troops against the partisans as in his attack on Soviet Russia. This vice broke the Volunteer Army, bringing a decisive military turn in the revolution.

The Nezaleznyky considered that twice the revolution had suffered defeat due to the weakness of the "internal forces of the Ukrainian revolution". In order to ensure a third victory the internal forces "must get control over the Ukrainian socialist revolution." Amongst the Bolsheviks active in Ukraine a current emerged which echoed the opinions being raised by the Nezaleznyky and Borotbisty, led by Yurii Lapchynsky. Whilst the federalists proved unable to found a new party they helped change Moscow's policy. After three years of revolution, in a series of resolutions and proclamations Lenin and Trotsky took the initiative to secure the support of the Ukrainians.

In the winter 1919, the Borotbisty made serious attempts to gain hegemony in Ukraine but they failed to gather the necessary strength. The Borotbisty considered that the prospects for independence would be more promising in the framework of extending the revolution; from this standpoint when the Comintern in high esteem. Executive instructed them to amalgamate with the KP(b)U a sub-branch of the Russian Communist Party, they were faced with the choice of remaining separate and competing for power, or merge. Both the Borotbisty and Lenin sought to prevent a repeat of the conflicts of 1919 fearing a renewed conflict between the left would be an opportunity to the enemies of socialism.

This episode also reveals the serious contradictions of Lenin's own thought. He continued to adhere to the old Plekhanovite policy of "one party, one state", which had already had negative consequences for the revolution. The amalgamation of the Borotbisty sparked controversy but was not

considered by all as a defeat; the communist historian Ravich-Cherkasski suggested that it was under their influence that the Bolsheviks evolved from "the Russian Communist Party in the Ukraine" to the "Communist Party of Ukraine". The fact the Nezaleznyky formed a rival Ukrainian Communist Party reminds us that for many the concept of a one party state subordinate to Moscow tended to vitiate the emancipatory goals of the revolution. Whereas as in other countries the communist parties were founded through a process of unity between groups, this was not the case in Ukraine.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks clearly reneged on their assurances to convoke a congress of soviets able to freely decide on the status of Ukraine. The winter of 1920-21 was a critical turning point.

The broad based attempts to reconstitute workers' self-government proved unsuccessful. A socialist revolution had not succeeded in the west, Soviet Ukraine was intact but it was the scene of "arid bureaucratism and Bonapartism." The soviets, the subjective element by which the social and national elements of the revolution could have been reconciled, fell into abeyance as the locus of political power shifted to the higher organs during the growing "Bolshevist Thermidor".

THE PARADOXICAL LEGACY OF THE UKRAINIAN REVOLUTION

IN 1920 the exhausted soviet forces defeated the Polish invasion. The resulting peace re-partitioned Ukraine. Five million remained under Polish rule. Maistrenko concludes that the "struggle for a sovereign Ukrainian SSR was decided in the negative not by the internal development of Ukrainian political life but by the external pressure of administrative organization."

But the failure to establish an independent Ukraine in 1920 is neither the end of the history nor would it provide an adequate assessment of the revolution. The years 1917-20 presented an historic opportunity to resolve the Ukrainian question. The divergences which arose were not irreconcilable.

An interesting early analysis was presented by Andrii Rychitsky, in a memorandum by the Ukrainian Communist Party to the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920. Rychitsky outlined how the workers' revolution was but one manifestation of the contradictions of modern capitalism.

"The task of the international proletariat is to draw towards the communist revolution and the construction of a new society not only the advanced capitalist countries but also the less developed peoples of the colonies — taking advantage of their national revolutions. To fulfil this task, it must take

part in these revolutions and play the leading role in the perspective of the permanent revolution. It is necessary to prevent the national bourgeoisie from limiting the national revolutions at the level of national liberation."

The fact that repeated opportunities to realize this conception were negated by the unresolved contradiction between the internal and the external elements of the revolution does not devalue its viability. The organised workers' movement saw a significant shift during the revolution, steadily turning towards support for a Ukrainian republic.

Prior to 1917 there existed only 'southern Russia'. The revolution had swept away the old social order and forged the Ukrainian SSR, a 'clearly defined national, economic and cultural organism'. It became the framework for a significant struggle between the two trends in Ukraine, the centralist Russophile element, and the "universal current" of Ukrainian communists.

The "universal current" succeeded in securing the policy known in Ukraine as "Ukrainization", a programme of positive action with regard to language, culture and promotion of non-Russians in the apparatus. It heralded an unprecedented national renaissance in the 1920s. The Ukrainian communists energetically carried the policy forward as a 'weapon of cultural revolution in Ukraine'. In the eyes of the some it was an engine of efforts to assert autonomy and liquidate the vestiges of colonialism. To others it was a manifestation of opposition to ascendant Stalinism.

The experience of Ukrainization provides us with the paradoxical legacy of the revolution, which brought "the Ukrainian people to the threshold of nationhood by the end of the decade".

The dynamics of Stalinist centralism destroyed the last vestiges of equality between the republics. The Ukrainian communists and intelligentsia were annihilated. So deep rooted was the vernacular socialist tradition that they were amongst the last remnants of opposition purged in 1936, and represented such a vital force in politics that they were still being subjected to official attack until the fall of the USSR.

In conclusion we may recall Lenin's neglected speech at Zurich in 1914: "What Ireland was for England, Ukraine has become for Russia: exploited in the extreme, and getting nothing in return. Thus the interests of the world proletariat in general and the Russian proletariat in particular require that the Ukraine regains its independence."

How well Lenin should have remembered Marx's statement that "the English Republic under Cromwell met shipwreck in Ireland. This shall not happen twice!" It did, in Russia's Ireland.

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When socialists looked to "Catholic power"

This article is the fifth in a series by Sean Matgamna about the British left and the events in Northern Ireland in 1968-9 — the biggest internal crisis the British state has seen since the early 1920s.

Previous articles have sketched the main events from the beginning of timid reform from above, to the emergence of a mass civil rights movement of the long-downtrodden Catholic minority in 1968, and the explosion into bloody communal conflict in 1969.

They have also introduced the main political forces surveyed — the IS (forerunner of the SWP); the Trotskyist Tendency inside IS (forerunner of the AWL); People's Democracy (a loose left grouping set up in Belfast in 1968, where sympathisers of IS were influential); and the Irish Workers' Group which had vanished earlier in 1968.

The last article looked at the coverage of Northern Ireland in *Socialist Worker* up to the Northern Ireland general election of 24 February 1969.

Read the previous articles at www.workersliberty.org/mode/9591

BEFORE reviewing the rest of what *Socialist Worker* had to say on Northern Ireland, as events there moved to the breakdown of mid-August 1969, we need to move "away" from the hurly-burly of week-by-week agitation in *Socialist Worker* and see what IS had to say about Northern Ireland, and what IS was trying to do, on the level of theoretical generalisations.

We must also try to get a picture of what IS's close comrades in Northern Ireland, the leaders of People's Democracy, thought they were doing.

The first we can do by looking at an article in the IS magazine in April/May 1969, written by John Palmer and Chris Gray. This was, sort of, the "theoretical assessment" called for in IS's first (December 1968 Executive Committee) discussion on Ireland. It seems, from the text, to have been written in January 1969, and therefore is an aspect of what we have called IS's "first position".

What the leaders of PD thought they were doing was fixed for posterity in a recorded discussion involving Eamonn McCann (who was ambivalent about PD), Michael Farrell, Bernadette Devlin, Cyril Toman, and Liam Baxter, presided over by Antony Barnett and published in *New Left Review* (no.55, May/June 1969) at about the same time as IS published the article by Palmer and Gray.

IS THEORY

First, Palmer and Gray. I remember not liking the official "theoretical" underpinning of IS's Irish work. But ancient memory could not prepare me for reacquainting myself with it.

An uncorrected typo in the text indicates that it had been written for publication as a pamphlet. It is not an attempt to look afresh at Ireland, and Northern Ireland, in the light of what was happening, but a crude Catholic-Nationalist propaganda rehash, laced with inappropriate bows to working-class politics.

It manages to combine learned footnotes about the origin of the word Tory — a 17th century Gaelic word for freebooter or robber — with only minimal attempts to analyse the current situation in any Marxist sense.

It consists of a rushed harum-scarum tour back through Irish history, seen through the lens of traditional middle-class nationalism, but with peculiar bits all its own. It casually picks up and repeats the barebones "Marxist-as-economic-reductionism" explanation for the division of the Irish people (the South wanting tariffs, the North did not) which was then being put into circulation by a Stalinist-Maoist organisation, the British and Irish Communist Organisation.

BICO took it from the book *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy* (Columbia University Press, 1951) by the Austro-Marxist Erich Strauss, and in fact it became the estab-

lished "economic Marxist" explanation on the left. The Trotskyist Tendency favoured an "economic" explanation from the refusal of the capitalists in north-east Ulster to pay for buying out the landlords in a Home Rule Ireland (eventually, the British state did the buying-out). I still think that was a better "economic" explanation — has more truth in it — but any account that sinks the history, culture, and historically-formed identity of the Scottish-English colony in north east Ireland into such "bottom-line" economic explanations is a caricature of Marxism.

Not an attempt to look afresh at reality, but a crude Catholic-nationalist propaganda rehash

capture of Marxism.

Palmer's and Gray's working notion of Marxism is a very blunt economic determinism. It takes no note of what Engels wrote:

"The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure... also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form".

They use the crudest of kitsch-Marxist schemata and categorisations, and the prefabricated language of Stalinism and Maoism rather than that of Marxism, for example going on about the "national bourgeoisie".

The article is full of pietistic judgements and categorisations, both nationalist and workerist. What concerns us here is what it had to say about Northern Ireland and the politics of 1969.

On the historical and geographical anatomy of the origin of the Six Counties, the story Palmer and Gray tell is of the Orangeists having to capture enough Catholics to give them a Catholic agricultural hinterland, and then repression and gerrymandering following on that.

In the Boundary Commission of 1924-5 "it became clear that there was a contradiction between the 'wishes of the inhabitants' and the 'economic and geographical conditions' obtaining. By the former reckoning at least two counties (Tyronne and Fermanagh) would have joined the Free State by the vote of the predominantly Catholic population in those areas. Parts of the Counties of Londonderry, Down and Armagh also contained Catholic majorities which, it could be argued, deserved inclusion in the Free State.

However, even with four counties out of six

the Orange enclave would not have been viable economically; there would not have been sufficient agricultural hinterland. On the other hand the inclusion of all nine Ulster counties (i.e. the addition of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan) would have swamped the Protestant population... So, by another grand old British 'compromise' the boundary as fixed at the Truce was agreed upon..."

The idea that without the Catholic-majority areas the Six Counties would have been unviable was shared by the Trotskyist Tendency, and was the prevailing idea in Catholic-nationalist anti-Partition propaganda, for example in the influential 1957 book by Frank Gallagher, *The Indivisible Island*. But it was nonsense, on a par with the other Catholic-nationalist "economic" argument that the Six and 26 Counties went together as industrial and agricultural units in a balanced economy (which ignored the fact that most Six Counties industrial production was for the world market).

The "unviability" argument was a figment of historical "rationalisation" — a product of the thought that the Protestants did it, and therefore they must have had good economic reasons for doing something that created great problems for the "Protestant state" with its unwieldy Catholic-nationalist minority.

The true explanation, if I understand it, is that when men like the Unionist leader Edward Carson, a Southerner, talked (as they did) of there being "two Irish nations", they identified "their" nation not with the population of north-east Ulster only but with a Protestant community scattered throughout the 32 Counties.

To their minds the "Protestant nation" was entitled to as much of the island as it could get. They were used to coercing the whole island, which, even in the era of reform from above that opened in 1869 with the disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Ireland by Gladstone, routinely had whole districts under emergency police rule. The prevailing imperialist ethos of 1920 influenced them to underestimate the problem they would face as a result of keeping Catholic-majority areas in the Six Counties.

One of the great changes by 1969 was that the brutal rule of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its auxiliary sectarian militia, the B-Specials, which they could and did exercise from the 1920s through to the 1950s, was no longer politically acceptable in the UK. Especially when, as on 5 October 1968 in Derry, the brutality was exercised in front of TV cameras.

The following passage in Palmer/Gray is one of many similar ones giving their picture of the Northern Ireland regime.

Over the years this whole apparatus of counter-revolution has been used to keep the

Catholic population from getting the upper hand and voting or forcing the Six Counties to join the South.

How could a Catholic minority of about one third of the population get the "upper hand" in the Six Counties? How could they vote the Six Counties into a united Ireland? How, except in IRA fantasy, could they "force" the Six Counties "to join the South"?

There is not a hint of the starting-point of the age-old "Irish Question" in modern history — the existence of a minority on the island who felt culturally and religiously and nationally distinct from the Catholic-nationalist majority. Because of its British protectors, that minority was able to create a Six Counties state where the Catholic-Protestant ratio on the island as a whole was neatly inverted, with the creation of an artificial Catholic minority in the Six Counties.

In fact, the Catholic minority in the Six Counties was a bigger proportion of the population there than the Protestants of all Ireland would have been in a majority-ruled united Ireland.

Palmer and Gray say rightly that the Catholic minority was, and had good reason to be, opposed to the Six Counties in its entirety. But there is not a hint of the fundamental issue

Any democratic resolution of the conflict ultimately must depend on a rational accommodation of the rights of the island's national minority

of Irish-national-minority rights that continued, hidden behind the grotesque realities of the rule by Ireland's minority in their own "Protestant state for a Protestant people". In fact, that remained and remains the basic problem: any democratic resolution of the conflict ultimately must depend on a rational accommodation of the rights of the island's national minority.

A proper theoretical article, a "scientific" exposition as distinct from crude, one-sided agitation, would be concerned to understand, and would present an objective picture of relations and interests in the Six Counties and in Ireland as a whole. It would, in assessing the whole picture and the historical roots of the problem, take into account the fact that the 26

People flee from armed troops

Continued on page 20

Counties had developed into the blatant "Rome Rule" of the worst nightmares of the minority.

Palmer and Gray implicitly included that fact in their conclusions (that only under socialism would a united Ireland be feasible, acceptable to Protestants), but they "forgot" it when it came to the history and the basic explanations.

They did, however, explain about anti-Catholic discrimination in jobs in Northern Ireland.

As regards employment, we have the noble example of [Northern Ireland prime minister] Sir Basil Brooke (later Lord Brookeborough), who said 'I am proud to say that I have never employed a Roman Catholic in any position on any of my estates' and who urged 'loyalists' to discriminate in favour of 'good Protestant lad and lassies' because, he said, the vast majority of Roman Catholics were 'disloyal'. He explained this by saying 'Unless you act properly, before we know where we are, we shall find ourselves in the minority instead of in the majority'.

He need not have worried, recounted Palmer and Gray, because affairs are so well organized that the emigration rate among Catholics is six to ten times greater than that of Protestants. Unemployment also is higher in Catholic areas.

"RADICAL" SOLUTIONS?

THE Socialist Worker editorial of 11 January 1969 had described the whole of Ireland as suffering "colonial status". The "theoretical article", more moderately, called Ireland a "neo-colony"; but it then went over into a populist economic nationalism that was taken from the Stalinists, an adoption of the criterion of national economic self-sufficiency and the supposed need for each "viable" nation to have its own manufacturing industry, including heavy industry.

The Treaty gave the Free State the right to build up its own industry by means of protective tariffs, but the country was left with large sections of its economy dependent on the British market, and with its banking services also under the control of British imperialism. The Free State was thus a neo-colony of Britain...

Palmer and Gray do not say this because they were ignorant of Ireland's economic history, but because of the "model" in their heads of what is "normal" and proper to an independent state, a "model" which Ireland could never match.

They add: "... despite the fact that it was itself a creditor country with some £200 million invested abroad by 1924... Under these circumstances it proved impossible to create a capitalist industry..."

The most concerted attempt to build an independent Irish capitalism was carried out by Eamon De Valera and his Fianna Fail Party which rose to power in 1932... Regulations were introduced whereby companies operating in the Twenty-six Counties were required to be under native capitalist control... State-sponsored bodies (ESB, Irish Sugar Co. etc.) were set up where they did not conflict with established manufacturing interests.

But the programme registered only a limited success, and over the years the prospect of Green capitalism surviving in its minuscule home market decreased

It reads very oddly today, when the 26 Counties has the highest output per head in the European Union. In any case, for Marxists — for the Theses on the National and Colonial Question of the Comintern's Second Congress (1920), for example — the fundamental fact is that so long as the market regulates the relationship between big and small, developed and underdeveloped, industrialised and non-industrialised countries, real equality between them is impossible.

Populist nationalists — in Latin America, for example, and in Ireland — conclude from the inequalities that "real" national independence requires "economic" independence. De Valera's "autarkic" economic policies from 1932-58 were a variant of that. Here populist nationalism helps tie the working class to the vain petty-bourgeois quest for an utopian and reactionary "economic independence" cut off from the world market.

Palmer and Gray go on: *The moment of truth arrived in 1958 when Sean Lemass, who had inaugurated the Control of Manufactures Acts as Minister for Industry and Commerce under De Valera, dismantled his own Acts and embarked on a programme of attracting foreign capital... a Free Trade Agreement was*

signed with Britain in 1965, opening hitherto protected sectors of the economy to competition from Britain...

They do not seem to notice that their description of the 26 Counties after 1958 and the opening up to foreign capital contradicts what, to Republican and Irish nationalist readers, they have retrospectively endorsed — the 25-year attempt to cut off from the world market.

Palmer and Gray examine O'Neill's moves for reform from above in Northern Ireland. It

Nationalism helps tie the working class to the vain petty-bourgeois quest for an utopian and reactionary "economic independence" cut off from the world market.

would be difficult for anyone but John Palmer — an economic journalist on the Guardian by profession — to concoct a more concentrated tissue of politics from which all thought has been banished by agitational convenience than the one that follows:

... Developments have changed the attitude of the big battalions of British capitalism towards the Southern regime... The dismantling of the police state regime in the North... is necessary to protect the political stability of the Southern regime, threatened as it is by the highest strike rate in Europe, plus the latent violence of industrial and agrarian struggles, plus the growth of the disturbingly radical southern Labour Party, plus, above all, the need to discipline somehow the southern Irish working class, which, given the sellers' market for labour following the influx of foreign capital, has forged ahead economically as well as politically.

In this situation there is the added danger that the Civil Rights movement in the North may fall into the hands of those emerging as the alternative in the south — those republicans moving towards working-class (Marxist) politics...

Strikes in the South threatened the regime? Not the government, though even that idea would be fantastic, but the regime?

The southern Labour Party was radical only in words. The Republicans "moving towards Marxist politics" were the Stalinist-controlled Sinn Féin and its rump IRA (from which the Provisional IRA would have off at the end of 1969). The Stalinists had been a major force in the civil rights movement from the beginning.

While De Valera was in power there was always the chance that he might choose a radical solution to the Irish problem, and certainly he was not likely to surrender as much as Jack Lynch has to British interests. But Dev is now out of the way, Lynch is functioning as a good policeman for Britain, and there is therefore no need of a policeman in the North to watch him, as there was when the Treaty was signed.

The idea that De Valera (who had been

Taoiseach up to 1959, and was president in 1969) "might choose a radical solution to the Irish problem" means what, exactly? An invasion of Northern Ireland? The idea was fantasy, contradicted by De Valera's three decades as premier. It emerges here as part of the populist-nationalist strain in Palmer's and Gray's article — the "nostalgic note".

O'Neill then found himself faced with pressure from Wilson and from progressive opinion in England to grant some reforms... This raises the political temperature, and simultaneously alarms the fundamentalist Orange elements headed by the Rev. Ian Paisley. The problem is to grant enough reforms to satisfy Wilson without at the same time raising a demand for even greater reforms.

The article was (I deduce) written at the beginning of 1969, but not before there was more than enough evidence to show that the civil rights movement could not unite Catholic and Protestants. Yet Palmer and Gray write:

There is the danger of the emergence of a very dangerous combination for the Orange capitalists, a combination active in 1798, glimpsed in 1907 when Larkin was operating in Belfast, and now threatened by the ability of the Civil Rights Movement to break out of the Orange-and-Green straitjacket designed by Unionist propaganda to contain onslaughts on the regime from any quarter by branding all opposition as 'disloyal' [that is, Catholic-Irish nationalist].

This combination, this final spectre, is a united Protestant-Catholic revolutionary movement. The basis for it is not lacking, since Protestant workers also suffer from unemployment (textiles and shipbuilding) and are subject to the manipulations of Unionist local authorities, as for example in Derry, where slum clearance in Protestant areas carries the danger of upsetting the carefully gerrymandered arrangement of voters.

This, then, is the ultimate time-bomb on which O'Neill and the rest of them are sitting, which explains why they need Doctor Paisley... to keep the Protestant workers faithful to the end. Similarly they need Messrs MacAteer and Austin Currie, the official Nationalist 'Green Tories', as a buffer against the militants on the Catholic side.

This deliriously optimistic assessment lacks any concrete picture of the interaction of the real Orange and Green workers in the real Six Counties, where the movement of the Catholics for limited civil rights (not the "socialist" or social civil rights movement towards which Palmer and Gray grope, but the real civil rights movement) had alienated the Protestants.

The Trotskyist Tendency, at the time, called this sort of political raving "Catholic Economism" (the idea that Catholic nationalism would semi-automatically slide into socialism, just as the Russian "Economists" of about 1900 thought that trade-union militancy would semi-automatically slide into socialism).

The ultra-optimism clothed the very limited real civil rights movement, and an elemental movement of Northern Ireland Catholics which was far from non-sectarian (as Eamonn McCann would point out in the NLR discussion), in fantastic extrapolations. Palmer and

the IS leaders related not to the actual, but to an imaginary, civil rights movement.

Their conclusion? *"The big question is whether the [civil rights] movement can develop on the basis of working-class unity in a revolutionary socialist direction, whether, in short, some sort of transitional programme can be worked out which will carry the day against the present bourgeois leadership"*.

But in January, when (I guess) this article was written, not to speak of three months later when it was published, it was already plain that there was no "question" about the civil rights movement developing into a united working-class movement! None at all.

The notion that "some sort of transitional programme" could "carry the day against" — subvert, bypass, eliminate — the "present bourgeois leadership" was a search for magic slogans and "abracadabra" solutions. It reprised one of the malign characteristics of those post-Trotsky "orthodox Trotskyists" to whom the IS leaders felt so much superiority.

In fact the "programme" of the IS leaders and their closest comrades in Northern Ireland was "militancy".

Palmer and Gray outline the four points from the January 1969 IS National Committee:

1) *The withdrawal of all British troops from Ireland;* 2) *no UK arms for police and B-Special thugs who are increasingly allied with Paisleyites;* 3) *an end to the subsidies paid by the British Government to support the Orange Tory police state;* and 4) *the right of the Irish people to national self-determination.*

They continue: *It is arguable that if these demands were successful the result would not necessarily be the socialist revolution, but we must make it clear that the right of self-determination is not conditional on the creation of a socialist republic.*

Arguable? The idea that these four "demands" could have anything to do with a socialist revolution is fantastic! And it was the IS leaders who were making self-determination conditional on the pre-existence of a socialist Ireland.

The interpretation put on point 4 — that "it allows for a possible decision by the whole

The IS leaders were making self-determination conditional on the pre-existence of a socialist Ireland

people of Ireland to merge the two statelets on the basis of some degree of autonomy for the northern Protestants — is very interesting for its idea of "some degree of autonomy for the northern Protestants", but limits self-determination to a decision by "the two statelets". It is not self-determination as proposed, discussed, and adopted by the IS National Committee.

That the NC decision could be construed like that in the major statement of IS's position is an indictment of what IS democracy was even in its best days.

Palmer and Gray conclude: *"History leaves little option but for the working class to take*

Bernadette Devlin



A civil rights rally

the lead in the battle for democracy and self-determination in Ireland. The objectives of this struggle are bound to take on a socialist coloration if the role of the defeatists and appeasers is successfully combatted. We in Britain can only gain strength and inspiration from this struggle."

The civil rights struggle would become the Irish socialist revolution? The more clued-in reader can note the word "coloration" as a sceptical reserve; but that civil rights would grow into socialist revolution is exactly what is said here to most IS members and others who read the article.

WHAT KIND OF "REVOLUTIONARY" ORGANISATION

AS I have said, the article by Palmer and Gray seems to have been written some time in January. God knows, given the considerable resources of the group and the importance the IS leaders attached to the Irish work, why it took months to appear. The joke is that by the time it appeared, it was out of date. IS was moving on to "IS position number two", in which the workers' republic slogan (rejected in January) would be central to agitation.

The *New Left Review* discussion was held in Derry on the evening of 20 April, while serious fighting was going on in the city. By 20 April the participants had had over six months, since 5 October — and in terms of what had happened, six months of tremendous experience — to get their political bearings.

The discussion is important in the history of the times for what it tells us of those who played a big part in shaping events there. It is important for our concerns here in that it establishes the way those to whom IS accommodated saw events and their own role in them.

Michael Farrell and Cyril Toman were those to whom IS accommodated. Eamonn McCann had different politics — or at least the aspiration to different politics — and was, as the discussion shows plainly, at odds with Farrell and the Belfast people. McCann wrote only a couple of reports in *Socialist Worker* in 1969.

The important confrontation of ideas and attitudes in the discussion was between McCann and Farrell. Toman played Robin to Farrell's Batman. He did not represent a distinct viewpoint.

Bernadette Devlin had just been elected as the (Catholic) "Unity" candidate for Mid Ulster. She had been a socialist for less than a year, and was still very raw and politically naive. She seconded McCann as Toman did Farrell.

Liam Baxter contributed little except the idea that Cuba would be a socialist model for Ireland to follow.

These were "student leaders", but it is important to note that the key people were not students nor, as revolutionary activists go, especially young. McCann was 26, Farrell 25, Toman 26.

McCann was highly critical and self-critical of what they had done and left undone. He was eclectic and (so I deduce from what he said

about the impossibility of progress because of "the crisis of capitalism") somewhat influenced by the "third period" SLL of that time, for which "the crisis" ruled out the possibility of any progress, short of the socialist revolution. He was in the Northern Ireland Labour Party, and had (platonically) more "Trotskyist" views than the others.

Farrell is the interesting one. His activities, such as the Long March, had shaped events in the previous months. He was thinking out loud about the situation and its possibilities and was, evidently, free from any Trotskyist "political baggage".

What he says about developing a revolutionary organisation — about the desirability of organising on a loose left-consensus basis rather than a clear programme — had marked continuity with what Mick Johnson had argued in the Irish Workers' Group, summing up the views of the "anti-Trotskyist coalition" in the IWG of which Farrell had been part.

There would be some dispute in the future about whether the Young Socialists in Belfast had been "liquidated" at the start of PD. McCann would say yes, the others no. There is no doubt that the key people from the YS worked together. The fact, though, is that the decisive "liquidation" had been that of the Irish Workers' Group. That began very soon after the September 1967 IWG Annual General Meeting, with the faction fight in which the nature of the organisation and its future was a central issue, and culminated a year later in the formal dissolution of the IS-controlled rump of the IWG.

The people round Farrell had not only gone along with Gery Lawless's "Pabloite" ruminations about a revolutionary party not being necessary (which is not surprising, of course: they were pre-return-to-Lenin IS in their politics), but backed the programme of splitting the IWG and the "coup" with which it began (a committee of three, including Gery Lawless and his wife, "expelled" Liam Dalton, Rachel Lever, and myself).

The discussion opened with Antony Barnett asking what PD was.

Farrell: *PD is not just part of the Civil Rights movement, it is a revolutionary association. Its formation was considerably influenced by the Sorbonne Assembly [before the French general strike in May 1968] and by concepts of libertarianism as well as socialism. It has adopted a very democratic type of structure; there is no formal membership and all meetings are open... I think it will be necessary, within the overall framework, to find a way of introducing a little more co-ordination.*

I had hoped that the PD would realise the necessity of taking a stand on class issues, and would... transform itself into a broadly socialist body, though a non-sectarian one in which socialists of several different tendencies could co-operate. I no longer think this will happen of its own accord.

There have recently been some sharp disagreements within PD... between socialists and an alliance of anarchists and right wingers.... Right from the start the Young Socialist Alliance was the core of Peoples' Democracy. It involved three of the people who are here

now.

Barnett: *Your central demands appear at first sight to be reformist — one man, one job and one family, one house. Why have you focussed on these specific issues?*

McCann thought the PD slogan amounted to a "transitional programme" (though he did use the term here). *Because the transformation of Irish society necessary to implement these reforms is a revolution. We are definitely in a prerevolutionary situation in the north. The Unionist Party must give something to the pope-heads of Derry to get them off the streets, but if they give them anything the Unionist party will break up. So by supporting these demands in a militant manner, we are supporting class demands and we are striking hard against the ruling political party.*

This manages both to focus on the Catholic-Protestant divide and to pretend it isn't there! As part of the Catholic civil rights movement all such demands had the effect of polarising Catholics and Protestants, and therefore tending to sink class divisions on both sides into the sectarian blocs. Also, it was not true that concessions to the Catholics, as such, would necessarily split the Unionist party (as distinct from having off splinters).

The explosive force would come from the Orange backlash (which was stimulated by the militant civil rights movement). In the end the Unionist Party would indeed be broken up, at the cost of a massive — and, for the working class, crippling — increase in sectarian polarisation.

Farrell: *Our general strategy in the past was that we should enter into the Civil Rights movement in order to participate in the mobilization and radicalization of the Catholic working class, and to radicalize the civil rights*

In the end the Unionist Party would be broken up, at the cost of a massive — and, for the working class, crippling — increase in sectarian polarisation

demands themselves. We should now move forward in two ways.

1. We should complete the ideological development of the Catholic working class. 2. We should develop concrete agitational work over housing and jobs to show the class interests of both Catholics and Protestants.

We have delayed far too long trying to develop the ideology of the Catholic working class and agitating on specific class issues. It is certainly now time that People's Democracy became an organization capable of carrying out this agitational work...

The manipulative idea of what revolutionaries do implicit in Mick Johnson's argument in the IWG is clearly and unembarrassedly expressed here.

What should PD move on to? *"Producing leaflets and — more important — a paper*

which carries analyses of that situation"

McCann has the more clear-headed realisation of how things stand. He is not, on the level of ideas, a "Catholic Economist".

We have failed to get our position across. We keep saying parrot-like that we are fighting on working-class issues for working-class unity, that our objective is a workers' and farmers' socialist republic.

But when you say to the people in the Bogside area in Derry that they are being exploited because they are workers not because they are Catholics, they are not very inclined to believe you. All their lives they have been told by the Unionist Party that this is a Protestant state for Protestant people, and that pope-heads will be beaten into the ground if they dare to open their mouths.

Moreover a number of jumped up opportunist nationalist politicians who have been the only means of expression of Catholic discontent... have deepened the religious divide. The consciousness of the people is still most definitely sectarian...

As revolutionary socialists we have been used, through the years, like revolutionary socialists in England, to talking to tens of people. Now suddenly, since October the 5th, we have found that we have an audience... of tens of thousands of people. We got carried away by this, and submerged the Young Socialist Alliance in the PD; we submerged our politics into the Civil Rights movement. All that we managed to get across was that we were more extreme than the Civil Rights people...

We failed absolutely to change the consciousness of the people. The consciousness of the people who are fighting in the streets at the moment is sectarian and bigoted...

Talking about the socialists suddenly getting a huge audience, McCann might have been describing the situation of the Russian Social-Democrats (Marxists) after the outbreak of the 1905 revolution, and may have known it. The difference in the preparation of the Russian socialists is the telling difference.

The Bolsheviks had built an organisation of educated militants, and therefore could function and lead. The liquidation of the Marxist organisation in 1967-8 had the opposite effect for the socialists in Northern Ireland.

Farrell still doesn't realise where things are at politically (and, to judge from his retrospective account, in his essay in the book *Twenty Years On, never will*). *We have radicalized the Catholic working class to quite a considerable extent, and in some degree got across to them the necessity of non-sectarianism and even the fact that their Protestant fellow worker is almost as much exploited as they are. But we have failed to get across at all to the Protestant working class. So there is now a more radicalised Catholic working class, whilst the Protestant proletariat is still as remote and inert as ever.*

McCann: *I think this assessment is very wrong... I believe that we have failed to get our position across in the last six months. It is perfectly obvious that people do still see themselves as Catholics and Protestants, and the cry 'get the Protestants' is still very much on the lips of the Catholic working class. Everyone applauds loudly when one says in a speech that we are not sectarian, we are fighting for the rights of all Irish workers, but really that's because they see this as the new way of getting at the Protestants.*

Devlin. *Our real difficulty is the support we get from people who are opposed to the Unionist party, not because it is capitalist, but because they associate it with having oppressed them because they are Catholics. Despite the fact that we are socialist we still get a lot of support from Catholic capitalists and bigots... The basis on which we can communicate with the Protestants is by being honestly socialist.*

Devlin was sincere in this. For instance, she — and McCann too — would denounce the civil rights leaders from a platform she shared with them at a three thousand strong rally for civil rights in Strabane (*Derry Journal*, 1 July 1969).

Barnett asked the leaders of the militant civil rights movement: *"To what extent have you leafleted the Protestant areas you will be actually marching through, explaining to them that the march is not meant as an aggression against them?"* That is, to what extent had they acted as other than Catholic civil rights activists?

McCann knows and says: *Absolutely none. Only occasional, half-hearted efforts have ever been made at doing this. We have never had a perspective here... All our failures spring from*

Continued on page 22

tionary party...

But for Farrell, PD, which he has already described as the loosest of organisations, is nonetheless a potent force to deal with this problem.

Farrell. *People's Democracy could issue such a leaflet... People's Democracy could do it in Belfast and it could do it in Derry too, because the People's Democracy idea exists in Derry and that would give it enough following to allow you to issue such a leaflet.*

McCann and Devlin do not find this mystical concept of "PD" or "the PD idea" sufficient; but they see little prospect of creating a revolutionary organisation.

Devlin: *We are totally unorganized and totally without any form of discipline within ourselves. I'd say that there are hardly two of us who really agree, and it will take a lot of discussion to get ourselves organized. The fact of the matter is that everybody knows where they don't want us to go, but nobody really knows what they do want and nobody is prepared to organize: we are all madly tearing off — nowhere.*

McCann. *As I've already said, the reason we have no organization is that we effectively disolved ourselves politically into the Civil Rights movement: so effectively, in fact, that we have nothing to recruit people into once they have been radicalized by that movement. It has been a crucial error and a grievous one.*

Farrell, now in passing, reveals one of the "secret ingredients" in the ability of PD to do things like the Long March. The Republicans — in the manipulative tradition of the Fenians and the "front"-creating of the Stalinists who now dominate the Republican movement — have been a great help.

The Republicans have been of very great organizational assistance, both to PD marches, such as the Long March in January, and to the Civil Rights and PD meetings in towns, where they have often provided the stewards and so on. As far as the local Civil Rights associations are concerned, they have brought us right up against the Catholic bourgeoisie. Initially, when the CR committees were formed they tended to be committees of the local bourgeoisie of each area, sometimes with a token gesture in the direction of workers... All of them have emphasized the ending of the religious discrimination that has a painful effect on the prospects of the Catholic middle class...

Barnett puts the plain picture of what they have been doing. He echoes, deliberately or otherwise, one of the key points made by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?*, the need to fight to make socialism more than mere trade-union-level assistance to the working class. Barnett indicates that PD has fallen into the same role vis-a-vis Catholic civil rights as the Russian "Economists" did vis a vis trade unionism.

"The implication is that you are shoring up the Civil Rights movement, firstly by posing militant demands which mobilise the Catholic workers and small farmers, giving the movement its numbers, and secondly by keeping this militancy within the arc of the Civil Rights movement. At the same time, it appears that you have been unable to transform it. So although at first sight you give it direction and punch, it seems that you are in fact performing a servicing function for the CRM rather than vice versa?"

Toman agrees: *Yes, this is broadly true. The others make no recorded comment.*

Barnett now raises the question of Republicanism. In the years that follow, Republicanism will be the ultimate "militant civil rights" organisation, focusing on the civil right of civil rights in the situation of the Six Counties Catholics: self-determination.

Barnett: *In striking contrast to England there is a living revolutionary tradition in Ireland. What forms does it take and how does it assist you?*

McCann: *It's Republicanism, and the idea of the revolution is implanted in the minds of the Irish people surrounded by the glory of 1916 and its revolutionary martyrs. The idea of revolution is not at all alien to the Irish working class, as it is to the English, and when one calls for revolution, no matter what one actually demands, there is always a link to Connolly and to 1916 and the armed uprising. What we have to do is to complete the national revolution by making the theoretical and practical link between what we are doing now, and what was fought for in 1916.*

Farrell: *What we are trying to do is to link this very powerful tradition to the concept of international proletarian revolution.*

Republicanism will well up as if rising out

of the ground like the warriors in the legend where the dragon's teeth were sown. The idea of "completing the national revolution" will be central to its expropriation of the politics of militant civil rights.

VIABILITY

THEY now discuss the question of the viability of the Six Counties state, and the possibility of it breaking up into Protestant and Catholic enclaves, or some of the Catholic areas seceding from the Six Counties. This idea would be central to the heated debates at the September 1969 IS conference, after the British army had taken control of the streets in Northern Ireland.

Farrell's delusions about PD's "base" (the Catholic working class) and his ruminations about "Catholic power" in parts of Northern Ireland, under the wing of the Unionist state, are interesting parts of this exchange.

The question of a revolutionary programme is a very complex one here in Northern Ireland. We cannot call for all power to the

Get the local Catholic population to take over... a sort of Catholic power... against the Unionist state power.

Soviets because our present basis is not the working class as a whole, or the working class and small farmers as a whole, it is only one section of the working class. This leaves us with the question of whether we concentrate initially on putting forward the largely reformist demands which could unite Catholics and Protestant working class, or whether we concentrate on posing the question of dual power in areas where the Catholic population is concentrated and militant by getting the local Catholic population to take over and run its own affairs, a sort of 'Catholic power'.

This would be a very serious decision, but it is just possible that it might be necessary for us to establish such dual power: on the one hand Catholic-based power, of a socialist form, and on the other, Unionist state power. This would demand a socialist movement among the Catholics to create socialist councils such that Protestant workers can see that they fulfill class demands rather than creed demands, and want to create councils for themselves or merge with the Catholics in them.

This stuff is a mix of New Left/ Mandelstam "theorising" around unrefracted straight-line extrapolations to create such notions as colleges and universities in Western Europe becoming "red bases". Farrell here suggests some Maoist influences, too.

There is a curious and unexpected element in the book *Twenty Years On*, which Farrell edited in 1989. In his list of events which shaped the left of which he was part in 1968-9, he includes the Maoist Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966. That was a savage, destructive and reactionary rampage through Chinese society by a youth movement controlled by the Chinese army and used as a bludgeon by the Mao/ Lin Biao section of a divided bureaucracy.

It influenced the many autonomous Maoist groups in the US and Europe, turning most of them into ultra-left lunatics — or just lunatics. The IWG had published a very hostile account of the Cultural Revolution at the start of 1967. Farrell did not demur.

Barnett asked whether Farrell's scheme would "raise the question of secession".

Farrell: *Well, there's no question whatsoever of that, because the areas where the Catholic section of the population is militant are not the two areas which are supposed to have Catholic majorities-Tyrone and Fermanagh. The most militant area is Derry, after that perhaps Newry which is in South Armagh, after that perhaps apart of county Tyrone. Anyway you couldn't take out whole areas like Fermanagh and Tyrone because they contain vast tracts of country which are inhabited by people of very extreme Protestant views.*

Secession is as out of the question as is assistance from the 26 counties, where the bourgeoisie government, far from assisting any working-class movement (as I'm afraid some people in the Bogside imagine) will immediately fall with the six-country bourgeoisie government...

If you went ahead and tried to establish dual

power in Catholic sectors you would have to do this in a number of clearly delineated and separate areas — Derry, Newry, Coal Island and Gannon, perhaps.

Farrell's objection here to Barnett drawing out the "secession" logic of what Farrell is saying is inadequate, in a situation of looming civil war; and that was the situation. In conditions of a breakdown of the state, the Catholic majority areas would quickly enough turn "militant". They would have to, in self-defence. So would Protestant areas. The terrible logic of communal war would take hold.

McCann is less willing than Farrell to face the reality that their movement is and will remain Catholic-nationalist. He still thinks that a united working-class socialist movement is possible, as a development of the existing "civil rights" agitation.

He finds a "terrible confusion in what has just been said over the business of Catholic areas electing local committees.

We must always remember that there are already Catholic areas with 'Catholic power'. Newry has an overwhelmingly Catholic majority, too great to be gerrymandered. It has Catholic power. Further, there is nothing more calculated to prove to the Protestant working class that the Civil Rights people all wear papal flags under their jerseys, than the establishment of unofficial pope-head councils in areas like Derry and Dungannon. It would remove the possibility of winning any Protestants over to our cause...

Farrell: *What I suggested as a possibility was something quite different, the election of popular councils based on universal franchise defying the bourgeois state and not recognizing Stormont, which of course Newry Urban council does. This would be something totally anti-bourgeois. I'm saying that we have to think about this as a possible answer.*

Farrell, of course, is trying to generalise from the experience of Derry, which, as they speak, is going through a short-term secession from Northern Ireland, and not for the first time.

McCann: *You cannot have a Catholic popular council elected and then reveal the socialist nature of it. If you want to elect a socialist council you must campaign on radical socialist issues. It is impossible, for example, to elect a 'Catholic power' body which can do anything about housing...*

[O'Neill] is going to fail because the North is tied, just as the South is in different ways, to Britain, and therefore to the failure of the Wilson government to solve the crisis of capitalism in Britain...

Unless we understand this and start to link it up to the cuts in the social services, the laws against the Trade Unions and so on, we are never going to be able to build any organization capable of overthrowing Toryism in this country. If we talk about local issues like Catholic councils without campaigning on the broad issues, we will never get anywhere.

What is wrong with these general truths is that the people in the discussion, and the Catholics of Northern Ireland, are already deep into a situation that precludes using their slogans and projects to unite a Catholic/Protestant working class movement.

Farrell retreats from the crude but accurate "Catholic power" description, but sticks to his point.

I used the words 'Catholic power' humorously. What I meant was that in areas of heightened struggle such as Derry, or areas of Derry, it would be possible to elect a popular council.

Now a popular council would, in the nature of things in Northern Ireland, be a Catholic council in that it would be mainly elected by Catholic workers. But it would not be elected

Demands for an end to British aid to Ulster are very bad. They imply that the Protestants are white sahibs and this is a colonial state.

as a Catholic council, and the purpose of electing it would not be to remedy the lack of representation of Catholics. It would be elected as a people's council in an area where people are singularly militant...

McCann: *Dual power in this situation can*

only be Catholic power versus what Mike calls Unionist state power, which would in effect be Protestant power... What we have got to do now is to realize what a mess we have made of the whole thing over the past few months... We have failed to give a socialist perspective because we have failed to create any socialist organization. What we must do now, even in the volatile state of politics we are in tonight in Northern Ireland, is to set up with the greatest urgency a serious organization. Even if it is only something into which we can recruit people to form lines of communication. We cannot form a Bolshevik party overnight...

SECTARIAN SOCIALISM

FARRELL, who will evolve (to put it very mildly) into a satellite of the Provisional IRA, is still committed to a "sectarian socialist" approach to Partition, the approach IS took in December-January. Nothing can be done about Partition short of socialism.

Farrell: *The border must go, but it must go in the direction of a socialist republic and not just into a republic which might at some future date become socialist.*

Firstly the border must go because it is a relic of imperialism, and in order to root out imperialism we have to root out the neoimperialist set-up in the South and the neo-colonial one in the North.

Secondly, Northern Ireland is completely unviable economically and only exists as a capitalist entity at the moment because of massive subventions from Britain. Similarly the South on its own is an area of small farms with very little industry. It too is completely unviable on its own and as a result is also dependent on Britain.

The unification of Ireland into a socialist republic is not only necessary for the creation of a viable economy, it must also be an immediate demand, because only the concept of a socialist republic can ever reconcile Protestant workers, who rightly have a very deep-seated fear of a Roman Catholic republic, to the ending of the border.

In response to Barnett's question about PD's calculations when it participated in the Stormont elections, Farrell offers ultra-left, quasi-anarchist, and quasi-Irish-republican answers.

We participated in the election to smash this consensus [which O'Neill sought], and in order to destroy (particularly among the Catholics who were very vulnerable to this) the notion that O'Neill's reforms would meet our demands. Our participation in the election was very successful from that point of view.

Barnett asks: *What is your attitude to the demands that some English comrades [i.e. IS] have put forward for an end to British Aid to Ulster?*

McCann: *They are very bad. They imply that the Protestants are white sahibs and that this is a colonial state. Ulster is not just a colonial state; it is in many respects, though not in all respects, an ordinary bourgeois state. The subsidies do not support a privileged layer of the population.*

The Catholic working class have a lot of children and receive a lot of state benefits... You can't demand [withdrawal of aid] in Britain and not demand [it] here, and if you go to the most militant section of the working class and demand that family allowances be stopped you are not going to get very far.

The whole national question comes in here but the simple fact of it is that you can't go down to Bogside and advocate that British subsidies are withdrawn...

Obviously, no-one here imagines that our problems could be solved by intervention from Westminster. But an awful lot of our supporters do see such intervention as a means of solving the problems over which we have been agitating.

It is necessary to go to Westminster to demand the solution to these problems to show that Westminster is a farce, and that we will have to do it ourselves.

Finally, Farrell on the political party they need:

This very discussion has illustrated the need too for a radical socialist Party, but equally it has shown that we cannot form any high level organization, as we do not yet have the theoretical basis for any clearly determined policies, in fact we have not even discussed some elementary problems. What we need to form at the moment is some sort of alliance to develop a theoretical analysis of our struggle in the North, as well as to carry out systematic agitation work.

Upcoming events

Saturday 24 November — Workers' Liberty day school on Marx's Capital
London Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road (Holloway Rd Tube) 1:30-5:30pm
Sheffield — St Matthew's Hall, Carver St, 12-5pm
Find the reading at
<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/9194>

Thursday 29 November, London educational on Capital, inequality and domination

Downstairs at the Camera Cafe, 44 Museum St, London (Tottenham Ct Rd Tube), 6-7:15pm. Find the reading at www.workersliberty.org/node/9291.

Saturday 1 December, Scotland Shop Stewards' Network launch conference
Central Hotel, Central Station, Glasgow, 11am-5pm

Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 December, No Sweat anti-sweatshop conference 'beating big brand exploitation'

Transport House, 128 Theobalds Road, Holborn, London. For more info and to book tickets visit www.nosweat.org.uk

Thursday 6 December, London AWL educational on crises

Downstairs at the Camera Cafe, 44 Museum St, London (Tottenham Ct Rd Tube) 6-7:15pm. Find the reading at www.workersliberty.org/node/9291.

Friday 7 December, London Socialist Feminist Discussion Group meeting on women and the French Revolution

Lucas Arms, 245A Grays Inn Road, London, near King's Cross. 7:30-9pm. Email socialist.feminist@gmail.com for more details

Saturday 8 December, Campaign against Climate Change demo

Assemble at Millbank from 12pm for march to US embassy. See www.campaignccc.org

Saturday 15 December, Christmas social for members, sympathisers and friends of the AWL

From 7:30 pm at Tommy Flynn's, 203 Holloway Road, London (Holloway Rd tube)

Monday 17 — Sunday 23 December, AWL week school

A series of educationals on Marxism and our politics. Email martin@workersliberty.org for further details

NUS democracy – mobilise for extraordinary conference!

BY SOFIE BUCKLAND, NUS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE (PC)

AFTER a month of organising their pet sabbaticals to request an extraordinary conference to push through attacks on democracy, the NUS leadership have succeeded; the conference will be held in Leicester on Tuesday 4 December.

The task for left activists is now to get delegated to the conference. Where unions haven't already held cross-campus ballots for their NUS Annual Conference delegation we should insist they do – there's no requirement for Extraordinary Conference delegates to be elected, even by union councils or executives, and sabbaticals can hand-pick their delegation without contravening the NUS Constitution. Where cross-campus ballots aren't taking place, the largest possible democratic forum should decide who goes – open meetings for example.

Some left-wing delegates are facing mandates from their union councils to vote for the review, regardless of the platform they stood on during their cross campus elections. In principle,

mandates from large, democratic open meetings might restrict how delegates can vote, but union councils should not be allowed to over-rule delegates who stood on an anti-review manifesto and were elected by their general student body. Vote against and fight any censures from your union!

The conference will discuss the new NUS constitution, supposedly written to represent the "bones" of the white paper, the "meat" coming later in schedules and standing orders, which do not need a two consecutive two thirds majority votes to pass. In fact, the constitution goes further than the white paper in some areas – the Board's proposed veto over Senate decisions, sold to NEC as a last resort involving consultation, will be much stronger. It will be able to over-rule any decisions that pose "legal or financial risk" to the union; it's not beyond imagining that this will rule out any militant tactics, such as occupations. The Board will solicit "external" advice before making a decision, leaving the left-wing facing an even bigger barrier of legal-speak than is currently used to block our policies.

Perhaps the most brazen attack is the enshrining of "ultra vires" law into the constitution.

Under the review NUS will already become a charity, and thus be bound by laws which restrict political activity – however, not content to leave it at that, the NUS leadership have written compliance with charities law into the new constitution! Ultra vires prevents students' unions from spending money on political causes outside their remit as "educational institutions", removing our right to democratically decide what we spend our money on. NUS has never been bound by this law, and as such has provided a (albeit limited and bureaucratic) channel for political campaigning. In fact, NUS's current policy (ignored by the right-wing) is to campaign against charities law, and assist students' unions in getting around it!

NUS should be a mass membership, political, campaigning body, not a charitable lobbying group like Amnesty. The current structures allow for little input from ordinary students, but this attack will finalise the process of consolidating a permanent right-wing majority and disenfranchising anyone who's not a union officer. If you want to get involved in mobilizing against it, email volsunga@gmail.com

We need a socialist women's officer!

Sophie is standing for Women's Officer of NUS

NO one needs to tell feminist activists that the fight for women's liberation has not been won. In Britain women make up 70% of recipients of the pathetically low minimum wage, we face cuts and privatisation in the public services so many of us rely on, domestic violence and rape aren't taken seriously by a judicial system full of ancient male chauvinist judges and disinterested police, we still have to cast doubt on our own mental health to get an abortion, and we struggle to find high-quality affordable care for our children if we study or to work.

Internationally, the situation is no better. From imperialist war justified on a "feminist" pre-text in Afghanistan, to women struggling for their rights against both the occupation and the fundamentalist sectarian militias in Iraq, to Argentinian women taking on the Catholic establishment for the right to an abortion, our sisters all over the world are fighting back.

So why has the NUS Women's Campaign done so little?

For many years, but particularly since its takeover by Labour Students four years ago, the Women's Campaign has done hardly anything in the way of campaigning.

I am standing for NUS Women's Officer

because I want to change all this. To get a women's campaign that fights, we need to kick out Labour Students and elect a socialist feminist as Women's Officer.

I stand for:

- A Women's Campaign that actually campaigns, and involves thousands of women students
- A serious effort to rebuild campaigning, political women's groups on every campus
- Working with trade union women's sections to organise a national demo for women's liberation
- High profile campaigns, including direct action, on abortion rights and a living, equal wage
- Consistent international solidarity - with grassroots women's, workers' and student movements, not with NGOs and "progressive" governments
- Militant demands in the fight for free education: no fees, living non-means-tested grants for all, taxation of the rich and the re-organisation of our education system on the basis of democratic control and provision for need. And militant tactics: mass direct action, including occupations. NUS's failure to organise a demo this year is a disgrace
- A Women's Campaign that fights the Blairite leadership of NUS, and stands with

The 3 March torch-lit march for abortion rights

workers and students fighting the Brown government.

Over the last eighteen months I have organised the two Feminist Fightback conferences, a national march for abortion rights, a speaker tour about the student and worker uprising in Oaxaca, the first occupation against top-up fees, and three Education Not for Sale gatherings; supporting women's officers, reporting on the machinations of NUS executive, producing briefings about issues including education funding, NUS's culture of waste, Further Education and ultra vires, and organising the campaign to defend NUS democracy.

I am the candidate of ENS Women, a socialist feminist group fighting to rebuild the women's movement. See socialistfeminist.org.uk and free-education.org.uk

If you would like to get involved in my campaign, or find out more, please get in touch at volsunga@gmail.com

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!

workers' liberty & Solidarity

Union activist is victimised for standing against cuts

Defend Karen Reissmann

Karen Reissmann

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

THE strike to get sacked UNISON steward Karen Reissmann reinstated is continuing. Karen was sacked for speaking out against cuts. A massive show of support on the demonstration in Manchester on 24 November will show the employers and government that we are not prepared to let trade unionists be gagged or disciplined for carrying out the job of representing their members.

Sheila Foley, the Chief Executive of the Manchester NHS Mental Health Trust, has refused to reopen substantive discussions with UNISON over Karen's dismissal.

Foley was "ambushed" by pickets as she returned to work from her holiday in Dubai, where she had flown as the strike began.

Ben Jackson, a striking occupational therapist and UNISON steward, told *Solidarity*:

"We thrust a letter into her hand from UNISON asking to meet with her to try and end and resolve this dispute. She eventually came out and made an arrangement to meet with us at 9 o'clock yesterday..."

"I was asked what the union's position was. I offered that... as a gesture of goodwill the Trust should immediately reinstate Karen pending her disciplinary appeal. Then in response UNISON would suspend industrial action... When we met again with her... she

said that she wasn't able to reinstate Karen pending her appeal, she was determined to stick to the process..."

"We said we felt disappointed and angry that the Trust had turned down flat our request. We think it is unacceptable and particularly irresponsible of the Trust to be unable at this stage to have come up with any way of resolving this. We feel the only way is to continue our action. We have a lot of solidarity. We urge people to come along to the demonstration."

Foley claims to have "contingency plans" to deal with the strike. Ben commented: "There is a certain amount of pressure on other health professionals and mental health trusts to come and do our work as a way of lessening the impact of our dispute. We are receiving a great deal of solidarity from other health professionals and other organisations."

This includes a threat by UNISON members in the neighbouring Pennine Trust to ballot for action of their own if asked to carry out work done by striking nurses.

Another striker said "We've loads and loads of support from other trade unionists, not just UNISON, but also unions like UNITE, PCS, the Fire Brigades Union. Money is still coming in. There are union branches that have pledged £2,000 a month while we are out on strike."

The kind of impact the dispute is making could be seen at a 200-strong rally on 14 November. Speakers from the NUJ, CWU, PCS and FBU outlined the steps they are

taking in support, ranging from providing office facilities to circulating all branches of their union calling for financial support and solidarity. The extent of the support can already be seen by the fact that £100,000 has already been donated, though most has already been spent on strike pay.

Sady, the only representative of a political party on the platform was a Lib Dem councillor - the Labour Council's health spokesperson called for a return to work and branded strikers "irresponsible".

The main tasks for trade unionists now are:

- to commit labour movement organisations to supporting the strike;
- to keep the money coming in (to UNISON Manchester Community and Mental Health Branch, c/o union office, Chorlton House, 70 Manchester Rd, Manchester M21 9UN);
- to support the pickets at North Manchester General Hospital and Chorlton House, 8-11 weekdays;
- to mobilise for the demonstration on Saturday 24th, starting from the Peace Garden, St. Peter's Square, Manchester at 1pm.

Petitions and other materials can be found at: reinstate-karen.org/5.html

This is a crucial dispute that could set a precedent for whether trade unionists can stand up to bullying employers who are trying to implement job and service cuts under the Brown's banner of "reforming the public services".

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