Since 2005 the Unite union in New Zealand has run a “Super Size My Pay” campaign focussing on fast food and coffee shop workers. Starbucks workers have gone on strike. Unite has won wage increases for young workers. An organiser from Unite will be touring the UK in February to tell us how they did it. More, page 3.
HUNDREDS and even thousands of enthusiasts and candidates have turned out at rallies and actions for the various candidates in the 'tick-the-millionaire' elections currently underway to select the two main parties' candidates for the November 2008 US presidential election. It is a dramatic contest, with the US having the most nearly universal assembly surrounding elections in the UK; even if Gordon Brown had allowed a contest for the Labour leadership, can you imagine crowds of thousands turning out to support him?

The reality behind the crowd scenes in the US is, however, far from democratic. In place of the kind of membership-controlled, more-or-less democratic, class-based party that the Labour Party is (to a certain extent) used to, both Republicans and Democrats are not only almost identical in policy terms, but function as political cartels through which different factions of the American ruling class manipulate the public. (Even Britain’s bourgeois parties are more democratic in how they function.) Through these structures, the leaderships of both the primary system, the state and big business are strikingly intertwined.

The degree of control from below exercised in the primaries is almost zero: this is in process in which an atomised electorate picks from a list of millionaires who corporate funding has allowed to get a hearing in the corporate media. This is true of the Democrats too. In the case of the Republicans, it goes without saying; in the case of the Democrats, it doesn’t go without saying, but doesn’t, due to the demagogic, populist rhetoric through which sections of the party maintain their support from the US electorate.

The British liberal press has made a big fuss about how the Democrats’ candidate for president will almost certainly be black (Barack Obama) or a woman (Hillary Clinton), but neither represents even the kind of “rainbow coalition”, left-populist politics which fuelled Jesse Jackson’s insurgency in the 1984 Democratic primaries. The real corporate connections and unambiguously pro-capitalist policies of both Obama and Clinton are well known: for instance, Clinton’s most senior adviser is Mark Penn, a corporate PR man whose clients have included Shell, the Argentine junta and Union Carbide in the wake of the thousands of deaths its negligence caused in Bhopal in India.

There has also been a certain amount of fuss about John Edwards, the former North Carolina senator who was John Kerry’s vice-presidential candidate in 2004. Edwards finished second in the Iowa caucuses (the first primary of 2008), beating Clinton into third place with populist rhetoric about ending poverty and reclaiming American democracy from control by the corporations. In terms of his critique, Edwards is willing to be quite radical:

“I have seen the seamy underbelly of what happens in Washington every day. If you’re Exxon Mobil and you want to influence what’s cut, earns many hundreds of thousands consulting for companies, including private equity firm Fortress Investment. In 2006, the latter paid him $200,000 as a consultant, in 2007, the press reported that it owned part of a company responsible for preying on poor home owners, including by foreclosing on the homes of many Hurricane Katrina victims. Edwards divested and spent a lot of his own money to create a fund for those who had lost their homes, but the contrast is instructive.

Unsurprisingly, then, Edwards’ policies are a left-leaning version of the standard Democratic fare. They go nowhere near solving problems like the 44 million Americans with no health insurance, let alone tackling the deep and growing inequalities of US society. In any case, even genuinely left-wing Democrats like Jesse Jackson and, today, primary candidate and former justice department official Barack Obama, have not supported a bourgeois political party that is an essential part of the system which the US ruling class maintains its political power. Socialists cannot support any Democratic candidate: because doing so means giving up on the task of building an independent voice for the US working class.

In the primaries, the US unions have functioned as clients of the various Democratic candidates the public sector union SEIU, for instance, supports Edwards, while the local government union AFSCME supports Clinton and the firefighters’ union supported Connecticut senator Chris Dodd. In November, they will all line up behind wherever the Democrats eventually select, but the relationship will be essentially the same. What is needed, above all, is for a significant section of the labour movement to break with the Democrats and client-patron politics, and build a工人民主 party of its own.

Contrary to myth, there have been many projects for workers’ representation in the United States – from Henry George’s trade union-sponsored candidate for US president in 1886, which Engels hailed despite its inadequate programme as a step towards working-class political parties for the US. The Greens of the 1990s and 2000s saw a significant section of the labour movement to break with the Democrats and client-patron politics, and build a工人民主 party of its own.

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But it is not our only argument that benefit claimants really are unable to work, or that maybe they don’t much like living on a pittance. We also contest the idea of compulsary employment, when most of the jobs out there are alienating, tedious and badly paid – why should anyone have to do a demeaning job where they get bossed around for £5.50 an hour? Who opposes any plans which make benefit dependents on clients’ willingness to work?
How to organise young workers

ONE of the most visible impacts of capitalist globalisation has been the massive expansion of low-paid (and often semi-casual) jobs in the service sector. This “precarious” employment — in bars, restaurants, nightclubs, hotels, fast-food chains, supermarkets, high-street retailers, call centres and elsewhere — means long hours, barely-legal wages and unsafe working conditions. Young people fill these jobs.

According to a recent TUC survey, workers between the ages of 16-24 make up nearly a third of the total workforce in hotels and restaurants in the UK (migrant workers and women of all ages are other significant groups in this sector). Young people take these jobs because they are readily available; high staff turnover means employers are almost constantly recruiting. The frequently part-time nature of the work (either at weekends or in the evenings) means that young people at college or university can fit them in around their studies. And the semi-casual nature of the work means that no formal training or qualifications are required; workers can more-or-less start work the day they’re told they’ve got the job.

Clearly, these young workers — in a economically significant and expanding sector, and faced with some of the worst exploitation around — are in dire need of collective organisation. And yet it is often in these sectors and amongst these groups of workers that British trade unions are weakest. The average age of a trade unionist in the UK is still 47.

How should the revolutionary left respond to this situation? Some activists argue that a straightforward “anti-globalisation” perspective is required; if Wal-Marts, Starbucks, Subways, McDonalds, Carphone Warehouses and other retailers weren’t cropping up left, right and centre in our cities then the problem wouldn’t exist. This response is utopian. Even if we could (by demonstration and persuasion alone) “turn the clock back” and eradicate global corporations, would the High Street of the past, of small “family” shops, be free of exploitation? Unlikely. Small and local business are often equally if not more exploitative than bigger employers.

Rather than opposing the expansion of global capitalist corporations in the name of defending local capitalism(s), we should see their expansion as a site for struggle, for fighting exploitation and, ultimately, building a workers’ movement strong enough to eradicate capitalism altogether.

The Super Size My Pay campaign was high profile and dynamic and succeeded in organising the first Starbucks strike in history.

In the here and now, revolutionaries need to agitate within the labour movement to force it adopt a serious organising strategy for low pay workplaces.

There are plenty of lessons to be learned from international struggles.

In France, the CGT trade union has had some success in organising fast-food workers in companies like McDonalds and Pizza Hut. It has led strikes in McDonalds franchises in Paris and Strasbourg, winning victories because it adopted a grassroots organising approach rather than viewing a traditionally anti-union employer like McDonalds with intractable trepidation.

“Syndicalist” groups like the IWW can also be learnt from. Although some of Wers talk of building “revolutionary unions” outside of the existing labour movement, and we would not agree with that, they have at least had the courage to attempt to organise workers in workplaces in areas that mainstream trade unions would not touch. They will do things like sending in organisers to get jobs in the areas they’re trying to organise, rather than just turn up outside with suit, mobile phone, and car as the “traditional” union organiser would.

The experience of the IWW in New York in organising Starbucks workers is one the AWL — through campaigns in which we are involved, such as No Sweat — is trying to build on in the UK. Their successes stem from building unions as fighting bodies. This approach is a million miles away from the mainstream unions’ way of organising — attracting members by being providers of cheap insurance and credit cards.

The most inspiring international example comes from New Zealand, where the Unite union (no relation to the UK union of the same name) ran a “Supersize My Pay” campaign in 2005, focusing on fast-food and coffee-shop workers. The campaign was high-profile and dynamic and succeeded not only in organising the first Starbucks strike in history but also in winning significant wage increases for young workers in Auckland.

What defines this campaign — and campaigns like it — is a spirit of militancy and of building unions as weapons workers can use to fight their bosses. It rejects any notions of “partnership” with the bosses. It overcame the timidity and inertia with which so many UK unions are gripped.

Between 10 and 18 February, AWL members active in No Sweat will be helping build a speaker tour around UK cities featuring Mike Treen, a Unite activist, and Axel Person, a French CGT activist working for Quick (similar to Wimpy), to discuss how labour movement activists in Britain can replicate at least the spirit if not the precise format of previous campaigns.

Some labour movement bodies in the UK are already taking steps towards this sort of work; in Yorkshire, the TUC Youth Forum and the Regional Young Members’ Activist Committee of the GMB are discussing organising young workers in bars, nightclubs and call-centres. This is positive, but small groups of activists concentrated in one or two localities cannot sustain large-scale campaigns. For such campaigning to be successful in the long-term, it needs the organisational infrastructure and collective strength of big unions like the GMB and Unite behind it.

AWL members and other revolutionary activists in the trade union movement must act now to catalyse a currently dormant labour movement into action. We hope the No Sweat week of action, including the speaker tour, can help do that.

More details: www.nosweat.org.uk
Workers organise against immigration controls

BY BECKY CROCKER

A PUBLIC meeting on 10 December 2007 was part of the build-up to the No One Is Illegal Trade Union conference against immigration controls. Javier Lam from the GMB, who has supported Chinese families following the Morcambe Bay cockle pickers disaster, spoke about organising the Chinese workers in Soho. He said that many migrants come to this country focused on finding a wage and a place to live. He noted with regret that immigration is often not the first thing on their minds, and that this pragmatic approach has left the political debate about immigration in the hands of the racists and the government.

The task of the GMB in Soho last October saw immigration officials burst into Soho, arresting 49 Chinese people in one day. Of those, four have been freed. This was part of the build-up to the No One Is Illegal conference. Javier, who heads the head of the Chinese community, said the Soho-based immigration service is now providing training on how to check papers. By the end, the immigration official will be ready to ask awkward questions that would expose the status of their workers. Each worker from outside the European Union will need a certificate of sponsorship from an employer to enter the country. Once here, there will be measures to make sure that people go back again, such as partly paying workers in their country of origin, or holding bonds for them in their own country.

One of the laws is that it places responsibility for policing immigration in the hands of the employers. The Trade Unions are in a key position to fight this system as part of their fight against their bosses. The meeting’s discussion, however, highlighted that the current union movement is not fit to fight these measures. The new laws will come into effect on March 1st. It would be wonderful to think that unions across the country could go on strike to defeat these laws. But the anti-union laws, the lack of understanding about these issues amongst rank and file workers, the reluctance to take any kind of militant action from the unions’ leaderships — leads to a depressing picture. But that is why it is important to promote the Trade Union Against Immigration Controls conference as much as possible amongst rank and file workers. The conference will hopefully not be a one-off event, but part of a process of organising workers together for this important fight.

IN response to the impact of August 2007’s 12-hour strike, Justice Secretary Jack Straw announced plans for a strike-ban for prison officers on January 8. Tabled as an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill, the measure will be debated in Parliament as Solicitor General, Lord Goldsmith, goes to press.

The decision to reintroduce a strike-ban contradicts its repeal in 2005, when David Blunkett replaced an all-out “reserve power” banning striking with a “voluntary” no-strike agreement, due to expire in May 2008. The Prison Officers’ Association gave 12 months notice of withdrawal from this agreement in May 2007, and New Labour are clearly attempting to replace it with a renewed ban before then. Although sociologists don’t regard prison officers as workers, or the Prison Officers’ Association as a normal trade union, this move is a strengthening of New Labour’s anti-trade union laws and should be opposed.

SHOP WORKERS 

Bonus cuts strike

SHOP workers have been on strike in Berlin (and other parts of Germany) — a number of support picket chains, department stores, the biggest bookshop chain, and also H&M.

The employers want to abolish the bonus schemes for late and Sunday shifts — 20% bonus after 6.30pm Monday-Friday, 50% bonus after 8pm, 120% bonus on Sundays and public holidays, 20% bonus on Saturdays after 4.30pm. These bonuses make up a lot on top of the basic pay. When abolished, a full-time worker would lose 180 Euro per month (or the equivalent in time).

The union has attempted to hold talks with the employers since January. They refuse. The union are also demanding a 6.5% pay rise (on top of the retention of bonuses).

PRISONS

Prison officer strike ban

BIRMINGHAM city council has upped the ante in its battle with its staff over equal pay, by seeking to impose new contracts which mean drastic pay cuts for workers and longer hours for thousands more.

The council claims that its goal is equal pay between men and women, but is quite transparently using this as cover for an attack on the workforce. Many women, as well as male workers, will suffer pay cuts if it is successful — some by as much as £6,000 a year. No wonder 70 percent of workers have either formally rejected or decided to ignore their new contract.

This struggle has been simmering for some time, with 1000 prison officers in Birmingham town hall. The council unions, Unite, GMB and UCATT, will rally again on January 12, supported by council workers from across the UK. If they can win a settlement which guarantees equality while protecting the workers’ terms and conditions, it will be a big step forward in clarifying the definition of ‘equal pay’ as being not just equal pay. To do that, however, strike action will be necessary.

The council unions support Birmingham council workers: 12 noon, Saturday 12 January, outside the Council House in Market Square.

Unpaid overtime action

A TUC investigation has found that the number of workers working unpaid overtime increased by over 100,000 in 2007, with the total topping the five million mark.

On average each of these workers loses a staggering £5,000 a year, which means that a total of £25 billion worth of overtime work goes unpaid. To put it another way, five million workers are putting in an average of over seven unpaid hours each week.

The TUC has calculated that if all this over-time came at the start of the year, every single worker would get paid would be Friday 22 February. It has declared this date “work your proper hours day”, calling on workers to have a proper lunch break and go home on time.

For more details see www.workyourprop- erhoursday.com

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Equal pay fight

HEALTH

Karen Reissman campaign

WORKERS in Manchester’s Community and Mental Health Services, who struck last year against the victimisation and sacking of their Union branch chair, SWP member Karen Reissman, have now returned to work — but are building a political campaign for her reinstatement.

On 11 December the branch unanimously carried a motion advocating a campaign including a Union delegation to Health Secretary Alan Johnson, pressure on Union-sponsored MPs and a campaign of 5 strikes so that the whole branch can attend a lobby of Parliament in London.

As the motion puts it: “This raises issues of national significance relating to trade union rights, the right of freedom of expression and the defence of the NHS: ‘This is a crucial struggle. Please get your branch or other organisation to support it — visit www.workersliberty.org to find out more.”

For the full text of the resolution, see www.workersliberty.org/node/79733
BY COLIN FOSTER

IN 2008, public sector workers across the board faced three years of real wage cuts. The Government is determined to limit public sector pay rises to around 2%, and wants to clamp that limit in to three-year deals, while inflation (RPI) is still running at 4.2%. How can public sector workers reinvigorate the idea of trade-union solidarity across different trades and unions on this issue?

The public services union Unison estimates that since April 2004 the accrued increase in local government pay stands at 11.4%. Over the same period prices have risen by 12.5%, and average earnings across the whole economy by 13.4%.

Local government can not be untypical of the public sector. Now the Government wants to set the wage loss in stone by insisting on three-year deals — at a low rate — for local government and health, and civil service sectors, this year. In local government and health, a wish from the employers for three-year deals was already flagged up in 2007. In the explanations from Unison union leaders about why they support the “Public Review Body” for health workers, that Body is supposed to have the virtue of being “independent”; but now it has been told by the Treasury to deliver a three-year formula.

On Sunday 16 December AWL members from different public sector unions discussed strategy. This is a summary of conclusions, subject to corrections, amendments, and additions. It has been updated with new information received since 16 December.

Our first conclusion is that we should not get buried in the details and limits of feasible string-pulling to elicit action from the different public sector unions. The AWL’s primary task is to sweep all these ‘ins and outs’ — rather than to pull endless strings on which we (as yet a relatively small organisation) do not have much pulling power anyway.

Basic, unifying, long-term demands

DIFFERENT sections of the public sector have different pay structures, different negotiating systems, different detailed concerns. That sort of “sectionalism” is inherent to wage-bargaining under capitalism. It can be mitigated, but not abolished at will. As Karl Marx put it: “The cry for an equality of wages rests... upon a mistake, an insane wish never to be fulfilled.”

In the AWL conference document of 2008, we wonder if the AWL fraction should make sure it is visible in its union and sector as the advocate of a wide agenda, which in the present situation revolves around two main themes, levelling up pay and conditions and organising the unorganised”.

In the public sector we should argue for coordination beyond practical things, like dates of ballots. The basic touchstone should be a campaign for above inflation pay rises across the sector (i.e. a “sliding scale of wages” agreement) and an agreed minimum wage.

We have to politically emphasise as well as help to reorganise and renew the trade union movement. We argue for standardised pay rises matching and beating inflation, against both regional bargaining and “performance-related pay”.

We also argue for unions to work for a common settlement date across the public sector, and against multi-year deals which ensure that only a fraction of workers can move each year, so that the full strength of the unions is deployed together. At present the Treasury gives its remit for civil service pay, its budget for health and local government, etc., in a coordinated way each year, but the unions fight (or don’t fight) separately.

At present, even within Unison, health and local government pay both run from April to March, but the two sections don’t put claims in at the same time, and they don’t give the Government and employers a common timescale to respond.

We have to politically rearm as well as help to organise... to pull a continuous string, and to do it as fast as possible. That might mean a one-off one-day protest. AWL will press the Government on 26 October its recommendation on a pay settlement to run from three years from September 2008. (The three-year term was already in place before the Government’s recent announcement). The Government, unusually, has taken a long time about responding. Theoretically the Government can accept the STRB recommendation or pay more or pay less. According to NUT general secretary Steve Sinnott, speaking at an NUT Divisional Secretaries’ meeting on 9 January, the Government has to go public on the report by the end of January at latest.

The STRB (Scottish teachers’ union) has accepted a three year deal of 2.5%, 2.5% and 2.5% which in February they consider amendments to the STRB recommendation. In January the Teacher’s Union of America (NUT) is expected to announce a one-year deal of 2%. Teachers in the schools will almost certainly be offered less.

NUT Executive policy is to ballot for discontinuous strike action if the Government does not grant an increase catching up with inflation. The left won a narrow majority, on the Executive, against general secretary Steve Sinnott, to make it “discontinuous action” rather than a single one-day strike.

Sinnott had pencilled in 30 January for a one-day strike. After the Government’s delay, any action will certainly be later than that. If the NUT Executive sticks to its policy as discussed up to now, then the NUT will ballot for action. The earliest possible action will be late February, after half-term, which is around the second week of February.

There is still, of course, a danger that the right will oppose action when it comes to the crunch, or that Sinnott will limit the action to a one-off one-day protest. AWL will press for it to be discontinuous action, and if as quick a tempo as possible. That might mean two strikes before the end of term (just before Easter), and further strikes from April.

NUT activists say:

• The Union has done a lot of campaigning in the schools on pay.
• Teachers in the schools are more agitated about workload issues than about pay, but will probably respond to the chance to express a national protest by strike action over pay.
• It would not make sense to delay NUT action in 2008 in order to increase the chances of coinciding with other sectors. If the pay settlement announced by the Government is allowed by delay to come to appear an “accomplished fact”, that will undermine mobilisation.

NUT policy is for an increase of 10% or £3000, plus reduction of differentials through such things as establishing a “single spine” for the pay structure. It is not clear what the exact demand will be over which members may be balloted for strike action. The demand is on the Government as the body which decides teachers’ pay, although there exists no procedure for the union to negotiate with the Government over pay.

NUT conference is at Easter (weekend of 23 March). Motions have already been submitted from branches. In January branches vote on which motions to prioritise, i.e. get to the actual conference floor. Then in February they consider amendments to the prioritised motions.

Because of this schedule it is common practice to submit “holding motions”, with the sharp edges of their content being supplied by subsequent amendments. There is a holding motion from the left with (oddly) a call for a ballot on action over pay “before Christmas 2008”- obviously it will have to be amended.

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Resist the 3-year public sector pay cut!
raised within PCS is that the union should seek disputes over the Treasury remit, i.e. the overall guidance that the Treasury gives to the 241 bargaining units. Why not extend that idea to a ‘national civil service’? Of course, we are not strong enough to win this in 2008, but we will never be strong enough to win unless we try.

Of course, any general theme we argue isn’t going to supplant the actual union claims, which in most cases other than for local government are already in. But, in the background we’ll support local disputes, we have an overarching commitment to build solidarity in any negotiations, including for the ‘private sector’ workers within the public sector, that is, contracted-out workers in the local government. But we have never been strong enough to win it this year, but the idea outside the civil service? Of course, we want action, not just in the civil service, but in local government “service group” of the local government workers, which is weak; the top union officials do not want it. If we need to build local co-ordination, the AWP formula which UCU has called a “maximum” for pay in the college. The union has not done that.

The different pay bargaining units in the civil service have been separate, but not separate and distinct. Thus we want rank-and-file link-ups across unions and sectors to put pressure on the Treasury. We need to build union unity in the important locations, and not just in the cities.

But there is a Catch-22 here. In anything like current circumstances, even modestly living families can’t get by on what they can earn, and that is why we want a higher pay. The government is making it clear that they will not accept any inflation. The problem is that the setup now requires local Union branch to run local campaigns on this issue, and many branches are simply not up to it — because of lack of activists, or because of lack of interest in the conditions of the contract and their pay.

Despite ancillary workers having been generally the backbone of NUPE organisation in the Health Service before the merger that formed Unison, the union has waged no systematic campaign to organise and win improvements for the ancillary workers.

We should argue for Unison to campaign for an enforceable national agreement to get contracted-out workers NHS rates, and to launch an organising drive among contracted-out workers on that basis.

Local government

The relevant Unison committee has proposed a claim for the next settlement, due in April, for a 6% increase, with a minimum wage of £6.75 per hour. The committee is due to finalise the claim in January. Unison conference on 15-16 June, and the deadline for motions to it is 22 May. We are waiting to see if the government budget for 2008-9. But there is no need to wait that long to know that the government will not listen to our demands.

In November there was a national activists’ conference which the government had five years in office, when pay was discussed. The unions fulltimer argued strongly for a pitiful claim of 2% over 3 years.

An AWL activist prend argued that co-ordinated action was necessary to win for that reason the union should only consider a one year deal.

The motions will be voted on at the conference and for that reason the union should only consider a one year deal.

The question of deadlines and tempo is important, especially for health and local government workers who are dragged on for months after the settlement date in April, despite the obvious fact that it will take almost indefinitely to win for the union leadership told them was only a small chance of a slightly better deal. Instead, we should argue for the deal to be reported to be dissatisfied and angry with the pay deal, even if they voted for it.

There is also the question of agitating and organising among ancillary (contracted-out) workers for them to be lifted up to NHS pay rates.

It is “incredibly difficult”. The strongest section of the union’s official stance now is: “We expect a 6% increase, with a minimum wage of £6.75 per hour. The committee is due to finalise the claim in January. Unison conference on 15-16 June, and the deadline for motions to it is 22 May. We are waiting to see if the government budget for 2008-9. But there is no need to wait that long to know that the government will not listen to our demands.

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Following the upsurge of action by French railworkers, students and others in October and November last year, a group of young AWL members and contacts visited the city for three days in December. We joined up with two Workers’ Liberty members who are currently teaching in Paris as part of their university courses. As well as learning about the ongoing struggle, we revived our ties with sections of the French revolutionary left. In the process we gained valuable ideas about the way forward for socialist activists in Britain.

Scenes from last December’s protests against Sarkozy’s plans

B y the standards of Britain, at least, the class struggle in France is at a high pitch.

Following his election last year, conservative president Nicholas Sarkozy immediately went on an offensive against the unions, with anti-strike laws for “essential services” such as public transport and officers’ pension rights. He also took a huge wave of strikes. Prevented the extension of this attack to the public sector, but between then and the defeat of further strikes in 2005, the ruling class gradually got most of what it wanted, but a some workers were exempt.

Both these struggles have pitched the railworkers, one of the best organised sections of the French working class, to the forefront. Several of the socialists we spoke to stressed that, in take on the railworkers, Sarkozy’s government has a dual purpose. The first is to open the door to a further series of generalised attacks on pensions and other social rights (one comrade used the analogy of the special regimes being a small plug preventing a mass of water rushing through), but the second is to confront and break one of the vanguards of the French working class.

In October and November, railworkers, gasworkers and others carried out major strikes and demonstrations, using General Assemblies (AGIs) to organise the struggle. There have also been strikes by teachers, civil servants and other groups of workers under attack. The background is the events of 2006, in which mass student and school student occupations and AGIs, backed by a rising tide of workers’ action, forced the withdrawal of the CPE, a deeply unpopular attack on student funding. This time too, the student movement has clashed with the government, though their struggle is a direct attack on the government University Reform Law (LRU), which moves French universities further down the road towards privatisation.

While very impressive indeed, both workers’ and students’ actions have been relatively weak compared to the CPE struggle. In the case of the students, only a minority of universities and a few schools have taken action, compared to the great majority of universities and a large and growing number of schools in 2006. Meanwhile, while there is mass support for the railworkers and others striking to defend the special regimes, the strikes have not burst the bounds of sectoralism and union legality in the way they did last year.

A bit of explanation about the French labour movement. In France, only a small minority of workers are in a union (currently 9%), but many non-members and many non-members will take strike action. At the same time, there is more of a tradition of minority strikes, and of workers taking action and organising independently of their union leadership. In 1986, for instance, a three week rail strike took place (and won) completely independently of the rail section of the CGT (France’s main union federation). There are obvious disadvantages here, but it is undoubt-edly easier for workers to take and escalate action even if their union bureaucracy is hostile.

Easier — but the pressure and inertia of the bureaucracy still plays a role. In the 2006 strug- gle, all the major unions, the national student union UNEF and the leadership of the Communist and Socialist Parties demanded — sluggishly, hypocritically, but nonetheless — the withdrawal of the CPE. That provided a frame-work in which workers and students felt confi- dent to take action: an inadequate framework for going further to challenge and overthrow the government, but a framework. This time, in contrast, the CGT, UNEF and especially the Socialist Party range from unclear to downright treacherous and in league with Sarkozy. As a result, it has been more difficult for action to snowball.

B Y the time we visited France, the unions were in negotiations and action (both among workers and students) was fizzling out for the time being. While we were there, national strikes and Paris Metro strikes took place, but because most workers regarded these as actions tokenised by the union leaders to avoid supporting, and not as a serious blows against the employers and government, they were poorly supported.

Meanwhile, most of the university occupations had dispersed for the holidays. One French comrade described it as at the end of the first round and a draw - but one which could have been a victory if not for the actions of the union leaders. We did visit one of the last occupied campuses in Paris, and participated in a thou-sand-strong student demonstration. Of necessity, however, most of our activity involved discus-sions with individuals and groups of activists.

We met with a number of activists from the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, including youth from its left-wing Democratic Révolutionnaire tendency, two members of its political bureau (one from DFR and one from its leading majority) and a small group railworkers (one of our delegation was a young AWL railworker, which meant a very fruitful discussion and plans for joint activity in the near future). We met members of Latte Ottoville’s minority tendency; a comrade from the rather strange but cautious LCR (whose sister organisation the IRLU, which united a number of Trotskyist activists in the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the LCR and no other group, and a leading activist from the Reeul Education Sans Frontières (Education Without Borders Network), a left-wing campaign against the deportation of children and families. Last but not least, we discussed quite a bit with the Yves Coleman, editor of the journal Ni Partie Ni Frontières, and attended a number of public meetings.

There is no space to go into detail here, but a few observations:

1. There is a lot to be learnt from the French labour movement and left. One thing our trip was useful for was disabusing us of the notion that French workers, students etc simply burst-ing with fantastic, explosive militancy. This is far from being the case. Nor is the deadening weight of bureaucracy absent from their move-ment. Nonetheless, the French workers have never suffered a crushing defeat as the British working class did in the 1980s. And they have won some big victories (1986, 1995, 2006).

While it will, probably, take a long time to create a fully revolutionary labour movement, there is no reason why our movement in Britain cannot fight, win and begin the process of rebulding now. There is nothing in the water which makes French workers more militant. And the lessons from their struggles can be applied here. Combative against government and employers, driven to organise independently of and against the union bureaucracies, mass democratic forms of organisation such as general assemblies — we should learn from all of these and much more. Equally, French worker activists have things to be learnt from us. Building strong links between French and British workers is a crucial task for socialists in the period ahead.

2. One reason why the French working class has better maintained its fighting capacity is the presence of relatively large numbers of socialists in its ranks. A key aspect – the LCR comrades who we spoke to said that there are something like 300 organised revolutionary socialist rail workers in France, including more than 100 in the LCR (LO has a strong base in many indus-trial sectors). The equivalent figure in Britain cannot be more than 30! The same is true among many groups of work-ers and among students. The LCR’s youth section, JCR, has three hundred activists in universities and several dozen in schools, something which no group in Britain can hope to match.

This implantation is a material factor in the strength of the French working class. The French left has established it by a patient orienta-tion to workplace and union struggles, and by a willingness to reach out beyond the existing structures of trade and student unions (in part, admittedly, because both, particularly student unions, are much weaker in France than in Britain). This helps to establish a virtuous circle: during the current struggle, the LCR’s profile has meant a steady stream of membership applica-tions from railworkers.

The French left is in ferment. Since the 2002 presidential election, the LCR has grown rapidly, particularly among young people, prob-ably doubling (to between 400-600 members) its candidate, the now very famous Olivier Besancenot, received more than two million votes, many times more than the candidate of the Communist Party. The LCR now has a rela-relationship with many thousands of activists who want to fight the bosses and their government, and recognition from many tens and hundreds of thousands more.

This is, obviously, very different from the situation in Britain but that is because the French left has made different choices. The LCR (and, previously, LO) have grown not through Respect-style opportunism and stunts, but by a basic focus on ideas of class struggle and workers’ representation.

The LCR is currently making propaganda and attempting to launch a campaign for a new “anti-capitalist” workers’ party — and, while there is much to criticise in and many questions to ask about all this, it is very different from the foul populist swamp into which the British far left has collapsed. (When I asked a leading LCR member for his view on championing of George Galloway by their sister organisation the ISG he was obviously embar-rassed.) The new party project may not succeed, but the French far left still has a real political project, the Vanguard of the French left has made different choices. The French left is in ferment. Since the 2002 presidential election, the LCR has grown rapidly, particularly among young people, probably doubling (to between 400-600 members) its candidate, the now very famous Olivier Besancenot, received more than two million votes, many times more than the candidate of the Communist Party. The LCR now has a relationship with many thousands of activists who want to fight the bosses and their government, and recognition from many tens and hundreds of thousands more.

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We had a great time in Paris, and plan to return some time in early 2008. If you would like to come on our next delegation to France, get in touch: sacha@workersliberty.org
Kosova, formerly the Albanian-majority province providing the core of modern Kosovo, is likely to declare independence in February 2008.

The European Union, the USA, and NATO will support independence, despite Russian (a longstanding ally of Serbia) blocking an approval for independence and declaring that independence will be "outside internation law".

That the people of Kosovo should have their right to independence respected is good, and a damning condemnation of those on the left who backed Milosevic in the 1990s. Many things about the way independence is happening is bad.

Kosova was, in effect, a colony of Serbia from when it was conquered by Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire in 1912 — in a bloody campaign that brought Leon Trotsky, then a war correspondent in the region, to denounce "Serbian imperialism" — until 1999. Kosova was occupied by Italian and then by German forces during World War Two, but reconquered by Serbia at the end of the war. It is the one province of the old Yugoslavia for which there is no evidence of the people ever having in their majority wished for, or at least accepted, inclusion in the federal state. Its population is about 90% Albanian.

Despite the 1995 Dayton Agreement (designed in serious talks with Turkey in the 1950s about "serbianising" Kosovo and way of deporting the Albanian-Muslim population en masse to Turkey), Kosova enjoyed a relatively benign era from 1974 to 1999, with great autonomy within the Yugoslav federation.

In 1999, Kosova was suppressed by the new Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, who had risen to prominence in 1987 on a platform of Serbian chauvinism directed specially against Kosova. In the 1990s Milosevic's chauvinism led to the break-up of Yugoslavia as Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, successively broke away from Belgrade rule. In Croatia and Bosnia there were bloody wars.

Meanwhile there was a Serbian rule of terror in Kosovo. The Albanian population had to impress a whole series of underground schools and hospitals, and so on.

In March 1999 the big powers, nervous that bombing Serbia from 24 March to 10 June 1999 (a much shorter NATO bombing campaign in September 1995 had forced Serbia into agreeing to negotiations on Bosnia which ended the war) there; it seems that NATO hoped for something equally easy over Kosova. In response, Milosevic dramatically stepped up his drive to "secure" Kosova by massacring or driving out the Albanian population.

Serbian forces killed at least 600 Kosovars, in 1998 and the first half of 1999, over 1.5 million Kosovar Albanians, maybe 90% of the total population, were driven from their homes.

According to Human Rights Watch, the NATO bombing killed about 500 civilians. Eventually, Milosevic backed down and withdrew. Nonetheless, in November 1999 the province has been under UN administration, though elements of Kosovar political institutional have been gradually introduced.

On 17 November, the party of Hashim Thaci, the former leader of the Kosova Liberation Army, a guerrilla force that fought Milosevic, won Kosova's elections. That has put pressure on Thaci, former leader of the Kosova Liberation Administration, though elements of Kosovar political parties withdrew Serbian troops from Kosova. Since then, Kosovars; in 1998 and the first half of 1999, have the right to do so. But the persecution of minorities. If the population in the small patch of Kosova where Serbs have been driven from "nationalism" is as possible in order to tilt the international supervises their war. However, things are as they are. That the Kosovars are likely to get their national self-determination, under tense conditions, and with supervision by and protection from the European Union. The persecution of minorities in Kosova, the arming of the Kosovars, and independence from Belgrade rule.

Kosovar refugees in Bosnia at the time of the Balkans war bloody attempt by Serbia to restore its rule; there is no alternative to independence for us. Marxist who support the right of nations to self-determination must regret that independen
tion did not come earlier; and that, coming so late, it comes in such persecution.

Oppression does not make nations "good", or"good" or "bad" nations. On the contrary, the most justified, the most heroic, of struggles for national self-determination often go together with persecution of minorities within the territory of the oppressed nation. When Turkey won independence in the early 1920s, Turkish forces drove out the whole Greek population of Smyrna (now Izmir), maybe half a million people. After World War independence from Britain in 1960, the Greek majority on the island differentiated against the Turkish minority.

That the Albanian majority in Kosova has treated the Serbian minority — and, even the smaller, Roma minority — badly since 1999 is therefore no surprise. Between June and September 1999, almost all the 50,000 Serbs then living in Kosova's capital Pristina were forced to leave. What is particularly poisonous is that, Kosovo's development being supervised by big powers explicitly committed to safeguarding minority rights, and despite those powers pushing through anti-discrimination legislation which the Minority Rights Group describes as being on paper the best in Europe; the persecution of minorities has only hardened and become more institutionalised since 1999.

According to a Minority Rights Group report, communal segregation is worse in Kosova than anywhere else in Europe. The Serban and Albanian communities not only have separate education systems — as they did before 1999, of course, in the Albanian system being "underground" — they also have separate health systems. That started when the management of a hospital in the Serban-majority area of Mitrovica, which is not allowed to do the right thing. But the persecution of minorities cannot make us deny the right to self-determination of the Kosovars any more than that of any other nation.

H O W E V E R, Socialist Worker has denounced Kosova's independence. In a SWP 22 December 2007, Alex Callinicos declares: "Kosova is a province of Serbia. Serbian law, and Serbia's "right of conquest", rank higher for him than national rights." He denounces the US and EU for "trying to back a regime ran by nationalist Serbians whose independence must destabilise the region that was torn apart by war less than a decade ago."

In 1999, the SWP gave 100% backing to the Serbs on Kosova. The SWP's most consistent democracy.

We say that the assial issue is Kosova. The Kosovars can decide on their own the future. The SWP's line was for NATO to stop the bombing leaving Serbian troops in possession of Kosova. The SWP's line was "anti-NATO imperialism". But the left does not have to and should not follow them and mimic them.

The left's (and the SWP's) current "reac
discussion of the Serbs: Milosevic's victory will lead to the annihilation of the Kosovars. That alone is enough to determine our attitude... To say stop bombing now, without demand
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s, or even the UN. They (Workers' Liberty).

Today we say the same. The national rights of the "ganyšs" and the Kosovars were dis
to majority area of Mitrovica stated in 1999 that they would have no Albanians in the hospital, and has escalated since then.

Kosovar Albanian chauvinists carried out an "ethnic cleansing" of Serbs and Roma from many areas in 2004. Without the international supervision, it is of course possible that after June 1999 the Kosovar Albanians would have tried to drive out the Serbs. The function of exact inver
domestication, that Milosevic had done to them. If sparks of democratic scepticism, or just fear of reprisals from Belgrade, had restrained them in the heat of that moment, then there is a seri

amount to success for "imperialism". The bombing must be stopped, and Serbia's troops still on place and free to continue their "ethnic cleansing". The SWP's rhetoric against weaker-stomached NATO-phobes who urged that the "stop the bombing" slogan be coupled with a call for self-determination for the Kosovars.

Kosova could have self-determination with the Serb troops rampaging across their country, the weaker-stomached never mentioned. Besides, the Kosovars, or their leadership, were "nationalist gangsters" and "fascists" that must put it. Other nations have national rights, despite unattractive leaderships, but the Kosovars only have the right to do so. But the persecution of minorities cannot make us deny the right to self-determination of the Kosovars any more than that of any other nation.

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Iraq: a quiet patch in the nightmare

BY MARTIN THOMAS

I

n my last summary article on Iraq in Solidarity 5/117, 13/09/07) I wrote that the Bush “administration now seems to have no strategy but to bash on and hope it can keep things relatively under control until it hands over the mess to another US presidency in January 2009.”

And I suggest that it might achieve that limited objective. “The tighter division of Arab Iraq into Shia-only or Sunni-only neighbourhoods — now separated off, in Baghdad, by high concrete walls and checkpoints — should tend to reduce the number of killings.” It has done so. The rate of killings remained high through to September, but two heavy-weight US reports published in December — the Pentagon’s Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq, and the Brookings Institution’s Iraq Index — detail a drop in violent deaths in October-December down to about the same level as before the Samarra mosque bombing of February 2006 set off slow-burning sectarian civil war.

The lower level is still horrifying: about 600 deaths a month according to the Pentagon, which almost certainly underestimates. The Brookings report tells us, for example, that “79% of people in Baghdad have had a family member or friend murdered or kidnapped, and that 80% now have more than half the number of doctors it had before 2003, 17,000 having fled the country and 2,000 having been murdered. Conditions are nightmarish, but it is a quieter patch in the nightmare.”

What does this mean socially? The Pentagon report, which no-one can suspect of painting the situation worse than it is, says bluntly that there have been only “minimal advances in the delivery of essential services to the people of Iraq” like electricity and water, and that a major limiting factor is endemic sectarianism in the Iraqi government.

The Pentagon report ventures no guess about whether unemployment — generally reckoned around 50% — is decreasing, and Brooking reports it unchanged.

And what does it mean politically? Both the Pentagon nor the Brookings report see little or no advance in the Iraqi government’s ability to build a broad political base or to provide efficient civil administration. Their evidence is in line with the summary judgement of Joos Hilmert of the International Crisis Group think-tank.

“What Petraeus [the current US military commander] has accomplished is a feat that is sustainable through the American elections [in November 2008]. It’s not an indefinitely sustainable without political accommodation at the top.”

The failure of prime minister Nouri al-Maliki to build a governing alliance of any strength has been exposed in the current round of the International Crisis Group think-tank.

“arrested the political process by using the temporary constitution to authorise himself to govern by decree. The opposition have held firm.”

“breath of fresh air.”

In short, Iraq is quieter because it is more tightly and tidily controlled by local mafias. The Pentagon report has 64% of Iraqis saying they feel safe within their own neighbourhoods, but only 34% thinking they can travel safely outside the neighbourhood. The relative quiet may not hold through to January 2009, as Bush hopes. In April it will become constitutionally possible to set up a new autonomous region in the South on the model of the Kurdish region in the north. Some Shia-Islamist groups strongly support a “region” covering a very large Shia-majority territory; others want a smaller “region” including only Basra and two other provinces; yet others oppose any “region.” The clash could turn sour.

Even more explosively, a decision on the status of the northern oil centre of Kirkuk, claimed by both Kurds and Arabs, has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December 2007. But the relative quiet may hold. In particular, the sharp drop in recent months in US military casualties has been delayed from a previous deadline of 31 December.
For a working class campaign against fascism

“Only one thing could have stopped our movement — if our adversaries had understood its principle and intentions and from the first day had smashed with the utmost brutality the nucleus of our new movement.”

Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

“To bear the road to fascism, to bar it once and for all, it does not suffice that workers oppose it physically at demonstrations; it does not suffice to denounce its infamies … Today we defend ourselves against the rise of reaction, but … to be efficacious this resistance must transform itself into a struggle for power.”

Leon Trotsky, Conversations with a Dissident from Saint-Denis

BY CHARLIE SALMON

In the 2005 general election 192,746 people voted for the British National Party. Of the BNP’s 119 candidates received an average of 1660 votes. On local election polling day, 3 May 2007, the BNP received 292,911 votes — a ninety-seven fold increase since the year 2000. Over the last four years the BNP has doubled the number of councilors where it contests seats and has quadrupled the number of candidates. As of the last local elections, the BNP held fifty council seats. Election results can tell us some things. On the surface these figures show an increasing return on an ever increasing number of BNP candidates. They stand as evidence that given the choice between a Labour candidate, a Tory or whoever else, large numbers of people are prepared to tick the box for a fascist. Election results act as a warning to working class organizations that something is going on. They do not tell us what that is or how to combat it.

British fascists have made great efforts to transform themselves from a group oriented to street agitation, outright racism and anti-Semitism, threat and intimidation into a “legitimate” political operation. Though they still lurk in the shadows, the shaved headed, jack-booted, mono syllabic things have all but vanished from the limelight. They have been replaced by slicker, popular political operators — people like Sadequain Graham and newly “media-friendly” Nick Griffin. But a new suit and toned down rhetoric, do not make for a complete transformation. The still rumbling crisis in the BNP has publicly exposed the true nature of the group. With each side in the dispute calling the other “Nazis” and “extremists” the liberal media and anti-fascist news sources have had a field day. Few have paused to ask how such an organisation has built a base of support and grown so rapidly in so short a space of time.

The relative success of the BNP cannot be isolated to a parting of ways with past fascist political methodology. In previous periods of right-wing resurgence where fascist groups rose from the sewers, subjective as much as objective circumstances played a part in flushing them away. In the 1930s and 40s Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists faced stubborn, heroic resistance from working class and Jewish organisations. In the mid to Seventies, when the National Front could claim a membership of 20,000 and managed to circulate five million leaflets in one year, mass political, community and cultural mobilisations — not exclusively called by the Anti-Nazi League — drove fascists from the streets. Today’s anti-fascist groups are a pale imitation of the past and the absence of militant working class opposition to fascism is a pressing concern.

THE WORKING CLASS, LABOUR AND THE BNP

“The enemies of British Nationalism continue to portray the claim that the BNP is a ‘racist party.’ This claim is most often repeated because the BNP unhesitatingly addresses itself to the issues and concerns of the indigenous British population, and because it seeks to ensure that British people remain the majority population in this country.” (As the BNP Racists! from the BNP website)

The BNP no longer appeals to working class voters on the basis of outspoken race hate alone. A change in social and cultural attitudes means that crude racism is not acceptable to a majority of people. The fact that the labour movement has never tangled racism in a consistent and wholesale way means that — but deeply held — racist attitudes are there to be exploited.

The BNP does this by confusing very real working class concerns with the presence of minority and immigrant populations. They claim to be defending the interests of an “indigenous population” who suffer from unemployment, poor housing, health and education services because “immigrants” are either given preferential treatment or “flood” an area in overwhelming numbers. Gordon Brown recently jumped on this bandwagon when he shamefully promised the following to a meeting with the GMF union:

“It is time to train British workers for the future.

Recent BNP propaganda focuses upon “explaining” the crisis in jobs, housing and public services.

British jobs that will be available over the coming few years and to make sure that people who are inactive and unemployed are able to get the new jobs on offer in our country.”

Had this statement appeared without credit most people would assume it sprang forth from the mouth of Nick Griffin, not a Labour Prime Minister. Since 1997 this Labour government has pursued a hard-line policy of attacking asylum seekers and immigrants. They are scapegoated by the right wing press and the government reacts by issuing even more draconian policy statements. Rather than tackle head-on the racist myths spread by the Daily Mail and BNP, the Labour Party of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown has pandered to them.

This strategy has a dual effect: it gives political cover for the very real failings of the Labour Party over the past ten years and legitimises the political message of extreme right-wingers and the fascist BNP.

The BNP has built a base and made electoral advances in areas previously dominated by working class areas where the wifal neglect and attacks of this government find concrete material expression. Child poverty, the loss of homes, homelessness, insufficient public services — from health through to education provision — remain everyday realities in British society. Those in work face poor conditions and pay. In the absence of a collective trade union movement and the presence of a legal framework that militates against the emergence of class-wide solidarity, workers are effectively abandoned. Add to this the emasculated local structures of the Labour Party and wider labour movement — based traditionally by means which working people expressed their concerns and fought for change — and we have a situation ripe for fascist agitation.

Recent BNP propaganda — both locally produced and in national publications — focuses upon “explaining” the crisis in jobs, housing and public services. For instance, in an article headed “NHS at Breaking Point” the BNP blamed the crisis in the NHS not on under funding but on Polish immigrants who have “poured” into Britain. Are the BNP lying when they point out problems in public services? No, but the spin they put upon such problems is political poison. An anti-fascist campaign thatEither ignores such issues or focuses upon the “positive aspects” of society fails to address the real questions and concerns of the working class.

UNITE AGAINST FASCISM AND SEARCHLIGHT

UNITE Against Fascism (UAF) and the Searchlight organisation — a group that produces a monthly anti-fascist magazine and runs some local campaign groups — have major political faults. UAF is essentially a political coalition of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Action — a small Stalinist sect close to Ken Livingstone. It claims the support of most major trade unions and a variety of religious organisations. The political foundations of UAF are built upon the SWP’s interpretation of the United Front tactic. Leon Trotsky outlined the basis and need for a united front as follows:

“So long as it does not hold this majority [of the working class], the [revolutionary] party must fight to win it. The party can achieve this only by remaining an absolutely independent organisation with a clear program and strict internal discipline. That is the reason why the party was bound to break ideologically and organisationally with the reformists and the centrists — it was not able to fight for the democratic revolution, who possess neither the capacity nor the desire to prepare the masses for revolution, and who by their entire conduct thwart this work … But it is perfectly self-evident that the class activity of the proletariat is not suspended during this period preparatory to the revolution. Clashes with industrialists, with the bourgeoisie, with the state power, on the initiative of one side or the other, run their due course. In these clashes — no less as they involve the vital interests of the entire working class, or its majority, or this or that section — the working masses sense the need of unity in action, of unity in resisting the onslaught of capitalism or unity in taking the offensive against it. Any
party which mechanically counterposes itself to this need of the working class for unity in action will unfailingly be condemned in the minds of the workers” (my emphasis). Revolutionary socialists advocate the formation of a united front to fight for working class interests on the basis of unity between established working-class organisations. Trotsky advocated such a tactic to counter the rise of fascism in Germany in the 1930s. In practice the SWP denounces the united front of its essential working class orientation. For example:

Q. Does UAF practically unite working class organisations?
A. If all Trotsky means by unity is getting trade union general secretaries to sign a piece of paper, then yes — but this is not what Trotsky meant. For socialists, “unity” means a unified and purposeful action. UAF “appears” when the SWP thinks it politically expedient to roll it out. This means either turning SWP branches to anti-fascist activity at election times or turning out leading members for protests and conferences. There is no evidence of work towards major mobilisations of trade union members. No joint initiatives above the printing of T-shirts and pamphlets. No practical unity.

Q. Are socialists “politically independent” inside UAF?
A. It is not possible for the SWP to be politically independent without tearing apart UAF. Sir Iqbal Sacraie — chair of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) — was invited as a headline speaker to UAF’s 2006 national conference. Bad enough that the MCB has reactivated its roots response to BNP activity in their town. Together “group ran a very successful, grass-roots response to BNP campaign.”

Stop the BNP has a much healthier approach to building local groups and relating to local issues than UAF. For example, the “Keighley Together” group ran a very successful, grassroots response to BNP activity in their town.

For the campaign materials produced by Searchlight leave a great deal to be desired. Where UAF has a rabid homophobe, Stop the BNP has Alan Sugar who appeared in material produced for the 2007 local elections. Alan Sugar has nothing to say about poorly funded public services and attacks on the working class. “Hope Not Hate” is the main political message of Stop the BNP materials — rather than relating to real issues and offering working class solutions, there is a preference for accentuating the positive. It is an inadequate response to the opportunism of the BNP in its current phase.

A rational response to the current phase of BNP activity must combine the sort of work carried out by Stop the BNP — the creation of grass-roots groups that campaign on local issues — together with a serious work in the trade unions.

WORKING CLASS ANTI-FASCISM IN THE 1940S AND 1970S

The history of working class anti-fascism in Britain is often hidden behind stories of mass street protests and rock concerts. But the organised working class has played a central role in disabling fascist political initiatives in the past. In the two periods where British fascist organisations gained some prominence — in the mid-to-late 1940s and 1970s — trade unions worked, organised and mobilised their memberships against them.

The immediate post-war period saw the emergence of small fascist propaganda groups. In spite of Hitler’s defeat and a growing public appreciation of the horrors of Nazi Germany, these groups held street meetings, mass leaflet drops and advocated their politics at every opportunity. The release of Oswald Mosley from wartime internment in 1943 encouraged the remnants of his British Union of Fascists on the offensive.

An indication of the level of trade union involvement comes from a collection of 302 letters sent to the Home Office between January 1945 and December 1948. According to Dave Renton (a semi-official historian of anti-fascist campaigning), of the 302 letters asking the Labour government to act against the Mosleyites, one third came from trade union branches. “If we were to add the letters from groups of workers and socialist organisations, from tenants’ associations and from individuals rooted in working-class campaigns, the proletarian aspect would represent a clear majority” (Renton).

The signing of a letter is hardly an indication of militant anti-fascism — especially when the letters in question called upon the Home Secretary to impose state bans on fascist groups — but post-war anti-fascist was not a letter writing campaign. Fascism became a central concern of trades council and shop stewards groups. They politically educated members on the dangers of fascism, encouraged them to keep watch for activity, and in Birmingham formed an “anti-fascist league”. The Anti-Nazi League (ANL) of the 1970s claimed the support of “30 branches of the AUEW engineers union, 25 trades councils, 13 shop stewards committees, 11 NUM lodges, and similar numbers of branches from the TGWU, CPSA, TASS, NUJ, NUT and NUTUPE (Renton). Some unions set up their own campaign groups, for instance the NUM held a “Miners Against the Nazis” conference in 1979. But even these two examples show the latent potential of trade unions to mobilise anti-fascist sentiment — to engage in working-class politics. In both cases the relationship between different wings of the Labour Party and the far-left (the CPGB in the 1940s and SWP in the 1970s) produced some very uneven outcomes. On the one hand the Labour right wing took a naturally conservative approach to their campaign. Inside the unions they attempted to stem the influence of Communists and Trotskyists by restricting access to young members’ conferences, for example. The political methods of postwar Stalinism and Socialist Workers Party alienated a good many activists.

The current tactics of the BNP make a labour movement based campaign all the more important. It is not just a case of mobilising large numbers of people to protest against fascists but of providing political and organisational structures to address working class concerns.

We need to encourage genuine non-racist action for working-class interests on housing, employment and welfare rights.

THE ANTI-FASCIST CAMPAIGN WE NEED

The BNP characterises the current period as the start of a “quiet revolution”. They claim to speak for a “silent majority” of people abandoned by the major political parties and excluded from the gains of wider society. As “Proud Nationalists” they defend the “indigenous” people of this country against the threat posed by “ethnics” and “reds.”

Through hard work and a tactical change of direction the BNP has built serious political organisations that work hard to relate to local, working-class concerns. In areas where the Labour Party has all but collapsed and where trade unions have few organic links in communities, BNP branches can be the only political organisations relating to people’s concerns. In many areas the situation is desperate.

We who oppose fascism do so primarily because we value freedom: freedom of speech, the freedom to organise and the freedom to protest. The BNP’s freedom to operate is freedom to organise intimidation, as well as to spread violence and race hate. We defend the free speech of those who fight for positive non-racist changes to society as well as the freedom of traditionally victimised sections of our communities against the threat of fascist organisations such as the BNP. The BNP attempts to penetrate social movements and trade unions, and to take elected positions as councillors. They do this in order to foment division and racism as well as to identify their opponents and look for routes of intimidating them. We therefore advocate:

• That the BNP should not be given any recognition or a place in genuine democratic debate.

• That all community organisations — but particularly trade unions and councils — do their utmost to isolate and remove them from their midst; thus preventing them from using any democratic façade behind which to organise.

• That as far as possible BNP activities should be blocked by mass pickets and mobilisations of local communities backed by the radical and trade union movement.

The BNP pretend to be a party of working class protest at times even to the left wing critics of the Labour government. What is worse is that many parties for them believe this to be true. We cannot allow the BNP to continue to peddle this monstrous lie. It is an essential aspect of effective anti-fascist campaigning therefore that we:

• Encourage genuine non-racist action for working class interests on housing, employment and welfare rights as well as for combating non-racist demagogic working class organisations, such as trade unions, to organise around genuine issues.

We need a united anti-fascist campaign in which a diversity of views are welcome but we need to build a campaign that will not only challenge the work of our constituent organisations and campaigns in taking up such issues. Such a campaign — mobilising the labour movement with a consistent working class political will — not only challenge the threats and lies of the fascists but go some way to re-educating our class with socialist ideas.
LAST week my seventy year old mother, who walks with the aid of a stick, was deemed a security threat by a bus driver. The driver had already failed to stop for her once, yet was very quick to call the police when she tried to board the bus on her second attempt, using her stick to keep the back door open.

Yes, it was naughty, and she shouldn’t have done it, but waiting for half an hour for a bus when you’re recovering from a knee replacement operation is not exactly a pleasurable experience. Watching it drive past you twice is painful.

This isn’t an everyday sorry tale of an inconconsiderate driver and a disabled passenger. My mum wears a headscarf; and in the current political climate she has become a target for a whole range of prejudice and racist stereotyping.

“You could be a terrorist” harks the bus driver.

“Do I look like a terrorist!” my mother asks.

Sniggers from driver and three racist old ladies who have been most outraged at my mum’s Pettain behaviour.

Their sniggers meaning that “you actually do; you look like one of them”.

“I’m tired of watching you lot break the law”, snipes one of the old ladies. “You’re racist, you mother retorts, “I just wanted to get on the bus”.

“Well a racist” shouts the bus driver.

“Then we shall see what the police have to say about that!”

And so the police were called. They asked my mum for ID, and took her address and date of birth.

“The bus driver said I was a terrorist. She’s being racist!” My mum complains to the police officer.

“No she’s not!” the policeman snaps, “I get tired of watching you lot break the law”.

“My mum is confused, upset and angry for being treated like a criminal. “Well I’ll close the case and put it down as a misunderstanding” says the PC.

A misunderstanding? A woman who has spent two days crying in front of her T.V, watching terrorist bombers rip apart her native Pakistan is then herself accused of being a terrorist! A misunderstanding? A woman who has used London’s buses for forty years and who today couldn’t board a bus without being subject to suspicious glances and accusations of being a suicide bomber!

A misunderstanding? You could call it that. Or you could say it was a sign of the racist and bigoted times we are living in.

Faryal Velmi
Dumb and down the legend

BY ANNA SADDIQ

A SMUG doctor, played by Emma Thompson, gives a TV interview about how she has adapted viral bacteria to, in effect, cure cancer. Then, behind the words “Three years later”, we see the sunlit cityscape of New York — but a New York totally abandoned, no people, no traffic, its buildings falling into disrepair and vegetation spouting up from the concrete.

This is the incredibly effective opening of I Am Legend, the new sci-fi/horror film starring Will Smith which is the third adaptation of the 1954 novel of the same name, the other two being The Last Man on Earth (1964a) and The Omega Man (1971). In this version, which moves the action from mid-70s California to NY 2012, we learn from flashbacks that the cancer cure virus mutated, killing 90% of the human population; most of those who survived became infected with a disease that made them something like vampires: feeding on the blood of the uninfected, very difficult to kill but unable to live in sunlight.

The result was the collapse of civilisation; by the time the film opens, the protagonist, Robert Neville, believes that he is the only healthy human left alive, though he sends out increasingly desperate broadcasts in the hope that someone will find him. (If a lot of this sounds cliched, the novel was extremely influential in terms of the zombie genre, the idea of a world-wide apocalypse due to disease and explorations of vampirism.)

The film’s first hour hits hard because, against the lush computer-generated background of the decaying city, it focuses on the monotony and horror of Neville’s daily life. Every day is a struggle: he must get up at sunrise to maximise the time available to him, check and fix the defences of his house, conduct experiments in search of a cure, hunt for the dog who is his only companion, hunt and scavange for food and equipment, make sure he is home well before sunset, stay fit — and, most difficult of all, stay sane: the logistical holes in the plot — okay, so he generates his own electricity, but how come the water’s still running? — don’t really matter. It is the question of how, and whether, a human being can maintain themselves in such a grim and prolonged struggle that is interesting.

Unfortunately, about an hour in, the film begins to succumb to a number of Hollywood viruses: action movie shoot ‘em up battles, mawkish sentimentalism, religion (I can’t really expand on this without giving too much away). These problems are, moreover, implied in the changes that have been made from the book.

I’ve only just started reading I Am Legend, so I’m not sure, but it seems that there the “legend” referred to is how the infected think of Neville; here, predictably, it is about his legacy to human civilisation, his desire to save the world (while the infected are changed from rational but amoral beings to snarling CGI beasts).

This is not by any means a stupid film, and I’d highly recommend it, but it has been subject to the dumbing-down treatment. Incidentally, part of what keeps Robert Neville going is the philosophy he sums up in a quote from Bob Marley: “The people that are trying to make the world worse never take a day off, so why should I?”

Andrew Glyn, economist of the left
June 30 1942 – December 22 2007

BY BOB SUTCLIFFE

O N December 22 2007, Andrew Glyn, left wing economist and prolific author of books and articles about capitalism, died of a brain tumour.

When Andrew began teaching economics at Oxford University in 1969, the capital-ist world was experiencing major politi-cal turmoil. Memories of the US civil rights movement were fresh, France’s political explosion of the previous May still echoed around Europe and workers in many countries were engaged in the most active struggles for decades.

In this atmosphere large numbers of workers, students and teachers were radi-calised and Andrew, already something of a rebel during his Etonian education, was to become one of the most influential of this new generation of socialist scholars and teachers. From his base in Corpus Christi College, he was to spend most of the next 38 years teaching economics and writing critically about the recent history and present state of capitalism. As a teacher he acquired a legendary reputation due to his infectious enthusiasm, bordering at times on the euphoric, and to the fact that, as one student has put it, “he challenges your mind but not your dignity”.

One thread unites most of his books and articles: his interest in the way income and welfare are distributed under capitalism, both among individuals and between labour and capital. In other words the economic manifestations of class, a dimen-sion which is all too often absent from conventional economics. In the 1960s he emphasised the sharp rise in the share of income going to labour (the “profits squeeze”) and warned that the capitalist class would be impelled to use its political power to reverse this trend. To defend its gains, the working class would have to turn to a more aggressive form of politics.

When the capitalist counter-attack came, in the forms of the Thatcher and Reagan governments, the attack on unions and the spread of neoliberal doctrine, Andrew, as well as criticising it, seized the opportunity to play a significant practical part in the resistance. During the historic miners’ strike of 1984–5 he went far beyond expressing solidarity and standing on picket lines; he used his economic skills to produce a series of newspaper articles and pamphlets which destroyed the Coal Board’s economic arguments for pit closures.

Dave Frickert, former head of research of the National Union of Mineworkers, on learning of Andrew’s death, recalled that he was “one of the economists who went to the aid of the mining communities against the pit closures of the 1980s and 90s. Their [these economists’] solidarity was vital. With their help, we won cases against closure, but sadly the National Coal Board — later British Coal — went ahead anyway. Andrew, the first academic economist to join the fray, in 1984, [worked with us] to produce The Economic Case Against Pit Closures” (a pamphlet published by the NUM). John Moyle, the last President of the Kent NUM has said of Andrew: “He will be missed and remembered for his intellectual inspiration and support of the working class. In the great year long battle of 1984/85 his work and philosophy were of great assistance to our rank and file miners and our women’s support group.”

After the end of the strike, labour defeats multiplied and trade union membership and strength declined. By the turn of the century Andrew was writing not about the “profits squeeze”, which he had identified in the early 1970s, but about what might be called a “wages squeeze”. “The extraor-dinary turnaround in the relative fortunes of labour and capital over the past 30 or so years” is the major theme of his last book, Capitalism Unleashed: finance, globalisation and welfare, the second edition of which was published only works before his death. This book well exemplifies Andrew’s particular style as an economist — a critical perspective on capitalism, a masterly understanding and presentation of complex economic data, an exceptional ability to combine the techniques of modern economics with the concerns of the classical economists, especially Marx, and a readable, not overly technical, style of writing.

He never lost sight of the idea that the ultimate purpose of writing was political. In Capitalism Unleashed, he analyses the current instabilities in the world economy, as he says, not for their own sake but as part of the “difficult task of devising poli-cies to advance the cause of egalitarianism which has taken such a bettering over recent decades”. Another prominent social-ist scholar wrote in a letter to me after Andrew’s death: “Andrew was pretty close to my ‘ideal’ of a committed intellectual”.

Among Andrew’s many passions beyond political economy were reading novels, good movies and, most of all, jazz. He would constantly listen to recordings from his incomparable collection. A few days after the diagnosis of his illness, he confided in me that if he had not been an economist he would have liked to be a jazz pianist.

Whatever the loss to jazz, I am happy that this did not happen. If it had, the left would have lost one of its most original and important intellectuals and I would probably never have met the most joyous, affectionate and dependable friend that anyone could wish for.

Bob Sutcliffe was co-author with Andrew Glyn of the book, Capital-ism, workers, and the profit squeeze (1972).

This obituary was written for Red Pepper magazine — www.redpepper.org.uk — and will appear there in the February/March issue.
A report on discussions between Education NUS and the Solidarity with Iranian Students activists (published in a spirit of openness and accountability)

Representatives of the SWP/Student Respect met members of Education NUS for a day on 9 December to discuss the idea, proposed by ENS and others, of a united left slate for the six full-time officer elections at NUS conference 2008. We wholeheartedly welcome the decision of the SWP to respect the uncertainty in discussions. However, the meeting highlighted a number of barriers to progress.

Among these are the SWP’s insistence that Respect must have at least half the places on any such slate; their advocacy of including the small and conservative Labour Left group while excluding others including Socialist Students, and — most problematically — their bizarre and sectarian insistence that unity is impossible unless the slogans “No to war, no to racism, no to the occupation of Iraq for Palestine” are included in the joint programme for the slate.

At a time when the NUS leadership are attempting to undermine the very existence of NUS as a national union and a united left is needed to oppose them more than ever, this sort of sectarianism is particularly damaging.

The SWP comrades bent themselves into all sorts of contortions in order to argue that unity is impossible unless the slogans insisted on by the SWP should be made a precondition for participation by any group while excluding others including Respect who have at least the same goals.

In the end, however, our common understanding of the jobs of their members, but what is important is how they do that. Rank and file members should offer an alternative that is genuinely in the interests of the working class and does not rely on their employers’ initiatives.

In the start of December, the Iranian government arrested over 40 left-wing Iranian student activists. Some have been released but many are still in prison. (A full update will appear in the next issue of Solidarity.) Meanwhile, there have been a number of protests held in London, and British students and others are being told to support the SWP position.

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The last days of the old order in Northern Ireland

Barricades go up at the junction of William Street and Roisive Street, 12 August

Part seven of a series on the Northern Ireland crisis of 1969 by Sean Matgamna — the start of nearly 40 years of “The Troubles” — and the responses of the left. For earlier articles see www.workersliberty.org/node/9693.

H igh above the Bogside, the Catholic ghetto that proclaimed itself in large letters painted on the gable end of a house, to be “Free Derry”, Frank Roche and I stood, one night in September 1969, on the perfectly preserved visitor’s gallery on the floor of the House of Commons, to give the British MPs a taste of what their army was dishing out in the British Labour government, which in January and April 1969: Catholic barri- cades had gone up against the Six Counties state. An editorial by John Palmer in Socialist Worker (on August 21, 1969), when Catholic Derry and parts of Belfast were barricaded off depicted what they were grooping towards.

“In Derry in particular the Bogside has a real chance of holding out. The Derry people, who are overwhelmingly anti-Unionist, were never consulted about the Border. They were forcibly co-opted into the Northern State… One day the people of Derry will take their city from the Chichester-Clarks and the sham landlords.”

They Catholics of Derry were grooping towards breaking away from the Six Counties. The 6/26 County partition of Ireland was a curse on the Protestants within it as well as to the Catholics.

Many elements entered into the social and political discrimination of which the Catholics were the victims, very importantly a general scarcity of jobs and of material resources; ages of Catholic/ Protestant animosity; and the inbred belief among the Protestants that the Catholic Irish were an inferior people.

The facts that kept it alive, that united Protestant-Unionists to defend and sustain it, were not only political differences and the competition for scarce resources, but also, a lot of fear. The Protestant-Unionists were a minority on the island. It had taken an armed near-revolt, and the credible threat of a real revolt, to keep them from being delivered by the attempt to subjugate them into a united Ireland. The way the 26 Counties had developed into the “Rome Rule” which they said had Home Rule would inevitably be suggested to them that their fears and their efforts to avoid being a Protestant-British minority in a Catholic-ruled Ireland had not been needless. They feared “betrayal” by London, and were on the look-out for it. They saw the pressure for return from London as the thin end of the wedge whose thick end would be an attempt to subjugate the Six Counties into a united Ireland. They saw the Catholic mobilisations for civil rights as Republicanism writ small, but not the same.

And they were not wrong in all of this, though their own backlash speeded up and intensified what they feared. They understood how things stood in their Six Counties; “Protestant state”. The basic “civil right” the
Catholicism lacked national self-determination. And the Catholics were in the majority in large swathes of the state’s territory, for a large part of the time. Hence a minority inescapably interfaced with a majority

The logic of the demand for civil rights formulated by the civil rights movement amounted to nothing more than political mobilisation as a first stage in the overthrow of the Protestant state. There were people at the heart of the social-political development, either — was a majority population in the island. That could no longer be denied.

The reason why the civil rights movement does not ask for troops — which have in the past been used for riot control in Northern Ireland — is that British Prime Minister Harold Wilson has said publicly that if Stormont needs troops to maintain the law and order then the whole constitutional relationship between Britain and Northern Ireland will be open to question. They will be a last resort.

Monday 4 August: Rival Catholic and Protestant mobs clash. Both sides petrol-bomb the RUC. On the same day, Bernadette Devlin appeals to British Home Secretary James Callaghan to put the RUC under the control of British police officers. She wants the recall of the Westminster Parliament to discuss the situation in Northern Ireland.

Labour Home Secretary James Callaghan says “law and order” as the Belfast government’s responsibility.

The RUC says it blames “Tonty-anar-chists” for the trouble in the Catholic Falls area.

In response to the clashes between the Protestants and the police, Bernadette Devlin (who had been elected in April as Westminster MP for the CDS), speaking in Enniskillen, appeals to the Protestant workers: “If you’ve ever been fighting the police for the civil rights movement, Protestant workers should unite with their Catholic brothers and sisters to form a new government.” She says, The Government has shown its readiness to use force against — armed wing of the Unionist party’ — against Protestants as well as Catholics.

Thursday 7 August: The Belfast Telegraph states the statement by the Protestant Shankhill Defence Association that the “police are no longer the friends of Ulster Loyalists and never can expect our help again.” The naivety here is mind-boggling! The Shankhill Defence Association is led by Ian Paisley and Ian Paisley’s brother John McCrea.

Tuesday 5 August: Paisleyites storm the Council Chamber in Lisburn. The newspapers print pictures of riot gear-clad police and streets littered with broken paving stones, and showing blackened patches from petrol bombs.

Wednesday 6 August: The Belfast Newsletter reports the results of a poll it had taken: 90% want a ban on all parades. Incitement” of Catholics living in Northern Ireland, Protestants and vice versa is already rampant in the streets of Catholic Ardoyne. Tenants’ Association says it knows of 60 Catholic families forces out.

Sunday 10 August: a meeting is held in Carlisle Park, Belfast. John Hume and other Social Democrats in the RUC, and arming of the police again.

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The RUC says it blames “Tonty-anar-chists” for the trouble in the Catholic Falls area.

In response to the clashes between the Protestants and the police, Bernadette Devlin (who had been elected in April as Westminster MP for the CDS), speaking in Enniskillen, appeals to the Protestant workers: “If you’ve ever been fighting the police for the civil rights movement, Protestant workers should unite with their Catholic brothers and sisters to form a new government.” She says, The Government has shown its readiness to use force against — armed wing of the Unionist party’ — against Protestants as well as Catholics.
Where Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer had on the 10th called for 26 Counties troops to intervene, Bernadette Devlin and Eamonn McCann issue a statement on 12 August appealing to London: “The visit which has taken place in Derry today, and resulting violence in other areas of Northern Ireland, show that Northern Ireland is anguished under the present constitution. Westminster must now act. The barricades in the Bogside in Derry must not be taken down until the Westminster government states its clear commitment to the suspension of the constitution of Northern Ireland and calls immediately a constitutional conference representative of Westminster, the Unionist government, the Government of the Republic of Ireland, and all tendencies within the civil rights movement.

The situation in Derry at the moment is such that the people of Bogside are fighting off the combined forces of the police and the Paisleyites, who are operating as a single unit. The police have already entered Bogside with the support of the Paisleyites in defiance of orders from senior officers. Therefore the RUC is out of control and can no longer be considered as the force of law and order. The country is now in a state of chaos. It is the responsibility of Harold Wilson and his government, who should have acted almost a year ago and who have repeatedly been warned by ourselves and others of the possible consequences of their deliberate and total inaction. It may well be of personal concern to Mr. MacLennan that in his own position in the Labour Party, he cannot take the political risk of intervening in Northern Ireland. We consider the lives of Irish people more important than the careers of Harold Wilson.” (Irish Press, 13.08.69).

Tues 13 August

Bogside Jack Lynch appears on TV, making an emotional declarationcoupled as it is by no commensurate action, it is impossible to say the least. So is the not dissimilar statement by Cathal Goulding, chief of staff of a very shadowy IRA. He announces IRA mobilization, and claims that the IRA is extensively active in Northern Ireland. It isn’t. It is an extra dollop of petrol on the fire.

The Dublin Fianna Fail nationalist paper, the Irish Press, comments: “Virtual civil war hit Derry in the wake of the Taoiseach’s speech when 500 cheering men, women and children, hurling petrol bombs and stones, waved the tricolour and shouting ‘Up The Republic’, charged RUC and B-Specials and charged over the Bogside. But their place was taken by a strong group of Paisleysites, who hurled petrol bombs and stones at the jubilant Bogside’s.”

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association calls on every “able-bodied Irishman to make himself available to go to the North of Ireland for active service”. And Catholics across Northern Ireland are starting to act to take the pressure off Derry. At least eight police stations are attacked, in Belfast, Dungannon, Armagh, Coalisland, Dungiven, Dungannon, Enniskillen, and Newry.

A steady stream of women and children flee over the border to Donegal. What will be a big movement of refugees has started. In Armagh, the police station is under siege for over 30 minutes. In Coalisland, a crowd forces its way into the police station, breaks windows, and puts petrol bombs through them.

In Armagh, 400 youths march in protest at what is happening in Derry. Paddy O’Hanlon, Nationalist MP for South Armagh, says that they want “to take some of the pressure off Derry”. In Coalisland, 500 defy the ban on marches and meet in the street. A couple of barricades are put up in Dungannon.

In Lurgan, Catholic and Protestant crowds face each other. Catholics put up barricades. Bottles and stones are thrown by both sides, and a few petrol bombs from the Catholic side. Earlier, a crowd had gone to the RUC station to protest at police actions in Derry. In Enniskillen, stones and bottles are thrown at the RUC, who have interfered with an [illegible] meeting on the events in Derry.

B-Specials are being mobilized to man border posts and to guard the Waterside and Fountain Street Protestant areas in Derry. The Belfast Newsletter claims that people from the South have taken over the town of Newry.

In Belfast, 200 people attack Hastings St RUC barracks. One group sets up a barrier across the Falls Road, at the Divis St junction, and set it alight with bombs. Police armed cars smash two barricades.

100 RUC are on the Shankhill Road, guarding the connecting streets from the Shankhill to the Falls.

A big crowd moves down the Falls Road, in Belfast, and sets up barricades at the top and at the bottom of the road.

On TV, Northern Ireland prime minister Chichester Clark tries to calm things by rein-erating his commitment to a civil rights referendum programme, but declares that he will not shrink to summon “other than police aid.” He is threatening the Catholics with the British Army.

“Hooligan irresponsibles in our midst, whether they are Protestant or Roman Catholic, are a menace to our prospects as a community.” How can the riots not be attributed to intransigence on the Government’s part?

The police may stand upon these walls — that houses should be allocated by need, that public jobs and appointments should be filled on merit alone. That there should be equal protection for the law-abiding, and equal retribution for the law-breakers. No other course is either possible or moral.”

Aren’t the riots widespread peacefully to their homes and observe the law, no attempt will be made to exploit the situation. I give this assurance in the name of the Government and in the earnest hope that it may contribute to peace.”

If the rioters withdraw peacefully to their homes and observe the law, no attempt will be made to exploit the situation. I give this assurance in the name of the Government and in the earnest hope that it may contribute to peace.”

The London NICRA curry on every “able-bodied Irishman to make himself available to go to the North of Ireland for active service”. Similar calls have gone out in the South.

This same day (14 August), at about 5.30pm, four hundred British soldiers take to the streets to “replace the RUC”. The Belfast government has decided to call on the main British state power. Contrary to Chichester Clark’s threat on TV, the troops do not attempt to enter the Bogside or to remove the barricades. The orders are to prevent rioters breaking out in the centre of the city. About 200 armed B-Specials join on the cordon around the Bogside. They are withdrawn on the night of 14 August and sent to protect the British Army.

Bernadette Devlin says that “we are ready to negotiate with the British Army.”

RUC and Unionists go up Rossville Street 12 August

Rossville Street, 13 August
A THURSDAY 14 AUGUST, BELFAST

5 Derry sabres, fight to the finish. B-Specials, the hated British police, cannot deploy. Protestants force the issue.

Barricades go up in the Falls. The whole panoply of RUC repression is thrown at the Catholics, including one heavy machine gun able to penetrate through brick. A child is shot dead in his bedroom through the walls.

A few IRA men have guns and use them.

The Orange Belfast Newsletter reports: “Belfast swept by battled and flames. Machine-guns used in Belfast today.”

Pubs are burned in Crumlin Road — one Catholic and one Protestant. Some factories are fired, reportedly by Catholics. Four Catholics are shot dead by police fire: one Protestant is killed by a shot in Divis Street. Two people, one a Protestant and one a Catholic, die by shots by civilians. And the fighting is still spreading.

Newry: attempts to put up barricades, fighting in the streets.

Portadown: Catholic and Protestant crowds gather.

Dungiven — Orange Hall burned, and the courthouse, and the premises of the Ulster Bank and the post office.

600 soldiers of the 26th Canadian Army (three companies) have been now moved close to the border with the West.

On the evening of 15 August the British army does what has been done in Derry — it goes on the streets of Belfast to relieve the RUC and separate the Catholics.

On the evening of 15th, the Army enters the Falls. Catholic houses are burnt that night by Protestants at Bombay Street (Falls Road area) and Cricket Road (Stirchley Road). The whole Catholic streets have been burned down in Belfast on the 16th the army enters the Crumlin Road area. In Belfast as in Derry the army makes no attempt to force its way into the barricaded Catholic areas.

According to the Scarcman tribunal, 1,820 families flee their homes in July-August 1969. Over 80% of the families are Catholic. Ten people are killed, 900 injured. 16 factories and 170 houses are burned down. A further 417 houses damaged by fire.

Over the longer period from August 1969 to February 1973, according to another estimate, between 8,000 and 15,000 families will move as a result of a sectarian insurrection. These are the largest forced population movements in Western Europe since World War Two.

James Callaghan makes a statement to, so to speak, accompany the troops. There will be no constitutional change in Northern Ireland without the consent of the people of the province.

There are hopeful signs too. On Wednesday 15 August at a 4,000-strong mass meeting, Belfast shipyard workers declare their peace, and sign a token manifesto at 5 p.m. in support of their “concern”. They pledge to keep sectarian conflicts out of the shipyards. Mayor of Commerce Roy Bradford addressed the meeting.

The left in Ireland, such as it was, used its political capital — as a result of the previous 50 years and previous centuries. It was right and necessary to be on that side of the Six Counties’ oppressed of the British state. It was a hope — otherwise the whole war against that British state. It was a hope.

There is a forty-load of men, with guns, including sub machine guns. Hand grenades are thrown through the window of the RUC station at Clonard, and a grenade thrown at a police station.

The Workers in the South were powerfully militant on the job, but no political condition to reshape society. The working class had its own independent initiative: to make proposals as to how the divided people of Ireland, or of Northern Ireland, could democratically solve its affairs. There was no possibility of a working-class political force to fill the gap.

The left shared middle-class Catholic-nationalist ideas, changed only by re-expressing them in the left’s own political language. For instance, the “Trotskyist” notion that Ireland was experiencing, or could be made to experience, a “permanent revolution” in which the Catholic-nationalist movement would grow over into socialism and working-class power. From 1970 Northern Ireland would settle into a long low-level civil conflict, half-smothered by the British state, and entwined with a Catholic-nationalist movement. The IRA war against that British state. It was a hopeless and unwinnable war. The Provisional IRA had no power base in the British minority but to subjugate it. Since they could not defeat the British civil war could not but result in continued partition, perhaps with a smaller “Protestant state”. The Provisional IRA were reduced to trying to force Britain “to persuade” the Protestant community into a united Ireland.

What have happened and seem to have — after the long trawl, into the present system of intricately structured bureaucrati- cally organised sectarian power-sharing — a system that, though not the Provisional, war cannot but work to perpetuate the communalism it enshines in its workings, and therefore cannot but perpetuate the division in the Irish working class.

What happens on the level of big events such as those in Northern Ireland happens because, everything being as it is, it has to. In retrospect what we are observing seems much the same. And despite the changed jargon of fact that things in retrospect in which we see it are reversible.

Could things, in the flux of 1969, have gone differently? What makes things plausible, worse or better? That is the issue that lay at the heart of the debates on the left. So at the September 1969 Conference of the International Socialists (forerunner of today’s SWP), and occupied the discussions for many months. We will explore that in the next article in this series.
From back page

It is most likely that a jihadist group is responsible for Bhutto's murder — killed as a stooge of imperialism — although some commentators (and not just Bhutto's own supporters) have speculated about it being a collaboration with elements in the military. The protests reflect a fierce, generalised opposition to Musharraf's government over many issues: rising unemployment and inflation, the alliance with the US, and, not least, the killing of hundreds of civilians caught in the cross fire of the military operation in the so-called tribal areas in the north of the country.

Fauzoo Faqir General Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan describes the mood: “It is a very volatile, unstable, unpredictable, explosive, dangerous, impulsive, fickle and capricious political situation.”

Parliamentary elections due on 8 January have now been postponed to 16 February.

The assassination has left the western powers worrying about how, and whether, stability is now possible in Pakistan. For the sake of stability, to keep Musharraf in power, to compensate for the disappearance of Bhutto and therefore provide not just for her party, the PML-Q, and to give a democratic facade to the military regime, the US brokered a power-sharing deal between the military dictator and Bhutto.

That deal was scuppered when Musharraf declared martial law, arrested the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and started locking up unfairly lawyers who wanted an end to such things as the torturing of prisoners and trade unionists who were fighting privatisation and rising unemployment.

Benazir Bhutto thought twice about ending her chance to get back into power by the back door but in the end she knew, if she wasn’t going to lose more middle class supporters, she had to take a stand against the crackdown.

Apparently the US had given the green light to martial law; as far as they were concerned it was all going to be okay as long as Musharraf stood down as army chief (which he did); temporary martial law could still be part of a process to achieve “stability”. But what kind of stability were the US looking for? That remains unclear.

Some US politicians had raised the alarm about jihadist groups getting power in Pakistan and having access to the nuclear button. But the Pakistan army is still, by a long way, the strongest physical force in the country, the jihadist groups do not yet have a country-wide mass support. Furthermore no section of the military is going to promote the jihadists more than they do already. With its myriad ties to industry, land and public utilities the military needs to protect its institutional predominance and keep the jihadists and all other political forces in their proper place — subordinate.

Musharraf’s regime continues to patronise jihadist and other Islamist groups (in Kashmir, Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province) but only in order that they will back up their regime. The UN in mid-December was forced to fire the military operation in the so-called tribal areas by the US-backed ‘military alliance’, the so-called MMA that oversaw it. Later he made a hypocritical lip service to Islamic piety when the situation demanded it.

As foreign minister in the dictatorship of Muhammad Ayub Khan, Bhutto took Pakistan away from reliance on the US and that, in the political context of the time, gave her her “left” credentials. But Bhutto did that only to form different client relationships — with China for instance. In 1970 Bhutto helped provoke a political crisis which led to the secession of Bangladesh (previously “East Pakistan”). He backed the army’s murderous campaign against the secessionists being careful to distance himself from the political regime which oversaw that campaign. He made a hypocritical peace with Bangladesh.

As prime minister Bhutto nationalised many major industries. He did not do it to serve the interests of the workers, but to develop and “modernise” Pakistan.

After their father’s death, Benazir Bhutto and her two brothers were, in the beginning at least, committed to reform in Pakistan, i.e. a “modernising” state capitalism. Benazir spent time in jail after her father’s death. For this she has been called, not unreasonably, brave. But when she herself became prime minister in 1988, she did not do it by way of reform; she did provide employment to some of her supporters. She made a name of being stymied by the military, but she did not mount a campaign against them. She was removed as prime minister some months later.

The popularity of her party endured and she was reelected in 1993.

Back in power, she was able to do a little more... It is alleged that she and her husband accumulated $1.5 billion during her time in office. She distance herself from her husband’s “business dealings”, but court cases continue. She also backed the Taliban in Afghanistan at the time, the US also thought the Taliban would bring that all-important stability.

When her brother Murtaza began to kick up a fuss inside the PPP he was murdered by armed police. It is said that the decision to carry out the execution had been taken at a very high — political — level; stories about Aitzaz’s involvement continue to circulate.

In November 1996 Bhutto was again ousted, this time by her own PPP President.

Unfortunately some leading trade unionists have attachments to the PPP and have publicly stated their belief in the party’s propensity to reverse job cuts due to privatisation.

More unfortunately still, the Labour Party of Pakistan (LPP) has now joined the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM), a grouping of some 20-plus parties, of all which oppose the elections. In the past the LPP had firmly rejected this catch-all political bloc (it has and remains open to all Left alliances). In December the APDM’s political complexion changed somewhat. Nawaz Sharif’s party and some of the religious fundamentalists left that party. But the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and some of the religious fundamentalist groupings are nationalist, Stalinist etc.

The decision to work alongside JI, it is surprising given the LPP’s strong record on campaigning for women’s rights and stand for secularism. The LPP has shown that they are in their lot with the APDM because it is “anti-dictatorship” and being anti-dictatorship seems imperative in the political context of the time.

The Trotskyists must still continue to build solidarity with socialists like the LPP and others small groups) and trade unionists, in the hope that greater and international links will be of political help in the difficulties they face.

**INTERNATIONAL 19**

MUSHARRAF faces a dilemma. If he signs the vote on 18 February, as he intended to on 8 January, there will be a tense and violent backlash. But if he does not rig the vote he will lose. As long as he stays in power the protests will continue, workers will face more cuts and attacks as a consequence of economic fall out, Islamist violence on the streets will increase.

Yet, despite clear evidence that their strategy is stupid, the US remains committed to

What did Bhutto actually stand for? He was an inconsistent nationalist, and an economic anarchist. A self-styled secularist, he also paid lip service to Islamic piety when the situation demanded it.

As foreign minister in the dictatorship of Muhammad Ayub Khan, Bhutto took Pakistan away from reliance on the US and that, in the political context of the time, gave her her “left” credentials. But Bhutto did that only to form different client relationships — with China for instance. In 1970 Bhutto helped provoke a political crisis which led to the secession of Bangladesh (previously “East Pakistan”). He backed the army’s murderous campaign against the secessionists being careful to distance himself from the political regime which oversaw that campaign. He made a hypocritical peace with Bangladesh.

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The Trotskyists must still continue to build solidarity with socialists like the LPP and others small groups) and trade unionists, in the hope that greater and international links will be of political help in the difficulties they face.
Why Pakistan is exploding

BY CATHY Nugent

“The new Pakistani general [Musharraf], he’s just been elected — not elected, this guy took over office. It appears this guy is going to bring stability to the country, and I think that’s good news for the subcontinent.” (George W Bush, 1999)

On 27 December Benazir Bhutto, leader of the Pakistan People’s Party was assassinated, killed by a gunman who then blew himself and 21 other people up. The belief that Musharraf was responsible in some way for the assassination has led to countrywide violent protests and riots; over hundred people have been killed. The government claim al-Qaida have taken himself and 21 other people up. The belief that Musharraf was responsible in some way for the assassination has led to

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19 January conference
BNP splits: don’t let them recover!

BY JACK YATES

The British National Party is in the throes of a major crisis, the root of which is the outspoken fascism of leading BNP member Mark Collett. Mark Collett is notorious for appearing in two documentaries: Russell Brand’s “Nazi Boy” and an edition of Dispatches entitled “Young, Nazi and Proud” (see YouTube). Cllr Sadie Graham (head of “Group Development”) and party administrator Kenny Smith have been expelled for “gross misconduct” because they raised concerns over Collett’s behaviour to the membership and the wider public. But BNP leader Nick Griffin has firmly sided with Collett in this dispute. The Graham clique — styling themselves as the “Real BNP” and “party loyalists” — have gained the support of significant sections of the organisation nationally.

It is widely acknowledged that Sadie Graham is one of the most competent, articulate and organised fascists in Europe. Through consistent groundwork, community organising and political opportunism she constructed a network of BNP branches, sympathisers and fund-raisers across the country. As champion of the BNP’s turn towards the “legitimate” big-time political cadre creates this base.

If the BNP intends to stand in the upcoming Greater London Assembly and Mayoral elections and is currently raising funds for the Euro Elections. Richard Bambrook — a councillor in Barking and Dagenham and would-be London Mayor — is firmly in the Griffin camp but faces a split in the London organisation with many sympathising with Graham. But a destabilised and demoralised organisation does not make for an effective electoral machine.

A humiliating defeat in London will further cripple the BNP and together with insufficient funds for a European challenge could force a reassessment of strategy.

The BNP may decide to continue business as usual, tolerate the electoral defeats and wait for calmer weather. Griffin isn’t really interested in finding legitimacy through the electoral system but recognises that his much-hoped-for “nationalist revolution” won’t happen by magic — any type of “revolution” requires a political base. Contesting elections and scrabbling for mainstream acceptance whilst creating an organised political cadre creates this base.

By the BNP may return to the street fascism of the National Front. That would be attractive to many BNP members. But such a turn would be a turn to more confrontational tactics would see a further haemorrhage of support.

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The dispute between Griffin and Graham has exposed the fascist underbelly of the BNP for all to see. We should act decisively to ensure that those who have voted for the BNP in the past or who may be considering voting for or joining the organisation in the future are exposed to the facts.

The BNP has grown in the recent past not merely because of organisational initiative on their part but because of the Labour government’s continued attacks on the working class and the relative weakness of anti-fascism.

Any serious anti-fascist organisation should base itself on the concerns of the working-class, the labour movement and combine a critique of BNP fascism with criticism of this government and capitalism more generally.

Anti-fascists in the Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP campaign have started this work already. They have called a regional conference for 19 January with the aim of creating a network of labour movement based campaigns. If you want any further information on the conference or anti-fascism contact nottsnobhop@yahoo.com or www.workersliberty.org/node/9734

• The kind of anti-fascist movement we need, see centre pages

Continued on page 19