

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

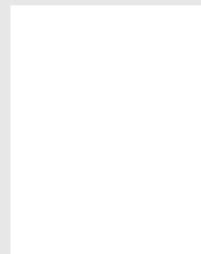
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an injury to one is an injury to all

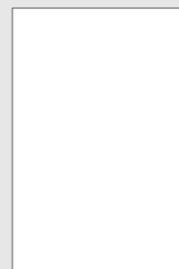
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IRAQI REFUGEES

Hunger strike follows failed deportation

Around 30 Iraqi asylum seekers whom the government tried to deport to Iraq last week are among a group of 50 hunger strikers at Brook House detention centre in West Sussex.

The UK has been deporting "failed" Iraqi asylum seekers back to Iraqi Kurdistan for several years but last week for the first time tried to deport 39 people to Baghdad. In Baghdad, the authorities said they would only let in those who wanted to be let in, and no one should be forced to go back to Iraq against their will. Most on the flight chose to return to the UK.

In a statement, the hunger strikers explain:

"We have been in detention centres for months and years and our cases have not

been handled professionally.

"We are all locked up in detention, which is exactly like a prison, but most of us have never committed any crime whatsoever.

"We are going on hunger strike until they release us.

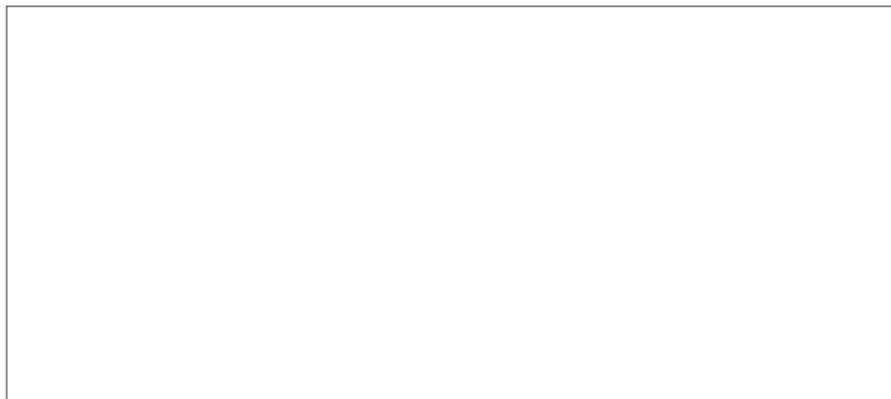
"Most of us are being falsely removed to countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, which are clearly war zones.

"Most of us have families in the UK. What are we supposed to do? Leave them behind or take them with us right into the middle of a war zone to be killed?"

• Contact the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees for more details: d.jamal@ntlworld.com

PAKISTAN

Islamist violence on the rise



Fleeing from South Waziristan

BY SAM RUBIN

On Wednesday 21 October four people were killed in a suicide bomb attack on a university in Islamabad.

This attack was the latest in a series on prominent, government, institutional and military "targets" in Pakistan, by jihadists associated with or in support of the Taliban in Pakistan. It was retaliation for the Pakistani military's incursion, now a ground offensive, in South Waziristan.

The Pakistani government, acting under pressure from the US, want to destroy, demobilise or otherwise disorganise the Taliban in this region, which forms part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan and borders Afghanistan. Like the south of Afghanistan, these border areas of Pakistan are heavily populated by Pashtun people. Some of the Pashtun tribal leaders and people are now part of the Taliban, or are associated with it, or support it. But that is of little consequence to the thousands of "civilians" who are now pouring out of South Waziristan.

The main factor behind this war is the US war in Afghanistan. The US want a more ethnically representative and more stable government (an aim not helped by the massive corruption in Afghanistan's recent election). But before they get to that point they have to weaken the Taliban.

The US have now enlisted Pakistan despite the fact that the Pakistani military has been, and remains in large part, reluctant to go on the offensive against the Taliban. Recently the US government

agreed an increase of \$7.5 billion over five years in non-military aid to Pakistan. That was the bribe.

The problem for the Pakistan People's Party government is that in order to "defeat" the Taliban they will also have to deal with the myriad of jihadist groups, some actively nurtured under General Pervez Musharraf's military government, that hide out and prosper in Pakistan. The recent past has seen many of these groups (who are most active in Pakistan's most populous region, the Punjab), integrate and collaborate with each other and with either the Afghan Taliban "refugees" or the Pakistani Taliban.

Socialists and trade unionists who have to operate in the cities where Islamist violence is increasing will find their job harder. In such a situation anyone can become a victim. On 15 October a leading trade unionist, Master Khudad Khan, was killed in Peshawar. He happened to be passing just as a suicide bomber was carrying out his deadly mission.

Master Khudad was the deputy general secretary of Pakistan Workers' Confederation and a founding member of Bonded Labour Liberation Front. The Pakistan Workers' Confederation is the main trade union body in Pakistan.

The Labour Party of Pakistan, of which he was a member, are now campaigning for his body to be released to his relatives.

The campaigns of comrades in the LPP for workers' rights, against the corrupt capitalist government of the PPP, and against the Islamists, is more urgent than ever.

• www.laborpakistan.org

ECONOMY

No, the crisis isn't over

BY COLIN FOSTER

Is the economic crisis ending? If it is, does that mean that the threatened public service cuts won't come, or will be smaller? Probably not; and no.

Almost a year ago we wrote in *Solidarity*:

"The big nationalisations and government bail-outs of financial firms have moved the sharp end of the crisis somewhat, to point at governments rather than banks."

Governments could, and chose to, bail out big banks (and manufacturing companies, like General Motors), and prevent further big collapses like that of Lehman Brothers in 2008. The question then was whether the crisis would move on to a string of collapses in government finances, with governments unable to meet payments due and unable to borrow fresh funds abroad.

In the event, only small states, small enough for the IMF to bail them out although at the cost of hardship for their people, have come to the brink of financial failure: Iceland, Latvia, Hungary, Ukraine.

Flush with big bail-outs, able to borrow money from central banks at almost zero interest and then lend it on at higher rates, banks are now doing well. According to the *Financial Times*, City bonuses this Christmas will be 50% up on 2008, and no politician is doing more than bleating about it.

Share prices have been rising again. The Dow Jones US Total Stock Market Index and the FTSE 100 index, in Britain, hit bottom in March and have been rising since then.

But many sober bourgeois analysts are still cautious. Wolfgang Munchau put it most worriedly on the *Financial Times* website on 18 October.

"This bubble will burst sooner [than previous ones]... The single reason for this renewed bubble is the extremely low level of nominal interest rates..." [i.e. not some real revival in overall business profits].

After a while — after 2010, Munchau reckons — central banks' drive to push easy credit into the banking system will start to bring inflation. "Central banks might be forced to switch towards a much more aggressive monetary policy [high interest rates, tight credit] relatively quickly... A short inflationary boom could be followed by another recession, another banking crisis, and perhaps deflation".

Martin Wolf, also in the *FT*, puts it similarly: "Trying to make financial systems safer has made them more perilous. Today... neither market discipline nor regulation is effective. There is a danger... that this rescue will lead to still greater risk-taking and an even worse crisis... in the not too distant future".

The underlying imbalances which triggered trouble from early 2007, and full-scale financial panic from September 2008, are largely still there. There are still unsustainable mountains of debt distributed across the world economy.

A year ago, everyone in government circles was insisting that there must be a

comprehensive reshaping and re-regulation of financial markets, and soon. The recovery in the financial markets has quieted that talk. Most plutocrats have negotiated the crisis quite deftly. The *Financial Times* reports (22 September): "While significant numbers of people have lost homes, jobs or businesses, found themselves on lower pay or faced with crippling debts... wealthy people in the UK have managed to hold on to their money during the financial crisis, with two-thirds actually increasing their wealth or keeping it at the same level".

The power of inertia and vested interests seems well set to stymie or limit any reform.

Which means, of course, that everything remains set up for a repeat of the September 2008 chaos in the event of new and unpredicted shocks to the system. And maybe even soon.

The financial-markets revival is much faster than any rise in real profits. According to the latest report from the Office for National Statistics (7 October) the manufacturing profit rate in 2009 quarter 2 stood at 6.7%, down from 13.1% in 2007 quarter 4.

The *Financial Times* again (27 August): "Business investment has dropped more sharply over the course of the recession than in the downturns of the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s.... Spending fell by 10.4 per cent over the second quarter... 7.6 per cent... in the first quarter... Investments ranging from building work to vehicles and computer software purchases fell [year-on-year] by 18.4 per cent, the sharpest year-on-year decline in at least 43 years".

Even if a "real" upturn starts, such an upturn is much slower to "trickle down" than a downturn. In downturns, bosses push down wages and tighten their control on the workforce. The upturn tends to start with bosses being able to produce more, and more profitably, by using their existing capacity more fully and squeezing more out of existing workers.

Although unemployment is still rising in the USA, in Britain it was the same in September as in August, at 7.9%. But the odds are that it will continue high, or even increase, for some time, even if the capitalist recovery is relatively vigorous.

But a relatively quick capitalist recovery might mean that the threatened public service cuts don't come, or are much reduced? On the contrary.

If there is an obvious lurch back into depression before the general election, then even David Cameron and George Osborn may hesitate at drastic public-spending cuts which push economic activity down further.

If, on the other hand, the financial-markets revival is continuing, and there are some signs of productive revival, then such dangers as that of a fall in the British government's credit-rating in international markets will loom larger. They will be bolder about using the period when they are best able to do unpopular things — straight after winning a general election, and while lots of people are still resigned to bad things being "necessary because of the crisis" — to push through drastic cuts.

ROYAL MAIL DISPUTE

Back the postal workers!

What is at the root of the dispute in Royal Mail?

The postal workers and their union the CWU are one of the most important bastions of well-organised workplace trade unionism which remains from the great build-up of trade unionism among blue-collar workers from the 1940s to the 1970s.

By applying the basic trade unionist principles of solidarity — the idea that unity is strength and an injury to one is an injury to all — postal workers have protected their pay, their union, and much of their terms and conditions in the face of the global race to the bottom which has afflicted workers in blue-collar jobs throughout private industry. This trade-union strength rests in part on the post office still being essentially a public service.

Royal Mail bosses want to put an end to this. Their agenda is to see postal workers exposed to the same “rigours of competition” and “discipline of the market” as other workers in the deliveries and logistics business. That means casualisation, speed-up, job cuts, and lower wages.

Governments and Royal Mail bosses have been driving for “liberalisation” (opening-up to capitalist competition) and privatisation since the early 1980s, when the Thatcher Tory government removed the Royal Mail monopoly on larger items (1981), broke up the old Post Office structure into six bits (1981–6), and privatised some of them.

Governments across Europe have been doing the same sort of thing. It is part of the general drive to batter organised labour with global competition which has been central to the new era of capitalism since 1980.

The New Labour government wanted to part-privatise Royal Mail, and backed down only because it had too much trouble on its hands in the run-up to a general election. If the Tories win the next election, they are almost certain to go for privatisation — as they did in 1996, but this time with the vigour of a newly-elected government rather than the tiredness of one about to lose office.

Royal Mail bosses and politicians say that postal workers are refusing to move with the times. They must adapt or die.

Why should we want to move with these times? Why should we want to be in tune with the new capitalist era which has produced spiralling inequality across the world, and now given us the great credit crash of 2008?

In fact postal workers are well-placed to resist the craziness. Other industrial concentrations have been shut down or shifted offshore, but that cannot be done with the mail.

People will use electronic communication instead of postal workers strike? They will anyway. There still remain huge numbers of letters to deliver. And even in the most “liberalised” postal-service “markets” in Europe, the company with the universal service obligation — the duty to provide a service to every letterbox, not just in chosen city centres — still has well over 90% of the trade.

Isn't it that European postal workers have made the adjustment, but British postal workers have lagged, and now have no choice but to catch up?

According to the latest European Union statistics (December 2007), UK prices for a standard first-class letter are lower than in other large West

European countries (France, Germany, Italy), and the percentage of such letters delivered on time is substantially higher.

In Germany, where Deutsche Post is majority private-owned, and there is more competition, the unions had to campaign for (and, in November 2007, win) a minimum wage for postal workers of £7 an hour. Progress?

Compared to most European countries, though, “liberalisation” has been pushed faster in Britain, not slower. The *Financial Times* (13 October) reports: “In the 1990s Royal Mail made healthy profits, but much of these were siphoned off by the Treasury in ‘special dividends’ instead of being invested in new technology... More recently, de-regulation was introduced faster than in the rest of Europe”.

So the bosses keep coming back, again and again, with new plans, each time telling the postal workers that it's a matter of “modernisation”?

Yes. In 1996 it was the “Employee Agenda”. In 2003 it was “Major Change”. That deal was a big blow to workplace militancy in Royal Mail, which once accounted for one-third of all strikes in Britain. Levels of strike action fell from 50,000 days a year up to 2002 to about 3,000 in 2005. But the union retained much strength.

In 2007 a major industrial battle between postal workers and Royal Mail ended with the union leadership letting industrial action dribble away, and then, after a long pause, pushing through a deal which gave Royal Mail bosses a go-ahead for “flexibility”.

The 2007 deal conceded unilateral changes (in starting times, for example) imposed by Royal Mail bosses during the dispute, and called for such “flexibility” as bosses being able to vary workers’ daily working hours within a weekly total, to shift duty time up by to 30 minutes, to ask them to work from a different office, and to cover absences.

The “flexibility” was to be negotiated locally, but with the proviso that offices would only get their next pay rise after they had shown satisfactory “flexibility”.

Jobs have been cut steadily. More recently, Royal Mail has started taking on all new employees as part-timers. It is a drive to fragment and control the workforce.

But it's necessary to get a good service?

All the bosses’ pushes have gone together with a reduction in service. The second delivery went. Sunday collections went. Reliability of delivery has been cut as fewer and fewer people have the same postal worker, someone who knows the patch, delivering every day. Meanwhile workers have to take out larger loads of mail, and do longer stints of delivery.

How should the union respond?

It should make a clear stand of principle that the post is a public service, not a profit-making enterprise on the market. It should demand that the Government take responsibility for sorting out the Royal Mail pension fund deficit — largely created by the Treasury siphoning off money in the 1990s — and guarantee postal workers decent pensions.

And the CWU needs to organise casuals and workers in private delivery companies, fighting to raise their poorer conditions to a level with permanent Royal Mail workers.

As we wrote in *Solidarity* back in June 2005, Royal Mail workers “also need to involved those working for potential competitors. These are [Royal Mail workers’] allies, not [their] enemies. The threat of competition will be used to drive down terms and conditions, not to mention jobs, in all areas of the industry. Maximising resistance to this will blunt the edge of those who seek to gain from privatisation, and strengthen those opposing it”.

BRITISH TELECOM

Vote no to Openreach threats!

BY A CWU MEMBER

Members of the CWU post and telecom union in BT OpenReach are being consulted again on a set of attendance pattern changes they have already rejected.

A narrow no vote (56%) in a consultative ballot only last month rejected a deal on attendance patterns despite the hard sell from the CWU Executive, and intense lobbying on a one-to-one basis by BT managers. Despite this the Telecoms Executive has called another ballot on exactly the same changes, but with phased implementation. It's a case of keep voting until we get the right result.

Openreach engineers are disgusted with the lack of leadership and cynical undemocratic manoeuvring by the "Effective Left" (sic) majority on the Executive.

This roots of this fiasco go back earlier this year when CWU telecoms representatives met with BT Openreach management to discuss a package of changes to attendance patterns, work practices and future job security for over 25,000 staff working in BT Openreach — those providing the service from the exchange to the home, overwhelmingly engineering grades.

The most controversial of the proposed changes was on attendance patterns, where members were expected to be rostered to work Saturdays and evenings (up until 9pm and flexed beyond this) on flat money. There were also other changes, including a mobility clause that meant members could be asked to work away from home at one week's notice.

Currently those who accepted money to move to Monday-Saturday working in the 1990s (the Customer Service Improvement Plan) and those recruited since 2000 on the so called "Martini" contract (any time, any place anywhere...) are working Saturdays as a normal day. But over 50% of current staff are still entitled to premium payment for Saturday, and all staff are entitled to chose to do overtime for work past 7.30pm.

The proposed changes are unpopular in all areas of the country, including those where there are a large number of newly recruited staff.

There is great strength of feeling on this issue, with staff observing that BT's commitment to family-friendly policies and work-life balance looks a bit thin. Though there is provision for P&D arrangements (Personal & Domestic) these are already hard to get, with management operating an unacknowledged cap on these. With a greater span of hours and days covered, those with caring responsibilities will face an uphill task in balancing work and responsibilities at home.

At CWU Conference in June a package of measures including the proposed attendance patterns was comprehensively thrown out by the Telecoms Industry conference. The union's Telecoms Executive went back into negotiations in indecent haste and came up with a new agreed set of proposals with minor changes (such as a reduc-

tion of one hour to the flex times). This was then the subject of the ballot in August.

Broad Left members of the Telecoms Executive opposed the proposals and urged members to reject them in the ballot. Despite the present marginalisation of the Broad Left within the bureaucracy of the CWU, their campaign was successful. The Broad Left are also urging a No vote in the current ballot which is likely to be conducted electronically because of the postal dispute.

Both in the August ballot and at the June Conference the Telecoms Executive made great play of assurances from Openreach management that they would drop plans to outsource pro-active work (between 8,000 and 13,000 of all current Openreach jobs) if the attendance pattern changes were approved. There is no long term logical connection between these issues, though this would meet the demand of the management for cost savings for work in house in the short term. In the long term it would mean staff were cheaper to TUPE out

Also as the benchmark for the whole industry, the reduction of terms and conditions for BT Openreach staff would lead to lower pay and worse conditions for all telecoms engineers.

The BT board has previously considered outsourcing some of BT Openreach's work and may well do so again sometime in the future. Ironically the availability of Government subsidy to build the Next Generation Access through the levy on fixed lines means that this issue is a live one. The question is whether BT would get the contract to do this, or another firm or consortium would do. This in turn would affect the most profitable outcomes for BT, including outsourcing possibilities.

The "Effective" Left (a split from the Communications Workers Broad Left at the time of the last Deputy General Secretary Telecoms election) has led the negotiations with management. This current situation is a new low in the company unionism that has always been a feature of the POEU, then NCU and now CWU telecoms side.

Whilst this telecoms tradition has often been industrially pragmatic there had always been a commitment to democracy from the days of the POEU and resistance to the old right wing. This seems now to have been abandoned.

The Effective Left has been playing a divisive strategy with the Openreach membership. They have set members rostered to work Saturdays against those who are not. They have set members on reactive work — those who respond to customer faults — against those on pro active work, who are in more danger of outsourcing.

Union policy is to oppose outsourcing and to call industrial action if BT attempt to do this. This is the proper response to BT Openreach management's threats, not giving in. We need to unite the membership against the threat to their terms and conditions and resist management and official Union propaganda. Vote no. It's the first step to rebuilding a fighting union that respects democracy.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Support the Leeds refuse strikers!

BY DAVE KIRK

Leeds refuse collection workers have voted to reject an offer by the council and continue their all-out strike, which started on 7 September.

The latest offer saw some improvement on future wages, but at the cost of extending the working day by an hour and further changes in conditions. The workers are still calling for no change in working hours and maintaining current pay rates.

With strong picket lines and the unions provision of strike pay a return to work without the desired settlement is unlikely. 1,000 people came to a recent benefit gig — probably the largest demonstration of trade union solidarity in Leeds since the miners' strike.

Council smears about workers' absenteeism, and sickness levels have so far failed to have an impact on public support for the strike. But the unions cannot take it for granted and need to use the support they have to put more pressure on the council.

To date the strikers have stayed on their picket lines and not used opportunities to get their message out directly to the public. One striker told me "The public support us now but losing it won't make us go back to work. It would make it harder but we won't go back to work". Whilst the council has so far sent out four letters to residents explaining

their case the unions have relied on the local media to do that for them.

Socialists and trade unionists in Leeds have set up a solidarity committee to raise money and publicise the strike, but the trade union officers have preferred to rely on local Labour MPs and councillors as their advocates.

The council are using the strike as a way of pushing through reforms not just on wages, the original issue, but also on working practices. They plan an increase in the daily work rate from the current 190 residences a day to 220. This is considered an impossible target by the strikers.

At the same time the council are demanding that people doing a hard physical job should reduce their sickness levels. The workers are now the target of a drive to cut costs at the expense of the their wealth and health.

If the strikers lose, other council workers will face similar demands in the name of productivity. But they lack the "industrial muscle" of the refuse workers. A defeat would set an example for other councils to follow and potentially unleash a wave of cuts in jobs and services across local government.

So: the Leeds strikers need the solidarity and support of workers across the country.

- To send messages of support and to get information on giving donations email branch@leedsunionlg.org.uk or see the details at www.gmb.org.uk

IN BRIEF

LONDON UNDERGROUND: A recent meeting of RMT reps voted to reject the offer management which brought the last round of strikes to a grinding halt. A majority of RMT reps believe their members are ready to take action, or could be persuaded to. The "pay rise" offered by LUL was below inflation, effectively amounting to a pay cut. The RMT leadership should immediately launch an industrial action ballot; and officers, reps and activists should fight hard for a substantial.

EUROSTAR CLEANERS: cleaners working for the Carlisle Group contract at Eurostar, St Pancras have announced four new strike days after talks between their union the RMT and the company broke down at ACAS. The cleaners held a solid 48-hour strike in September which led to the negotiations and the suspension of further strike dates. But the company has not budged on the cleaners' demands for the London living wage, and against redundancies, increase in their workload, bullying by bosses and harassment, including compulsory finger-printing of staff, and the victimisation of RMT rep Mohammed Yellow. New strike days are the 23 and 25 October and 6-7 November.

On 23 October, from 8 to 10 am, a protest is planned at St Pancras, and a picket exchange with postal workers due to strike on the same day.

JOURNALISTS: the union is electing a new editor for *The Journalist*, the union journal. The union has about 35,000 members; one of the candidates Mark Watts has emailed 19,000 of them with witch-hunting accusations about another

candidate, Richard Simcox. Simcox is a member of the NUJ Left, and has the backing of the NUJ Left. The NUJ Left has its faults but it is an open organisation which is honest about its intentions to wield influence inside the union.

Watts' email accuses the NUJ Left of operating like a shadowy cabal and he criticises Simcox for not declaring his affiliation in his election address.

Simcox explains this by saying that not all his backers are in NUJ Left. It might have been better for him to declare his membership of NUJ Left in the address, but it is hardly a secret in any case.

Watts' own affiliations are hard to discern from his own election address. He says "*The Journalist* should continue to promote such campaigns [against low pay, police harassment of photographers] that advance NUJ members' interests." This seems to be code for saying that the NUJ should not be more overtly political, which is what he thinks. The email reveals he is part of that half of the union that rejects the idea of it having a political fund — because journalists need to show they are independent of politics!

The debate on this issue came to a head when the union's 2007 annual conference voted to support a boycott of Israeli goods and services. *Solidarity* opposes that policy but we do not therefore support the idea of unions being apolitical.

Channel 4's news anchor Jon Snow is backing Mark Watts — even though Snow is said to have left the union dismayed by such politicking! If he received Watts' recent email he might be embarrassed to be endorsing Watts. There are many struggles going on over jobs, terms and conditions, pay, and over the future of the news media themselves. We certainly need politics!

A London freelance branch member

INTERVIEW

“We should draw up a big strike plan”

Two CWU activists from North East London spoke to Ed Maltby.

EM: What's your attitude to the 30,000 casuals Royal Mail bosses are hiring?

V: People are furious. Royal Mail can dress it up all they like, but we know they're there to break the strike. We're going to tolerate it; we're going to take them on in the courts and we're going to organise against this.

We are approaching a few casuals about joining the union. We are appealing to their conscience, but if this doesn't work we'll try different tactics.

K: Management have been hinting to us that the picketing has been working. For example, they are no longer letting us use the delivery office toilets on strike days, claiming that casuals feel intimidated by the idea of bumping into union members on a strike day, and some have been staying away. Even if it's just a couple of them, that's great news, and it's got management rattled.

We need to talk about the tactics that we are using on this issue nationally.

Don't forget that we're working with casuals on a day-to-day basis, not just on strike days. People give them the cold shoulder and don't co-operate with them. We've made our feelings towards them clear. We've started to approach a few of them, but not as a branch or in an organised way. So far we've only got about a dozen casual staff in our office, but they are aware of how we view them.

Our members are just ordinary working-class people, who just want to get on with their day. They're not quick to get angry about things. But people are furious about this, they're approaching us and saying, "This is fucking wrong, something needs to be done". We tell them, yes, don't do anything silly but do what you think needs to be done. We have a few plans of how to deal with the situation. Nothing dramatic, nothing violent, but there are a few ideas in the pipeline.

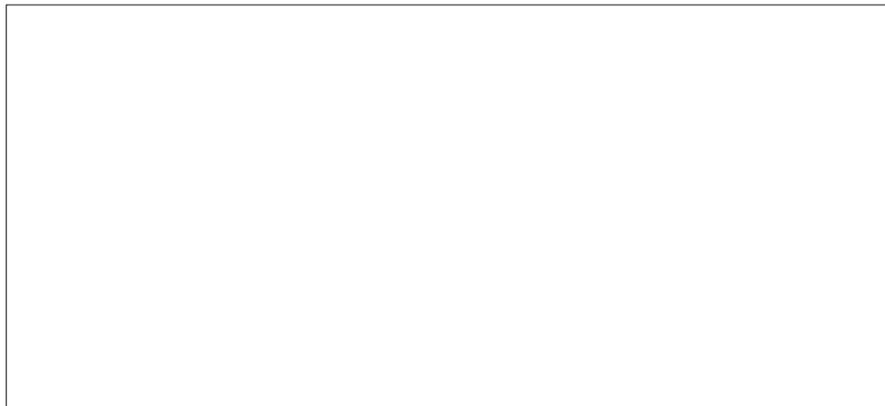
At the mail centres, which are big workplaces, people have started doing little things, to show their collective strength, like singing together on the mail room floor. Imagine 150 workers all singing - it's little things like that along with the action are showing our strength. It's all adding up.

EM: People have been talking about the need for rank-and-file control over the dispute. Apparently the London and Bristol Divisional Committees have been organising regional reps' meetings, but these haven't been well publicised. What's your view?

V: I haven't heard about these reps' meetings. They may well have happened, but I haven't heard about them. We have been discussing the need to organise emergency branch AGMs to discuss our response. This is a serious attack on the union and we need to get the tactics right.

The problem is that reps are very busy at the moment and it isn't easy to call meetings.

EM: How have you been making links with the rest of the labour movement?



Casuals going into work

V: I spoke at NUT meetings in Poplar and Walthamstow this week, and got a very good response. We got the chance to explain the dispute - explain the issues like bullying and harassment which are forcing our members to take action. The NUT are organising now to stage rallies and collections for us and join our picket lines. They'll be rallying at train stations and places like Walthamstow market, leafleting people and getting out information.

EM: There used to be an attitude among certain sections of the CWU, in previous disputes, that reaching out to other groups of workers wasn't so necessary, that you could win with your own industrial muscle alone. How much does that attitude persist?

V: Not so much. People see that we are under serious attack this time. This is a fight not just for the CWU but all trade unions. Mandelson has made this clear - they're out to smash all unions and this fight is everyone's cause now. We've been proactive in reaching out; we've been sending people to go to union meetings, and to trades councils. Again the difficulty is finding the time; all our activists are very busy at the moment!

EM: Looking at the demands that Dave Ward has set out in his "peace deal" letter to Royal Mail, they're quite defensive - asking for all changes to be negotiated and for the CWU to be consulted on modernisation. Do you not think the union needs a more aggressive approach?

V: Before we call off strike action we want Royal Mail to reverse all the executive changes they've made. I think the speech Mandelson made in the House of Lords was a declaration of war. We should come out with our own declaration of war, get people out on the streets, make a noise, draw up a big strike plan. At the moment strikes are being announced on a week-by-week basis. We need a longer-term programme of action.

EM: What do you think of the question of rank-and-file control of a strike?

K: Emergency AGMs are a good idea. It would be quite difficult to organise them on a city-wide level, it makes more sense for the East London offices to meet and so on. Then branch secretaries could meet up and feed back afterwards. That would be easy - but this plan is still in its early stages, we need to bring it to our branch. It's quite difficult to organise meetings right now - we actually had to

cancel our last branch meeting because of all the work around the strike.

It would make sense to hold an emergency branch AGM on a strike day, when we wind up the picket line.

EM: How strong are the picket lines?

K: We've got about 45 people in our office and we have been getting 20 or so people there reliably. We had 28 at the last one and we're hoping for more than 30 on the next strike day.

EM: Are workers getting ground down?

K: I don't think so. The branch is getting stronger. Some people are coming along to meetings or speaking at other

unions' meetings. Some others are getting on the phone and going on radio talk-shows and phone-ins to explain the dispute, and it's not easy to do that, as some of these shows are very hostile. These are just ordinary posties picking up the phone and going on the radio. A few months ago I would have never imagined they would do anything like that.

We want to come out of this dispute with a solid victory. A five day week would be a good start, and we want to preserve the service. The Post is a good job for a young person to go into and we want to keep it like that. Royal Mail want to casualise the whole thing and move everything part-time.

We don't want to have to wait on a phone call and get four or five hours here or there. We want a 35 hour week. Dave Ward often talks about that demand, but not as much as I'd like. I expect Dave and the rest of them will be shown the door if we don't come out of this dispute with something good.

As for negotiations, we're not getting a great deal of information about how they're going. I don't agree with that, I'd prefer for negotiations to be put on the telly, but I suppose that's just the way it's done. For as long as I can remember, it's been "so-and-so is locked in talks" and you don't hear about how it's going until they all come out.

Build mass pickets to stop strikebreaking

In the face of the mass scabbing operation Royal Mail is attempting to organise under the cover of hiring its Christmas casuals early, the CWU needs to act quickly and decisively, and the labour movement should back it up on the picket lines.

Picketing should be stepped up on strike days. Union members should approach casuals and ask them to join the union and not cross picket lines. Membership should be offered free or at greatly reduced rates. It should be made clear to casuals that once they join the CWU they should join the strikes - and they have a right to do so. We should explain that postal workers have a quarrel with Royal Mail, not with the casual staff themselves, who are facing all the exploitation that management hopes to heap on permanent staff too: low wages, no job security, management bullying.

In addition to 'regular' workplaces where we picket, the union should find out where temporary scab delivery offices are being set up, big or small, and send delegations to picket and talk to the casual workers there.

Under regulation 7 of the 2003 Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations and the Employment Agencies Act 1973 it is illegal to knowingly supply workers to conduct duties normally performed by a worker who is taking part in industrial action. The CWU should encourage casuals in every office to get together and demand CWU vetting of all work they are asked to do to see if that work would break the law by strike-breaking.

The rest of the labour movement should give solidarity. Support committees should help posties picket scab delivery offices and discourage local job-seekers from signing up as strikebreakers. Student Unions should work to stop students from taking these jobs. PCS members working in Job Centres and the Department for Work and Pensions should demand their management check the legality of any Royal Mail or agency advertising for jobs in the post before they process those job offers.

What the Law Says:

2003 Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations.

"Regulation 7: Restriction on providing work-seekers in industrial disputes

Regulation 7(1) provides that an employment business may not supply a temporary worker to a hirer to replace an individual taking part in an official strike or any other official industrial dispute. In addition, an employment business must not introduce or supply a work-seeker to do the work of someone who has been transferred by the hirer to perform the duties of the person on strike or taking industrial action. An employment business will have a legal defence to having acted in breach of this regulation if it does not know, or has no reasonable grounds for knowing, that official strike action is in progress.

Regulation 7(2) provides that this regulation applies to official strike action only. In other words it does not apply to unofficial strike action."

APPEAL TO STUDENTS

Support the postal workers, don't be used as scabs!

Postal workers organised in the CWU union have voted overwhelmingly (76% on a turnout of nearly 70%) for national strike action against ongoing attacks by Royal Mail management against workers. The first days of strike action are scheduled for Thursday 22 and Friday 23 October.

The strike is in response to "modernisation" plans by Royal Mail, which essentially involve making postal workers work harder, longer and for less. There has been an increase in "cross functioning", whereby managers make workers of one grade do the work of another grade with no increase in pay. Several local offices still face closure, resulting in potential further job losses. Workers' routines are being disrupted, as postal workers are reallocated to new walks at no notice and the number of casual workers increases.

Students should support the postal dispute not only out of basic solidarity with people fighting for their livelihoods but also because it is, in essence, a dispute for the heart-and-soul of the notion of public services. The dispute poses the question of whether the postal service should be run democratically by workers and users, in the interests of public need, or by unaccountable managers in the interests of profit.

Precisely the same question, in fact, which is posed over and over again in the education sector by student struggles around issues like fees and course cuts. If the postal workers win, it will drive back the New Labour project (which is certain to be continued by a future Tory government) of swallowing up and privatising what remains of public services in Britain. The striking workers should not be held responsible for the inconvenience and disruption caused; withdrawing their labour is the only real weapon available to workers who want to assert their right to have a say in how their industry and workplace is run.

Constant media focus on the inconvenience caused by the strike — rather than the management attacks that motivated it — indicates nothing except the ruling-class bias of the mainstream press. Ultimately, blame for any disruption caused by the strike must lie with Royal Mail bosses.

There is also a significant likelihood that, as Royal Mail attempts to break the strike and ultimately smash the power of the union within the company, students may be used as scab labour. Reports indicate that Royal Mail are in the process of recruiting (mainly through agencies like Manpower) an army of up to 30,000 casual workers in order to act as scabs.

It is in fact illegal for managers to hire casual staff to do the work of striking workers, but Royal Mail intends to get around this fact by claiming that

the 30,000 are just the normal casual workers they hire every year to cope with increased seasonal demand around Christmas, plus the existing backlog from the last round of regional strikes. Except this year, they're hiring them in October. Suspicious...

Although the pressure to get part-time work of any kind to fund ourselves through our studies is increasing, students should not allow themselves to be used as pawns of Royal Mail management in their effort to break the strike and smash the union. Even if you earn some money by working for Royal Mail now, will that really outweigh the cuts in pay, conditions and quality of service that postal workers and service users will suffer if Royal Mail breaks the strike.

Do not take casual work for Royal Mail and, if you're already working as a casual in the postal service, join the CWU and refuse to cross picket lines! Student Union-run job shops should not advertise casual vacancies for Royal Mail, or promote the agencies (such as Manpower) being used to recruit scabs

The postal strike is a battle between two different visions of society and whether the needs of people or profit should come first. Students have a very immediate interest in taking a side. We should side with the postal workers.

Daniel Randall, NUS Trustee Board
Tom Wills, President, University of Sussex Students' Union
Chris Marks, Vice President Education, Hull University Union
Katherine McMahon, External Convener, Edinburgh University Students Association
Ben Sellers, Co-President, SOAS Students' Union

The text of this statement can be on the Education Not for Sale website found at www.free-education.org.uk
To sign email education.not.for.sale@gmail.com

How you can support the strikes:

- Visit your local picket line. Check the CWU website www.cwu.org for local details.
- Pass a motion supporting the postal workers at your SU. See the ENS website for a model motion.
- Get a CWU speaker for your SU or campaign group meeting.
- Do a street collection or organise a benefit gig at your university or college.

Rank and file control is essential

Issues in the dispute

RANK AND FILE LEADERSHIP

After the tremendous "Yes" vote in the national ballot, there can be no doubting the resolve of the membership to take management on and see the dispute through. The next step is to ensure that the strike is as strong as possible and organised so we can stand up to the tough trials ahead.

The way to do that is to keep the membership in the driving seat. A strike is stronger if the members are informed and active, rather than passively waiting on instructions coming from the executive.

One reason the 2007 strike ended the way it did was because much of the membership was in the dark about the decisions made at the top about the deal; and being kept out of the loop saps members' confidence. The tactics and the demands of this dispute need to be discussed and decided by postal workers and their directly-elected reps, not by largely unaccountable national negotiators.

REPS' MEETINGS

The national reps' meetings are the obvious focus for rank-and-file debate and control of the dispute.

Reps' meetings need to be held more regularly, and on a regional and city-wide level, not just a national level. London and Bristol Divisional Committees have organised area-wide reps' meetings. This is good and should be built on — and repeated in other regions! These meetings need to be a place where real decisions are taken — where written motions can be tabled, discussed and voted on, where there is time for a discussion.

The proceedings of these meetings should be made public, with reports going up on the web and reps reporting back to their branches, so all members are in on the facts and can have their say. When meetings of workplace reps make a decision and pass it up to the executive, the exec should either carry out that decision or give the membership a reason why not. These meetings should make decisions on demands, and also monitor the negotiation process, and hold our negotiators to account.

ON THE OFFENSIVE!

In the letter from Dave Ward to Royal Mail bosses where he offers a "peace

deal", Ward lays out the CWU's core demands in the strike: against bullying, against management unilateralism, for management to honour their 2007 promise that "change will be introduced by agreement".

Now, Royal Mail bosses already say that they plan no more job and workload changes this year. But purely defensive demands against management attacks are clearly not enough — we need a clear idea of what we are striking for as well as what we are striking against. Postal workers need to go on the offensive for a positive vision of a public postal service run by workers and users. Most posties have a very clear idea of what they want changed in their workplace: let's draw these demands up into a clear, positive programme for change. Democratic reps' meetings should draw up the precise demands — shouldn't the call for a 35 hour week be one of them?

ROLLING STRIKES?

The tactic of taking rolling, selective action, with part of the service out on one day and another part out the next, is a tactic which appears to have the advantage of hitting the bosses for two or three days with each worker only losing a day's pay.

But some workers have expressed the concern that this tactic creates a situation in which it becomes normal to cross the picket line of another group of workers. This is a debate which our movement needs to have out at the grassroots level.

CALL FOR SOLIDARITY

As the national strike develops, a wider labour movement solidarity will become essential.

Trade unionists and socialists are organising in different towns and cities to support the CWU. They are organising different groups which will collect money for the strike fund, get out on the street and counter management propaganda, hold meetings and generally co-ordinating activities with their local CWU.

London CWU has produced a collections sheet; other regions should produce similar materials and contact activists in other workplaces to ask for solidarity. Postal workers should be proactive in calling meetings with trade unionists from other workplaces and helping bring solidarity committees into being.

NORTHAMPTON

Uniting service-users and workers

Ron Mendel of Northampton Save Our Public Services (SOPS) spoke to Vicki Morris about their anti-cuts and recent election campaigns.

How long has SOPS been going?

We became SOPS in April 2009 when we registered with the Electoral Commission, but the predecessor Save Our Services goes back to 2005–6 when we were campaigning against cuts in mental health and disability services within the NHS.

In 2007 we decided to run candidates in Northampton borough council elections. We stood in Old Duston ward — Conservative — and Lumbertubs ward — Labour. In Old Duston SOS finished in third place; fourth in Lumbertubs.

We continued to campaign around a number of local issues — proposed cuts to visually impaired people's library services (we beat back that cut) — also the sale of playing fields and access to facilities under PFI schemes.

We decided to stand in the county council elections last year because the council has more scrutiny and oversight powers over changes in the NHS than the borough. In June we fielded three candidates: two as per 2007 — Dave Green, Harry Tuttle — and Norman Adams, who had been involved in the campaign to defend sheltered housing wardens, in Delapre.

All three had been very visible campaigners around local issues. In the elections we did remarkably well. Dave Green came within 61 votes of capturing the seat and scared the Tories.

How do you get new people involved?

We organise stalls, write leaflets — for example, on the issue of a school being targeted to become an academy; in that case we tried to get parents involved. But our outreach is rather intermittent.

When, for example, there were clear threats to provision within Northampton hospital, when there were proposed cuts to learning disability and mental health services, it was easier to draw people in because people saw a direct threat to their services and their jobs. But when that immediate threat dissipated, people dropped off. We have a core group of about 10 people who do most of the work.

We punch above our weight. We have committed people who go to cabinet meetings and ask awkward questions of Northampton council. We cultivate a relationship with the local press — they call us when there is an issue they think we will have an interest in.

For example, the *Northampton Chronicle* had a feature story on the revival of trade unionism. I spoke to them about an upsurge in labour militancy — I had to explain the meaning of all this, that most industrial action is not over pay but about terms and conditions, etc., and more militant stuff, for example, Vestas.

Northampton is special in this respect; were we a large city we would not have this relationship with the local media.

What party are your MPs, council? Do you have any relationship with the local Labour Party?

Northampton North MP is Sally Keeble, Labour; Northampton South MP is Brian Binley, Tory. The borough council

Norman Adams joins a march against sheltered housing warden cuts

is Lib-Dem and the county council is Tory.

We don't have a relationship with the local Labour group; we have not been able or even tried to push them to the left. Other people involved in SOPS might have different views on that, but most of us who were members of the Labour Party have left it. I left after Clause 4 was cut from the constitution. I saw this as the writing on the wall.

However, if I had John McDonnell as my MP I'd be working for his re-election, or Jeremy Corbyn. They are exemplary Labour MPs. In Northampton, Labour MPs have never voted against the government. The CWU had to lobby Sally Keeble vigorously to oppose privatisation of Royal Mail until finally she came around.

What is the relationship between SOPS and the trades council?

I am the president of Northampton TUC. Although there is some overlap in the personnel of SOPS and the trades council we maintain a separation.

Many unions affiliated to the trades council have a close relationship with the Labour Party. There could not be any involvement of the trades council in SOPS's election campaign. But we do have joint stalls for other campaigning work.

The trades council is campaigning against cuts, against privatisation as well — we have many of the same policies. But for very clear reasons we are independent of each other. I don't see that as a problem. If you have a similar platform on issues, you can campaign together, but we draw the line at political intervention in elections.

When it stands in elections SOPS is running as an alternative to the Labour Party. Implicitly it exists because it sees itself as being in opposition to the three main parties. Our relationship to the Labour Party is shaped by that.

Did you expect to do so well in the county council elections? How did you fund your election campaign?

We didn't expect to do so well. We expected to do better than we had done in the borough elections. That was because of the general dissatisfaction with the three main parties, the MPs' expenses scandal.

When we set up stalls in the town cen-

tre asking people to sign petitions against cuts in NHS or local services, exposing the PFI scam, several people came up and said they'd never vote Labour again, Labour stalwarts; it was clear they were not going to vote for the Tories or Lib Dems. We had a sense that if we could tap into that general dissatisfaction we would do well, but we probably surprised ourselves given our limited resources.

We raised funds for the election campaign through donations; we raised some money in August from a festival where we sold cakes, ceramics, etc. Our biggest expense has been printing: for the last election we did two leaflet drops, printed thousands of leaflets. We don't receive any trade union funds.

In your publicity, you don't mention the EU, asylum seekers, etc. Do people you speak to when you are campaigning raise those issues?

Some people involved in SOPS might be sympathetic to 'No to EU', but some think it confused people — the EU has some progressive policies. But we never really discussed this inside SOPS.

Occasionally someone signs a petition on a stall and says that the reason why there is not enough council housing or why the NHS is contemplating making cuts is because of all these immigrants. It's just a kind of common sense view that some people have, they are not necessarily BNP supporters. Obviously, when it comes up, you have to tackle it.

We have dialogues with people on the stall. I had one with someone who was wearing a Chelsea jersey — I asked him where his team would be without immigrants? If you make these points to people they can see things from a different perspective.

Brown's slogan about British jobs for British workers is nonsense. One of the things we've done as Northampton TUC is outreach with migrant workers; we've done some leafleting at workplaces where we know there is a critical mass of workers from Poland, Lithuania. We've given them details for possible trade union contacts.

What campaigns are you involved in at the moment?

An anti-academy group in local schools; more longstanding campaigns around sheltered housing; we are still campaign-

ing around access to playing fields and facilities being built through PFI projects because we recognise that the general public has been short-changed. For example, clubs find that they now have to pay a fee for facilities run by PFI schools.

We try to monitor what's happening with the local health service — with district and community nursing, a move to quasi-private social enterprise provision for some of these is on the cards, we understand.

Will you stand in the general election?

We've had one or two discussions about contesting the seat held by the Conservative. What complicates that is the former Labour MP from Northampton South, Tony Clarke, was expelled from the Labour Party. He is an independent member of the borough council and has taken some positions that have been somewhat sympathetic to SOPS. He has been against market testing plans for, for example, street cleaning.

He has declared his intention to stand in that seat as an independent. Would we want to take votes away from him? In anticipation that the general election will be held in May we will have to declare our position.

What is the main purpose of SOPS?

The purpose of SOPS is to campaign to defend services against cuts; we try to draw together a coalition of people who are employed in the public sector with those who are depending on the public services. The TUC plays a prominent role in that because we can build on our ties with Unison/Unite/UCU/CWU. We can try to break this false dichotomy between the so-called producer and consumer. We see privatisation and outsourcing and cuts as bad for those who are providing the service and for those using them. Why not unite them in the same campaign? If you had to summarise our philosophy, that is it.

No matter what government is in power we will have to hold that government accountable for its actions. We are not against this or that party as such, we are against the government for their specific proposals/actions. When we campaign we don't ask what political party people support when they come up to the stall. We are non-political with a small p.

Our political intervention flows from our campaign work, it builds on it. Without that we would not have credibility. In the elections people say "we know Norman Adams, he's involved in sheltered housing and Defend Council Housing; Dave Green, he's the person who spoke up about PFI."

People don't see us as just humdrum politicians who are trying to get their vote and that's it. We're more than that. We are an organisation trying to provide an alternative not just on election day but 365 days a year.

Solidarity wants to help build a network of anti-cuts campaigns around the country. Do you think this would be useful?

Yes, I would love to see a network of groups campaigning against privatisation etc. I'm not just talking about Barnet TUC sharing information about sheltered housing with the Northampton campaign, for example, though that's good — I think you are talking about something less ad hoc, something more extensive than that, which would be good.

Working in mental health

MY LIFE AT WORK



Stephen Michaels, a student nurse from East London, spoke to *Solidarity*.

Tell us a little bit about the work you do.

I'm a student mental health nurse. I spend some time in classes, but mostly I'm in hospitals or out on community placements. It's a lot of on the job training and we are treated as an extra pair of hands; my work involves talking to patients, getting them involved in their care — its very varied. There's also loads of paperwork — mainly reports on patients and assessments.

Do you and your workmates get the pay and conditions you deserve?

Definitely not. Because of our status as students, we have no employment rights. We get a bursary of £7,500 a year, but that's definitely not enough to live on — particularly in central London. Even though many of us are working full shifts, we're not treated as workers in terms of our rights. With the proposed recruitment freeze in the NHS, there's also no guarantee of a job at end of our three years of training.

Do you enjoy your work?

I enjoy working with patients. I don't enjoy the NHS bureaucracy; the health service can be a very demoralising place to work in, and my university course is a mess. The NHS workforce is very fragmented and there are constant diktats coming down from management.

What are your bosses like?

The ward managers — the people we have most contact with — tend to be okay. Some individuals are better than others. But the management level above them, where the diktats come from, is a faceless bureaucracy.

A lot of the stress of the job is due to the privatisation agenda that management are pushing; there's constant policy reform, and there's a very low level of understanding of exactly what management do. That's something that bosses deliberately inculcate by using impenetrable management-speak and buzzwords. It's very dangerous. We want a health system that's transparent, not baffling.

There's a high degree of discontent amongst the workforce but unfortunately it often gets directed at other workers rather than at bosses.

Is there are union in your workplace? Does it do a good job?

There are several unions — Unison, Unite and the GMB all organise workers in the health service. But they're all very weak and don't have much presence in my workplaces. I'm in Unison; I want my union to get out agitating amongst the workforce, organising workers and running good campaigns that can bring people into the union structures and give them a chance to get active rather than lying down and taking everything that's thrown at us. A lot of people see themselves as part of professional associations like the RCN rather than as workers with a trade union consciousness.

If you could change one thing about your workplace what would it be?

A sense that we're part of a collective that can influence things, instead of the poisonous blame culture. I'd scrap most of the bureaucracy, which only exists for the internal markets. And we need more staff so that we could have the time and freedom to develop quality nursing care conducive to patient care and recovery.

French bosses bully workers to death

It sounds so fantastically morbid you would be forgiven for thinking we have made it up. But the statistics show that job insecurity and bullying at work are leading increasing numbers of French workers to take their own lives.

Twenty-four workers at France Telecom have killed themselves since the beginning of 2008. That's a lot, but, as a recent article in the *Economist* shows it is in fact in line with the national average (14.6 suicides per 100,000 people).

The *Economist* — which usually gives the bosses the benefit of the doubt — poses an important question: how is it that France, with its generally higher level of workers' rights, can have such

high rates of depression, stress and indeed suicide at work?

Perversely, the legal rights won by French workers mean that bosses — prevented from easily sacking them — have to find ways of making their working lives difficult; casual bullying, or forcing them to do meaningless tasks.

The lesson is not that legal rights are not worth fighting for — far from it. But that only ongoing workers' organisation in every workplace can help enforce legal rights and that ultimately, it is only by disrupting, subverting and eventually overthrowing the "right" of bosses to manage, rule, bully and run workplaces that the mental — as well as the economic and social — wellbeing of working-class people can be guaranteed.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Beware the Newcastle model

BY A LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKER

The first I had heard of the so called "Newcastle model" was at Unison conference in June this year.

The basic idea is for local government workers (or their unions) to be enlisted in a process of "modernising" local government services. This may involve cuts (or cost savings), but those cuts would be one-off "reforms". This process should help stop contracting-out/privatisation.

Unison's promotion of this strategy is extremely worrying. At conference there was a long presentation from various people in the Newcastle branch, a presentation which preceded a motion but "talked out" any debate.

At first the Newcastle people's account appeared quite hardline — they wanted "no privatisations" and "no compulsory redundancies". But behind the headlines it was all very different.

The branch had surveyed admin staff across the council identifying where they could make "efficiencies" for management. They result was the "deletion" of lots of (vacant) posts.

The union also identified re-gradings and negotiated with management to increase the voluntary redundancy packages. This resulted in many more people applying for voluntary redundancy than were given it.

Essentially the unions did management's job for them.

It was clear that the Newcastle model was Unison leadership's answer to the forthcoming cuts — look for savings and "efficiencies". The same language is being used by Council Chief Executives up and down the country.

This is a strategy born out of weakness and defeat. The line from the Unison leadership was very clear — we had to be "realistic"; job security not pay was the top of members' concerns (probably true, but we'd like decent pay as well!); members had shown that they had no desire for strike action (due to the pay dispute being botched in summer 2008).

Therefore this was the best option.

I think it is important to take stock of how appalling this is. A comrade from my branch who was at conference as a visitor, joined the presentation half way through. He thought it was a "comedy piece", a satire about how unions shouldn't behave. No such luck.

But the presentation was slick. Socialists and the left in Unison have to face the reality of where our union is. The leadership has no desire to fight and a lot of members have low confidence. We need to build that confidence. This strategy or model will not do that.

Sometimes it is necessary to settle for voluntary redundancies and deletion of vacant posts, but this should come only at the end of a struggle.

To suggest such solutions to management without any kind of fight is worse than a defeat.

Of course there is money spent in public services that could be spent in better ways — the wages of managers and board members, for example, are scandalous. If the union must focus on wasted money, these are the examples that should be used. The idea that administrative workers are "unnecessary" is at the heart of this strategy. It is an ignorant perception.

No thought here is given to the remaining staff's workload and stress levels, which would definitely increase. In all likelihood Newcastle have only got the soft cuts out of the way and shown themselves to be weak for management.

We have been told that 15–20% of "efficiencies" (i.e. cuts) need to be identified in the public sector. We have some serious fights ahead and they cannot be avoided. The left in the public sector unions needs to organise — recruit new members, publicise ourselves and thin hard about strategies.

We need to make clear that we have a different answer to the crisis to our union "leadership". It will be down to rank and file members to organise themselves that fight. Socialists have the key role of helping branch activists prepare for the battles to come.

CLIMATE SWOOP

Footsteps to whose future?

BY DANIEL RANDALL

What follows is a critical report on the “Great Climate Swoop” a mobilisation by Climate Camp on Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal-fired power station. It took place on 17–18 October.

Because of the diversity of tactics employed and the splitting up of the demo into several “blocs”, each with a distinct mission, it was difficult to tell exactly how many people had been mobilised for the action. The “bloc” I participated in — “Footsteps to the Future” — probably had around 200 people on it, with maybe another 300 on the other blocs.

Throughout the day, we received text message updates informing us that “people have got inside!” or that “people have got onto the coal pile!” But it was never clear — except to those already in the know — exactly who the brave direct action buccaners were.

The Swoop had been beset from the start by a bit of an identity crisis; no-one was quite sure whether the aim was simply to stage a symbolic protest in opposition to the expansion of coal power, or to “take over” or “shut down” the station. The division of the action into the diverse “blocs” (some of which aimed to “get to the control room and take the power back”, others of which aimed simply to rally by the plant gates) was a convenient way of sidestepping that problem.

The politics of the “Footsteps to the Future” bloc were a little crass and in

some places downright peculiar. One man rode around on a bicycle with a megaphone shouting things like “we are the makers of music and the dreamers of dreams.”

There was an abundance of placards with slogans such as “RIP UK coal”, “Bury coal” and “Leave it in the ground”. Chants included “Ratcliffe-on-Soar, filthy to the core”, and one piece of direct action theatre involved a “funeral to celebrate the death of UK coal.”

There was little evidence of the progress that has been made in getting the climate movement to take class issues seriously, and not treat polluting industries as homogenous entities to be straightforwardly opposed, but rather related to on the basis of supporting the struggles of workers within them and empowering those workers to change the way their industries are run.

A demonstration taking place at a coal-fired power station in Leicestershire — an ex-mining county — that cannot develop more nuanced slogans than “RIP UK coal” needs to think about what kind of change it actually wants to see in society, who it thinks can deliver that change and what kind of “future” it is actually taking “footsteps” towards.

At the brief rally that my bloc held outside the plant’s main gate, I spoke as a Workers’ Climate Action activist.

I talked about the work that had been done by WCA activists in the run-up to the Swoop engaging with Ratcliffe workers, about the perspective of worker-led just transition and about the legacy of

the miners’ strike.

That was a struggle by coal workers, I said, for a different vision of how society might be run — in the interests of the working-class majority rather than the interests of profit. Now the task was to build a movement in which workers in coal-fired power stations like Ratcliffe took the lead in fighting for a worker-led transition to a sustainable economy.

Everyone clapped and cheered, but no-one seemed to see the difference between the ideas I was raising and “leave it in the ground”-type slogans.

The speaker from Climate Rush, after me, confidently announced that “most people here are from a middle-class background” and laid claim to the legacy of the suffragettes who were, apparently, “middle-class women who dared to break the law and go to prison.” Unfortunately, her views are probably a more accurate barometer of the politics of the climate movement than my WCA speech.

How effective the Swoop was in terms of its impact on the functioning of the plant may not become clear until some days after the event. A heavy police presence meant effective liaison between the blocs was difficult. As I left, many activists were preparing to attempt to reconnect with other blocs and set up camps for the night.

A visual protest against an unsustainable source of power is worthwhile, and it is positive that worker-engagement was considered at all by the event’s organisers (something that did not happen automatically, but rather because of the hard work of Workers’ Liberty members and other WCA supporters in arguing for such perspectives within Climate Camp). But there is still a long way to go to build a movement for a sustainable future that is accessible to frontline workers and bases itself on their struggles.

Views from the Swoop:

Pete Radcliff, Workers’ Liberty and trade union activist from Nottingham:

“I think targeting the power plant is probably the wrong focus. This isn’t about this power plant as such, it’s about e.on’s perspectives and policies as a corporation. It would’ve been more effective and politically better to look at occupying their corporate headquarters rather than organising an action that could be seen as targeting workers.”

Anna, involved with Workers’ Climate Action:

“The Swoop will help maintain the whole profile of the debate around energy generation and the climate, and that’s important. But I think worker-engagement was under-prioritised. The organisers treated it in quite a tokenistic way; in the email they sent out before the Swoop, it was only the seventh or eighth item.”

Richard Braude is involved in Climate Camp and helped organise the action:

“I think we did really well considering there was relatively little preparation. The organisation of the action into blocs gave it a feel of several different, disparate groups coming together and I think that’s important. The fact that some activists were able to pull down the fences that the police and e.on put up quite early was also important; it showed we can be imaginative.”

Greg Marshall, activist from Nottingham:

“This is a worthwhile and valid protest. In terms of whether the workers are a target, I think it’s clear that the grievance is against the policies of e.on and the government and their commitment to an unsustainable source of power.”

Police at it again...

Despite some half-hearted attempts to clean up their public image since their brutal marshalling of the G20 protests, the police can’t help jumping at new opportunities to prove that whenever the interests of big business and corporate profiteering are threatened, they’ll be there to put the (figurative and literal) boot in.

Reports indicate that more than 50 people were arrested over the Swoop weekend, ostensibly for attempting to breach the fences that police and e.on security had erected around the perimeter of the site.

Police also pushed, shoved, and set dogs on activists doing nothing more than assembling near one of the fences. Some of the newer and younger

activists mobilised by Climate Camp learnt some tough but important lessons about what the police represents as a social force and who they’re there to protect.

“This was my first demo and it was one of those experiences that change the way you think about yourself. When the police got nasty, I had to make a decision whether to back off or to join the people sitting down with dogs barking in our faces and the police lined up with raised batons. The guy next to me was given a few sneaky jabs in the ribs with a baton when the cameras weren’t watching. It was strange to see two officers who I’d been having a friendly chat with earlier follow orders to threaten the peaceful protestors amongst us with batons and dogs.”

Khalil Secker, activist in the Woodcraft Folk

Workers’ Climate Action makes plans

DANIEL RAWNSLEY REPORTS ON WORKERS’ CLIMATE ACTION CONFERENCE

Sixty or seventy people attended the Workers’ Climate Action (WCA) conference in London on 10–11 October. Some had been involved in the network since the beginning, but many were new to WCA.

The first day was made up of workshops aiming to educate activists and provoke debate. Paul Hampton’s session

outlined key movement events like the Lucas Plan and the “green bans” movement centred around the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation and made the case for the importance of working class agency in the fight against climate change. Roger Geffen and Ian Fillingham’s session covered the history and politics of the environmental movement.

The sessions accomplished WCA’s self set task of bridging the divide between the labour movement and the climate justice movement, and prepared activists

to take on arguments around worker-led just transition.

The second day was given over to strategising for ongoing campaigns around Vestas, Kingsnorth and Heathrow, as well as looking at education for activists and the development of resources to help the campaign. A long discussion was held over creating structures for the network to help it carry out future work.

The meeting accepted volunteers for a minute taker, a treasurer, a website and e-mail working group and a meetings

working group. Though the day was lengthy and at some points arduous, activists attending seemed to feel satisfied with decisions made and prepared to carry them forward. The structure will be reviewed at the next WCA meeting which, it has been proposed, should take place before the end of the year.

The network seems set to grow beyond its work in the last few years, with activists beginning to plan local solidarity work as well as contributing time and energy to big national campaigns. The conference was a great success.

THE FAR RIGHT IN BRITAIN

How to fight the BNP

By CHARLIE SALMON

The agony and the ecstasy that come with commitment to the fascist politics of the British National Party have been shown in all their squalidness recently.

On the side of agony comes the ruling on BNP membership conditions by the Equalities and Human Rights Council together with the leak of an updated membership list.

On the ecstatic side the backbones of the racists, nationalists and fascist thugs who compose that membership will be substantially stiffened by the appearance of Nick Griffin on the BBC's "Question Time" and the waves of publicity that come with it. How do all these things fit together?

On 22 June this year the EHRC wrote to the BNP raising concerns under the Race Relations Act with regard to its conditions for membership of the party. These conditions stipulate (no changes have yet been made) that membership be restricted to particular "ethnic groups", namely those people of "English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish" ancestry. In short, people who are white and British. Three years after the Equalities Act of 2006, the EHRC came to

the conclusion that the BNP is fundamentally racist.

The EHRC gave the BNP the opportunity to amend membership restrictions or face legal action. The fascists failed to comply and the matter went to court.

Between the receipt of the initial letter and the BNP's day in the dock, the party went into a frenzy of activity. Their website promised a heavy-weight like confrontation between Griffin and EHRC chair Trevor Phillips. The party leader posed before war memorials, with stirring orchestral music in the background, demanding "extra efforts" and donations from the membership to fund their legal case.

But behind closed doors, even stranger and arguably more paranoid mutterings were making the rounds. Anti-fascist protesters picketing a BNP meeting in Shirebrook, Derbyshire, were accused of being the stooges of a man called Simon Woolley who wanted them all to join the BNP. Simon Woolley is the director of "Operation Black Vote", a group that organises within the black community for greater political engagement. The BNP was telling its members that Woolley had motivated the action by the EHRC in order to allow black people to join.

This claim has an appalling symmetry with another BNP claim that the government, urged on by and in cooperation with "Muslims", is encouraging the "Islamisation" of Britain. In the minds of the BNP this "weak government" is walking hand-in-hand with "alien forces" to bring about the collapse of the nation. Only Nick Griffin and the BNP can save us.

In fact, Griffin can't even save his own party. Despite all the promises of a show-down, the BNP backed down and agreed to amend its membership rules.

This humiliation will not transform the party; such legal measures will not and cannot make it any less racist or dangerous.

When they change the rules, anyone can be a member but only certain individuals — a small collection of people, selected and indoctrinated for the task — can actually vote on party policy. Conforming to Orwell's formulation of totalitarian thinking, in the BNP "some are more equal than others".

The second dose of agony comes from a new leak of the BNP membership list. The list, which is dated April this year, shows a total membership of 11,560 with a marked increase in female members since the last leak in 2008. (About one eighth of the party is now female.)

Interestingly, the information shows something of a contradiction between areas of electoral success and party membership.

Barking and Dagenham, Stoke, the North West and Yorkshire are areas where the party enjoys political representation but membership is actually most concentrated in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire. The only apparent correlation is the North West, where Lancashire suffers from concentrated membership.

One explanation for these concentrations is historic: in the hey-day of the National Front and openly Nazi organisations, Leicester and the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border towns and villages were centres of activity. It's likely that a number of long-time fascists, a readymade membership base, have joined the BNP but are of the "pub room fascist" variety rather than the energetic, younger members capable of winning elections.

Despite the facts and the embarrassing revelations, some parts of the mainstream are opening their doors. The BBC's decision to invite Griffin onto "Question Time" is the most prominent example of this to date.

The foolishness of the invitation has been explained elsewhere but the historic parallels and creeping dangers should be aired afresh. In the German Weimar Republic, members of the Nazi Sturmabteilung (SA) — Hitler's paramilitary organisation — operated with relative freedom, attacking Jews, socialists, trade unionists and other opponents. The Republic had very relaxed attitudes to free speech — anyone could say anything and quite frequently did, from all sides of the political spectrum.

The problem, however, was not one of free speech. Further up the establishment hierarchy, the Weimar courts treated SA members very lightly. The Nazis in general received a soft-ride from sections of the

press. There was a slow but steady accommodation to the existence and influence of the Nazi party, especially when electoral successes came their way.

The BNP is nowhere near as influential or threatening to democracy as the Nazis were in the years running up to taking power. The same levels of threat do not exist. But the slow, bit-by-bit accommodation by sections of the bourgeois media is following a similar pattern. As yet, the courts have shown themselves to be able and willing to take on the BNP. But such institutions are and can only be fair-weather friends in the fight against fascism.

The next general election is likely to herald significant changes in the political climate. Parliamentary representation for the BNP is not out of the question; neither is a significantly increased presence in local and regional government structures. If these things happen, then we cannot be sure how institutions of the state — the police, courts, law makers — will react.

We can rely neither on the bourgeois media nor the state to act against the threat posed by the BNP and similar organisations.

We can rely on our own ideas and our own movement to resist racism and fascism, but only if a political battle in our own house is won.

This means mobilising on our own terms against the fascists, articulating labour movement ideas and rejecting class-collaboration as a tactic. It means building and mobilising for a working-class movement against fascism.

• Notts Stopy the BNP
nobnffestival.wordpress.com

The "good name of the British military"?

By IRA BERKOVIC

A group of military top brass have released a statement condemning the "extremism" of the British National Party and accusing them of "hijacking the good name of the British military."

Apparently, the "values" of the modern military ("tolerance and fairness") are "entirely at odds" with those of the BNP. One is reminded of the stand-up comedian Stewart Lee's routine about the "values" of the Carphone Warehouse, the giant telecoms corporation which withdrew its sponsorship from the TV show "Big Brother" after the race row on a recent series; "the 'values' of the Carphone Warehouse", Lee sneers, "the sheer, naked hypocrisy of pretending that such things even exist."

But the British military is not just devoid of values but based on a very specific set of values where "tolerance" and "fairness" don't get a look in. The British military is an armed defence force for the capitalist class. It exists to violently defend its interests abroad (brutal invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq) and at home (military vehicles and personnel being used as scab labour to break firefighters' strikes, or soldiers being mobilised against striking workers).

So — beating the shit out of foreigners and smashing up strikes... maybe the "values" of the British military and the "values" of the BNP aren't so "entirely at odds" after all.

At various points throughout British

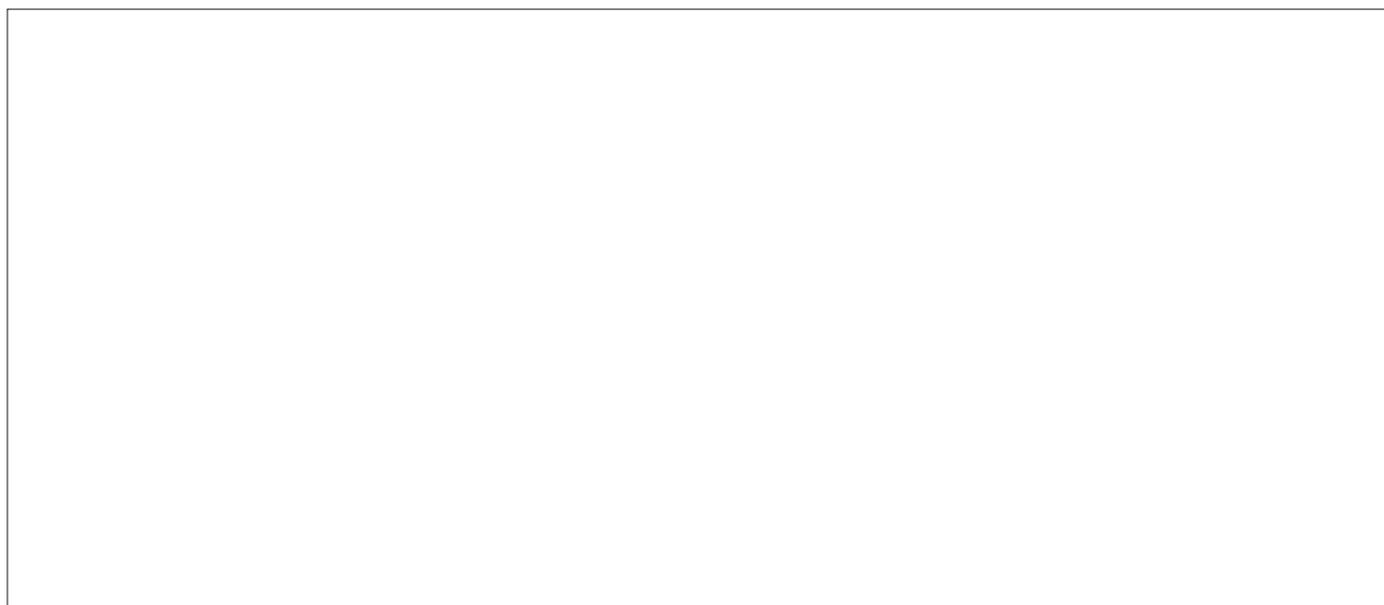
history, the predecessors of the military persons who've suddenly discovered their anti-fascist consciousness behaved very much like fascists themselves — individuals in the upper echelons of the British military were probably involved in plotting an extra-parliamentary military coup to depose (not-very-left-wing) Labour prime minister Harold Wilson in 1974.

Tragically Hope Not Hate (HNN) have already welcomed the statement, referring to those behind it as "a group of Britain's most distinguished generals." Both HNN and Unite Against Fascism (UAF) like to take a "the BNP aren't real patriots" angle and exploit misty-eyed World War Two nostalgia. Their view is that merely opposing the BNP (from whatever perspective, for whatever reasons and in whatever way) is enough — hence UAF, despite being run by the allegedly Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party, welcomes Ulster Unionists like Martin Smyth, far-right Tories like Teddy Taylor and indeed David Cameron himself.

For those of us serious about fighting fascism, we have to look at its root causes; namely, the capitalist policies of privatisation, marketisation and profiteering that drive working-class communities apart and allow racists to scapegoat ethnic minority workers. It is therefore impossible to fight fascism alongside people like the Tories who aspire to administer the capitalist system.

It makes even less sense to pretend that it can be fought alongside the armed wing of the capitalist state.

AIN: WHAT RESPONSE?



Now coming to Scotland

Scottish Defence League: why it must be stopped

BY ANDREW GREENLAW

The Scottish Defence League (SDL) — an offshoot of the English Defence League (EDL) — is planning to demonstrate in Glasgow on Saturday 14 November.

The EDL has been able to mobilise several hundreds for protests which it claims are against political Islam (but not ordinary Muslims) and the government's alleged "softness" on Islamist movements. It has also publicly distanced itself from the BNP (just as the BNP has distanced itself from the EDL).

As elsewhere in the UK, these people mean different things to different people. In practice, the EDL functions as a pole of attraction for racists, anti-Muslim bigots, right-wing extremists and, in some areas, BNP members and supporters.

What attracts these people to the EDL is not some profound political philosophy or theological critique of Islam. What attracts them is the chance to take to the streets in a show of force designed to intimidate local Muslims (irrespective of their politics), with the threat (or reality) of violence never far beneath the surface.

Like the EDL, the SDL puts on a moderate face in public. In a recently issued statement it rejected allegations that the SDL were "right-wing racists" and stressed that "we do not promote violence or racism."

The SDL, again following in the footsteps of the EDL, presents itself as the real voice of the British working class. In an interview with the *Sunday Herald* the SDL's leader, going under the pseudonym of "Don", explained:

"We are against fragmented communities living side by side, divided by hatred and distrust. It's time to take action because there will be bloodshed if we do nothing.... We will protest outside every council building, police station and school that tries to erode the voice of the working class majority in Britain."

But the SDL's "anti-racist" public statement also argued that "the Islamic faith (is) an aggressive movement, a religion that is being forced on others in the UK". It refers to "the decimation of cities in

parts of England where the indigenous population have been marginalised and left to their fate of being pushed from their areas by Muslim demographics and the creation of Muslim areas."

And *Searchlight* has reported, albeit without identifying the actual SDL leaders in question, that "the newly formed Scottish Defence League has known fascists at its core."

The SDL claims to have 180 members, with another 500 people having contacted the organisation to express an interest in joining.

This is almost certainly a gross inflation of the SDL's current level of support. The "official" SDL Facebook group is reported to have fewer than 150 members.

After its recent demonstration in Manchester the EDL boasted that "Football rivalries were long forgotten as [demonstrators] stood shoulder to shoulder for their country."

The SDL has rather less chance of overcoming "football rivalries" in attempting to mobilise support.

The SDL polo-shirt — available on eBay at £20 — carries the slogan "No Surrender to Al Qaeda." The choice of "No Surrender" as a slogan is unlikely to encourage "football rivalries" to be put aside. The same goes for the SDL's public statement, which condemns Irish Republicanism but not Loyalist paramilitaries:

"We will make a stand against those who wish to destroy this nation from within or without. This goes for any organisation or movement that would promote violence and terrorism within Great Britain and Northern Ireland, whether they be violent Muslims or murderous Irish Republicans."

Contrary to any attempt to overcome "football rivalries", an SDL Facebook page was recently set up specifically for Rangers supporters, with a "casualsunited" e-mail address as the contact address.

It attracted just 28 members before it was closed down, after Rangers had protested to Facebook about its emblems being used by the SDL.

In fact, within what now terms itself "the PUL community" (Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist), the SDL is receiving a very mixed reception.

The planned SDL march comes just at a time when Strathclyde police and politicians are highlighting the amount of money spent policing Orange Lodge processions — £1.7 million last year, to cover around a thousand parades. In that context, the SDL protest is not being welcomed by some of the more thoughtful members of the "PUL community":

"You can bet your bottom dollar that if this (demonstration) gets the go-ahead, the usual scum will come out and dream up amazing stories to tie the Rangers supporters, Loyal Orders, and Loyalists in general in with this mob..."

"As we all know, Glasgow City Council, the media, etc., don't need an excuse to have a go at the PUL community. But if this passes (i.e. public disorder) much the same as the rest (of the protests organised by the EDL), Christmas is coming early for our enemies!"

Although it remains unclear what the SDL is planning on 14 November, the most widely held assumption is that its supporters will meet up somewhere on the city centre side of the Clyde and then take a demonstration to the Glasgow Central Mosque on the other side of the river.

Alternatively, the SDL may go for a stationary protest in the vicinity of the Mosque.

14 November appears to have been chosen as the date for the SDL protest as there are no football games in Scotland that day — if the SDL is modelled on the EDL, then it will be relying heavily on football casualties for a turnout.

In addition, and probably more by coincidence than by design, 14 November coincides with a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Edinburgh, meaning that some of those who would have been likely to protest against the SDL will be demonstrating on the other side of Scotland.

The limited numbers who have signed up to the SDL Facebook page and the limited support in general which the SDL

seems to have generated to date are no reason for complacency. As the director of the Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance has put it:

"The planned SDL protest could finally shake Scotland from its complacency about the threat of organised racists operating in the country. It never has been an English-only problem, but for too long too many people in Scotland have been in denial."

"In June (in the Euro-elections), 27,174 Scottish individuals voted for the BNP — representing one person out of every 40 who voted. Whilst the actual membership of the so-called Scottish Defence League may be very small... these people are only out to provoke violence."

The focus of campaigning against the SDL protest should not be calls on the police and Glasgow City Council to ban an SDL demonstration.

Even if the demonstration were to be banned, the SDL would still be able to organise a stationary rally.

Ideally, a local Trades Council would take the lead in launching a trade-union-based campaign against local SDL activity. But Glasgow Trades Council meets only quarterly and will not be meeting again until after 14 November. In any case, its moribund state rules out any meaningful initiative from that quarter.

The only organised initiative to date against the SDL is "Scotland United", launched at a press conference on 19 October. "Scotland United" describes itself as "bringing together faith groups, trade unions, community organisations and politicians to celebrate Scotland's multiculturalism."

Initial signatories to its founding statement include the Scottish TUC, the Scottish-Islamic Foundation, the Scottish Interfaith Council, Sikhs for Scotland, the FBU, the Scottish Labour Party, the SNP, Unite Against Fascism, Hope not Hate (*Searchlight*), Glasgow Ant-Racist Alliance, Show Racism the Red Card, and the Stop the War Coalition.

According to the statement on the website of the Scottish-Islamic Foundation website, "the move (to launch 'Scotland United') comes after the stated intention of the far-right Scottish Defence League to protest outside Glasgow Central Mosque on 14 November. 'Scotland United' have said that they will be organising a rally elsewhere in the city at the same time."

It is still unclear whether the SDL *will* be protesting outside the Central Mosque on 14 November. But if the SDL *is* going to be doing that then it is ludicrous to "organise a rally elsewhere in the city at the same time."

In fact, *wherever* the SDL ends up protesting, it makes no sense to stage a counter-protest somewhere else. The approach of "Scotland United", however, is to do exactly that: by getting more people to their "celebration" of a "multicultural Glasgow and a multicultural Scotland", they want to show that they are more representative than the SDL.

Different people will demonstrate their opposition to the SDL in different ways. For some, this will take the form of participating in a "celebration" of multiculturalism. They are perfectly entitled to do so.

But the SDL's planned activities for 14 November are not just about attitudes to multiculturalism. They will be an organised exercise in racist intimidation, a physical manifestation of the idea that the streets belong to the SDL and that Muslims (and any dark-skinned person) is not welcome on them.

That is why the SDL need to be confronted and challenged directly, and why trade union, anti-racist, and anti-fascist activists will need to organise their own counter-protest for 14 November.

WORKER-COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRAQ

Why we will contest the election

Nadia Mahmoud of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq spoke to *Solidarity*.

The Worker-communist Party of Iraq has decided to take part in the elections due on 16 January 2010. This differs from our stand on the previous election on 2005 where the party adopted an "effective boycott" policy towards the election.

Why did we choose to take part in the election now? People believe that elections might bring in people who could make a change. Therefore we have to grasp this opportunity and introduce ourselves as an alternative that people can choose. All political parties are seizing this opportunity and putting all their resources into it to be on the top of the state. They are trying to reach out people and win their support although they have done nothing in the last four years apart from corruption and terrorising people. The bourgeois parties deceive, lie and terrorise people in the process of the election campaign, so we should go there and expose them.

We are not a parliamentary party. We do not believe that real change comes from Parliament. Real change needs no less than a revolution to shake and turn the whole system. But as there is no sign of a revolution in Iraq now, so we have to use what is on hand to push forward the people's movement towards freedom, equality and rights.

As a political party we have worked for the last 17 years for people's rights. We have to work to represent people in the Parliament. If we to boycott the election, the elections will not stop, people will go to vote and the Parliament will take place anyway.

What we have on hand now is a parliamentary election where political parties compete with each others over "control". We need to get there, be with people, put ourselves forward as a party that could be voted for, and go to Parliament to push forwards the demands.

Having said that, our daily struggle to organise people will continue. We will fight inside and outside Parliament. We believe that Parliament on its own can not do much without people themselves showing up in the streets, factories and their suburbs to make their voice heard.

The election commission has registered about 286 parties, groups and individuals who will compete for 310 seats in parliament. Our electoral bloc or list is called the "Freedom and Equality List". We will involve some independents who are not members of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq, from secular, workers', and women's movements.

The main points of our election platform focus on social security and a welfare system. "Jobs or Unemployed Benefit" — this one of the most pressing issue in Iraq. We will also stand for political freedoms — the right to organise, the right to protest, a secular non-nationalist state in Iraq, equal citizenship rights, women's rights, an end to capital punishment.

Many parties speak about fighting corruption, and we're in favour of having a legal system in place to

hold people to account. Corruption has become a widespread phenomenon. There are ministers of the ruling parties who have accused of fraud such as the Minister of Trade, Falah Al-Sodani, who resigned only one day before an investigation in Parliament began. The Prime Minister covered him by accepting his resignation so he could run away with what he did.

The Minister of Electricity ran away with millions of dollars. The Minister of Education opened fire on students while they were sitting for their exams. All these and others went unpunished.

We oppose the Iraqi government's policies based on "joint venture" contracts with oil companies, and we oppose the intervention of the IMF in Iraq. The IMF is putting pressure on the government to privatise and to keep the prices of domestic oil and fuel high. Whether the economy is privatised or not, we demand basic welfare provision and social security. We look to build a popular movement to demand that the wealth created from industries like the oil industry is distributed socially. This is the main task before us to mobilise people around.

The conflict over Kirkuk won't be resolved, in my opinion, until the Kurdish question as a whole is addressed. We said that the issue should be decided by the people of Kirkuk themselves. They should choose whether they want to be administered by Kurdistan or Iraq for the time being.

The final election law isn't out yet, but a draft is being considered by parliament. The first draft stipulated that anyone less than thirty five years of age wouldn't be allowed to stand in the elections and that anyone without a university degree wouldn't be able to stand.

Our party stands against these restrictions. We've started a campaign to abolish those rules. They would bar young people and workers from taking part. Other parties have commented about this that the age should be brought to 25 years not 35. One wonders why to vote you can be 18 years old, but to nominate yourself needs to be 35 years old? Many other parties are in favour of putting these conditions to "protect" parliament from "illiterate" or "uneducated" people.

In addition to that we want "open lists", not "closed lists". That means that voters know who are the individuals on every "nominated list". They are better informed and able to vote for the nominees they want. That was not the case in the last election.

The general picture in terms of violence is getting better compared with 2006-7, but that doesn't mean violence has stopped. The violence now is more between the government parties in order to seize as much power as they can and to defeat their competitors.

Now, all the mainstream parties are trying to wind down the sectarian rhetoric and play up their nationalist credentials. All the Shia groups are looking for Sunni allies, and all the Sunni groups are looking for

Iraq's provincial elections, January 2009

Shia allies. That's because they know that people won't accept sectarian slogans. People aren't buying it any more. People are sick and tired of all these sectarian conflicts. The Islamic parties, Shia and Sunni, understand this very well.

Economically; there are no precise unemployment figures and the situation's still pretty bad. There's no social security, so a lot of unemployed people rely on their families for support.

Water is a big problem. Turkey and Iran control a lot of the flow of water and are blocking the supplies. Electricity shortages are still not improved at all. The supply tends to come on and off every few hours, Fuel and gas are still an issue. You will see huge queues of cars trying to fill up on petrol.

As regards the trade unions and the workers' movement, the conflict is intensifying. On 7 October, there was a peaceful demo organised by workers of the industry sector in front of Parliament. The security forces opened fire in the air to frighten the workers, and beat up a number of them and arrested others. But the workers kept themselves under control so no blood was shed.

The intervention of the government in the trade unions including in the unions that are linked to the government, provokes anger among trade unionists. The government can not tolerate any independence from the trade unions.

The other danger I want to point out is that there is a tendency led by big companies and the USA to shift workers' organisations and trade unions' attention away from taking part in political life and towards "cultural" issues — to efforts to "improve cultural rights", to "take responsibility in the reconstruction of our country", to "raising labour productivity", to "human solidarity in labour relations". They pour money into the workers' organisations and trade unions to work on this direction.

It is about demolishing the ground for any class struggle from workers against the capitalist system. It aims to keep workers' organisations busy with superficial un-harmful middle-class activities. Some trade unions have swallowed the bait, and step by step the "beneficiary" workers' organisations have become more accountable to their "funders" than to the people they are supposed to represent. The same is happening for women's organisations. They need a "wake up" call.

By paying money to the mass organisations in Iraq, they aim to turn them to "civil rights organisations" or "charity organisations" which will in the final account pull the rug from under the feet of leftists, end any potential for communism, and leave the working class without a base of organisation. They are well aware that only communists can expose them and create a real danger for the capitalist system. No-one else can.

Appeal: union independence under threat

The Higher Ministerial Committee overseeing the implementation of a Governing Council decision announced recently that nominations are open to establish a national preparatory committee to organise and supervise the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW) leadership election across the country. But this government action was done without any prior knowledge or consultation with the GFIW. The union's Executive Committee says that this move violates Iraqi labour laws as well as International Labour Organisation conventions, and is calling for broad international support of their defense of the union's independence. You can send a protest message to the Iraqi government here:

http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/solidarityforever/show_campaign.cgi?c=588

TV

Racist attacks increase. Why?

Rosalind Robson reviews *Panorama, Hate on the Doorstep*, BBC 1 Monday 19 October

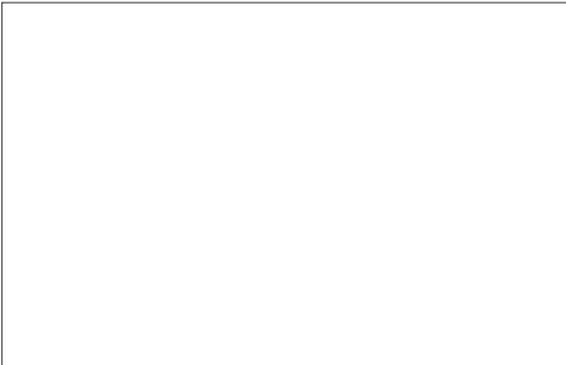
The most disturbing thing about this programme were the images of two British Asian reporters (posing “undercover” as a couple living on a largely white working-class housing estate in Bristol), being subjected to daily racist bullying by children and young people. But that was not the only disturbing aspect of this programme.

The two reporters (filming with cameras concealed in their clothes) were racially abused more than fifty times in eight weeks. It was a shocking experience for them — they both said they had never felt so threatened. And they surely did a good job in sticking it out for so long. However they were let down by the soundbite journalistic techniques of the whole “undercover” production.

We were told by a worker from a local project, Support Against Racist Incidents (SARI), that there had been a rise in racist attacks on the South Mead Estate where the reporters were living. But we were not told why.

That kind of information-gathering always seems to be out of the remit of current TV documentaries. I’ve got so used to shouting sarcastically “in depth!” at these kind of programmes, I forget to be truly concerned. But here I was forced to remember how important it is for a TV documentary to have “context” and “balance”.

This programme has caused a bit of a crisis at Bristol City Council. So much so, the council leader (quoted on the BBC website) has called for meetings “at the highest level”. At the highest level indeed! The council



Youth on the Southmead estate. All bad?

bureaucracy’s concern is prompted by the fact that a lot of money has recently gone into “improving” the Southmead Estate. So the questions the programme should have asked are, where has this money gone, what has been done to improve the lives of the people living on the estate and can “extra money” do to undermine racist and xenophobic ideas anyway.

Because the programme was based on exposing the handful of teenagers and local “hard” cases, young men with a history of violence, the viewer was left with the impression that the Southmead Estate was a racist estate — some decent people, but basically racist.

Which is not the view of Batook Pandya from SARI. Again, on the BBC website, she says, “I think we’ve got to look at it in this way: is Southmead a racist area, I would say no. Is there more racist attacks in Southmead? At that time (i.e. in June when the programme was made), and [from] the number of cases I get, yes.”

So the real story is... there has been a rise in the number of racist attacks. And the question that should have been asked and answered is, “why is this?”

The reporters themselves raise an issue about the BNP and whether it was operating in the area. They said they had no evidence of that. Yet in the film we see one of the children using the word “jihad” as part of a racist taunt. Does an eleven year old know that word?

I did a mini-investigation of my own and asked my partner, who is a teacher in a south London school, whether any eleven year old he knew would know that word. No way! was his answer. So how does a child pick up that kind of “technical” language if it is not from older mates, parents, relatives or friends of the family who *are* organised or semi-organised racists?

If there is to be a serious media investigation into the rise in racist attacks it will have to do better than this.

It should also steer clear of endorsing the government’s populist agenda which says it is okay to “name and shame” children — immature people who have who knows what going on in their lives, shaping their personalities and making them behave badly.

A child of eleven who tries to “stick up” a young Asian woman who cannot speak English because he has learned that such a person is an easy target for bullying, certainly needs some kind of positive adult intervention in their life. But shame on the programme makers for not remembering that he is after all, a child — a fact made so obvious from his method of “sticking up” (using his two fingers).

No child, no matter how badly they behave, should be, named, filmed and have it broadcast on national telly that they are under the supervision of social services.

BOOK

Well-chosen target, poor critique

Dale Street reviews *The Illusion of Freedom: Scotland under Nationalism* by Tom Gallagher

Somewhere, out there, there must be a book which provides a decent analysis and critique, from a socialist perspective, of the SNP and the SNP minority government which has been in power at Holyrood since May 2007. Unfortunately — for reader and author alike — Tom Gallagher’s recently published work is not that book.

The book begins with a history of Scotland from the Treaty of Union of 1707 through to the SNP’s election victory three centuries later. It is the good part of the book.

The Union of 1707, Gallagher explains (like countless others before him) was not an act of annexation. On the contrary, it left many of the main Scottish institutions intact. Nor was the Union something which lacked support in Scotland: there was a Unionist tradition in Scotland dating back to the early sixteenth century.

The Treaty of Union opened up England’s colonial possessions to Scottish merchants and facilitated the initial “accumulation of capital” needed to transform the Scottish economy. In the course of the nineteenth century, Scotland’s economy emerged as one of the most industrialised in the world.

Scotland’s relation to England was therefore anything but that of a colony.

In the early twentieth century, as continental competitors began to make inroads into British economic hegemony, the first voices which questioned the value of the Union for Scotland began to be raised.

But the shared experiences of the Second World War and the post-war Labour government’s creation of an all-British welfare state quickly stifled such voices, at least until the 1960s.

In the course of the 1960s the manifest failure of the Westminster government to prevent the ongoing decline of the Scottish economy, together with the dis-

covery of North Sea oil, re-opened the political space for the argument that Scotland would do better as an independent state.

The ongoing decline of the institutions which had “bonded” together the constituent parts of the British state provided further grist to the Scottish-nationalist mill. So too did the collapse of Scottish support for the major Unionist parties, firstly for the Tories after their adoption of Thatcherism, and then for New Labour after its own adoption of Thatcherism.

Devolution in 1997 actually resulted in a sudden collapse in support for the SNP. However the sorry record in power of the two Labour-Liberal Democratic Holyrood administrations (1999-2003, and 2003-2007) resulted in a revival of the SNP’s fortunes.

Fully one half of Gallagher’s book is taken up with this historical background to the rise of the SNP.

Gallagher’s critique of the SNP in power constantly struggles, albeit unsuccessfully, to raise itself above a loose and sometimes repetitive pastiche of journalistic anecdotes and cyberspace chatter.

True enough, there is no shortages of such anecdotes and chatter: Catholics, Islamists, Donald Trump, rich Americans, bankers, rich Scots, nuclear power, the Lewis chessmen, Andy Murray, Trotskyites (sic), William Wallace, Ireland, Qatar, Kosova, Mary, Queen of Scots, quangocrats, the Lisbon Treaty, Berwick-on-Tweed, Jahangir Hanif ...

And, true enough, some of the anecdotes and chatter are almost interesting. But what they do not add up to is anything even half-approaching a serious political analysis of the SNP.

In fairness to Gallagher, it could be argued that because the SNP is such an “all things to all people” kind of party, a rounded and holistic analysis of its politics is impossible.

But Gallagher’s vitriolic contempt for the SNP and his sometimes personalised attacks do little to raise the political level of the book, even if the vitriol does not

reach the level achieved by Gallagher in some of his other writings on the SNP.

Gallagher’s right-wing leanings — expressed, for example in his sneers about “anti-fascist rhetoric” and “class war rhetoric which has been gathering dust for decades” — only reinforce the book’s shortcomings.

In some ways, though, this is a pity. Somewhere within *The Illusion of Freedom* there is a serious book trying to escape. Unfortunately, however, the dead weight of Gallagher’s prose renders futile any such attempt at escape.

Although Gallagher never fully develops it, his basic argument is that post-1707 Scotland (like pre-1707 Scotland) was socially and politically conservative, and governed over by vested interests hostile to any idea of participatory democracy. And the SNP belongs to that tradition.

For all its rhetoric and apparent radicalism, the SNP would rule even an independent Scotland in the same top-down and non-participatory manner as its predecessors over the past three centuries.

It is in that sense that the SNP promise of an independent Scotland, governed by the SNP, offers only the illusion, and not the reality of freedom.

THE PAST WE INHERIT, THE FUTURE WE BUILD

The Scottish workers’ movement and
Scottish nationalism

£4 post and packing free, from AWL, PO Box 823,
London, SE15 4NA

Or go to

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/04/23/scotland-past-we-inherit-future-we-build>

CPB not split, but slate plans unclear

BY GERRY BATES

The internet rumours (reported in *Solidarity* 3/160) that the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*) had split were untrue.

The rumour now is that the CPB has u-turned again, and is back in on the "son of No2EU" project for an election slate. The split was said to be over whether or not to take part in that slate.

The CPB executive did vote to withdraw from the discussions on a slate which have been going on since the June euro-elections among the groups which took part in the No2EU slate then — the CPB, the RMT rail union leadership, the Socialist Party, and the Alliance for Green Socialism.

The RMT has called an open conference on 7 November entitled "Crisis in Working-Class Political Representation". It had seemed likely that the possible new slate would be launched there. ("Launch" it would be, rather than discussion, since the conference is "non-binding and non-resolution-based", and only four hours are allowed for the whole event, with eight platform speakers).

However, at first sight the platform does not look like a launch rally. It includes two SP speakers; John Foster (of the CPB, and said to be one of the CPB leaders who won the first vote to withdraw from the "son of No2EU" talks); Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, and Labour Representation Committee vice-chair Susan Press; and Dave Ward of the CWU and Matt Wrack of the FBU.

Respect (Galloway) and SWP have been signalling that they would like to get in on a "son of No2EU"-type slate, but neither has a platform speaker.

Another conference has been called for 21 November by the "People's Charter", an initiative of the CPB. The People's Charter website suggests two activities to people who back the Charter: sign it, and get others to sign it; and vote for MPs who endorse it. Its architects think of it as a partly-electoral project.

However, three Lib-Dems and two SNP MPs, as well as a maverick independent, Bob Spink, formerly Tory, then UKIP, have backed the Charter. It doesn't look good as a criterion of whether candidates can be considered as working-class political representatives.

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

New row in the SWP

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

Isaac Deutscher made a career out of divining the twists and turns in the Stalinist Russian state apparatus. Alongside his much praised but flawed biography of Trotsky he produced several apologies — posing as rational analysis — for the USSR.

His success, his plausibility, was in large part a function of a certain literary flair combined with sufficient chutzpah to fabricate what he — and everyone else outside of the ruling clique of Stalinist Russia — could not possibly know. There's a certain temptation to replicate his method when dealing with the latest manifestation of crisis in the Socialist Workers Party. Why?

Because the nature of that organisation is such that getting to the truth of the matter is near-impossible. Like a Stalinist Politburo, the SWP is all but sealed-off from the outside world. We are left with rumour, interpretation and extrapolation. Some may argue the case, as many SWP members do, that the party has a right to conduct its deliberations *in camera* — after all, what business is it of non-members of "The Revolutionary Party"?

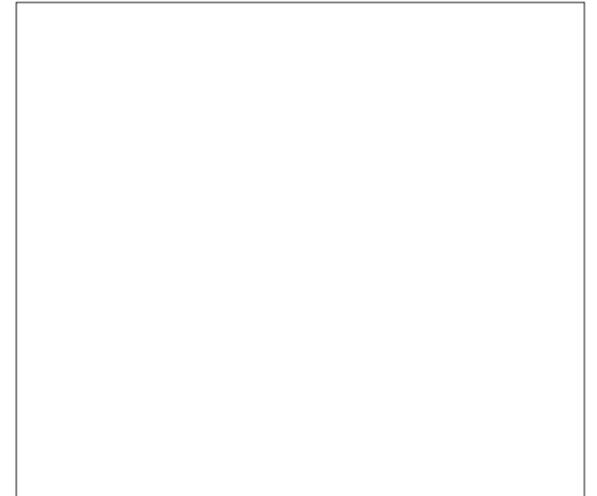
The basis for this argument is historically and logically flawed, particularly so for an organisation that claims to want to replicate the achievements of our revolutionary forbears. Even at the height of Tsarist repression, the contending factions of the Russian revolutionary movement had no reticence in conducting open and quite often sharp debates in public.

Unfortunately for the SWP, leaks happen.

The "Socialist Unity" blog, run by former SWP member Andy Newman, reported on 13 October that two student members have been suspended for "taking a different trajectory" from the rest of the party. He adds that "the sign up sheets for SOAS Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS) have been taken away by the SWP, preventing the society from registering this year". These are the basic facts and we have no reason to think that Andy or his source have fabricated them. So what's significant about the suspension of these comrades and why does it point to the possibility of a new crisis in the SWP?

From blog comments that followed the story, it seems that a great deal comes down to Martin Smith's attempts to consolidate his organisational (rather than intellectual) leadership of the party and see off the latest moves by the deposed Rees/German group.

The SWP is in a "conference preparation period", the only time in which differences can be aired, arguments debated and factions formed in the tightly-run organisation. It is claimed that at the last SWP national com-



John Rees — ready for a fight?

mittee, John Rees proposed an alternative approach (details unknown) to anti-fascist work to that currently taken by the party.

In a previous episode of factionalism, Rees is understood to have made unfavourable comments on the effectiveness of the party's anti-fascist work. Rees, the self-styled master of the "united front", wanted to teach Smith a lesson, and it seems he's having a second pop at his slow-learning comrade.

Rees' decision to oppose the formal line of the group over anti-fascist work is probably the opening shot in a major battle to come. Smith's response has been to suspend two comrades who support the Rees/German group and to take or threaten "administrative suspension" against other groups of supporters. These suspensions will exclude members from the national conference because they are not permitted to attend branch meetings and therefore cannot be nominated.

In addition a website run by Rees/German supporters — Counterfire — has been shut down. More significantly, Chris Bambery is said to have resigned as editor of *Socialist Worker*.

There can be little doubt that if left to his own devices, Smith will come a cropper against Rees and German. Rees is more erudite and impressive as an individual (which does not mean more correct or clear!) German is also a notch above Smith in this regard and is old enough to have been part of the last major factional battles in the SWP. Once upon a time she told this writer about her part in locking Jim Higgins and supporters out of the party national office.

But Smith is not isolated. One explanation for his "administrative" actions so far could be that party "theoreticians" Alex Callinicos and Chris Harman — both of whom could mount a serious ideological assault on Rees — have not spoken, or at least not to the wider party. Another consideration is that the numbers thought to be supporting Rees/German are sufficiently small that simply suspending and driving them out of the party before an all-out conference confrontation is a price worth paying. This could well be the estimation of Callinicos and Harman.

Either way, further hypothesising can only lead to a mangle-mangle of speculation much of which will be off the mark. What we do know, the meagre leaked "facts" of the situation, point once more to a party not only in crisis but a leadership willing to act out of all proportion to prevent genuine debate in the ranks. We have yet more evidence of the political poison that typifies the SWP's interpretation of Leninism.

The SWP may be rotting from the inside but for the sake of the left, we should once again make efforts to engage ordinary party members in discussion. If the SWP is about to experience further ructions and a further loss of membership, we cannot afford to lose genuine and previously committed activists to despondency.

The manifesting crisis in the SWP is a matter of politics and given the chance, we should seek and articulate political explanations for what's going on.

OUR VICE-CHANCELLOR'S WORST NIGHTMARE...

EDUCATION NOT FOR SALE GATHERING 2009:

A conference to fight fees, cuts and marketisation

SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER, 11AM-6PM, SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES (CENTRAL LONDON, NEAR KING'S CROSS, EUSTON AND RUSSELL SQUARE TUBES)

With education sector bosses clamouring for the £3,000 cap on top-up fees to be lifted or scrapped altogether when the government reviews it in 2010, it's more important than ever that students organise a national fight-back to resist the rule of profit in education and go on the offensive for a vision of universities and colleges run democratically by those who work and study in them. Education Not for Sale's fourth annual national gathering will discuss building nationwide direct action for free education, building on the experience of the January-March wave of student occupations. There'll also be workshops on anti-capitalist liberation politics, building student-worker solidarity, the possibility of building a fighting federation of SUs independently of the increasingly bureaucratic NUS, and an organisational session that gives you a chance to take some ownership over ENS and its work in the coming year.

More details are online at www.free-education.org.uk, and the Facebook event is "Education Not for Sale gathering 2009"

For more, email education.not.for.sale@gmail.com or ring 07961 040 618.

GLASGOW NORTH BY-ELECTION

Three contests underway

BY DALE STREET

The Glasgow North East by-election, triggered by the resignation of the sitting Labour MP and House of Commons Speaker Michael Martin, will take place on 12 November.

There will be three contests in this election.

- To win the election (Labour is the favourite against the SNP).

- Between the "candidates of the left" and the BNP.

- And rivalry between the left candidates.

Michael Martin stepped down at the height of last summer's scandal over MPs' expenses, after facing sustained attack for his failure to be critical of MPs who had milked the Commons expenses system and after trying to prevent the publication of information about MPs' expenses.

Martin's hostility to openness about expenses may have been for personal reasons. Between 2004 and 2008 Martin's wife claimed over £4,000 for taxi fares for shopping, and £50,000 for air travel. Air miles collected by Martin from his flights on official business were used to help cover the costs of holiday flights for family relatives.

As Speaker of the House of Commons, Martin lived free-of-charge in Speaker's House. In 2008 £148,000 was spent on furniture for the accommodation, £191,000 on air-conditioning, £13,000 on art, and £291,000 on "restoration and refurbishment". At the same time Martin claimed £17,000 a year for his home in Glasgow, and a further £7,500 a year in costs for using his Glasgow home as an office.

Martin was paid £137,579 a year as Speaker. But, despite losing his job, he is unlikely to face hard times: he will receive half his salary as a pension until he dies. This is on top of the £122 a day living allowance and £51 a day secretarial allowance he now enjoys following his "elevation" to the Lords as Lord Martin of Springburn.

Springburn is the old name for the Glasgow North East constituency. The lavish lifestyle enjoyed by Lord Martin stands in stark contrast to the poverty of many of his former constituents.

The constituency has the highest level of child poverty in Scotland, and the fourth highest level in Britain. 52% of its population have no educational or vocational qualifications, the worst rate in the whole of Britain. Over a quarter of its working-age population are on benefits because of long-term illness. 30% of adults in the constituency are classed as economically inactive.

Compared with other constituencies in Scotland, smoking rates, deaths from cancer, crime rates, income levels, life expectancy, and levels of alcohol and drug abuse are generally worse, and often substantially so.

Martin stood down as Speaker in June. Labour has delayed holding a by-election until November because they were afraid that a snap by-election — held at a time of ongoing outrage about MPs' expenses — would have cost them the seat.

In the contest to win the seat Labour remains the favourite. In this year's Euro-elections Labour outpolled the SNP in the constituency, albeit by only 2,000 votes. And Labour machine politics still functions, just about, in the constituency.

The SNP, in Glasgow at least, has probably lost support in recent months after announcing cuts in government spending on Glasgow — especially its decision to axe the Glasgow Airport Rail Link. Labour is also portraying the SNP as soft on crime — because of its decision to release Abdul Al-Megrahi!



Michael Martin. Stood down, but not before he had "earned" a lot of money

The candidates of the left, in the broad sense of the word, who are standing against the BNP, are The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity Scotland.

The BNP claims that it has enjoyed a surge in membership in Scotland in recent months, and that it will be contesting 23 Westminster constituencies in Scotland next year. It present itself as a "radical" alternative to the "establishment parties", and one committed to the interests of ordinary "ethnic Britons" (i.e. whites).

In the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections the BNP, in Scotland as a whole, did better than the SSP but not as well as Solidarity. In this year's Euro-elections the BNP did better than both the SSP and No2EU (which was backed by Solidarity and stood Sheridan as a candidate).

The third contest is between the SSP and Solidarity Scotland.

In June of this year Solidarity Scotland made a public appeal to the SSP to hold off from deciding to stand a candidate given that, at the time, a group of trade union officials were attempting to promote agreement to a single candidate of the left.

The Socialist Workers Party, which still maintains a paper attachment to Solidarity Scotland, even went so far as approaching a member of the SSP to suggest that he be the "unity candidate".

The proposal from Solidarity Scotland was rejected by the SSP, which went on to select its own candidate for the by-election. The (potential) trade union initiative promptly collapsed, as there could be no "left unity" candidate if the SSP was standing a candidate.

And Solidarity Scotland went on to stand Tommy Sheridan (again) — if the SSP was going to stand a candidate, then so too was Solidarity Scotland!

Just to underline its position on the question of "left unity", even in terms of supporting a single candidate in by-elections, the SSP issued a statement at the end of June amounting to "don't call us — we'll call you":

"The SSP was founded on the principle of left unity in Scotland. We continue to have that as our goal. In 2006 a split from the SSP fractured that unity. Once all of the legal obstacles have been cleared from our path we intend to initiate a full, open and democratic discussion around left unity in Scotland and the role that the SSP can play in achieving it."

In the midst of the electioneering cacophony of the main parties, socialists should attempt to gain a hearing for basic class-struggle politics and a working-class alternative to the policies of capitalist austerity and Scottish populism.

"It was the best for thirty years"

A Labour Party activist long centrally involved in battles for democracy in the party spoke to Martin Thomas about the vote at Labour Party conference this year to have OMOV (direct election) for the constituency places on the National Policy Forum.

This was the best thing that has happened at conference for thirty years. The unions and the constituency parties united and took on the whole party machine and won.

That hasn't happened for a long time. It was fundamental if only as a symbolic issue: the constituencies and the unions united against the party machine.

What happens now depends on the general election. If we win the general election, then I have no doubt that Gordon Brown will allow a bit more democracy in the party. If we lose the general election, then there will have to be a total review of the structures.

I think the restoration of contemporary motions at Labour Party conference is guaranteed. [It is due to be reviewed in 2010, to apply immediately to the 2010 conference if agreed]. But in my view a lot of other things are much more important than the restoration of motions. Motions mean nothing if the leadership can just ignore them when they are passed. We need to control the process of carrying out the motions.

If we lose the election, then there will be a new leader, and a lot depends on who that is. If we get a Blairite, then they may push things back.

Blair was a Tory, really, and the Blairite takeover was a Tory takeover. It seriously damaged the party, though it could not completely destroy the working-class base.

Even if we get David Miliband, who is a Blairite, as the new leader, he will have difficulty unravelling the moves to restore democracy now underway. But I don't think Miliband can win. Alan Johnson is the more dangerous Blairite candidate for leader. Some people say Johnson is not really a Blairite, but he is.

There is no left-wing candidate for leadership who will get enough nominations for the ballot. Jon Cruddas voted for the Iraq war, and anyway he would have no chance of winning.

What we can hope for is a new leader who will agree to more democracy in the party. The only person I see in the frame is John Denham. He is not a left-winger, but he is honest, he resigned as a minister over the Iraq war, and he would agree to more democracy.

If we could win the right to amend National Policy Forum statements at conference, that would give the party more power than motions did in the old days. In fact it would be better, in terms of conference control over actual policy, than anything since 1918.

I think it will take some years to win that. We might get something towards it earlier, for example the right to amend annex reports, which cover the progress (or otherwise) made at Policy Commissions in relation to submissions from conference.

But there is a long battle to win the unions to support the right to amend National Policy Forum statements. The CWU would support that now, but it will take some time to convince the other unions.

LRC: a chance to regain momentum

The Labour Representation Committee, a Labour-left group sponsored by six trade unions and associated with John McDonnell MP, holds its conference on 14 November.

According to LRC: "The original Labour Representation Committee was formed in 1900 to fight for political representation for the Labour Movement. In Britain today we face a similar crisis of representation. The task for today's LRC, founded in 2004, is to fight for power within the Labour Party and trade unions and to appeal to the tens of thousands who have

turned away from Labour in disillusion and despair".

Some LRC insiders, however, have said to *Solidarity* that in recent months the group has lacked the momentum it had when John McDonnell sought nominations to run for Labour Party leader against Gordon Brown after Tony Blair's departure in 2007.

LRC had no big part in the victory against the platform at Labour Party conference on election of the National Policy Forum, and the "Public Services Not Private Profit" campaign associated with LRC has not made much running against the public-service cuts

now flagged up as likely in 2010.

Back in June John McDonnell talked of creating a distinctive left "slate" within the Labour campaign at the coming general election, with a platform counterposed both to the Tories and to the Labour leadership. But nothing has been heard of that since then.

The conference should be used as an opportunity to regain momentum.

- Saturday 14 November, 10 to 5, Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London. Register online at www.l-r-c.org.uk.

BERLUSCONI, CRAXI AND P2

Italy's rotten republic

By HUGH EDWARDS

Over the last four months Italy's right-wing government has been increasingly threatened by the fallout from the sex scandals surrounding Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Are we now seeing a serious political and constitutional crisis?

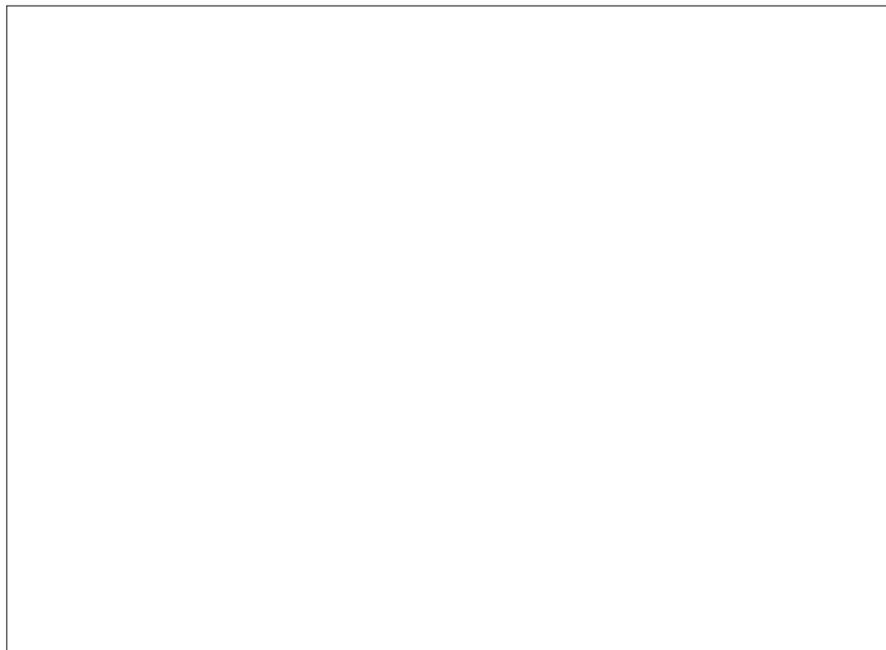
It all began with typically arrogant denials and outrageous lies about Berlusconi's relationship with a 17-year-old model. Then one sordid detail followed another. A squalid bacchanalia furtively lived behind the walls of the baroque palaces of a government presided over by a man formally pledged to the public service of "God, Family, Country".

Berlusconi has desperately tried to avoid any accountability either to parliament or to the press by ferociously attacking his critics by means of his media empire and initiating legal action and censorship against them. But now the issue of press freedom and censorship has now become of critical importance and has thrown the spotlight on the "conflict of interest" at the very heart of Berlusconi's presence in political life.

The government's staunchest and most powerful ally, the church, hit back after the publication by Berlusconi of a forged document blackening the name of the editor of *L'Avvenire* — a Vatican publication — that had written a critical article.

In mid October the Supreme Court ruled the Prime Minister did not have immunity from prosecution. Once again Berlusconi will face long-standing corruption charges, involving association with the mafia etc. Such accusations have plagued his business and political life.

Growing opposition is led by the liberal press and a section of the magistrates, rather than the left or trade union move-



Silvio Berlusconi and Bettino Craxi — partners in corruption

ment. Berlusconi has refused to bow.

He vilified the Supreme Court judgement as the work of a "red conspiracy", a conspiracy involving Italy's ex-Stalinist President Giorgio Napolitano, and the magistrates whose charter of autonomy and independence he now promises to reform completely.

The events unfolding in Italy deserve serious attention, all the more so because the characteristic buffoonery of the individual makes us overlook the truly ruthless and sinister nature of what he and his cronies are about. Some details from Berlusconi's background can shed some light on this.

BERLUSCONI'S BACKGROUND

After the ignominious collapse of the parties that ruled (or misruled)

Italy from 1948–1992, after their endemic corruption had been exposed by a group of magistrates — Operation Clean Hands — the Italian bourgeoisie had high hopes of a fresh political start under the banner of "Probity, Stability, Bipolarity".

Public life was to be cleansed of corruption, governments were to be durable and modern and alternating between parties of the left and right. In this way they could restore the fortunes of an increasingly decrepit capitalism, which had been reduced to near bankruptcy by the crooks just the judges had just turfed out.

The election of 1994 saw the emergence of Berlusconi. Here was a man who had already raised considerable anxiety by his links to corruption scandals in the last days of the First Republic. And as a billionaire media magnate turned politician he controlled a private empire. If elected, he would have access to state power which he could exploit in pursuit of both his political and business interests. Such a scenario seemed to signal the sinister prospect of the return of a form of plebiscitary rule.

Berlusconi's political formation didn't take shape within the model of the Christian Democracy that dominated Italy for nearly 50 years — a movement with a powerful social base enveloped by the aura of the faith and spirit of Catholicism and a leadership defined within a network of counterbalancing factions, immune to the cult of personality or the charismatic chief.

Culturally Berlusconi comes from a different world. He is from Milan — few if any of the traditional Christian Democratic caste were from Lombardy! He is the son of a bank clerk and had a fanatical desire to gain access to the sophisticated world of the Milan high bourgeoisie.

His failure to do so brought him into contact with the leader of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) Bettino Craxi in 1976. Berlusconi's relationship with Craxi (who is also from Milan) grew around a cosy arrangement, whereby Berlusconi's first television stations were successfully financed by lavish help from Socialist Party-controlled banks.

Craxi, a charismatic, utterly ruthless party chief and shameless populist, sensed the potential in the nexus of mass media exploitation of mass consumption and electoral power provided by Berlusconi. As a compulsive womaniser he enjoyed access to the regiments of models and showgirls liberally on sale at Berlusconi's mansions across the country.

On becoming Premier in 1983 Craxi rescued Berlusconi's national television network, broadcasting in defiance of a Supreme Court ruling to shut it down, and successfully passing a law that ensured Berlusconi had a permanent grip on the network. \$12 million were deposited in a foreign bank as a mark of gratitude.

Craxi perished politically in the scandals of the early 90s, exiling himself in Tunisia and dying there rather than face the courts in Italy. Berlusconi is his heir.

Another influence drove Berlusconi into the political arena. Berlusconi was a member of a secret Masonic order called Propaganda 2 (P2). Its 950 members from the most wealthy and powerful included 52 senior members of the carabinieri, 37 from the Treasury police, five government ministers, 38 parliamentarians, 14 judges, 10 bank presidents, as well as senior editors and journalists from the major press, and noted figures from the world of popular culture. The head of the organisation was an ex-fascist, Licio Gelli.

In effect the cabal was a shadow government, created in the context of Italian political crisis of the late 60s and 70s. It aimed at the creation of a strongly authoritarian central power involving a major assault on the political, juridical, constitutional and trade-union freedoms and rights formally present in the Italian bourgeois state.

The situation is different today. But the experience of Berlusconi's three periods in office — and especially now where he enjoys a comfortable majority — has provided clear evidence of the agenda that animates the mind, heart and spirit of this demagogue. It is very much in the hate-driven tradition of Mussolini and fascist Italy.

Like Mussolini, Berlusconi is seeking to exploit both the desperation and sense of impotence in a society deep in the throes of economic decline. He can also gamble on the cowardice and weakness of the various forces of opposition to him within and outside the country. In his 15 years of political life he has hardly had a serious blow landed on him, so politically disarmed have the liberal and radical left been.

It is only to be hoped that in the present flow of events, his acts of buffoonery, so much at the heart of the self-image as the key to his popularity, may make him overplay his hand. His opinion poll ratings have begun to fall.

Nothing could more starkly underline the state of Italian capitalist society, its bourgeoisie and its relentless decline, than the fact that its First Republic collapsed amidst popular outrage at stratospheric levels of political corruption in business and politics, only to see a Second Republic dominated by a man who is the very epitome of the illegality, greed, corruption and venality that pervades every part of the peninsula.

Around 10,000 Italian teachers demonstrated in Rome on Saturday 3 October against job cuts. Fifty-seven thousand teachers employed on fixed-term contracts, many of whom have worked in the same job for years, have been sacked in a government "reform". The total cuts are expected to increase to 150,000 jobs in the next two years.

The demo was organised by a network of co-ordinating committees of the sacked teachers. While some hostility to the major unions is understandable given their limited support for the teachers' dispute, I suspect it also reflects some anarcho-syndicalist influence. In the picture the cuts are described as a "fraud".

A big demonstration for freedom of the press, supported by the mainstream "centre-left" Democratic Party, should have been held two weeks earlier, but was moved to the same day as the teachers' protest. Unfortunately it had the effect of marginalising the teachers' protest.

Cath Fletcher, Rome

EGYPT

The rise of the working class

BY ATEF SAID*

In April 2009, a familiar scenario was repeated, as Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's police apparatus assaulted planned demonstrations and a Mahalla textile workers' strike. A year earlier, many activists and ordinary people from Mahalla received sentences in politically charged criminal trials for "planning the 6 April strike in 2008."

Despite the involvement of police personnel and government-led thugs in the destruction of the city in 2008, the emergency court sentenced 22 ordinary people from Mahalla to two- to three-year prison terms. This factor, along with the police occupation of Mahalla and downtown Cairo, led to another strike defeat in April 2009.

This article will discuss the background and recent examples of a growing labour revolt in Egypt. It is not a well-covered story: readers are confronted by daily news of a bloody Middle East, the Iraq war and constant conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. For them the Middle East is wars, violence and Islamic terrorism.

Many friends admit all they know about Egypt can be summarised in the fact that Egypt has a "moderate" president, a radical Islamist opposition (Muslim Brotherhood) and is a land of mummies and pyramids. It is good to know that Americans realise Egypt has one of the oldest civilizations in the planet, but otherwise this simplistic picture does not reflect the reality.

To summarise Egypt from the point of view of Egyptians: Mubarak is a dictator who has run the country through the use of emergency laws and a repressive police apparatus since 1981. The regime has been supported by different U.S. administrations because it has helped protect American "interests" in the region, particularly with respect to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

Mubarak is also preferred over his opposition, which is portrayed as anti-western and radical Islamic. The average American does not know that Egyptian opposition groups go far beyond Islamic groups, encompassing a spectrum from those with socialist ideals to liberal groups. If the Islamists seem the strongest oppositional force it is because all the secular groups have been flattened by Mubarak's repressive machine.

While the Western corporate media rarely covers news of workers' struggle, over the past year militant strikes have been able to break through that invisibility. In fact the Egyptian workers' struggle has a long militant history, important beyond the country's borders because Egypt has played a leading political and a cultural role within the Arab-speaking Middle East since the 1950s and '60s.

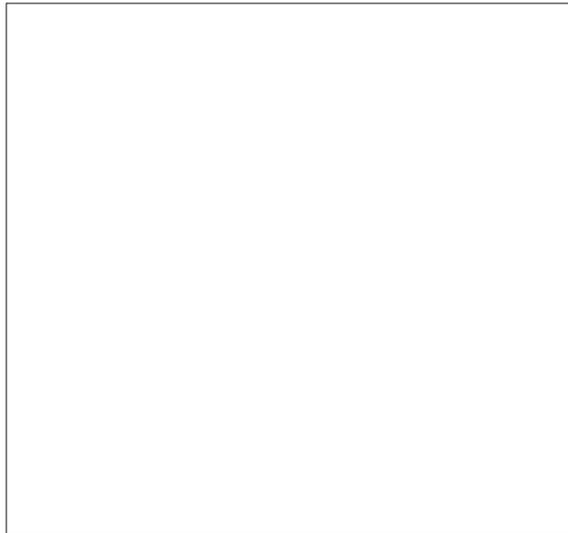
While it is true that Nasser's regime lacked democracy and instituted a top-down state socialism, his discourse of Arab nationalism opened some space to strengthen and crystallise opposition to Western imperialism and offered at least the vision of social justice. Once again the outbreak of Egyptian workers' strikes against injustices and ruthless neoliberal policies can be of inspiration to the workers in the Arab world who struggle against dictatorships and free market policies.

LABOUR STRUGGLES REBORN

The Egyptian leftist newspaper *al-ishteraki* (The Socialist), described 2007 as the year of labour strikes, and predicted the continuation of the strike wave. A flavor of those first events was summarised in an on-line article in Middle East Report:

"The longest and strongest wave of worker protest since the end of World War II is rolling through Egypt. In March, the liberal daily *al-Masri al-Yawm* estimated that no fewer than 222 sit-in strikes, work stoppages, hunger strikes and demonstrations had occurred during 2006. In the first five months of 2007, the paper has reported a new labour action nearly every day. The citizen group Egyptian Workers and Trade Union Watch documented 56 incidents during the month of April, and another 15 during the first week of May alone."

The number of strikes and sit-ins totaled 850, an unprecedented number considering the blows the working class took throughout the 1990s, which saw



2007 strike wave

the imposition of a harsh neoliberal agenda, particularly with massive government privatisations. The bureaucratic unions had no answer to the attacks, and consequently many sectors of the working class succumbed to a mood of defeat. Contributing to this lethargy was the fragmentation of the Egyptian left and a repressive regime.

Joel Beinin, currently head of the Middle East Studies department at the American University in Cairo and a long-time observer of Egypt's labour scene, described the recent wave in an interview as "the biggest, longest strike wave at least since 1951." He added that "Just in terms of the size of what we are talking about, it is substantially different from what we've had before." Beinin described the strikes as "the most substantial and broad-based kind of resistance to the regime."

In a Socialist Studies Center booklet Omar Said and Mustafa Bassiouni described the new wave as the birth of a new labour movement in Egypt.

Despite defeats and repression, the recent strikes bring some hope to all Egyptians aspiring to social justice and democracy. As a union organiser once told me, workers always bring many surprises. They are more progressive than the country's socialist theoreticians or organisers.

I will highlight three of the 2007 protests. Two of these were successful, one was not.

AN UNEXPECTED SPARK

In December 2006, around 27,000 workers at Egypt's largest state-owned factory, Al-Mahalla Al-Kobra Misr Spinning and Weaving, struck after learning that their annual bonus had been cut. The workers organised a massive rally in the center of al-Mahalla, a city located in the Delta. After five days the company administration backed down and offered the workers the bonus.

Kamal al-Fayoumi, one of the strike leaders, described the reason for the strike in an interview published by *al-ishteraki* newspaper (March 27, 2008):

"In 2006, our union promised us a two-month salary as a bonus. Then they started to backtrack on their promise. The workers have not forgotten and could not forget this promise. We started to mobilise everybody in the factory, and we used the resolution of the union. Leaders emerged everywhere in the factory, and everybody started to call for their right of the two-month bonus. Everybody was convinced that we do not have anything but the strike to force them to listen to us."

This strike was followed by another one, in September 2007 lasting six days. These successful actions sparked a wave of workers' protest. It is estimated that 104,000 textile workers took action; then strikes spread to the Helwan and Tura cement factories, to railroad workers and other industrial sectors. Faced with such unprecedented action, the government by and large complied with the workers' demands.

What happened to cause this unexpected strike in a traditional sector, and in a state-owned company? The story began in March 2006, when Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif promised that public sector worker annual bonuses would be increased from LE100 (\$17) to the equivalent of two months' salary by the end of the year.

But the pledge was never honored and, as a result, the Al-Mahalla workers started their December sit-in.

Joel Beinin pointed out in an interview in *al-Ahram*: "Textiles comprise Egypt's largest industrial sector and its employees are among the world's worst paid. They make 85 per cent of the wages paid to comparable workers in Pakistan and 60 per cent of those paid in India."

Al-Mahalla's workers felt empowered after obtaining their two-month bonus and decided to strike around other issues. Their demands included meeting another promised bonus of 25% of the basic salary and meals, instead of a money subsidy (which was currently 32 Egyptian pounds or less than \$6 a month).

The two Al-Mahalla strikes showed it was possible to strike and avoid being crushed by police repression. The fact that these strikers were not immediately repressed allowed them to establish committees and organise to provide workers with an opportunity to expose the lies of the mainstream media and the government.

The public could see that the strikers were peacefully protesting and not damaging the factory. This self-organisation was creating a space in which strikers were learning and leadership was forged. They were becoming confident and involved in making decisions. In this process they collected signatures and campaigned to force their union leadership to resign. Many explained to the media that they needed to establish unions free of government control.

THE STATE EMPLOYEES

In December 2007, Egyptians were surprised to find around 3,000 state workers organising a sit-in at the headquarters of the ministerial cabinet in downtown Cairo. The demand was to bring the working conditions up to the level of other civil service sectors.

The sit-in began right after the Eid holiday and lasted 11 days, effecting a 90% drop in tax collection. It was successful because it was backed by a parallel strike of 55,000 real estate tax officers throughout the country and culminated in the launching of a free union.

Under the neoliberal policies adopted, real estate tax collectors were no longer affiliated with the Ministry of Finance. Except for 500 high officers the collectors suddenly became subordinated to local councils, decreasing their salary and blocking possible promotion. This meant ruining the lives of the workers and their families.

Yet in the beginning the workers resisted striking. In September 2007, however, 1,000 workers organised a one-day sit-in at the real estate tax collection office in the Giza province. Another 4,000 workers demonstrated. Kamal Abu Aita, one of the strike leaders, describes the buildup to the December action:

"On 21 October, we headed to the Ministry of Finance in Nasr City and called out to the Minister, 'Come down from your ivory tower!' but of course he didn't because he was busy in America. We then walked in a huge procession to the Cabinet building, but security prevented us from entering to negotiate. On 13 and 14 November, we held our sit-in at the Egyptian Trade Union Federation on Gala' Street; they locked all the bathrooms and meeting rooms, leaving us only the pavement of the entrance. Then and there we decided to hold another sit-in but didn't publicise the location until the last minute, and that was the Hussein Higazy sit-in that started on 3 December."

During the strike the workers elected a supreme council that included representatives from all over Egypt. This guaranteed representation from all of the tax collectors and contributed a higher level of organization to the action. The strikers' supreme council included many committees that organised the tasks at hand. It also allowed for unprecedented solidarity to develop between men and women workers.

Although this solidarity developed in the al-Mahalla strike as well as others, in the tax collectors' sit-in, women workers answered the conservative media and police intimidation, insisting on their full participation.

Striker Ranya Anwar, who worked in the tax collection office in Giza Province, explained how her parents let her protest and sleep in the street: "My parents know

* Originally published in *Against the Current* no. 142, September/October 2009. www.solidarity-us.org/atc. Atef Said is a Palestinian journalist

Continued on page 18

that that I am calling and struggling for my rights. Indeed, they were concerned in the beginning, but later they accepted it. This happened when they knew how much respect we gained due to our persistence and solidarity in our struggle."

She also told the *al-ishteraki* reporter, "We do not sleep well. We only have three tents in the sit-in site. Men and women take turns in these tents. We go to wash in the bathrooms of nearby mosques. In many times, random people who live in the neighborhood offered us to come to sleep for some hours in their homes. We had a great sense of solidarity. In the sit-in, we have many sick people, and also many children came to support their parents."

One of the attractive slogans of the sit-in that reflects the workers' sense of solidarity was "We are Here! We are not going anywhere!"

Reflecting the confidence of the strikers, the council led to the establishment of the country's first independent trade union. On the first anniversary of their sit-in, leaders of the strike and thousands of the real state tax collectors gathered in the Egyptian Press Syndicate and announced the creation of their union, which included 29 members, seven of whom were women, democratically elected as representatives for the Egyptian provinces.

A FAILED NATIONAL STRIKE

Mubarak's police apparatus hit back in 2008 announcing an end to strikes. Originally the Mahalla textile workers called for a one-day strike on 6 April 2008. The strike was turned into a call for a one-day general strike by political activists, and widely circulated on the internet. A Facebook site was set up and 73,000 signed, and the action was further spread through text messaging. The government inadvertently publicised the strike by broadcasting and publishing legal warning against participation.

The police attacked the Mahalla workers' on the night of 5 April and arrested many leaders. The following is a long quote from an international call for class solidarity by the Socialist Studies Center of Egypt, released on 7 April 2008.

"In light of recent events in Egypt, the Centre for Socialist Studies calls on supporters of freedom and justice everywhere in the world to show their support for victims of repression at the hands of Hosni Mubarak's regime.

"Supporters should mount pressure on the Egyptian dictatorship to release more than 800 people who were detained yesterday. These include more than 150 political activists (socialists, liberals, and Islamists), more than 600 protestors from Mahalla (mainly women and children) and Mahalla strike committee leaders Kamal El-Faioumy and Tarek Amin — who are facing serious allegations of agitation which can lead to long prison sentences."

On the background of a workers' call for strike action on 6 April in Mahalla textile complex, various political forces decided to support the strike through parallel symbolic work stoppage and peaceful protests.

However, the Mubarak regime retaliated by occupying the Mahalla complex with security forces, abducting strike committee leaders Kamal El-Faioumy and Tarek Amin and arresting political activists of every political tendency in Cairo and other cities. Not able to suppress the protests that followed, Mubarak's security forces used rubber bullets, tear gas and live ammunition against the people of Mahalla, leaving at least four dead, including a nine year old boy, and hundreds injured.

On 7 April *Egypt News* also reported on the police crackdown:

"They have blocked Tahrir Square, the Bar Association downtown and all the streets and key areas in the provinces, especially in Cairo, Alexandria, and Gharbia. They have also arrested dozens of workers, activists and bloggers to curtail the strike called for by the opposition in protest against price rises. Among the detainees were Mohamed Abdel Kodous, Freedom Commission Rapporteur of the frozen Labour Party, Mohamed el-Ashqar, 'Kefaya' Movement Coordinator in Giza, Magdy Qarqar, member of the movement and Malek Mustafa of the 'Malcolm X' blog."

Just one month later one of the bloggers and the creator of the Facebook group was kidnapped on the street, arrested and then tortured in the state security intelligence headquarters. One day later he was left in a desert around Cairo.

There are several reasons why the 6 April 2008 strike failed. One is external: Washington stopped pressuring the Mubarak regime so he felt able to repress. But the intelligence apparatus gained experience in dealing with internet activism: by arresting the activists, the regime can warn all those who sympathise to drop their plans.

As one of the activists told me, when the street is closed, pro-democracy and labour organisers find new ways to organise. One of the best new ways was the cyberspace. But the government established an intelligence unit to trace bloggers and activists.

Despite the police harassment, bloggers and labour organisers continued. One of the labour organisers and a leader in al-Mahalla strikes, for example, was Kareem al-Beheery. The name of his blog was "Egyptian Workers." Kareem was arrested and tortured on April 5th. Arrested several times, he continued to blog and lobby workers in Al-Mahalla. To punish him, company administrators have forcibly transferred him to another branch in Cairo.

PATTERNS OF STRIKES

Can Egyptian workers' struggle continue to the point of ending Mubarak's dictatorship?

This article does not include many more labour strikes that have been taking place in Egypt since the end of 2006. In an email communication with labour journalist and activist Mustafa Bassiouni (between July 10th and 17th, 2009), Bassiouni described the patterns of recent waves of labour strikes in the following way:

1. While the highest points of most of the 1980s labour unrest were sit-ins, the recent ones were strikes. This reflects more anger and bravery among the workers,
2. Most strikes lasted for days or even weeks, unlike labour actions in previous years.
3. The number of women strikers was much higher in these strikes than previous years. Anger and bitterness over neoliberal policies encouraged more women to take leading roles in these strikes.
4. In the beginning the strikes did not end with police attacks. Due to the mass number of labour protests and the involvement of the workers' families, government officials and company CEOs were forced to negotiate with the workers.

These four features created a space for workers' self-organising away from the state-controlled unions. These developments led to the creation of the first independent trade union in Egypt in half a century.

Bassiouni and others agree that labour's revolt will rise as the outcome of neoliberal policies becomes clearer to ordinary Egyptians, where every home tastes the

bitterness of these policies. Some workers told me that they have not tasted the flavor of meat for months. Some say, we celebrate holidays without protein at home.

In a recent analysis by Reuters, published on 13 July 2009, Alastair Sharp concludes that workers in Egypt fight for pay, not against the state. This writer agrees with leftist journalist Hossam al-Hamalawy that Sharp's analysis is not completely accurate.

While most of Egyptian workers' recent strikes are seemingly economic, this does not mean that their actions are apolitical. As al-Hamalawy suggests:

"Workers are refraining from the existing 'political parties,' but that doesn't mean their fight is not 'political' or is not a direct 'political' challenge to the state. On the contrary, I see the strikes to be increasingly getting politicised — a politicisation, that is not necessarily manifested in the conventional political manner: parliamentary voting behavior, membership in political parties, or adopting the Kefaya (Egyptian Movement for Change) agenda, etc."

To summarise, while there are many factors that may bring pessimism after these waves of strikes, others bring inspiration and optimism to Egyptian workers. Among the reasons for pessimism is the failures of some strikes, and ruthless police apparatus and the continued attacks on poor Egyptians and the working class.

However, there are countervailing factors to be taken into account, notably the organising experiences that Egyptian workers gained in recent years, and the national attention these strikes drew. In recent public meetings, such as conferences organised by what is called the National Coordinating Committees for Workers' Organising Rights and Freedoms, many of the workers' leaders started to affirm the following statement: "It has become obvious more than any time before that struggles against dictatorship and corruption are not disconnected from struggles against neoliberalism."

The establishment of the first independent trade union in more than half a century in Egypt is a great inspiration to many Egyptian workers. One significant ramification of this development is the rise of labour protests among state employees, a sector that was least likely to protest. One example is a recent strike by social and economic experts at the Ministry of Justice, protesting new and severe working conditions suggested by the Minister of Justice.

Many independent groups and labour organizers established a national campaign to pressure the government to raise the minimum wage in Egypt to around \$240 a month. While this campaign is still in the economic realm, the campaigners work on the national level, reflecting a higher degree of coordination and coalition building among labour organisers and workers in Egypt.

Despite the fact that the Egyptian left is exhausted from the attacks of Mubarak's police apparatus, Egyptian labour proved to be more courageous. In fact some analysts suggested that a key factor that weakened the pro-democracy activism in Egypt in recent years was its disconnection from Egyptian workers' struggles.

Recently many attempts have been made to bridge the gap between the anti-neoliberal and the anti-dictatorship protests. Examples of these attempts are the meetings organised by the Socialist Studies Center, the newly established independent union for tax workers, and the Coordinating Committees for Workers' Organising Rights and Freedoms.

EDL mobilisation in Manchester should sound the alarm

From back page

The opposition to the EDL on the day, organised by Unite Against Fascism (UAF), had been corralled to half of Piccadilly Gardens. Outside there was no organised anti-racist presence.

Meanwhile gangs of hooligans, making their way to join up with the other EDL supporters, circled the northern areas of the city centre, eventually starting a well-organised march with dozens of placards. They linked up finally with the initial EDL contingent that had established themselves in Piccadilly Gardens soon after midday. All finally marched down to Victoria Station from where they were bussed out. By that time they had grown to more than 500.

There can be no room for complacency about our response to the planned EDL demonstrations in Leeds on 31 October and Nottingham on 7 December.

Fascist websites and discussion lists show not only

competitive envy and hostility to the EDL, but also a belief that the older and more established organisations could and should do the same sort of thing. Now the National Front and eventually the BNP may again take to the streets. In Leeds and Nottingham, in every town, working-class activists must organise serious counter-protests.

Activists should not ask the police to ban the EDL. Appeals for police bans disorganise those who should be mobilising and not lobbying. When they "succeed" in getting a ban, as in Luton, the ban leads to the same restrictions on anti-racists as those who they oppose. And the EDL and other fascists are capable of defying it. Activists must make connections in working class communities, explain the nature of the racist organisations we face, and promote activities based on class answers to the problems of working-class youths rather than racist or communalist ones.

A campaign has to inform and explain what the EDL

is about.

We need to physically confront fascists and violent racists to stop them organising and linking up with naïve and alienated working-class youths.

We should not just champion the status quo. Anti-racist protests shouldn't just "celebrate multi-culturalism". They should build multi-racial working class unity for democracy and against the injustices in society; especially racism, but also for rights for women, for gays, and for working-class people denied jobs and housing. We should defend individual rights to practise religion, but not defend political-Islamic clerical fascism, Sharia law, etc.

An anti-racist organisation should be well informed about what the EDL are doing.

The lack of effective stewarding, information gathering and thought-through organisation of the UAF counter mobilisation in Manchester indicates that the organisational base of that mobilisation was too narrow.

CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

Another way of educating

By PAT YARKER

For the past three years a team from Cambridge University comprising fourteen lead-authors and scores of researchers has undertaken the most comprehensive and thorough-going analysis of the state of Britain's Primary education service since the ground-breaking Plowden Report of 1967. The team published their Final Report on 16 October. Democracy is its key theme.

It cannot be an accident that the Cambridge Primary Review is one of the most democratically-based pieces of academic labour ever carried out in Britain. The team produced 31 Interim Reports looking at, among other things, the primary curriculum, assessment and testing, the impact of government reforms and the condition of childhood in Britain today. Their writings have incorporated evidence from thousands of academic papers, over a thousand written submissions, two hundred and fifty seminars and conferences and two dozen new research-surveys.

The team travelled the country to meet education workers, primary school pupils, their parents and carers, and took evidence from all these groups. The reports are informed not only by academic research but by the experiences, observations and considered opinions of very many who work in or use the primary school service.

The Cambridge Primary review was financed independent of government (by the Esmée Fairburn Foundation) and its remit was not limited, as was the government-commissioned Rose Review's, by what would suit the government of the day.

AUTHORITARIAN

The Review's Director and Editor Professor Robin Alexander says the current system of tests, targets and League Tables which so strait-jackets Primary education has "Stalinised" schools.

Alexander says the imposition by both Tory and New Labour governments of an increasingly centralised, coercive and rigid policy framework is a "the state theory of learning". Embodied in the so-called National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy, it has re-framed education as delivery and compliance.

He calls for centralisation to be reversed, for an end to the "empty rituals" of consultation and the disenfranchisement of local voices.

He condemns the way unelected and unaccountable groups inside government or its agencies make policy on the basis of scant or shoddy evidence.

He exposes the authoritarian mindset of those in power, and challenges them to lay aside their favourite rhetorical weapons, those of myth-making and derision, as they engage in the continuing national debate over education.

The Final Report includes over seventy formal conclusions and a similar number of policy recommendations. These build on government approaches which have made a positive impact, while also radically overhauling the primary education service where necessary.

Among the most important proposals are a re-definition of the "standards" agenda, a new approach to

assessment, a re-vamped model of inspection, a full review of the definitions, procedures and provisions involved in Special Educational Needs, an extension of the Foundation stage (before formal schooling is begun), and advocating that specialist teachers as well as generalists be used in the Primary classroom.

The Final Report re-states the case for broadening any conception of educational "standards" in the Primary school to aim at excellence not just in reading, writing and maths, but in oracy, the arts and humanities and the sciences. In other words all aspects of the curriculum to which every child is entitled. Higher standards in literacy and numeracy grow from richer all-round provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Part of that provision is the teaching offered pupils, and the Cambridge Review team make important recommendations about the nature, length and content of Initial Teacher Education.

Teaching younger children requires highly-sophisticated, knowledgeable and expert practitioners. It cannot be done on the cheap, for example by the misuse of Teaching Assistants to take whole classes. In its focus on the quality of teaching rather than on streamlining the curriculum, as well as in its overview of the aims and values which should inform primary education, the Review outflanks the proposals of the Rose Review.

The Review team calls for SATs to be scrapped, and for assessment for learning to be separated from assessment for accountability. This strikes at the heart of the current system, which makes a single set of public tests supply information about individual pupils, whole classes, their teachers and their schools. Everyone outside the Department for Children Schools and Families understands that SATs cannot do all the government pretends they can. Various suggestions for reform have been offered. The Final Report argues for an increased role for Teacher Assessment, for sample-testing and for an improved model of school-inspections.

Media headline have been focussed on the proposal to extend the period during which young children engage in play. The Review Team argue, partly on the basis of widespread international practice, that involvement with those more formal, teacher-directed activities all too commonly seen as being "proper" schooling should not begin until the child is aged six.

But "play" is understood in the Report to be children's work. Anyone who has spent time observing the multiple activities which go to make up a child's imaginative "playing" will recognise that it is an opportunity for many different kinds of learning. In "play" children begin to make sense of the world and their own capabilities to act within it and on it.

The Final Report claims: "English insistence on the earliest possible start to formal schooling... is educationally counterproductive". In particular, such an early start works directly against the best interests of the poorest children.

BLIGHTED

The Final Report deflates fashionable talk of 'toxic childhood', noting that children were among the

most upbeat of the many thousands of people who supplied it with information and evidence.

The Report is neither complacent nor doom-mongering about what it is like to be a child in modern Britain. Instead, it focuses attention on the most urgent area: "The real crisis of childhood concerns the fate of those children whose lives are blighted by poverty, disadvantage, risk and discrimination." It develops this understanding by noting once again that:

"The persistent 'long tail' of [school] underachievement, in which Britain compares unfavourably with many other countries, maps closely onto gross disparities in income, health, housing, risk and well-being." In other words, the poorest and most multiply-disadvantaged of working-class children are likely to achieve in school much less than they are capable of, and which in other circumstances they could achieve.

From the time of their arrival into the more-formal system working-class children are likely to be labelled as deficient, incapable or failing, with grave consequences for their future in the system.

One way to help the poorest children ready themselves for formal schooling is to give them a year or so longer to do so. In falling over themselves to reject the Final Report's recommendation to explore the feasibility of raising the age at which children begin formal schooling, the government has tried to present itself as acting in the interests of those most deprived. In reality, having presided over a widening of the gross inequalities indicated in the Report, New Labour has made it all the harder for such children to achieve success in school.

It was only to be expected that one-time NUT member and now Schools Minister Vernon Coaker attempt to rubbish the Final Report. The government has tried to disparage the earlier Interim Reports even as they implemented several key recommendations (notably those to scrap the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.) NUT General Secretary Christine Blower was right to call the Final Report "an immensely rich source of policy ideas". It will have to be reckoned with.

The Cambridge Primary Review has re-set the parameters within which Britain's state primary education service ought to be discussed for the next period. All in all the Review is too well-grounded in real experience and tested theory, too inclusive, too wide-ranging, too comprehensive, too weighty, evidenced and well-argued to be ignored. Government, whether New Labour or Tory, may pretend the Review does not exist. Ministers may claim, absurdly, that because the Review team commenced investigatory work in 2006, their Final Report, written over the past few months, is somehow out-of-date.

But wherever those ministers seek to adventure in considering Primary education during the life of this Parliament and the next, they will find the work, words and influence of the Cambridge Primary Review already awaiting them.

• What I've written here draws on material released by the Cambridge Primary Review team and made available on their website. It is not possible to download a full copy of the Final Report, and buying one is costly. However, all schools are being sent a copy of the forty-page booklet: Introducing the Cambridge Primary Review for free. This booklet will also be available to download. Visit: www.primaryreview.org.uk

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

Learn lessons from Manchester 31 October: stop the EDL in Leeds

EDL had a free run of Manchester city centre on 10 October

BY A COUNTER-DEMONSTRATOR

On 10 October, the far-right English Defence League got more than 500 people onto the streets of Manchester, and had more or less a free run of the city centre. That set a very dangerous precedent.

Estimates of the number of anti-racist protesters differ. There were many outside the 400 or so cordoned into Piccadilly Gardens by police, but those outside were unorganised.

Photographs taken from local skyscrapers make claims of 2,000 anti-racists difficult to credit.

There was little presence from trade unions, ethnic minorities, and even the Asian community. The anti-EDL mobilisation was mostly one of leftists and students.

By the end of the day, the EDL:

- Had marched through a mile of busy city streets, with chants like "Muslim bombers off

our streets", intimidating and threatening both people of ethnic minorities and anti-racist shoppers and town workers.

- Had pulled in not many young and not-so-young hooligans.

- Had attracted to them other young people who may initially think that the EDL are not racists but who are excited by their street activity.

Continued on page 18

For secularism and workers' unity!

BY IRA BERKOVIC

On 31 October, two groups of bigoted reactionaries will take to the streets of London to promote their racist, oppressive and anti-working class worldviews.

"Islam4UK", a political Islamist organisation descended from the now-illegal Al-Muhajiroun, has called a "March for Sharia". They will exhort Muslims to demand the "imposition" of Sharia law on the whole of the UK. Islamic religious law has many interpretations, but wherever it has been widely applied it has meant a massive clampdown on the rights of women, LGBT people, religious minorities and secular and left-wing political organisations. This march has been heavily publicised (for its own reasons) by the Daily Express (15 October).

A tiny fascist grouping, a splinter from the English Defence League (the "English Defence League: St. George Division"), has called a counter-demonstration.

This is not a case of fascists or organised racists attacking a mosque or a Muslim community institution. The "Muslim demonstration" has been organised by a far-right political current. The fascist counter-demonstration counterposes an equally reactionary politics.

The biggest threat in Britain today of violently reactionary politics comes from the fascist BNP and far-right groupings like the EDL. They pose an immediate physical threat to Muslim and other religious and ethnic minorities and must be confronted physically.

Forces like Islam4UK are, while less powerful, no less reactionary. If they become stronger, the first people to suffer will be women, LGBT people, secularists and dissidents *within the Muslim communities*. It is in the interests of everyone who believes in equal rights, working-class unity and class struggle to organise to prevent that from happening.

Workers' Liberty believes that there should a

third action on 31 October, an anti-racist, working-class presence that makes the positive case for workers' unity, common struggle and universal human rights against the bigotry of both Islam4UK and the EDL and against the "mainstream" racism of the Daily Express. We are discussing organising such an action alongside revolutionaries from within Britain's migrant and asylum seeker communities, including the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI). The WCPI has first-hand experience of the importance of organising against political Islam.

Nadia Mahmood, a WCPI member living in London, said: "Is it not enough for Islamists to turn the lives of Middle Eastern people to a hell that they have to try to do it again in Europe? Women can't go unveiled without being beaten in many places. People in countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan, Iraq and others controlled by Islamists are struggling for freedom from Sharia law. The Islamists govern Muslims with blood and iron fists, let alone those who are not Muslims, such as Jews, Christians and atheists. People in Europe should not allow Islamists to impose their discriminatory and barbaric laws here. Secularism in Europe is an achievement for the whole of humanity and we all should defend it."

Revolutionaries have a responsibility to stand alongside communities whenever they come under attack from racists, bigots and reactionaries. That means standing alongside Muslim communities when they are attacked by fascists, and it means standing alongside them when the political Islamist reactionaries who claim to speak in their name march to promote the imposition of barbaric theocratic law on Britain.

- For more information on action on 31 October, visit www.workersliberty.org.

What sharia law means

There are many reasons to stand against the Islamists in the UK and abroad. The first thing is to understand why they are so eager to impose sharia law everywhere. Only by seeing what they stand to gain through it, we can see the danger. With sharia law, they can turn the household from a prison for the female population into a slaughterhouse.

Under Sharia law the man cannot be punished for any killing with the justification of defending their honour.

We know that young women are killed in Europe by Islamists for not following Islamic traditions. These kind of killings increase under Sharia law, because they can go unpunished.

The Islamic regime of Iran assassinated more than 250 Iranians who spoke out against the regime outside Iran. Who knows how many they have killed inside the country? Islamists have a history of assassinations and terrorising people. They burned hundreds of people in cinemas in Iran; unfortunately, most people in the west are not aware of this history.

Nasrin Parvez, Iranian socialist

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